



Raluca Mateoc

The Memory of Romanian Rural Socialism (1949-1989)

Shapes and Reflections in Life Stories, Archives
and Local Museums

LIT

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**The Memory of Romanian Rural Socialism
(1949–1989)**

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Raluca Mateoc

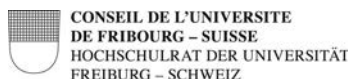
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To my son Filip

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Introduction

This work is the result of inevitable shifting approaches in the research-conceiving process, which ended up considering the village as a unit of analysis, and its transformation under a specific modernization agent – the socialist state. One main challenge in the research topic was the contouring of the time frame. In previous anthropological studies (Kligman & Verdery, 2012; Iordachi & Dobrinu, 2009), the time interval 1949–1962 was mainly applied, focusing on the collectivization of agriculture: the key policy which altered the social, economic and cultural configurations of Romanian countryside. The time frame of the research became clearer when designing the Swiss National Science Foundation funded research project – *Survival Strategies, Ethnicity and Empowerment in Socialism and Early Transition in Romanian Countryside*.¹ This big project was preceded by a smaller one focusing strictly on rural Roma from a Western Romanian countryside in the context of postsocialist change.² After this small project, I chose to adopt a more inclusive approach, without focusing on a single population but on a whole village, in order to better grasp the transfers and interdependencies between the Romanian majority and the co-inhabiting ethnic groups, Hungarian and Roma, in a rural area of north-western Romania. Thus, the SNSF project was born, aiming to study the countryside throughout the whole socialist period (1949–1989), under the effect of collectivization, in an innovative time frame extending beyond the time interval of the collectivization campaign (1949–1962).

In the chosen field villages, collectivization is a process with long-term effects on community life and the personal destiny of peasants leading to a deep transformation which does not imply the property status uniquely, but the peasant status itself, the emergence of new institutions, changes in work relations, in the rural-urban dynamics, or in everyday life. The “new rural order” brought about by the communist regime in Romania between 1949–1989, often with extreme violence, leaves trace up to this day, not only on the level of norms and practices, but also in memory. This memory is approached here through an intergenerational sharing reconstructed through the various viewpoints of involved actors, with a highly rich panoply of voices: families of former deportees and of executed villagers, former CAP chairmen and mayors, retired engineers and schoolteachers, land tenants, as well as members of younger generations who complete the storytelling by con-

¹ Project description: <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/146057>

² *Gypsies in the Context of Postsocialist Change*, project funded by the “Fonds de recherche”, University of Fribourg (2012).

testing details, reinforcing injustice, or adding emotional elements. The extensive life stories are joined by archival documentation and use of documents from the communist party (PMR or PCR), the Secret Police, the Village Council or the Gendarmes Unit. Finally, the memory practices within two local museums give precious insights into curating communism. All the collected data offered a rich resource for a long-term study of the whole socialist period, touching upon several fields of social anthropology, namely historical anthropology, the anthropology of imaginary, economic anthropology and political anthropology. The study mainly refers to the anthropology of memory, and oral history, as well as to social representations for others, if the perspectives of the subjects themselves are referred to, or the ways in which they perceive the events related to collectivization. Finally, the study also touches upon the anthropology of emotions, and, transversally, gender anthropology.

The suggestion to take into account the long time frame comes from the witnesses themselves, whose recollections, especially when being elicited as a life story, surpass the frame of events related to the implementation of collectivization: imposition and forced seizing of quotas and violent repression; deportations and forced domicile for those considered responsible for the revolts; creation of cooperatives; loss of land and other goods; tense relations with state power when, by manipulating the class fight ideology, it produced enemies in order to eliminate them and to maintain fear and terror. It is around this conflictual, traumatic and often tragical core, articulated by various voices, especially feminine, that the discourse of a generational memory is produced, echoed by archival documents, drier, more concise, more attached to figures and statistics, often more explicit in relation to ideological reasons hidden behind the decisions and the reports of the authorities. The long-time frame allows an exit from the repressive events and focuses on empowerment, liberation through work and adaptation strategies to the socialist village institutions. Thus, the long temporal frame is imposed by the life-story itself, as the latter does not stop at a certain temporal marker, but it is a chain of meaningful moments put out in descriptions incorporating pairs of contrast such as “before” and “after”, or “now” and “then”. Finally, life stories are not discursively organized around a rupture of political order, but of personal time. In the recollection processes, individuals select themes, reify some moments and omit others, thus revealing a dynamic of personal time.

The collected biographies also inform a discussion on the interpretation of recollections. Partly, these illustrate the departure hypothesis on the tragic, brutal and forced nature of Romanian communism at the beginning. At the same time, they are a manner of representing facts. The internal coherence of the whole narrative, the narratological issues, important for seizing meaning unrelated to the mentioned facts but to argumentative structures, the rhetoric on which the discourse of witnesses is built are also considered in each chapter.

After my first exploratory field visits, my temporal frame, geographical setting and populations were defined. In addition to the richness of the multi-ethnic setting, I chose two of my field villages because of the state repression experienced in 1949, when villagers protested collectivization. At the same time, my research was a way of going back to my native country, to look at shapes and reflections of the socialist order through an innovative mix of ethnography, biography, archival study and museum study. The study at the edge of time allowed the last interviews with villagers who lived collectivization as children, and the whole socialist order at all ages of life. The 1949–1989 innovative time frame allowed a unique biographical approach, where childhood is paralleled with the repressive events such as the end of the war, the peasant revolt of 1949 and the consequent deportations to Dobruja. The young and old adulthood years coincide with the accommodation of the socialist regime, allowing a rich thematic analysis of work styles, professional roles, and gender or interethnic relations.

Fieldwork began with sessions of life story interviewing, with a focus on the generation born between 1935 and 1945. For my field setting, I chose to focus on a core village, Ucuriș, and two additional ones, Cociuba Mare and Tinca. The initials of the village names will be used throughout the study, to protect the privacy of shared life events, or to make it less visible. The archival documents will mention the real names of the villages they refer to. Interviewing sessions taking place between 2012 and 2016 were coupled with archival research in the city of Oradea and the Village Councils themselves, and ethnography of everyday intercultural relations between Romanians and Roma. Attendance at church services in the Roma communities, weddings or endless informal discussions with local authorities and NGO members were part of my field stays. A museum ethnography took place in the final fieldwork stage.

Ucuriș and Cociuba Mare have a mixed population of Romanians and Roma, while Tinca is inhabited by three ethnic groups: Romanians, Hungarians and Roma. The boundaries between the populations during the socialist regime, as well as their reciprocal categorizations in everyday life and at institutional level called for an original analysis. At the same time, the historical presence of the Roma population is unique in each village, allowing a rich and diversified analysis. Moreover, as aforementioned, I considered the state-enforced repression of collectivization in Ucuriș and Cociuba Mare in 1949 for the choice of my field setting. My central research question is: How is the communist past shaped through and reflected by life stories, archives and local museums? What insights do these sources provide into key thematic domains such as work, gender, property, and institutions? Fifty recorded interviews and uncounted other non-recorded ones, field notes, around thirty archival files, and ethnography within two local museums answered this question. The research sub-questions are methodological: How do life-history narratives enable the analysis of the impact of larger-scale commu-

nist processes at the individual and family levels? How does the combined use of interviews, archival materials, and museum ethnography illuminate the shifting meanings of property and institutions among members of the two ethnic groups?

Book structure

The book consists of eleven chapters, three historiographical and conceptual, and eight analysis-based, each offering a detailed structure with several subsections, making the text easier to read. Field pictures are placed within the book itself, visually highlighting the themes approached in specific sub-chapters. The first chapter reconstructs and analyses the historical development of the Romanian peasant classes from the first agrarian reform of 1864 to the reform of 1945, which implemented the abolition of latifundia. The chapter emphasizes that the 1945 reform, although it involved the redistribution of large estates, should be seen as the first step toward the collectivization of the land. In this sense, it can be said that it laid the groundwork for the introduction of the socialist economic system as well as the socialist social system. When doing so, I situate the collectivization of agriculture in a historical context. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the interesting thesis by Micu (2012, 27), who highlighted the shortcomings of both the pre-war and post-war reforms in the agricultural sector. This means that there was an important continuity within the discontinuity, which significantly worsened the situation of the peasants. This thesis is particularly interesting, as similar phenomena can be observed in Western European countries (e.g., in Italy), even though these societies did not experience a socialist political order.

In the second chapter, I focused on the reconstruction of the socialist system within the historiography that emerged after 1989, by offering an important and critical analysis of various events and processes of the socialist period from a historical perspective. In a more historical event-based approach, I discuss research trends in the study of Romanian socialism together with transnational comparisons, a chronology of research production on collectivization and rural socialism in Romania, as well as an outline of the themes in the study of agricultural collectivization. When doing so, I situate the novelty of my work by highlighting the innovative time frame (1949–1989), the *longue durée* analysis of interethnic relations, and the fact that it provides the first anthropological analysis of events related to the year 1949, namely the peasant revolt and the subsequent deportations to Dobruja, following solid historical work (Moisa 1999; Țărău 2009a, 2009b). The chapter continues with the important theoretical concepts for this study: memory, possession or ownership, nostalgia, and ethnicity, and addresses them in detail, with particular emphasis on the various dimensions of memory. The concepts provide an excellent basis for analysing empirical data, as shown in the discussions related to each concept. In a separate section, I discuss the theoretically grounded connections between the four terms, important for analysing

empirical data, namely the connection between memory and nostalgia, or between memory and possession or ownership, or even between memory and ethnicity.

Chapter three presents the design of the empirical phase and, therefore, the choice of applied methods. I opted for an original multimethod approach, primarily based on oral history, life stories, participant observation, qualitative interviews, selection of archival documents, content analysis, and museum studies. This extensive choice provides a very solid foundation for the following chapters, in which the materials gathered through these empirical methods will be analysed. Additionally, I discuss the native anthropologist's return to the home country as a *halfe*.

The eight analysis chapters approach the socialist transformation of rural Romania from different but complementary angles. Event-based chapters examine the system of obligatory quotas, the revolt of 1949, the deportations, and the everyday campaign of collectivization, highlighting how violence, coercion, and negotiation reshaped village life. Thematic chapters turn to questions of gender, Roma communities, and labour, showing how people were not only constrained but also active agents in redefining social relations and practices. Finally, the analysis of memorials and museums situates local memories within broader processes of curation and public commemoration, linking village life to national and transnational narratives of the communist past. Bound by a single thread, the chapters show how the communist past is carried forward in memory and reshaped through everyday stories, institutions, and commemorations. Each of the eight analysis chapters contains a historiographical and ethnographic part, combining the three data sets: biographies, archives, ethnography, and museum anthropology, for the last chapter. When doing so, they provide multiple perspectives – internal and external – by situating the theme in related historiographic trends, by discussing the narratives of actors and victims, and by showing the language and imaginaries of archival documents. Moreover, the analysis chapters are thematically grouped in relation to the chosen time span (1949–1989), doing justice to events and processes in the life stories of narrators. The first three analysis chapters are chronological, based on childhood recollections of story tellers and local and national archival documents.

Chapter four addresses the first phase of the socialist agrarian reform, and the beginning of collectivization, based on the collected personal testimonies. It addresses the important issue of “quotas”, i.e., the mandatory grain deliveries that farmers had to provide to the state authorities. The focus here is not so much on the reconstruction of objective facts and processes, but rather on the narration of subjectively interpreted events. The aim is to highlight the painful memory of past events in the present. In this way, I attempt to distance myself from a historical approach and carry out a genuine anthropological analysis, which is also pursued in the remaining chapters of this book. The issue of “quotas” is also ex-

amined through archival documents, where the different versions of the past are compared. This double-track approach of a methodological nature is consistently pursued in the next chapters, which primarily deal with three fundamental events and processes of the establishment of the socialist system in Romania and in the region under study: the bloody two-day revolt of 1949 (Chapter five), the subsequent deportation of August 1949 (Chapter six), the compulsory land and property taxes that led to the collectivization of agriculture (Chapter seven).

The chapters on the peasant revolt of 1949 (Chapter five) and of the subsequent deportation (Chapter six) originally stage a dialogue among memories, revealing how meaning is constructed and reproduced at a long distance from the events themselves. With the main configurations of the narrative around the revolt and the deportations, other themes intervene as soon as the question of survival strategies or ways of adaptation for the actors of that time who became the witnesses of today is evoked. It is mainly about norms and values that maintained a feeling of solidarity with the family and the community, in competition with others that threatened them or wanted to annihilate them. The deportation chapter finely highlights the conflicts among memories, as well as the attachment of people to certain traditions, practices and values through which they affirm their identity or the need to maintain a certain feeling of continuity or appearance. When doing so, it offers a discussion on the deportee category in state documents and everyday parlance, as well as a chronology of the deportation itself: the abduction from home, the journey to the obligatory domicile, life in the deportation place and the return home. Finally, redress and memory politics related to deportations, as well as commemoration forms are approached. The revolt and deportation chapters bring up a micro-level analysis (e.g. atmosphere in the village) combined with a macro-level one, in terms of state repression methods, as highlighted in narratives and state documents.

At the same time, the two chapters offer an important contribution to the knowledge on the peasant revolts of 1949 and subsequent deportation and assigning to an obligatory domicile, which were less approached in Romanian post-communist historiography, in comparison with other deportations, such as the mass deportations in 1945 to the USSR or in 1951 to Bărbănt. The discourse of memory which reconstructs events strongly connected with the personal biographies of witnesses, also in the largest context of collectivization and its long-term effects, is central. The perspective is large and nuanced, attentive to details and to the polemical aspects of memory. The richness of the material generates an extension of the initial perspective in concentric circles towards other subjects. The cartography of an inventory becomes obvious, and opens the research towards interesting avenues, impossible to foresee at the beginning of the research.

Chapter seven covers the collectivization campaign on the everyday level by looking at the encounters between villagers and campaigners. Fierce opposition,

intrusion in one's private home in everyday encounters, jokes, and evasion, are some of the highlighted opposition tactics for villagers against the campaigners. Moreover, the chapter brings the accounts of villagers who resisted collectivized and consequent impacts for their survival strategies.

In the next three chapters (chapter eight, chapter nine, and chapter ten), thematic issues are addressed, which are more structural in nature than temporal. Chapter eight addresses the issue of gender, with a particular focus on the important question of the role of women in the socialist system and, specifically, their activities in the work processes of the collectivized rural environment. Naturally, everyday practices that can be described as typically feminine are also presented here. Ultimately, this chapter is also concerned with general conceptions of labour. In other words, the chapter reconstructs the role and the place of women in the contexts highlighted by previous chapters, by looking at marriage, work, collectivity. Itinerant work, parallel work activities, or consumption practices are some sub-themes which highly enrich the analytical frame. The changes that communism brought at the level of traditional practice and their re-symbolization are discussed in detail.

Chapter nine examines, from an ethnographic perspective, the economic activities of the three Roma groups, by taking into account the given and received identities, according to different historical moments, the role of family relations in the habitat, the "ritual" (especially the bride wealth) and work, as well as the role and the effects of confessional (mainly neo-Protestant) belonging, on the social status and internal relations within the groups as well as those which concern the Romanian majority. The work of Roma in the agricultural cooperatives and state farms brings innovative perspectives on various forms of interculturality (heritage, symbolic investment in the house conceived as a prestige place), but also on the informal economic practices, either like those of the majority population or different from it. When doing so, the chapter touches upon the heavy discrimination against Roma, even during the socialist period, and its soft present-day forms.

Chapter ten brings up the world of work and professional life and primarily involves an analysis of activities in the collectivized cooperatives and in local government administration. The description and analysis of the diverse practices, activities, and modes of exchange in the agricultural informal sector, which, as in all other socialist countries, were very widespread, is particularly meaningful. By addressing work in the cooperatives, the chapter reveals professional identities and changes arising from collective work, as well as everyday institutional dynamics and hierarchical relations. Moonshine production and consumption as well as the role of de-collectivization in the lives of villagers, with a shift forward in time, highly enrich the thematic analysis.

Chapter eleven shifts to museum ethnography and discusses memory practices in two local museums on two facets of the communist past – one related to

early communist repression and another one on the discothèque of the 1980s. The presence of villages U. and C.M. in the narrative of the first exhibition reinforces their place in the local repression picture and the role in current memory practices. The choice of the two phenomena, resistance and repression as well as the discothèque, reveals the complexity of the curatorial approach in relation to the socialist past.

Methodologically, the chapters bring together various sources and works, either historical or ethnographic, life stories, archives, and museums. Each chapter offers a literature review, revealing its pertinence and its limits, and the novel approaches of each topic in relation to previous work. When making a systematic state of research (micro and macro) before communicating my own field research results, I show the various interpretations of facts and events, and value my innovative methodological mix of life stories, archives, institutional ethnography and local museums. This methodological combination leads to a plural conception of events as well as of the ideology and politics which generated them, contributing to the richness of the study. At the same time, the fieldwork pictures bring up new perspectives on the cultural spaces related to the memory of socialism and to the Roma culture.

Moreover, although the book title mentions only the socialist period, it deals – almost paradoxically and in an indirect manner – with the highly complex phenomenon of the postsocialist “transition” in the three multiethnic villages in north-western Romania. However, I chose to analyse the socialist period in depth, as it remains highly present in post-communist existence and in everyday life – within collective memory, social consciousness, systems of action, everyday culture, and not least, in social and institutional structures. In this sense, the study is not so much historical – although the role of the past in the present is decisive – but rather socio-anthropological in character. Ultimately, this work seeks to address the significance of the past in the here and now.

Finally, the book pleads for an interpretation of history by witnesses and actors (in spite of being victims and later adults coping with the realities of the communist regime), which fits perfectly into the frame of historical anthropology, in which history serves for revealing the sense it has for the actors, and of post-modernism, by offering a “polyphonic anthropology” (school or manifest of Santa Fe). If in the latter, the anthropologist was completely erased in the chorus of voices, it is not the case here, viewing the dialogue between the victims of the state confiscations and the executors, with a background analysis of Party reports (e.g. chapter on Giving up one’s property).

The use of the term socialism in the book title does justice to Verdery’s (1996) work, as she prefers the term socialism to the word Communism, which none of the Soviet-bloc countries claimed to exemplify. All were governed by Communist Parties but identified themselves as socialist republics, on the path to true

Communism (Verdery 1996, 330). However, the last chapter privileges the term communism and does justice to the vocabulary of museum curating, which refers to museums of communism, either local or national.

The field villages

The three field villages belong to Bihor County and are situated less than 30 km from its main city, Oradea. After the Great Union of 1918, the county became part of Great Romania. Between 1939 and 1944 the Northern and Western part of the county was attributed to Hungary, through the Vienna Dictate. The field villages, Ucuriș, Cociuba Mare, and Tinca, remained in the Romanian part of the county. All three villages are characterized by the typical settlement pattern of the region: a central, densely settled core and a large surrounding area of arable land. The central area is the administrative, commercial and cultural centre for the whole village. The CAP (Agricultural Production Cooperative) offices were in the centre of the village and the SMT (Machine and Tractors station) close to the pasture or to the forest. The lands are of uneven quality, but most of the area is covered with rich soil. In Ucuriș and Cociuba Mare, all land belonged to CAP, while in Tinca, it was divided between state and collective farms.

In the socialist period, the authorities encouraged either migration to the cities, or, in the early 1980s, commuting from the rural areas, unlike in Bulgaria, for example, where the communist modernization aimed at transforming the rural communities by developing the infrastructure and the economy (Benovska-Sabkova 1997, 114). After the breakdown of the communist regimes, with the attempts to resettle the national economic system, the commuting trend ceased. The former “worker-peasants” remained in their native rural areas trying to adapt to a genuine social environment. Yet their former urban and industrial socialization drove them to choose other survival strategies than those shared by the non-commuting population.³

Tinca

Tinca is situated on the lower basin of the Crișul Negru River at 42km from Oradea, the head city of the county. It has a population of 4.340 inhabitants, out of whom 2.593 are ethnic Romanians, 886 ethnic Hungarians, and 756 ethnic Roma.⁴ It is the main village of the commune and its administrative centre. The most numerous religious groups, in the order of group size are the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic. Agriculture, livestock breeding, craft-

³ Even on the scale of one county the variations in commuting patterns gave birth to a strong differentiation of local economic strategies. Hence the town-countryside relations have undergone a subtle process of change, in which the administrative setting matters far less than the cultural patterns (Hirschhausen 1997, 265–269).

⁴ The census of 2011 will be used for all population figures related to the three villages.

manship (building work, painting, mechanics), trade, food industry, wood processing industry and oil extraction are the main economic activities. One village monograph presents the pre-war village in relation to the Turkish occupation and later the Habsburg one: after the chase of the Turks, the situation was not much improved, as the Habsburg rulers organized even more meticulously the exploitation of the *iobagi* from Transylvania.⁵ The social unrest continues and many *iobagi* participate in the riots aiming to chase the Habsburgs from Transylvania (Turla, 2012). The monograph also addressed the key moment of September 1944, when the village was bombed by the German army, and three local civilians perished.

The communist period is presented in terms of property loss and administrative change: “In 1948, through the nationalization of the main means of production and banks, the bank of Ludovic Bica – the current post office – became property of the state”. In 1968, the Crişana region and the Salonta *raion* are abolished”.⁶ Village T. remains the head village of the commune, with four attributed villages: G., G.N., B., and R”. (Turla, 2012). The interwar years are described as peaceful and prosperous. A cinema functioned in the village, and theatre plays, and student choirs were organized during the school holidays.

⁵ *Iobagi* (singular: *iobag*) was a historical term used in Transylvania and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe to refer to serfs – peasants who were legally bound to the land they worked and subject to the authority of a landlord. In the Transylvanian context, *iobagi* were typically Romanian or Hungarian peasants under the control of noble landowners, and their status involved obligations such as labour services, taxes, and restrictions on mobility.

⁶ Under the Law on the territorial-administrative division of the country adopted in 1950, Romania was reorganized into regions, towns, *raioane*, and communes. The *raion* functioned as an intermediate territorial unit with economic, political, and administrative responsibilities, comprising towns and communes subordinated to a region. This system was revised in 1967, when both the region and the *raion* were abolished, leaving the county, the town, and the commune as the main administrative units.



1. Tinca – on the left-hand corner, one building of the future school, at the time, a private bank belonging to an ethnic Hungarian family (photo made on September 16, 1941)



2. Tinca, participants at a theatre event (photo of 1947)

Ucuriș

The village belongs to Olcea commune and has a population of 1252. The whole commune has a population of 3,082 and the greatest ethnic group is the Roma one (426 inhabitants). The census of 2012 shows a diminishing demographic trend for the Romanian majority and a growing one for the Roma minority. The area transits from a hilly landscape to a plain. The pasture at the edge of the commune descends from an altitude of 236 m to one of 120–150m at its edge (Ardelean et al., 2014). In terms of religious groups, the Orthodox form the majority, followed by Baptists and Pentecostals. Agriculture and livestock breeding are the main economic activities. A chicken production unit, a flowergrowing business, and a broommaking enterprise are examples of current entrepreneurial activities.

One monograph of the commune (Ardelean et al., 2014) reveals how the interwar agrarian reform introduced small production entities in the civil circuit, as it did in the whole areas of Banat, Maramureș and Crișana, the so-called Romanian territories of Hungary. At that time, there was a deficit of arable land, while the most important land surfaces were covered with old forest units. In the first post-war years, the local Soviet Commandment collaborated with the Gendarmes Units on matters related to dispossessions, or to the chasing of Bessarabians or Bukovinians in hideout. In 1950, the territorial and administrative unit changed,

according to the Soviet model, into raioane and regions. In 1969, it returned to the interwar model, based on communes and counties.

Cociuba Mare

Village C.M. lies in the Crişul Negru basin and is composed of four villages. According to the 2021 census, it has a population of 2,724 inhabitants, with a Romanian majority (80.54%), followed by a Roma minority (12.26%); for 6.79% of the population, ethnic identity is not declared. In terms of religious affiliation, the majority of the population is Orthodox (77.39%), followed by Pentecostals (10.21%), Baptists (2.79%), and Old Rite Christians (1.28%), while 7.38% declare no religious affiliation. Corn cultivation and animal breeding are its main activities. The arable land size is 1527 ha, and there are 102 ha of hayfields and 968 ha of forests. Large-scale, together with medium scale and individual agriculture are the main activities in the village. Two-generational families are involved with arable land, livestock breeding, vegetables and watermelon cultivation. One of the current projects of the local administration is the community centre.



3. *Cociuba Mare, main street, early 1990s*

Chapter 1

Land reforms in Romania: peasants, farmers or neither

This chapter gives a historiographic overview of land reforms in Romania, after discussing the connection between land reforms and territorial concerns in South-eastern Europe.

Agrarian reforms, as regulators of property, have for long been associated with a traditionalist, conservative perspective regarding social relations. Giordano (2014) emphasized the role of agrarian reforms as instruments of territorial policies which pursued the strengthening of national cohesion and unity of the new states that emerged in Southeastern Europe during the 19th century. Property is associated with the modern formula of “Staatsnation”, widespread in Europe in the 19th century. The idea of “Staatsnation”, a German term of French origin as Stephane Pierre-Caps aptly pointed out (Pierre-Caps 1995, 56, cited in Giordano 2014, 31), is based on the doctrine according to which each “nation” must have its own territorial State, and each State must consist of one “nation” only (Altermatt 1996, 53, cited in Giordano 2014, 31).

Landed property rights through state legislative acts are always re-defined through land reforms. As R. P. Dore pointed out in his classic studies on land redistribution in Japan, from a sociological point of view, a land reform answers two needs: one of a political and the other of an economic nature, each with a specific type of landowner (Dore 1965, 487 seq., cited in Giordano 2014, 33). During the 19th century, two types of landowners persisted in Southeastern Europe: those who monopolize domination structures deriving from conquest or feudalization processes and economic actors or, in Marxian terms, representatives of the “rural wing of the bourgeoisie” who might wield an indirect power due to their wealth and contacts with politicians and administrators of urban origin (Giordano 2014, 33).

In Southeastern Europe, where the national States attained independence late, land reforms were meant to reach three main goals: (1) reducing the latifundist regime to give “the land to the tillers”. Land reforms were intended (1) to find a solution to the “social question”, which, given the specific socio-economic situation in Central and Eastern Europe, as in several other societies, was above all an “agrarian question”; (2) to create an economic basis for the rise or growth of a

rural “middle class” or “fifth estate” of wealthy peasants who could rapidly modernize agriculture, which at the time was considered indispensable to a successful industrialization policy; and (3) to “nationalize” the state’s territory by “ethnicizing” landed property, that is, by apportioning it preferentially to members of the “entitled nation” (Giordano 2014, 34). The idea that land is a fragment of national territory is recurrent in all major state-enforced discourses beyond the 19th century. The way in which the Yugoslavian land reform was implemented in Kosovo between the two World Wars confirms that, during the period of the reorganization of the agricultural sector in postsocialist Bulgaria, the land becomes national territory (Kaneff 2002, 180 seq., cited in Giordano 2014, 40).

The Agrarian Reform Law of 1864: the emancipation of peasantry and its subsequent depression

The large regional differences in land ownership, in natural conditions or in legal regulations informed Romanian historiography in terms of agrarian reforms. The relevance of regional differences holds for the reform of feudal relations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as for post-communist restitution policies in the 1990s.

The concept of property started to be applied in the Romanian Principalities to the economic and social relations constructed around land, in the first constitutional texts, namely the “Organic Regulations” in 1831–1832, although only in reference to the land estates owned by the nobility, the boyars. Property was first applied to Romanian peasants through the agrarian reform law in 1864, carried out by Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza (Müller 2011, 211). By abolishing feudal servitude and relationships, the law represents a first attempt at the modernization of the peasantry and of the whole Romanian state. Over 460,000 peasants were given land lots with a surface of about 1.8 million hectares. After the reform, the peasants owned 30% of the agricultural land, while the remaining 70% was owned by the great landowners and the state (Radu, 2012). As Moldavia and Wallachia remained autonomous under Ottoman rule, the land remained under the control of the boyars, who retained their estates and political power. In 1878, when the principalities became independent, Romania remained a land of large estates (with a strong tradition of absentee landlords in Wallachia, as landlords were moving to Bucharest and abroad) and a depressed peasantry (van Meurs 1999, 111). After the treaty of Berlin in 1878 when the young Romanian state was carved out, 80% of its population was made up of peasants, illiterate and landless, who owed less than 5 ha of land, while more than half of the cultivable land was in the hands of great landowners. The country was engaged in an export-oriented, cereal growing agriculture (Marin 2017, 94).⁷

⁷ After peace was signed at Adrianople, in 1829, when the Ottoman commercial monopoly was abolished, the Romanian Principalities entered the European market mainly through the export

The land reform of 1864 is another proof that territorial concerns come together with the definition of land regimes after the disintegration of multi-ethnic empires. Romania, after attaining its independence again, was confronted by powerful “autochthonous” landowners with feudal or patrimonial backgrounds (bo-yars) who, besides their political privileges, had considerable economic means built upon the “second serfdom” system (Giordano 2014, 34). With the abolishment of serfdom in 1864, the state was making a rapid attempt at modernization, giving way to a form of neo-serfdom: peasants received land but were tied to it, could not sell or liquidate the property, and thus exchanged their political bonds for economic ones. The small grants of land kept through hereditary fragmentation that peasants had received in their emancipation of 1864 were insufficient to make a living. Less than half of the land was divided between the 7 million peasants and the other half in the hands of small landowners. Towards the end of the 19th century, the absentee landlords preferred to rent land to capitalist entrepreneurs who extracted a rent plus a profit for themselves from the peasants. Land rental became thus a form of real estate speculation while the price of peasant labour remained unchanged (Marin 2017, 97). In parallel, the first cooperative structures appeared, namely the popular banks (rural cooperative banks), given that peasants suffered from a lack of capital and were at the mercy of private moneylenders. This novelty could not improve their situation, on the contrary.

The uprising of 1907

The turn of the century caught rural areas in Central and Eastern Europe in precarious living conditions, given the indebtedness and impoverishment of the rural masses, usury, overpopulation and unemployment in the farmlands, emigration, pulverized small and medium properties, and the persistence of the latifundia (Giordano 2014, 34). A lame and, at times, entirely off-the-mark industrialization process, unable to employ the agricultural workforce surplus, heightened an already dire and critical situation. In most of Europe’s Central and Eastern countries, these economic factors would create a widespread atmosphere of social tension, that would often break out into bloody riots such as the one of the Romanian peasants in the Spring of 1907 (Castellan 1994, 51, cited in Giordano 2014, 35).⁸

The uprising of 1907 was, and still is, the most violent and destructive episode in Romanian history ever to occur in peacetime. In historiography, peasants are

of cereals. These radical changes determined the increasing interest in land exploitation in a context in which most properties were not economically viable as the surface of the lots was reduced, because of the frequent inheritances, sales and donations that took place over time (Prozan 2014, 792).

⁸ Giordano (2014) sees the uprising as part of a situation of endemic rebelliousness, reinforced by sweeping historical events such as the Russian Revolution, and which summons the phantom of Central and Eastern-European societies’ “bolshhevization” among the great landowners.

pictured as victims of the land leasers, as lacking any form of agency in relation to their property and economic life. Recent work (Marin, 2017) looked at the Romanian peasants' uprising of 1907 in a transnational comparative context, by providing a structural, comparative explanation of the unequal spread of large-scale rural violence across the complex frontier between two empires, Habsburg and Tsarist, and the fledging states that emerged out of the Balkan fringes of the Ottoman Empire: Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia. Structural factors such as patterns of land tenure, size of land for the average peasant, literacy rates, initial terms of emancipation, and land exploitation techniques (subsistence farming, lease holding) played a role in fostering conflict along the complex frontier with three empires, Habsburg, Tsarist and Ottoman. In other words, the author looked at the dynamics of "rural combustibility" along this frontier.⁹

The uprising of 1907 is mainly viewed in historiography in terms of the leasehold system that resulted in colonial exploitation of peasantry and explosive social relations (Marin 2017, 98). Absentee landlordism led to the lease holding system in which landlords ran competitive bidding processes for their estates. There was no incentive for investment in the estate as most lease contracts were for a period of three to five years, and never more than 12 years, and any investment belonged to the landowner. In Romania, lease holding was an extractive system and hereditary leaseholds were rare. This was a disincentive to make any investment as the contract period was too short to see it pay off. Thus, the discontent of peasants is explained in terms of this exploitative system of land tenure, which was predicated on land leases and chronic land hunger. Romania geared its entire economy around producing and exporting grain, unlike Bulgaria and Serbia, which concentrated on cattle growing. In statistics of the year 1900, Transylvania is described as dominated not by cultivable land, but by meadows, pastureland, and woodland. The Romanian state thus became the victim of its own richness – the great Romanian landowners made a conscious decision to practice monoculture or biculture agriculture rather than diversify. They pursued profit at all costs, at the expense of the peasantry (Marin 2017, 99).

Moreover, in Romania, pastures and forests remained in possession of great landowners and this was the lynchpin of the exploitative system of land tenure leading to the uprising. This situation was isolated as the use of pastures and forests was legislated in both Austro-Hungarian and Tsarist borderlands. In the fledging kingdom of Romania, the acquisition of state independence meant that all power was now concentrated in the hands of great latifundia owners turned into statesmen who legislated and ran the country according to their personal interests

⁹ Marin's (2017) work is part of a broader project looking at the interconnection of peasant violence and anti-Semitism in the borderland region of the three empires. The project argues that in Romania, a very feeble rural policing system allowed simmering unrest to boil over into general uprising.

with no higher agency to bring them to account. The political and economic power was thus fully overlapping. The priority of land leasers and landowners was seeing how much work they can extract from the peasant without paying for it. The obstacles placed by landowners in Romania on investment into agricultural modernization as well as the short duration of contracts were instrumental into shaping Romanian land tenure relations in this period and defining its exploitative character (Marin 2017, 100). The author dismisses the Jewishness component of the uprising, despite an apparent anti-Semitic reaction to it, as the troubles started on estates rented out to Jewish landowners. However, it was not the anti-Semitism of the peasants that fuelled the uprising, but rather the anti-Semitism of the local authorities, as their delayed reaction allowed the local disturbances to gain momentum and spread out (Marin 2017, 106).

The reform of 1921 and the interwar period

The reform of 1921 emerged out of a need to substantiate the national states of modern Europe, in the international situation at the end of World War I with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman and Tsarist kingdoms. The states of Europe were re-configured and there was a need for the implementation of large and radical social, economic and cultural reforms (Prozan 2014, 1).

First, historians highlight the socially oriented component of the reform which aimed to expropriate a part of the big landowners' estates, and to distribute it among the poverty-stricken people, with special concern towards the First World War veterans or their widows.¹⁰ The reform could ease the social tensions by eliminating the old-fashioned landowning system through social redistribution of land holdings and temporary improvement of the living standards for the peasantry (Prozan 2014, 6). The reform was thought to be the most radical of its kind in the region in terms of abolishing large, landed property. At the same time, historians view this agrarian reform as a mythical symbol of the national renaissance in the nation-building process, and as a way of contributing to the consolidation of Great Romania. With the need for the economic reconstruction of a country devastated by the first major world conflict, the reform outlined new horizons. For the people, it gained the valences of a true agrarian reform, happily completing the success of creating United Romania. Another reason for enforcing the reform was the fear that Bolshevik revolutionary ideas would influence peasantry (Radu 2012, 345).

¹⁰ Large landowners were expropriated, with compensation, and approximately 6 million hectares – around one third of the country's arable land – were redistributed to 1.4 million peasants, who were required to make payments over a period of 25 years, or converted into community-controlled pastures and forests (Roberts 1951, 362). As a result, the proportion of smallholdings increased substantially, with properties of up to 5 acres accounting for 82.7% of the total land area. At the same time, the Romanian government did not exclude peasants belonging to ethnic minorities from the redistribution process (Radu 2012, 346).

Second, the reform was discussed by historians in terms of its political component, being seen as a weapon of gaining support for the National Liberal and National Peasant Parties which needed a class of small proprietors as a constituency, under the circumstances of universal suffrage. Thus, the peasants as a group were gaining some political weight. The land reform redistributing the surfaces of large landowners is then criticized for failing to address the issue of economic modernization: it did not invest in infrastructure, mechanization, and middle-sized farming enterprises, despite the support of the rural population for the ruling National Liberal Party.

Finally, subsistence problems, with the peasant estates becoming smaller, due to the inheritance system, are another theme in the historiography. As the problem of debt was spread nationwide, agricultural and financial cooperatives, as well as cooperatives for consumption and for joint cultivation of land grew in number. Numerous, socially immobile and barely integrated into the entitlements of citizenship, peasants are presented as losers in this reform. The legislative support for small households was absent, and peasants did not have their own capital for a long-term investment, nor sufficient agricultural tools. At the same time, the global economic crisis heavily affected Romanian agriculture, initially manifested through an alarming price drop, especially for cereals.¹¹ In 1930, in Romania, 2,5% of agricultural exploitations supplying the internal and external market had more than 20 ha, or 40% of the agricultural surface. Moreover, the economic model promoted before the great economic depression (1929–1933) focused on economic protectionism, which slowed the rate of industrialization and creation of new jobs in the cities (Murgescu 2010, 250 seq., cited in Prozan 2014, 793).

Overall, the interwar period bridging the agrarian reforms of 1921 and of 1945 was affected by the international credit crisis throughout the 1930s, which impacted peasantries throughout the entire world, following various kinds of modernization programs. For instance, the wave of farm bankruptcies in the United States in the 1930s was just one instance of an overarching mismatch between the demands of the financial system and the necessities of peasantries across the globe (Cîrjan 2014, 195). The interwar period also experienced a failure in modernization, arising from the different political visions on modernization in Romania. Some radical Peasant Party members talked about socialist cooperatives, M. Manoilescu looked at fascism as a possible model, Social-Democrats looked at the SPD's anti-capitalist project, the Peasant Party refused the capitalist dimensions of the Western model. These divergent opinions over what the "West" meant

¹¹ The interwar Romanian economy characteristics were very similar to those of the neighbouring countries. In 1930, 78% of the population was employed in agriculture and its related services, given that in Bulgaria the percentage was 80% (1934), 79% in Yugoslavia (1931), in Poland 65% (1931) and 53% in Hungary (1930). The Czechoslovak state's situation was somewhat better, where the population employed in the agricultural sector covered only 38% (Radu 2012, 213).

were underpinned by different modernization projects and class interests, which listened to different discursive constraints (Cîrjan 2014, 195).¹²

Generally, the failure in regulating the circulation of land and in securing a viable rural infrastructure were part of interwar Romanian society. As cadastral laws were never implemented, legal land transactions were impeded and the development of a stable market obstructed. Land circulated through informal means, still very much dependent on traditional social structures such as kinship and matrimonial ceremonies. The development of a land market, hindered by the legislation, might have provided rural entrepreneurs with the possibility of having a head start in the race for development. Thus, despite its interventionist stance throughout the interwar period, the state seldom found the means to intervene in rural economic life (Micu 2014, 134).

The reform of 1945

The reform law of March 23, 1945, covering the surface of Great Romania – the estates in Moldavia and Wallachia, as well as the middle-size farms in Transylvania – was enforced in a country deeply affected by the devastation of war and engaged with armed forces on the Western Front. At the same time, the country had to pay war compensation to the Soviet Union, and there was a need to support the Soviet occupation army and the internal economic recovery. In this context, Petru Groza's government issued Law No. 187 for the land reform stipulating the expropriation of all land of over 50 hectares and its distribution among 918,000 peasants in 5-hectare plots, with one quarter of the land becoming state property.¹³

First, the reform was approached in terms of its political dimension. To counter the influence of the National Peasant Party in the countryside and to mediate communist influence among the peasants, the communists supported the formation of the Ploughmen's Front, which strongly supported private property.¹⁴ On December 23, 1945, during a meeting of the Ploughmen's Front, Petru Groza

¹² The author further claims that as Elley and Blackbourn have tried to show and as some post-colonial scholars have pointed out, the existence of a "Western model" is little more than a discursive trope, used in local ideological conflicts. Historicizing modernization discourse instead of employing it as a conceptual framework can be a strategy which might push Romanian social history into a post-Cold War framework (Cîrjan 2014, 198).

¹³ By the completion of the land reform in 1946, more than three million households – approximately 75% of the total – held less than five hectares of land. By 1948, this number had increased to around five million peasant households, accounting for 91% of all farms (OECD 2000, 76). Both agrarian reforms implemented in the first half of the twentieth century prioritized broad redistribution over economic efficiency, allocating relatively small plots – an average of 2.3 hectares in 1921 and 1.3 hectares in 1945 – in order to provide land for as many beneficiaries as possible, with limited concern for the long-term viability of the newly created holdings (Axenciuc 2000, 100–103, cited in Micu 2014, 134).

¹⁴ The Ploughmen's Front (*Frontul Plugarilor*) is commonly portrayed in post-communist historiography as a democratic agrarian organization led by Petru Groza, claiming to represent and

affirmed that Stalin had told him that the Romanian peasants must choose 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 (Radu, 2012). Before winning the elections of 1946, the communists continued to pose as defenders of peasant property, and maintained this stance until 1948, after which they started to denigrate the peasant farm. In 1949, at a plenary session of the PMR, the small peasant farm was characterized as “tottering and lacking in future prospects, compared to the collective farm, which will ensure the general welfare to the agriculturalist” (Jerca 2012, 134).¹⁵

Second, the reform of 1945 is viewed as secretly preparing ground for the collectivization decree. Initially, the communists proclaimed themselves as firm defenders of Private property, on ideological and economic grounds.¹⁶ Ideologically, the PMR aimed to attain sympathy from the rural population to the detriment of its increasingly important political opponent – the National Peasant Party. Practically, the communists enforced an excessive fragmentation of the agricultural land, so that they would later be able to claim that small farms were not profitable and, thus, prepare for the process of collectivization and affirm the superiority of collective farming (Roberts, 1951; Radu, 2012). Peasant agriculture was characterized by small and fragmented holdings of less than 5 ha, as well as obsolete equipment and technology for tiling, by low yields and consumption limited to households. Additionally, the expropriation enacted by the PMR through Groza’s government involved a seizure of land from the owners. As the peasants who were given the confiscated land from the great landowners as allotment plots were obliged to pay for it to the Ministry of Finance, the land reform was not free, as the communist propaganda stated at the time (Radu 2012, 212).

The connection between agrarian reforms in Central and Eastern Europe after 1945 and the Soviet collectivization model is a third study theme. Due to ideological pressure coming from the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party, the Romanian state was pushed towards the Soviet Union’s collectivization model, carried out from 1929 to 1933. Thus, the agrarian reforms in Central and East-

defend the economic and political interests of the rural population against established politicians and party politics.

¹⁵ The condemnation of the individual farm is paralleled with the repression, which, in 1948, had already intensified throughout the country. Around one million people endured various forms of incarceration such as prison, forced domicile, and deportation (Ionescu-Gură, 2005, cited in Jerca, 2012). 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, cited in Jerca 2012, 134).

¹⁶ In the first years following their access to power, the communists issued no public declarations about collectivization. They acted with prudence, rightly concerned about the predictable opposition this process would generate in the countryside (Prost, 2006, cited in Micu 2006, 6). 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 (Jerca 2012, 102).

ern Europe after 1945 exceeded their initial socioeconomic nature, turning into a genuine political weapon in the hands of Moscow patronage parties, especially interested in capturing the elective attention of the rural population (Radu 2012, 211). At the same time, in view of the high land fragmentation and debt, reform was necessary.

Moreover, there was an urgency in controlling peasant agriculture, after most of the service and industrial sectors had been nationalized and all new capacities were built solely by the state. As private owners of production means, peasants were a serious threat to the power of the communist elite, as they could manipulate a fundamentally important resource: food.

Finally, the reform is discussed in relation to the German minority of Romania. Between 1945 and 1948, alongside outstanding personalities and regular people from all social categories, members of ethnic minorities were deprived of rights, put under surveillance, arrested, deported or killed.¹⁷ The German ethnic group was punished collectively through the confiscation of wealth, so that the unity and solidarity of the German communities from Transylvania and Banat would be destroyed. Following the decisions of the Soviet authorities to deport Romanian Germans to forced labour in the USSR, many Romanian Germans who returned home, particularly after 1948, discovered that they had no future in their own country (Jerca 2012, 101).¹⁸

Another temporal frame: “After WWI”, or land reforms as ongoing processes

The land reforms in the post-World War I period fit into the frame of the transition from subsistence agriculture to commercial agricultural production, from peasants to farmers or, in Polanyian language, from embedded economy to disembedded markets. These projects, conceived as responses to what classical historical sociology has termed the “problem of backwardness”, led to the rural reforms of 1919/1921, of 1945 and of the postsocialist period, as well as to the set of ongoing processes following their actual implementation (Cîrjan 2014, 192).

In the long post-WWI time frame, during the interwar period and the communist one, the definition of property overlapped social realities that were not entirely compatible with it. In terms of the legal understanding, property-related interwar legislation reflects a distinction between “small” and “large” property when re-

¹⁷ The agrarian reform was simultaneously an act directed against members of the German community from Romania and only secondly against landowners, as the Communists’ and the Ploughmen’s Front’s speech and propaganda implied. In 1945, about 75,000 ethnic Germans were deported to the Soviet Union for hard labour (Radu 2012, 129).

¹⁸ Despite the more tolerant politics of the regime enforced in 1956, ethnic Germans engaged in mass emigration. The exodus reached a high peak during 1970, following the agreements of RSR and the Federal Republic of Germany, followed by another high peak in the 1990s (Jerca 2012, 102).

ferring to the sale of “small” property gained through the agrarian reforms. The communist regime, in its turn, applies the distinction between “estate owners” and “peasants” (Micu 2012, 81–82 and 84–85). At the same time, the interwar social structure relied on the co-option and the support of traditional elites, leading to a renewed form of traditionalism, despite the modernizing discourse of the Romanian central elites. Paradoxically, only in the communist period could a new layer of professionals appear due to the well-developed educational system producing a generation of technicians and experts capable of replacing traditional rural elites (Cîrjan 2014, 137). Third, in terms of land merging, the interwar period is viewed as a failure of specific modernization models, while the communist regime emphasized the importance of merging the land into larger units of production.

During the first half of the 20th century, land was a “survival mean” and together with the slow industrial development and low rate of urbanization, there was a very limited internal market for agricultural products. Then, due to the taxation of grain exports and high prices of agricultural implements, average households specialized in subsistence production (Mitrany 1968, 434 seq., cited in Micu 2014, 137). Nevertheless, the lack of incentives which might have boosted an economic entrepreneurial class capable of replacing the political and at the same time economic elites was common in both periods. This entrepreneurial elite might have forwarded the transition from a subsistence economy to a market-based economic structure, from peasants to farmers (Micu 2014, 145).

Overall, both the interwar and the communist regimes have seen a failure in achieving the modernization of the countryside, with a vague effect up to this day. The Romanian modernization of the countryside failed since Romanian elites, far from focusing on the economic development of the rural area, harnessed this project to various ideological perspectives: nationalism, the preservation of the post-1918 status-quo or the creation of an egalitarian society, each with its own modernization program. Therefore, a separate outlook at socialism will reveal its anti-market rhetoric, its vision of agricultural production and its own modernization program (Cîrjan 2014, 196).¹⁹ With its modernizing project which did not include the market, the communist period can reveal that it is possible to “modernize” the countryside without entering the global market or accepting capitalist social relations. At the same time, the language of modernization vs. backwardness is not just a problem of scholarly discourse, but also an important ideological tool. Moreover, the idea of a civilizational backwardness emphasizes material conditions and techniques but without neglecting ideas and representations (Hann 2015, 882).

¹⁹ The author calls for the deeper understanding of modernization. There is a certain claim that modernization was conterminous with the Western model. Which Western model? German state-led capitalist development, British capitalism along with its colonial dimensions, US capitalism and its racial segregation, Italian fascist corporatism, the Italian workers’ councils? (Cîrjan 2014, 197)

In today's political discourse on agriculture, the main political players get their legitimation from a consensus regarding the proper "modernization" of the countryside: creating a commercial, farm-based rural economy.²⁰ The modern influence of EU policies calls for a surface increase of agricultural holdings, opening a historical question over the adequate size of agricultural holdings which has been nagging rural economics since their inception. The adequate land size depends on a variety of variables (types of crops, access to credit, modern machinery, and markets, etc.) which do not automatically disqualify small holdings as backwards or inefficient.

²⁰ One assumption underlying Micu's (2014) study is that, following Romania's integration into the European Union and the restructuring of agricultural policy, agriculture ceased to function primarily as a support for industrial development and nationbuilding and instead became increasingly integrated into transnational capital flows. However, despite the rhetoric of the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy), large farms benefit disproportionately from agricultural subsidies; given existing patterns of land distribution, these effects can be socially damaging in Eastern Europe.

Chapter 2

Historiographical and conceptual background

Historiographical background

The Romanian socialist regime in the stages of post-1989 historiography

The paradigms which informed the anthropological and historical study of phenomena pertaining to the socialist regime were outlined by Iordachi and Dobrinu (2009). In the post-1945 decades, the paradigm of “totalitarian model”, emphasizing total control, repression and coercion was dominant (Arendt, 1951; Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1956). After the 1960s, the model was challenged by social, cultural and anthropological approaches, in the field of Soviet studies. At the same time, anthropology was changing in the 1960s from a study of the “people without history” (Eric R. Wolf), to the people from the new states that appeared after the crash of the colonial system. Therefore, social anthropology became historicized and reassessed the anthropological relevance of the distinction between past and present, present and future. It has increasingly regarded these distinctions as both an epistemic and existential watershed (Dorondel & Șerban, 2014). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, revisionist social historians emphasized the magnitude of social transformation and the multifaceted aspects of post-colonialism both “from below” and “from above”. These historians proposed the “interest group” approach and the “institutionalist pluralist model”. Starting with the 1980s and 1990s, culturalist and anthropological approaches emerged, coined by Fitzpatrick (1992) as cultural front.²¹

Historiographical phases in the study of Romanian socialism reflect the everyday events. In socialist Romania, for more than five decades, the regime attempted to erase from public memory all symbols or artifacts of the pre-communist era.

²¹ “The cultural front” refers to the period examined by the author, spanning from the October Revolution through the Stalinist 1930s. It designates a historical current in which the intelligentsia, despite the erosion of its autonomy and the degradation of its cultural authority, emerged as a partially victorious group. Fitzpatrick’s work addresses major developments such as the Cultural Revolution, the formation of the new Stalinist elite, and the institutionalization of socialist realism.

The repression of the late 1940s–1950s was an unfortunate but necessary phase that eventually ceased with the Declaration of Independence of 1964 promulgated by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, the Secretary of the Communist Party,²² six years after the Soviet Union’s withdrawal from Romania in 1958 (Ciobanu 2015, 93). Starting with the early 1960s, national history was gradually rewritten. On the other hand, party-state propaganda incorporated all aspects of life in an all-inclusive ideology of a socialist order that promoted in the 1970s and the 1980s a strongly nationalist ideology in which pre-World War II capitalist order was unfair, unjust, and corrupt. Historian Șerban Papacostea distinguishes two stages of communist historiography. First, between 1944 and 1965, the main themes were communist internationalism and the positive role played by the Soviet Union. The second stage unfolding between 1964 and 1989 reflected the development of what came to be known as “nationalist communism”. The latter involved a theoretical identification between the state, the party, the proletariat and the nation. This was achieved with the support of historians and intellectuals – novelists, philosophers, poets, and artists – who promoted a cult of personality through their works (Papacostea 2004, 223–224, cited in Ciobanu 2009, 93).²³

The politics of memory and justice, which handle the wrongdoing of the previous political regime, are another research trend. A policy of lustration was the main memorial weapon, acting at three levels: the disqualification and removal of certain categories of officials of the old regime from public office; the establishment of independent bodies to manage the secret archives of communist regimes’ secret police; and the granting of individuals access to the files kept on them. The roots of the lustration idea lie in the Proclamation of Timișoara²⁴ released in the 1990s and becoming the basis for a lustration law only in 2005, fifteen years after its publication. At the same time, during the 1990s, a lustration *in situ* was continuously at the heart of intellectual and electoral debate among the anti-communist opposition movement represented by civic groups such as Civic Alliance (AC, *Alianța Civică*)²⁵ and the Group for Social Dialogue (*Grupul pentru Dialog So-*

²² This is also termed in historiography as the “Testament of Dej” and described as, for example, the basis for the country’s foreign policy.

²³ For the role of the intellectuals during Ceaușescu’s regime and the nationalist-communist doctrine see Shafir (1983) and Verdery (1991). Other historiographical work shows that, along with this historical production, a myth of Romanian exceptionalism was created based on claims that Romania was a small nation with a large role to play in the world and that the Romanian state was one of the oldest in Europe (Boia, 2001).

²⁴ The Proclamation of Timișoara was drafted by a group of individuals who came together in the second half of January 1990 to edit the newspaper *Timișoara*. Conceived as a counterweight to the former regime’s official press, the publication provided a platform for reformist and civic debate. For the most recent direct analysis of the reform proposals, the Proclamation itself, and the civic and media confrontations it generated, see Szabo (2015).

²⁵ Defined by its founders as a non-political forum, the Civic Alliance (AC), established in November 1990, functioned as a platform bringing together a wide range of civic groupings from across

cial).²⁶ Why did the debate on lustration come up so late? First, during these years justice became the work of those groups that attempted and to a certain extent succeeded in preserving some of the privileges and powers that the previous communist regime had granted them; second, the economic problems related to the adjustment to a new regime were more prevalent than the decision-taking in terms of publicly approaching the past regime (Ciobanu 2009, 316).

Lustration is particularly associated with a law proposal at civil society level put forward in 1993 by Ticu Dumitrescu, president of the Association of Former Political Prisoners (AFDPR).²⁷ The latter submitted to the Senate a proposal for a Law of Access to Files and Exposure of the Securitate as a Political Police. After initial rejection, it was resubmitted in January 1997 and approved in November that year as Law 187 known as the “Ticu Law”. The new law affirmed the existence of a “good” and a “bad” Securitate: one defending the national interest and the other engaged in political policing. This altering of the draft persuaded Dumitrescu to renounce his authorship of the law (Ciobanu 2009, 324). On the other hand, lustration was also paired with transitional justice,²⁸ with the instrumentalization of civil society efforts by successive post-communist governments interested in short-term electoral gains, or with the right to reparation and redress for the victims, aimed for by civil society in post-communist Romania. At that time, the new democratically elected government discouraged the need for active and unified action at civil society level (Stan 2013, 67).

the country. Its stated aim was to challenge the institutional power structures that had been put in place by the political regime in 1989. In 1991, the AC advanced its own call for lustration, following the initial demand articulated a year earlier in Article 8 of the Timișoara Proclamation. For a discussion of official lustration policies, see Stan (2013).

²⁶ The Group for Social Dialogue (GDS) was the first legally constituted civil society organization established after the fall of socialism. It defines itself as an independent, non-governmental association dedicated to promoting the values of democracy, freedom, and human rights (GDS website). Historiographical scholarship has shown that the interpretation and representation of the communist past by political actors and civil society organizations – such as the Civic Alliance (AC, *Alianța Civică*) and the Group for Social Dialogue (*Grupul pentru Dialog Social*) – have been shaped by the politics of the present, particularly by these actors’ varying needs for self-legitimation. Within this logic, integration into the Western democratic world requires an emphatic and comprehensive repudiation of the non-democratic past (Ciobanu 2015, 94).

²⁷ Established in 1990 in Bucharest, the association represents deportees, political prisoners and their relatives.

²⁸ Transitional justice refers to the pursuit of justice during periods of political change, typically through legal and institutional measures designed to address the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes (Teitel 2000; Kritz 1995). Political Scientist Lavinia Stan shows that transitional justice was applied since 1989 by surveying methods such as lustration (the banning of communist decision-makers from post-communist public life), court trials launched against communist perpetrators, ordinary citizens’ access to the files compiled by the secret political police, the Securitate, the presidential history commission, the citizens’ opinion tribunal, property restitution, and memorialization (Stan 2013, 10–15).

Another research trend is oral history, or the constellation of works which generate the genealogies of memory. The oral histories emerging all during the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s examined the armed resistance beginning during the Soviet occupation and annihilated in the early 1960s (Radosav, 1994), Bodeanu and Budeancă (2004), Jurju and Budeancă (2002) and Ioanid (1999), the testimonies of the workers' protest of Braşov in 1987 (Rusan, 2004) and the deportations to Bărağan (Vultur, 1997a., 1997b, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Ştevin, 2004; Sămânţă, 2015). Later, the access to Securitate files supplemented the recollections of former dissidents with studies of documents (e.g. Goma, 2005). Between 1991 and 2006, TV journalist Lucia Hossu-Longin gathered the recollections of former political prisoners and dissidents by collecting more than 30 hours of testimonies released in 2007 in the DVD collection *Memorialul Durerii. O istorie care nu se învaţă la şcoală* (*Testimonies of Suffering. A History That Is Not Taught at School*), and later, in 2012, in a written publication bearing the same name.

In addition to written works, the most coordinated initiative in gathering documents and testimonies about communist repression appeared in 1997, with the founding of the Sighet Memorial as a national historical site under Law 95.²⁹ The latter stands in a former prison, a prison where pre-World War II political elites were incarcerated³⁰ and hosts a Centre for International Studies of Communism. Overall, the works of the Civic Academy Foundation, of the Memorial, and later, of the local unit of the Centre for International Studies of Communism are part of a memory explosion that emerged in the early 1990s, resulting in hundreds – possibly thousands – of autobiographical accounts in which the suffering and inhuman treatment of former political prisoners, deportees, and their families in various repressive contexts was vividly described (Ciobanu 2015, 94). The latter became instrumental in producing a version of the communist past as repressive, inhumane, and alien. Ultimately, it resulted in a unique pattern of remembering that excluded alternative voices (Tileagă, 2012; Petrescu and Petrescu, 2014, cited

²⁹ Prior to the establishment of the Memorial, this body of work was published in a series of edited volumes by the Civic Academy Foundation, including *Instaurarea comunismului: între rezistenţă şi represiune* (*The Establishment of Communism: Between Resistance and Repression*), edited in 1995.

³⁰ In some recent historiographical work, the prison at Sighet is described simply as a “Stalinist prison” (Ciobanu 2009). For a broader analysis of the detention system in communist Romania, however, see Bădilă (2012). Within one classificatory framework, the Sighet prison is included among the category of “political penitentiaries”, which is divided into two types: “large extermination centres” (such as Piteşti, Gherla, Aiud, and Jilava) and extermination prisons, a group that includes Sighet alongside institutions such as Râmnicu Sărat, Deva, Târgu-Ocna, Iaşi, Botoşani, Suceava, Galaţi, Mîslea, Târgşor, Ploieşti, Sibiu, Cluj, Oradea, Arad, Timişoara, Caransebeş, Lugoj, Satu Mare, Vaslui, and Ocnele Mari. In an alternative typology, Sighet is classified as an “exceptional case” among penitentiaries: although relatively small in size, it functioned as a site for the systematic elimination of former political and anti-communist elites (Bădilă 2012, 22).

in Gallinat, 2009). For most social actors, however, who were neither directly persecuted nor part of the repressive apparatus, communism was a reality that meant adjustment and accommodation to the challenges of daily life (Gallinat, 2009; Todorova and Gille, 2012, cited in Ciobanu 2015, 94).

Finally, the condemnation of the communist regime through a presidential report is a key topic in the study of the communist regime. In April 2006, President Traian Băsescu established the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (CPADCR – Comisia Prezidențială Pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România), often referred to as the “Truth Commission” or the “Tismăneanu Commission”, and chaired by Romanian-born American political scientist Vladimir Tismăneanu. Hundreds of intellectuals signed a petition explicitly requesting the public condemnation of the Romanian communist regime as “illegitimate” and criminal and handed it to the Romanian president in March 2006 (Tileagă 2009, 284). The Commission issued, as soon as 18 January 2007, an almost 700-page report not endorsed by the legislature, labelling the communist regime as illegal and criminal. The consequences of the report in terms of transitional justice policies in Romania, the significance of Tismăneanu’s Truth Commission in general for conceptions of truth and justice in post-totalitarian countries of the former communist bloc and the confusing usage of concepts such as genocide, repression or dictatorship in the report are some of the report-related research topics (Ciobanu, 2015). Then, there were controversies and complaints from unrecognized groups in the report as well as critiques on the late arrival of the report in terms of “criminalizing the past” only directly addressed 17 years after the fall of communism.³¹ While the publication of the report brought some progress in revealing the truth, it did not have a similar impact on transitional justice policies (Ciobanu 2009, 314).³²

The autobiographies of former political prisoners make up another historiography theme. In a political context still dominated by former elites and the machin-

³¹ This delay has been attributed to the dominant position of the successor party to the Communist Party of the Romanian Socialist Republic, as well as to a broader public apathy toward engaging with the communist past, as much of the population was preoccupied with the practical difficulties of the post-socialist transition (Ciobanu 2009, 93). In contrast, other works present a more celebratory assessment of the report, emphasizing that the Tismăneanu Committee was the first presidential commission in Eastern Europe mandated to investigate the crimes of communism, preceded only by a parliamentary committee established by the German Bundestag in 1992 (Stan 2007, 126–127, cited in Tileagă 2009).

³² For the work of the Commission and its significance for coming to terms with the past see Lavinia Stan (2013) and Monica Ciobanu (2009). The authors placed the work of the Truth Commission in the historical context of the post 1989 democratic transition and examined its significance for the politics of truth and justice in Romania. Memory, history and justice are presented as embedded. For an overview of the report’s content and description of its rejection in the Romanian Parliament, see Tănăsioiu (2007). For the structure of the report materials and analytic framework, see Tileagă (2009).

ery of the Securitate in the 1990s and early 2000s, which persisted in trumpeting nationalist-populist propaganda, former political prisoners were often viewed with scepticism or outright hostility (Ciobanu, 2015).³³ Other famous biographies recall the deportations to Bărăgan, enforced in 1951 (Mirciov, 1998; Andrecă, 2002; Milin et al., 2016; Colojoară, 2012).³⁴

A chronology of research production on collectivization and rural socialism

The first work examining the collectivization of agriculture was commissioned at state level in 1991, when the Romanian parliament commissioned Octavian Roske's (1993) study that he later continued under the framework of the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, founded in 1993. Later, Dan Cătănuș and Octavian Roske (e.g., 2000, 2004) embarked upon a large project to publish documents on collectivization, including transcripts of Politburo, Secretariat, and Central Committee meetings and secret police reports (see also Roske et al., 2007). In the 1990s and early 2000s numerous similar projects emerged, bringing out documents both from the Party leadership and from specific regions or locales (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 464).³⁵

In the early 2000s and late 1990s, the most active association engaged in the memorialization of the communist repression was the Civic Academy Foundation led by the well-known former dissident and public intellectual Ana Blandiana. Many former "partisans"³⁶ and their supporters were invited to lecture at the Summer School of Memory organized by the Foundation since 1997 at Sighet Memorial. Moreover, the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS), the Civic Academy (Academia Civică), and the Romanian Institute for Recent History (IRIR) included collectivization in their examination of phenomena related to socialist pasts, resulting in document collections and analytic-interpretive essays.³⁷ The trend in the study of collectivization is to gather interdisciplinary work.

³³ For further analysis of the democratic transition and the role of former elites in shaping the process of democratization, see Tom Gallagher (2005).

³⁴ I am grateful to Smaranda Vultur for drawing my attention to a collection of works to which these belong; the great majority of these works were published by Timișoara-based publishing houses.

³⁵ see, e.g., Ciuceanu et al. 2003; Iancu et al. 2000; Cojoc 2001 [for Dobrogea]; Damian et al. 2002 [for Vlașca]; Dobeș et al. 2004 [for Maramureș]; Marton 2003 and Olah 2001 [for Odorhei district]; Moisa 1999 [for western Romania] (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 472).

³⁶ See Chapter Five, "The Revolt of 1949", for a discussion of the use of the label *partisan* in both historiographical and everyday discourse.

³⁷ We have works of historical synthesis – Ionescu-Gură, on the stalinization of Romania (2005), and Tănase's on the Gheorghiu-Dej regime (1998) – and village studies, for example Liiceanu's (2000) and Mungiu-Pippidi's (2010). On the national level, an increasing number of articles on collectivization began appearing in edited volumes about the communist era (e.g. Cesereanu

In the early 2000s, the focus on collectivization as a political phenomenon turned into one on collectivization as an engine for social change. Smaranda Vultur, for example, in conjunction with the Anthropology–Oral History Group of the “Third Europe” Foundation in Timișoara, edited several volumes of life-history interviews, many of which contain reminiscences about collectivization (e.g. 1997, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2009a). In parallel, University programs emerged such as the Institute for Oral History in Cluj, coordinated by Doru Radosav, with its associated journal (*Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală*) and numerous volumes concerning the anti-communist resistance (e.g. Bodeanu et al., 2006). Similar recuperative activities were found in several counties, through their museums or other institutions (see publications such as *Analele Sighet* and *Crisia*) (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 10). At the same time, ethnographies on local attitudes towards collectivization enriched the scholarship. For example, Șerban (2001–2002) identifies two types of collectivization: forced and organic, as well as differences based on civic, religious (Greek-Catholic), and political culture. In the forced collectivization type, all individual households joined the collective farm (GAC or CAP), except for 11 families. In the organic type, the authorities managed to replace the expression “socialist transformation of agriculture” in effective formulas related to tillage associations, cooperatives and contracts with the state. Consequently, property remained in the possession of individual households. After 1965, when the pressure from the authorities diminished, villagers could even work their land profitably, using mostly the consumption cooperation (*cooperația de consum*)³⁸ and the contracts with the state.

During the 1990s and the 2000s, the repressive feature of collectivization is amply documented by Vultur (1997a, 1997b, 2000a, 2000b, 2003), revealing regional contingencies through oral history, reports, or study of state documents. In the late 2000s, the multi-disciplinary work of Iordachi and Dobrinu (2009, 27) depicts collectivization on the everyday level by using three axes of analysis: state institutions, cultural system and social relations setting. In doing so, it privileges accounts of social agency and informal social networks over formal institutions or a dichotomous understanding of state-society relations. At the same time, the study stands apart from other historiographic trends dominated by a hierarchical view on a “Sovietization” process, in which industrialization (and urbanization) is a first tool, followed by agricultural collectivization.

2006; Dăncuș 2005; Iordachi and Dobrinu 2009) and in several journals (especially *Analele Sighet*, *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală*, and *Anuarul Institutului Român de Istorie Recentă*, as well as in publications associated with the Institutul de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 11).

³⁸ Following a decree enacted in 1949, Romania’s cooperative sector was reorganized into three main branches: consumption cooperatives (covering supply and retail), craft production cooperatives, and agricultural production cooperatives (GACs), alongside other associated forms.

In 2011, Kligman and Verdery's seminal work *Peasants under Siege* presents an outstandingly rich panorama on collectivization countryside. The study sees collectivization as a foundational act in the creation of the Romanian communist state and not as an "auxiliary to industrialization and urbanization", showing that the change in property systems destroyed social relationships and "peasant notions of personhood" (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 8). The book deeply challenges post-1989 narratives of peasant resistance and its effect on collectivization. As anthropologists, Kligman and Verdery claim separation from the mechanistic dimension of collectivization, while focusing on political, cultural, and social-relational issues rather than questions about how collective farms worked. In addition to ethnography itself, the book is theoretically rich in incorporating theories of memory, bureaucracy, dictatorial states or agency, being highly sensitive to matters such as personhood, storytelling, and the meanings of land, kin and community. Overall, *Peasants under Siege* is the first comprehensive English-language treatment of collectivization in communist Romania. It examines the intersection of communism and property as manifested in the collectivization drive of 1945–1962 and is preceded by a chain of ethnographies conducted by the authors in socialism and postsocialism in Romanian countryside (e.g. Kligman, 1990; Verdery, 1999, 2003).³⁹ In 1998, Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery assembled an international research group of twenty scholars to fan out across Romania and conduct fieldwork, oral interviews, and archival research.⁴⁰ Thus, the book is a product of a more than a decade-long cooperation among Romanian and Western researchers from the respective disciplines. It is a study of collectivization from above and from below, covering policy, law, high-level debates, propaganda and the response

³⁹ From the 1970s onward, Western anthropologists increasingly conducted research in Eastern Europe with the aim of examining the specificities of socialist regimes. During this decade, scholars such as Katherine Verdery, John W. Cole and his students, including Gail Kligman, began fieldwork in Romania. The following decade saw the publication of several influential monographs (Kligman 1981, 1983; Verdery 1983; Sampson 1984), a trend that continued after 1990 with further major contributions (Verdery 1991; Kideckel 1993). David Kideckel and Steven Sampson, together with Sam Beck, Marilyn McArthur, and Steven Randall, formed the Romanian Research Group at the University of Massachusetts during the 1970s while pursuing their doctoral studies. John W. Cole served as the senior figure within this group and drew on world-systems theory in his approach to the Romanian field. He challenged the assumption that "peasant" communities had persisted unchanged until the late twentieth century and were only then undergoing modernization. Instead, Cole argued that the specific characteristics of regions on Europe's margins should be understood through an analysis of their historical incorporation into the hinterlands of industrial states, rather than by attributing local traditions to underdevelopment or poverty. For a discussion of local and non-local approaches to communities in Eastern European contexts, see Mihăilescu (2003).

⁴⁰ For the book, they assembled a large and diverse team of researchers, including a historian, a legal consultant, and other scholars specializing in history, sociology, literary criticism or anthropology (17 in all, 14 from within Romania). These represent several generations and nationalities and create a powerful interdisciplinary mix.

of the population to this life-altering event. The book is structured in eight chapters, approaching collectivization as part of a broad set of what the authors call “modernizing technologies” that include industrial development, mass education, and improved public health. New empirical data collected from recently opened archives and interviews with peasants who survived collectivization make up the richness and uniqueness of the work. Kligman and Verdery bring to this study the combined experience of over 60 years of scholarship on the Romanian economy, rural life, property relations, and social relations.

In 2014, Iordachi and Bauerkämper (2014) make a first attempt to discuss collectivization in the former socialist countries of Europe all together in a single publication, *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe*. Collectivization is considered as a weapon of Sovietization and is discussed in this frame. The first group of countries deals with the Soviet Union, including republics that came under Soviet domination during World War II, and the second one is classified regionally: the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary under the heading “Central Europe” and Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania as “Southeastern Europe”. The study questions possible entanglements among national models and points to six areas in which comparison and a study of these entanglements look feasible: the policy context of land reform, available resources, the concept and figure of the *kulak*, campaigning techniques and “peasant” responses. In all studied societies, collectivization is part of a triple burden: famine following the war and the occupation, compulsory deliveries to avoid famine, and collectivization itself, which disrupted social and economic frames and was coupled with punitive measures. The study uses comparative methods and *histoire croisée*, showing what was particular and typical about the ways in which power was used. Collectivization is viewed as a major political venture and cause of trauma in the former Soviet bloc, and country-based examples sustain this claim. The study also shows how power was related to various imageries of modernity at various levels of politics and local communities in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Moreover, the book indirectly questions how specific entanglements produced a specific political anthropology or responses to state power.

Later, in Dorondel’s (2016) work which mixes social anthropology with environmental studies, political ecology and rural/peasant studies, collectivization and de-collectivization are approached in terms of human actions shaping the environment. By showing that the environment influences society and politics to create a circular system, the study provides a history of the local environment rather than the history of the local society and its personalities. The novelty and originality of the book reside in the introduction of themes and theories of environmental studies, which, intertwined with the social anthropological approach, highlights and revives seemingly outdated topics such as postsocialism (Șerban 2016, 208). The study reveals new meanings of ownership in the framework of a dominant

neoliberal logic. The neoliberal reforms didn't come solely against the social opposition and reluctance inherent to rural/ peasant societies (the works of James C. Scott speaks to this), but also against what Ștefan Dorondel calls "nature agency" (inspired by Bruno Latour who's also referenced in the volume). This is one of the first works examining collectivization from an environmental history perspective, after a recently edited volume by Iordachi concerned with the historical and human geography of the Danube Delta (Șerban 2016, 208).

The repressive side of collectivization produces constant research. Dorin Dobrințu's project "Building the Communist Regime. Political Violence and Class Struggle in the Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949–1962" (2017) has four aims: (1) scrutinizing party speeches and documents, laws and propaganda pamphlets etc. in order to analyse the ideological justification employed by the communist regime for its widespread use of violence in the countryside; (2) exploring political violence for specific power level: party cadres (through persuasion, indoctrination), state bodies (be it coercion by legislative means or by the administrative institutions, such as chairmen of the county, regional, district or municipal councils), repressive institutions – such as the Miliția, the Securitate, the border guards, and the army – and the politically controlled system of justice, namely prosecutors and military courts; (3) the reactions of peasants to violence during collectivization, and the extent to which collectivization policies led to the exacerbation of violence in the rural world, both top-down and bottom-up. The project aims to identify the tactics of active or passive resistance, but also of adaptation; (4) placing Romanian collectivization and related violence forms in comparative perspective, in an Eastern European context, in a dual comparison: a) a diachronic one, comparing collectivization in the Soviet Union during the inter-war period (1929–1935) and the campaign of collectivization in post-war Romania (1949–1962); b) a synchronic one, between Romania, on the one hand, and similar campaigns of collectivization that took place in other socialist countries in the region. The project mixes approaches from political history, social history, cultural history, comparative history, theories about propaganda, and historical criticism of documents produced by state and party institutions.⁴¹

The effects of the collectivization campaign are addressed in the longitudinal study of Kideckel (1993), conducted between 1974 and 1990 in the Olt region. The author's main argument is that despite the goal of the socialist state in producing individual peasant-workers who would labour enthusiastically in field or factory, collectivism brings with it solitude. Despite an ideological commitment to collectivism which was ostensibly realized through collectivization, the socialist system undermined collective arrangements and values. Cooperative villages became collections of autonomous, competitive households whose interests rarely

⁴¹ Project original title: Construcția regimului comunist: violența politică și lupta de clasă în colectivizarea agriculturii din România, 1949–1962 (UEFISCDI project).

overlapped with those of the village or the country. In fact, village households became the primary loci of economic coordination and passive resistance to the socialist state. Thus, collectivization produced a disaffected labour pool whose members were loyal to their own households.⁴² The title of the book – *The Solitude of Collectivism* – is thus based on irony and paradox. Additionally, when discussing collectivism in relation to nationalism, the author traces the history of the region, emphasizing “Romanian identity”, class consciousness, and the peasants’ connection with the land, and demonstrates that the roots of current Romanian nationalism and class differentiation were reinvigorated rather than diminished under Ceaușescu’s socialism.

Finally, transversal topics related to the whole communist regime, such as the organization of time as a form of control by the PMR and later PCR; the interrelationships between gender and national identity during socialism, and the ways in which these affect the dismantling of authoritarian structures and of paternalism as a system, informed the work of Verdery (1996). Additionally, the author looks at the nationalism of the 1970s and 1980s as the official ideology, and its echo in the 1990s, when national and ethnic symbols are manipulated by the same means as before but under different conditions. Private pig breeding and consumption in rural households under the forces of the state and the market, in a trans-regime dimension (Stan, 2000) or inheritance practices in rural Romania, in the context of de-collectivization (Gaborean, 2008) are other ethnographies. Furthermore, Micu (2014) proposes a *longue durée* outlook on the property concept as applied in the 1919–1989 period, and an issue of Martor (2014) deals with the agrarian question in South-East Europe.⁴³

Themes in the study of collectivization

The timelines

Collectivization went on for a period of 13 years and directly affected 12,000,000 of the 16,000,000 citizens, that is, the great majority of the Romanian population (Cătănuș & Roske, 2000).⁴⁴ Officially, a great part of the 21st century historiog-

⁴² This interpretation of collectivization as a process leading to the atomization of the “peasantry” contrasts with the arguments of other scholars, who have emphasized its perceived benefits for rural living standards and its role in stabilizing or “domesticating” the socialist regime (see Creed, 1998 on Bulgaria; Hann, 1980 on Hungary).

⁴³ In 2014, the journal *Martor* published a special issue devoted to “the agrarian question in South-east Europe”. The issue combines historical and political economy perspectives with case studies from interwar Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, Hungary, and Albania, and also addresses the agrarian question at the grassroots level, including environmental and ecological dimensions of agricultural practices.

⁴⁴ Not all the Romanian agricultural landscape has undergone this process of collectivization, and around 5% of the total rural areas that are situated near the mountains were left out of the collec-

raphy views collectivization as a “true war against the peasantry” (Tismăneanu et al., 2007). At the same time, collectivization took place at a time when politics had supremacy over the economy (Masson, 1985). The timeline of collectivization reveals an alternation between repression phases and more relaxed time intervals. Prior to the Decree 83 / 1949 enforcing the confiscation of all property over 50 ha, the property of the royal family (1947) and the lands of confessional schools and goods of private sanitary institutions, the properties of the Greek Catholic Church (1948) were confiscated. Historians point to the fluid nature of the Decree. Officially, the law targeted the so-called *moșieri* (a derogatory social label used to stigmatize landowners as a decadent pseudo-aristocracy, originating from *moșie* – landed estate). In practice, the Decree also eliminated a “middle peasantry stratum” that used mechanized technology, as the state confiscated the land, the agricultural inventory, cattle and all the bank credits or revenues generated by agricultural activities (art.2). Authorities took landowners by surprise, as, in addition to confiscations of land and houses, landowners and their families were deported and placed under house arrest, and abuses and thefts took place in the process (Iordachi & Dobrinu 2014, 255).

Moreover, the timeline is established in accordance with the dependencies or relaxations of the Soviet model and internal struggles within the Party. Other works show that the pace of collectivization depended almost entirely on the intensity of the use of force in the execution of the campaign: whenever coercion was relaxed, the collectivization drive stagnated until repression reappeared.

The first stage (1949–1953) is characterized by the large number of cooperative farms and the use of restraint methods. Until the 1950s, despite the highest participation rates in joining the farms, collectivization had poor results, as mostly peasants without land joined the CAF. There were peasants who had little land and agreed on joining, and those with more land, who had to join by force, and after joining they opposed the work in common by being late or working carelessly (Barbu, 2009).

The second stage of the campaign falls between 1953 and 1958, and began after a purge in 1952, which put the Moscow allies at a distance and allowed Dej to reject responsibility for agricultural failure and the brutality of the campaign.⁴⁵ According to the decree No. 115 (March 30, 1959), peasants who were members

tivization process (Bordanc, 1996). As these were mountainous or hilly areas, and the dispersed settlements did not facilitate crop production, these were not suitable for being part of the collectivization process (Kideckel, 1993; Turnock, 1991, cited in Ardeleanu, 2012). Thus, we have two types of communities in view of collectivization process: the former collectivized and the non-collectivized also known in literature as the individualist type of community (Ardeleanu, 2012).

⁴⁵ This period of relative relaxation unfolded within a broader international context, shaped by Stalin’s death in 1953, the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the subsequent condemnation of Imre Nagy, as well as the tenth anniversary of the launch of collectivization. Even after the

of associations had a fiscal discrimination compared to the members of the cooperative. This is also seen as a “destalinization” phase, abandoned a few years later. The agricultural associations (*întovărășiri*)⁴⁶ were replaced by cooperatives, in which peasants put together their land, partly or entirely, but were owners of the harvest and equipment. The associations facilitated mechanized work and were an intermediary stage in the achievement of collectivization, but had no stables, no common buildings, and no credits for buying livestock or machinery (Barbu 2009, 52).

The last stage unfolded between 1959 and 1962 and was an offensive for the forced and total collectivization of the Romanian villages. By 1962, the General Secretary of the Party announced that collectivization had been completed, even if many households remained non-collectivized by that time.⁴⁷

The campaign and the creation of the Party as parallel processes

A second topic connected to collectivization is the parallel creation of the PMR and PCR, and the unfolding of the campaign. Kligman and Verdery (2011) see collectivization as instrumental in establishing the nature of the new Party-state itself and of its subjects and reveal how a particular kind of state configuration – the Romanian Communist Party-state – was constituted, with its accompanying subjectivities and social relationships. The authors show how the Party-state was made through a “technology transfer” from the Soviet example, and the counter currents this process aroused. Literally, the Party did not spring into life and then collectivize; instead, the action of collectivizing simultaneously helped to create the Party-state that accomplished it (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 150). First, the Ploughmen’s Front had an essential role in the Party’s expansion, given its established modes of collective work and ownership. In the campaign itself, the “cadres” were simply overwhelmed with their task, received little guidance or support from the centre, and replaced persuasion with coercion and intimidation. These ill-equipped individuals then faced a lack of authority within their own villages and were easily overwhelmed by the flood of written directives that were sent their way and to which they often had to respond with reports of their own.

onset of the “final assault” in late 1957, the collectivization campaign required a further four years to be completed.

⁴⁶ *Întovărășiri* were early, semicollective agricultural associations promoted in Romania in the late 1940s and early 1950s, in which peasants pooled land and labour while formally retaining private ownership; they functioned as a transitional stage toward full collectivization.

⁴⁷ Other scholars propose alternative timelines. Marius Oprea, for instance, offers a more detailed analysis of the period between 1953 and 1962, distinguishing several stages: an initial phase of “stagnation” (1953–55); a second phase marked by both a “relaxation” of campaign mobilization and an intensification of political repression in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution (1956–57); and a final stage beginning with the successful experiment implemented in Galați (1958–62).

Finally, the authors also look at the challenges of the female cadres and traditional paths of male bonding that were closed to them, in particular those built on drinking and socializing, and women were especially vulnerable to rumours and physical threats (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 197).

The Soviet (counter) model

Kligman and Verdery (2011) examine the Soviet blueprint in the enforcement of collectivization in Romania and reveal the caution of PMR members in applying the Soviet model, in view of the famine in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, which was triggered by very coercive and hasty collectivization. The Soviet blueprint was also hard to apply in Romania given the contrast between the pre-war Romanian countryside and the Russian communal village. While the latter “provided a plausible idiom for collectivization”, rural Romania did not have historical experience with collective forms of ownership and production. While the cadres in the Soviet Union were able to collectivize entire village communities “via a single vote of the village council”, in Romania, they had to convince almost each household (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 81, 322, cited in Gürel, 2014). Furthermore, the Soviet Union did not have a model in collectivization, the Eastern European states did.

Second, the Soviet Union was collectivized with a sense of mission for developing itself differently than the West, while the Eastern European countries had it imposed on them. Third, there was a stronger link between nationality and collectivization policy in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, obtaining food requisitions and collectivizing agriculture itself and so on were part of a technological package termed as “the Soviet blueprint”. Moreover, the Soviet councillors and the Romanian Secret Police ensured conformity to the Soviet blueprint, and the main political form that was imitated under the Soviets’ watchful eye: that signature of Soviet socialism, the dual Party-state organization (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 50).

Finally, the Soviet model is a barometer for measuring the campaign across Eastern Europe. The process was fastest and most violent in Bulgaria, closely following the Soviet model (finished by 1958), and slowest in Romania. Others show that in no other satellite country was collectivization driven more directly by Soviet authorities than in Romania, where levels of employment in industry and agriculture resulted from the closeness to the Soviet model. Romania is, together with Albania and Bulgaria, in the group of countries which followed the Soviet model (Iordachi & Verdery 2009, 465). Then, unlike Poland or East Germany, Romania’s level of industrialization was low: in 1950, 74% of the population was employed in agriculture, and only 12% in industry. To reverse this situation, Romania’s leaders found collectivization appealing. The least industrialized countries fully followed closely the Soviet Union (Dobrinu, 2017).

Confiscation, political violence and control

In historiography, collectivization is ubiquitously paired with forced confiscations of movable and immovable property. With Decree 83 of March 1949, the former royal estates, the estates of monasteries, and some of the largest noble estates constituted the basis of the state farms (Wim van Meurs 1999, 113). Peasants were forced to give up land, buildings (barns, villas, warehouses, etc.), their farm vehicles and tools, carts and traction animals. The plots of the smallholders were merged into collective farms, peasant associations and co-operatives, which became the dominant form of agricultural production within two years. Above all, Decree 83 of March 1949, which launched collectivization was issued before the law was even brought to the attention of the peasants.

Furthermore, forced confiscations are paired with the use of violence, by poorly educated and trained Party and Securitate cadres.⁴⁸ For example, the reasons for arrests were refusing to join their GACs, using swear words at the GAC president, failing to plough their fields within some impossible time frame, urging others to withdraw from the collectives, threatening the functionaries who carried out collectivization, writing petitions for anyone who wanted to withdraw from a GAC or for spreading rumours. With the final assault beginning in late 1958, the number of arrests and sentences to labour colonies and prisons increased again vertiginously. Overall, the communist regime was essentially an occupation force that did not set its own political agenda and never managed to build political legitimacy (Iordachi & Dobrinicu 2009, 27).

Finally, all during the socialist regime, between 1949 and 1989, the state-controlled production through central planning. People were made dependent on the house plot, used for cultivating vegetables, livestock fodder and fruits.⁴⁹ Then, people were allowed to have only a limited number of livestock. Only later after 1980, due to higher gasoline prices, peasants were encouraged to breed horses once again (Kideckel 1993, 58, cited in Ardeleanu, 2012).

The personified state all through the campaign

Kligman and Verdery (2011, 211) reveal that before 1957, the state used pedagogies of power through technologies of rural transformation, namely specific techniques utilized to persuade and coerce peasants into giving up their property and way of life: propaganda, contests, and mimesis. First, villagers met the activists travelling to the villages for persuasion work with pitchforks, scythes, hatchets and guns.⁵⁰ At the same time, they engaged in “counter pedagogies”, undermin-

⁴⁸ Between September 1948 and November 1949, the Securitate arrested 23,597 persons, among which were 10,152 peasants (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 465).

⁴⁹ For more on harvest yielding in private plots and on state owned land, see Montias (1967).

⁵⁰ The responses mobilized by propagandists were equally severe and included public humiliation, arrest, deportation, and denunciation. The state singled out “rich peasants” (*chiaburi*) for partic-

ing the efforts of peasant cadres, party officials, or socialist youth, by spreading rumours about life in the collectives, and the imminent demise of communism, especially around the time of the Hungarian uprising in 1956. Or, disseminating anti-regime slogans and composing and circulating folk poetry that mocked and discredited collectivization efforts was another “counter-pedagogy”.

Written petitions were another counter-pedagogy form. At the meeting in Bucharest on 15 May 1951, in which Party General Secretary Gheorghiu-Dej and the head of the Agrarian Section of the central committee Alexandru Moghioroş, listened to three peasants’ complaints about local cadres who were forcing them to join collectives. The two leaders reiterated the importance of voluntary collectivization and promised to investigate the case (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 262–4, cited in Gürel, 2014). Petitioning was a tool of the regime for allowing a certain space for the expression of peasants’ grievances. In the end, villagers turned the abstract policy into lived objects of discourse and practice and appropriated the new language for their own ends. So, they moved from resisting the collectives to finally “accepting their inevitability” (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 211).

Rural policies and everyday life after the campaign

After 1964, the term “collectivization” turned into “cooperativization”. At the same time, during Ceauşescu’s presidency, peasantry was part of the construction of a national identity. The countryside functioned as a supplier of labour and products, and at the beginning of the 1970s the rural territory was rearranged: tiny villages lacking development prospects were grouped into localities that became cultural and socio-economic centres.

The Party press reveals specific work-related problems for each communist decade e.g. the increase in production, the extension of irrigated zones, the production of chemical fertilizer, and the more rational use of land. In 1977, in a change of conscience, it was decided that, in each cooperative, the work team should be collectively responsible for its results. Assuring employment at full capacity was another objective. The agrarian discourse is full of repetitions and exhortations. The state was stuck in some ideological constraints: it neglected the private sector, which could also be an important supplier of agricultural products (Masson 1985, 45).

Then, in the 1980s, a press campaign revealed that there is no poverty, but that Romania consumes out of pleasure. A principle of self-provision, of regional self-sufficiency governed the country and a scientific nutrition program was also proposed, accompanied by a vegetable growth trend in the cities. Then, time was

ularly harsh treatment, targeting not only their economic resources but also their social status, honour, and family relations. For a detailed discussion of the category of *chiaburi*, see Chapter 4.

restructured in the industrial sector, labour and resources were channelled into various industrial activities that served to alter workers' control over their own free time (Speteanu 2012, 158).

Ethnic groups under collectivization and rural socialism in general

In a longitudinal investigation of socio-economic and political conditions to frame ethnic relations in Transylvanian countryside, Verdery (1983) compared Germans and Hungarians, concluding that there was no unity among the two groups. In another study on the Odorhei district (the Hungarian autonomous region), ethnicity was not an important variable in the campaign, as Party activists and state officials were all Hungarian, and persuasion campaigns were conducted in Hungarian, as were written propaganda materials (Oláh 2009, 245–246). In the collectivization of Triebswetter, the state used ethnic and political criteria simultaneously as a well-orchestrated repression against the community.⁵¹ Țărău (2009a) analysed the successful collectivization policies in the Cluj region, particularly in the following case studies: the village of Măgina (district of Aiud, Romanian and Orthodox majority, originally small property owners) and Rimetea (district of Turda, Hungarian and Unitarian majority, with a local economy mostly but not solely agricultural).

As for Roma, Kligman and Verdery (2011, 158) show that they were frequent recruits, as “cadres” should have “healthy” social origins: that is, proletarian or poor-to-middle peasant backgrounds. At the same time, when empowered in the party-structures, the Roma could take revenge for the grudge that Romanians had against them. According to sociologist Nicolae Gheorghe, in the 1980s the paradigm of interpreting the Roma problems had shifted from the one on a marginal social group, to one on an ethnic group with an organization potential, both in the local context as well as in the context of the international Roma movements.⁵² Some study topics addressing the Roma in communism are the Origin of Gypsies Slavery in the Romanian Principalities (Gheorghe, 1983), text and music for Roma music producers and interpreters (Beissinger, 1991), slavery, racism and the formation of Romani leadership (Beck 1989) or the diverse approaches of socialist regimes (Barany, 2000).⁵³

Ongoing rurality, national ethnology: criticisms and accommodations

In the anthropological work of Westerners, the “rurality” of Eastern Europe was historically explained by the region's peripheral political and economic position.

⁵¹ The situation of various ethnic groups of Banat in the wake of the deportations enforced in 1945 and 1951 was amply documented by Vultur (1997, 2000a, 2000b).

⁵² See Matei's (2011a, 2011b, 2012) work on the mobilization forms of the Roma in Romanian in the first half of the 20th century.

⁵³ As for countries under similar a regime, Guy (1975) studied the Roma of Czechoslovakia, Stewart (1997) those of Hungary, and Silverman (1986) those in Bulgaria.

In this context, Mihăilescu (2003) revealed an “institutional essentialism” which over-emphasized the socialist state, omitting to see diversity within Romanian society. Another criticism of national and international anthropologists is the freezing of national ethnology in its use of the emblematic figure of the Peasant, just as colonial anthropology cannot ignore the Primitive figure (Mihăilescu 2008, 219).⁵⁴ In this paradigm, the peasant economy is centred on the domestic group and the satisfaction of immediate needs. At the same time, the author speaks of an outdated national ethnology, and of the need to surpass a “nation building anthropology”.⁵⁵ In other words, national ethnology is currently puzzled by the late and delayed death of the peasant. This death is covered in silence, and the mourning is still uncertain.

Moreover, Romanian society is a post-peasant society. The post-peasant is seen as a hybrid category, as a social proto-typical type of the post-developmental stage (Kearney 1996, 112 in Mihăilescu, 2008). In this context, Western anthropology also needs to re-define its examination strategies in a universe that is neither colonial nor post-colonial, and where its comparative and cosmopolitan approach is constantly challenged in local practice strongly rooted in a referenced past (Mihăilescu 2008, 219).

In terms of methodology, the confinement of anthropology in East European postsocialist societies was discussed by Rüegg (2014). The enthusiastic re-discovery of the national traditional religion, i.e. Christian orthodoxy, went hand in hand with the re-discovery of a free market economy, and this gave way to the re-emergence of a forgotten national-religious past and an equally idealized free and open present. Thus, ethnographic national studies emerged, rather than Marxist-inspired transnational or subaltern studies, at least for the time being, including a move back to the “pure origins”, which was impossible to preserve during a past destructive regime. The author mentions the endeavour of Western anthropologists in introducing a critical discipline like anthropology in former communist societies following the “old Soviet type of curricula” and their advocates are often still in place and continue to control the development of social sciences. On this background, Eastern European ethnographers, anthropologists, and sociologists continue to almost exclusively devote their field research to their own national territory, people and questions. Or, even today, when hired abroad, these scholars occupy positions related to their national sphere of competence. Thus, Eastern Europe is primarily considered as a field for ethnographical research and not as a place where anthropological knowledge is produced, and “Westerners” use

⁵⁴ First, the Primitive figures a “weak” origin – from which one moves away through evolution – whereas the Peasant represents a rather “strong” origin that endures through tradition (Mihăilescu, 2008).

⁵⁵ We either go with ethnology, on the primordialist side (thus, on the side of an outdated nationalism), or with anthropology, on the constructivist side (or, a postmodern liberalism) (Mihăilescu, 2008).

terms such as *regards croisés* or *dialogue* to include the view of their “Eastern” colleagues. On the other hand, little space is given for the exchanges of views between the two parties (Rüegg 2014, 87–88).

Finally, anthropological perspectives from home, that is, anthropologists studying their own fields, broke away from traditional approaches of folkloric (in one’s own national society) and ethnographic research (in other societies) (Giordano, 2009). Communist countries valued the worker instead of the peasant, since the latter was a pre-socialist relic unworthy of belonging to the proletarian vanguard. Later, in this context, peasants were assimilated to the working class. Paradoxically, even in the world of collectivism, the myths of rurality which nurtured pre-socialist times was still on. A veritable state-run folkloric industry was set up with experts on popular traditions, whose task was to enhance and reinterpret Herder’s conceptual heritage from a Marxist standpoint, highlighting the authenticity of the healthy peasant and thus of national roots (Giordano 2009, 296–297). In conclusion, anthropologists studying their own societies must guarantee compatibility between the actuality of ethnic or national specificities and the internationalist ideals according to which ethnic diversities are remnants.

Conceptual background

Memory

Individual and collective memory

The dependence of individual memory on social frameworks, in which memory is always embedded in a social context which makes for its collective dimension, belongs to the seminal theory of Halbwachs (1994[1925]). The sociologist views society as having a primary role in the production and perpetuation of memory and speaks of “remembering in society”: “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories” (Halbwachs, 2002 [1950]). Collective memory thus includes not only what people really remember through their own experience; it also incorporates the constructed past which is constitutive of the collectivity. It is a part of culture’s meaning-making apparatus (Miształ, 2003).

The different mnemonic communities, such as the family or the community, and the expansion of the term *mémoire collective* to include cultural transmission and the creation of tradition are also approached by Halbwachs (1994[1925]). Memory is co-created by personal experiences, symbols and narratives leaving mnemonic traces, as Halbwachs further shows. “Memories become generalized *imagos*, and such *imagos* require a social context for their preservation. Memories, in this sense, are as much the products of the symbols, commemorations, and narratives available publicly – and of the social means for storing and trans-

mitting them – as they are the possessions of individuals (. . .). Our memories remain collective, and are brought to memory by others, even when dealing with events in which only we were involved, and objects that only we saw. In fact, we are never alone” (Halbwachs 1994[1925], cited in Olick, 1999). Furthermore, genuinely collective memory is made up of public discourses about the past as wholes to narratives and images of the past that speak in the name of collectivities (Olick, 1999). Thus, collective memory is based on public discourses incorporating mnemonic processes, practices and outcomes, neurological, cognitive, personal, aggregated and collective.

The dichotomy between autobiographical memory (the memory of those events that we ourselves experience, though these experiences are shaped by group memberships) and historical memory (memory that reaches us only through historical records) (Halbwachs (2002 [1950]) also informs this study. Unlike history, memory is characterized by natural continuity because it preserves from the past only the fragments that remain vividly engraved in the conscience of the group that produces it. On the other hand, memory is grounded in lived history, and not in the history we learn, while history has the didactic tendency to make the past systematic, to place events in categories and historical periods. In other words, history is the remembered past to which we no longer have an “organic” relation, while collective memory is the active past that informs our identities. Although autobiographical memories are not necessarily accurate, they are mostly congruent with one’s self-knowledge, life themes or sense of self (Barclay and DeCooke, 1988, 2, cited in Misztal, 2003).

The multi-level study of memory is also informed by Assmann’s (1995) memory forms: social-communicative memory – the social memory shared in the private sphere among those who lived that particular past – and cultural memory – the remote past brought into the public sphere through cultural artefacts, often understood as collective memory or as an institutionally shaped and sustained form of memory. According to Halbwachs (1994) [1925] and Assmann (1995, 2006), everyday life is the field of connections, mutual influences, and collisions between individual and collective, private and public, official and non-official, self-conscious and non-intentional remembering, and the ground where political, historical, social, and cultural remembering intertwines.

Moreover, the concept of habit memory which refers to our capacity to reproduce a certain performance (Connerton, 1989) will be used in the study of commemorative practices. Three distinct types of memory – personal, cognitive, and habit – are part of this concept. While the first two types have been studied extensively, little attention has been given to the last one, which is the mode of inscribing the past into the present, as present. Habit memory, like all habits, is sedimented in bodily postures, activities, techniques and gestures. In the author’s words, images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conceived

and sustained by (ritual) performances (Connerton 1989, 40). Then, habit memory differs from other types of memory because it brings the past into the present by acting, while other kinds of memory retrieve the past to the present by summoning the past as past – that is, by remembering it (Miształ 2003, 75). Memorizing and ordering things into a narrative is not free of social constraints. Rules and conventions of narrative need to be respected in the case of verbalized memory, but in the case of habit memory, there are no reflexive process involved.

Finally, Hegel's method of distinction – often discussed as a theory of mnemonic aporia – between two types of memory is salient for this study: *Erinnerung* (recollection) – the internalization of initial incidents or lived experiences in everyday life, and the memory of these – and *Gedächtnis* (memorization) – a mechanical form of recall, such as memorizing names through writing (de Man 1982, cited in Goto 2011).

Memory and identity, memory and generation

By the turn of the millennium, memory joined or, some argue, replaced other key conceptual categories such as culture, history, and identity (e.g. Confino, 1997; Klein, 2000, cited in Kligman & Verdery 2011, 11) forming what may be viewed as a veritable “memory industry”. Previously, Halbwachs (1994) [1925] connected the concepts of memory and identity and viewed memory as a filter of past events that tends to preserve only those images that support the group's present sense of identity. Additionally, memory is seen as a distinct form of social action, and the importance of memory thus lies in the identity it shapes. On another level, Said (2000) connected memory and national identity, by showing that a particular nation has a concern with memory in times of crisis. In the late twentieth century, a time of bewildering change, of unimaginably large and diffuse mass societies, competing nationalisms, and decreasing efficacy of religious, familial, and dynastic bonds, memory provides a specifically desirable and recoverable past (Said 2000, 179, cited in Hoelscher and Alderman, 2004). A society's memory can be manipulated and even controlled by “hierarchies of power” that may choose which aspects of a collective past to emphasize, restrain, or even fabricate (Connerton 1989, 1–5).

Moreover, the concept of generation informs the study of biographical accounts at the level of respondents born between 1935–1945. The seminal essay by Karl Mannheim 1952 [1923] considers generation as nothing more than a particular kind of identity of location, embracing related “age groups” embedded in a historical-social process. The study of a particular generation inevitably deals with the problem of generational heterogeneity. In this sense, Mannheim develops the notion of a “generational unit”, as a sub-category of generation: “Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation

which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generational units” (Mannheim 1964, 304). According to the Mannheimian tradition, generations have been re-defined not as objective periods, but as subjectively defined cohorts: a generation exists if and only several birth cohorts share a historical experience that creates a community of perception. Generations and memories are mutually constitutive, not because of some objective features of social or cultural structure, but because of experiential commonalities and resultant similarities in individual memories of historical events (Olick, 1999). Oral history and anthropology as disciplines, due to their interest in the organization and transmission of social memory, have long adopted a generational approach into their analytical framework, as this work does.

The connection between generation and trauma is also highly relevant for the analysis of collectivization. Giesen (2004) examines the concept of generation in the light of traumatic or triumphal events, which set boundaries between generations that can be contested and conflicted, but they can also be publicly declared in a generally accepted way, and they can be imagined by literature and media. However, neither the collective memory of triumph nor that of trauma will last forever, as new generations devalue the experiences of the previous ones as they get distance from the world of adults and have lost their sensitivity for the new and extraordinary experience (Giesen 2004, 38).

Lieux de mémoire and museums

Memory in modern vs traditional societies was aptly addressed in Nora’s (1984) seminal work, which separates memory from history. For Nora (1984), memory is just a form of reorganization of the past, in the form of history. In archaic or traditional societies, memory was naturally preserved and handed down from one generation to another through the work of families, churches or elderly people, being kept alive through oral communication or, with the beginning of writing, by both oral and written means. In contrast, for fear of forgetting because of swift changes, modern societies organize their past in the form of history (Nora, 1989). In modern societies characterized by rapid change, history has separated from “real” memory. In other words, memory is history rendered through the “materiality of the past”, or *milieux de mémoire* are replaced by *lieux de mémoire* such as museums, commemorations, and archives. The latter are more volatile and multiple memory forms, being dependent on the input of different groups and individuals. Museums or archives are haunted by forgetting and they fasten onto concrete things such as spaces, images, or objects (Nora, 1984). *Lieux de mémoire* thereby evade fixed meanings and absorb new interpretations. While they clearly have a historical referent, they also constitute a breach in the historical time due to the symbolism with which they are endowed. Concrete sites with unquestionable historical relevance to national identities (contested or not), sites like battlegrounds,

internment camps, and penal structures help to comprise the physical landscape of recognizable objects and places (Nora, 1984).

Alternative to *lieux de mémoire*, societies oppose amnesia by strategies of public and private memorialization and musealization (Huysen 2003, 11). Additionally, museums and memorials are the “hardware” of the memory culture, while narratives and films are the “software” (Nora, 1984). Finally, the social mediation of memory and history (whether “official” or “popular”, oral or written) also creates selectively “usable” elements (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 14).

Memory and anthropology

Memory and social recollection fascinated anthropologists in terms of social practices as memorial depositories (Connerton, 1989; Candau, 2005), the peculiarities of the memory-work in specific communities (Bloch, 1998; Gessat-Anstett, 2007) or theoretical and general considerations on the “anthropology of memory” (Climo & Cattell, 2002; Berliner, 2005; Candau, 2005). Overall, the role of memory in shaping social responses to historical changes was widely discussed in anthropological literature (Cole et al., 1971; Kuchler, 1988; Tonkin and Whitehouse, 1995; Roseman, 1996; Sant Cassia, 1999, cited in Torsello, 2005).

The forms and traces of memory are inherently part of every field research, and the anthropologist is always more interested in social remembering as a relational process rather than as a mere source of information for analysis (Climo & Cattell, 2002). At the same time, heritage construction and the commodification of memory through material culture, for example, or in non-literate history or recollection are part of field research. Finally, questions of genealogical past, ethnic origins, or “shattering events”, figure prominently in ethnographies. (Evans Pritchard, 1969; Levy-Strauss, 1969; Rosaldo, 1980; Price, 1983; Goody, 1987, cited in Kamp, 2008).

The connection between memory and place also informed anthropological work. Keith Basso’s (1996) work with the Western Apache in the United States shows that the sense of place is given by the indigenous knowledge and experience, and is rooted in local languages, folklore, and geographies. Places preserve their meaning through the narrations of indigenous people, without which these places would lose their meaning. These places can sometimes be invisible to the outsiders (namely white settlers), who lack the memory and stories necessary for a deeper understanding of a place.

At the same time, the notions of memory and culture can overlap. Berliner (2005, 199) claims that the current usage of the notion of memory by anthropologists can be a source of confusion as it tends to encompass many features of the notion of culture itself. The author brings in the concept of *mnémotropisme*, which is “a problem in identity caused by our incapacity to master the anxiety of loss” (Candau 1998, 104, my translation, cited in Berliner 2005, 199). Then, the

contemporary anthropological use of memory is hovering between history as it is lived by people and issues of cultural persistence. The author supports Battaglia's idea that the study of "social memory" addresses problems in the "living history" and ongoing cultural traditions of collectivities of persons (Battaglia 1992, 14, my emphasis, in Berliner 2005, 201). And, without minimizing the crucial impact of the postmodernist turn since the 1980s, the author suggests that we can, and perhaps should, also understand the success of memory among anthropologists as an avatar of the never-ending debate about the continuity and reproduction of society. Thus, memory as used in anthropology is on the side of continuity, permanence and "retention", and, for anthropologists, there is nothing new about these ideas (Berliner 2005, 208).

Another set of reflections on the connection between anthropology and memory concerns the methodological tools for capturing memory via life stories and related challenges. The work of an anthropologist using life stories must be based on mutually strong empathy (Skultans, 2006). Anthropologist and informant must share the same dialogic experiences in time, and communication is about creating a shared time. Thus, ethnographic understanding can be "more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke or [...] reading a poem" (Geertz 1993, 70). At the same time, we should always remember that actors, at determinate time and space points, choose what to accept of their past, and convey it in the form of memories that serve the purpose of their everyday social life. In this regard, Bloch (1998) demonstrates how the two types of memory proposed by the western philosophic tradition (Platonic and Aristotelian) are never mutually exclusive. Bloch (1998), as discussed in Torsello (2005, 169), shows that there is no one way of relating to the past and the future-recalling defines the person in relation to time by invoking, or not invoking, notions of the past interaction with an external world which contains truth and falsehoods, permanent and impermanent elements, which is, or is not, in a state of continual creative dialectical flux. Aristotle claimed that "from memory people construct their experience", and that multiple memories of the same thing create a single experience in the end.

Finally, the different interpretative tools used in ethnography and oral history will be discussed. Ethnography and oral history are both hermeneutic disciplines, and interpretation is fundamental to all aspects of their work and ranges across different pairs of modalities. Anthropologists have been recently arguing that oral historians neglect the self in their approach, while the anthropologists value the self and neglect the structures: "Anthropologists did not attribute any importance to the problem of what these structures meant to those who populated them. In this kind of theoretical scheme, people, individuals, were important only as structures in themselves, or as related to structure in some identifiable way" (Cohen 1994, 14). On the other hand, oral historians moved from recognition of the particularity of their subjects to recognition of their informants as creators of cultural meaning.

Memory of socialism

The memory of socialism was approached from the angle of a “memory crisis” emerging at the beginning of post-communist societies (Eyal, 2004), stemming from two major causes: the manifestation of a generalized post-communist amnesia, namely the tendency systematically to forget all previous communist crimes and compromises, and the super-saturation of memory, with researchers arguing that, in fact, there is no such thing as too little memory, but rather too much of it (Nora, 1984; Huyssen 2003, cited in Anton 2009, 110). As a middle way between the two causes, memory is instrumentalized for specific purposes as politics of memory. This concept appeared in the social sciences (following older concepts of collective identity and politics of identity) to analyse the ways in which power and politics are influencing, and often dictating, the memory boom of one past or another (Huyssen, 2003; Misztal, 2003; Garcia, 2006; Lebow et al., 2006; Olick, 2007, cited in Anton 2009, 114). Politics of memory are about “who wants whom to remember what, and why” (Confino 1997, cited in Anton 2009, 112).

Depending on the present interests of different political actors, the post-communist memorial agenda is always putting forward certain sites of memory to the detriment of others. For example, the memory work immediately related to the restitution of direct economic or social rights could be favoured to the detriment of other social memories, whose victims are difficult to hear or even to identify at a given moment. At the same time, while certain pasts have become the centre of numerous studies, public debates and legislative projects, others are still silent. Anton (2011, 2) differentiates between low remembering forms, involving silenced pasts (e.g. pro-natalist policies, collaborationism forms etc.) and forms of remembering in the public sphere (through debates, commemorations, patrimonialisation etc.). The former are not entirely absent in present-day society – determining a so-called “social amnesia” – since they clearly manifest their presence in the private sphere through social-communicative memory. At the same time, remembering is low because there is no one to blame, no one to put to trial, no one to punish as the main scapegoat, and there is also a taboo dimension of certain traumatic pasts. Memory and place in the built environments of totalitarian regimes also informed anthropological work extensively.

The memory of socialism encompasses the memory of guilt, of compliance, of resistance, or of accommodation, passing through specific filters: nostalgia (embodied through ritual manifestations), heroic/empathetic perspectives (the mystification and de-mystification of resistance), the trauma syndrome discourse (the national victimization paradigm), and the ironic narrative of young adults, who experienced communism as children and teenagers. Meanings and their receptions have been particularly important in postsocialist contexts.

The memory of the socialist past was also approached in the light of the relationship between memory and agency.⁵⁶ The socialist past has often been treated as a cause of loss for personal agency, so that it should be compensated for by, and filled in with personal memories (Skultans, 1998). At the same time, previous work pointed out that people who now feel free to narrate their experiences under socialism do face the problem of justifying themselves and at the same time of establishing some sort of continuity in their life stories, as instead of the state justice, a life story does justice too. Overall, memory is an active and cognitive function capable of extracting events from their historical context and transforming them into symbolic text allowing an understanding of identities and changes in the public lives of communities. On the micro-level, from an anthropological perspective, the study of memory also addresses intergenerational transmission between individuals and collectivities.

Property

The material, social, or relational dimension of property has become a core issue for political economy, development studies, social anthropology, and ecology (Benda-Beckmann et al., 2006). In a famous definition, property is multi-dimensional: “It is about rights and obligations, about economic access, about citizenship and political status, about social relationships, and about notions of personhood” (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 7). Thus, if property involves persons, things, and their relations – the standard anthropological conception – then those persons and things are clearly bound, have integrity, and are easily recognizable as separate kinds of entities (Humphrey & Verdery 2004, 5). At the same time, property is studied at various levels of social organization: cultural ideals and ideologies, more concrete normative and institutional regulation, social property relationships, and social practices (Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann 1999, 22). It is important to study the interrelations of these compounds, as property may mean quite different things at each of these layers.

Moreover, rights and entitlements are part of the study on normative and institutional regulation regarding property. The property relations theory itself advises the in-depth study of the “total distribution of rights and entitlements within society, of material things and of knowledge and symbols” (Hann 1998, 34). On the other hand, “rights” or entitlements are among the cultural constructs informing the concept – they are native to Western Europe, and these features emphasize

⁵⁶ Agency is mostly explained as the ability to act of the individual structured by social orders and normative settings. To name the two rather prominent examples in social-theoretical debates, the importance of agency is discussed with Bourdieu’s habitus concept and Giddens’ theory of structure.

and see the subject of property relations as inherently right-bearing; hence the prevailing language of property rights (Micu 2014, 135).

The embeddedness of property in social relations is part of the work on changing meanings of property due to political regimes in transformation. In Romanian fieldwork, the concept of property informed the examination of land confiscation and restitution at the edges of a political regime (Cartwright, 2001; Verdery, 1998). In his study of the Hungarian countryside under socialist rule, Hann (1998) reveals two property forms: while land in rural areas was held collectively (in collective farms) or owned legally by the government (state farms), households still had a guaranteed right to a private plot for subsistence production. Households had the right to the exclusive use of plots but not to the sale of crops grown there. In the multi-ethnic setting of this work, property is highly connected to local customs and practices settled historically. Like everywhere, it can generate overlapping interests to serve social relationships (family, neighbourhood, and community), moral ideas, identities, recognition of social personas, or the social group. Property is a relevant concept for the study of rural socialism as it reveals meanings, attachments and belonging forms.

Nostalgia

Micro-level nostalgia

Nostalgia will first be discussed in the light of the anthropologist's choice of field sites. Berliner and Angé (2015) discuss the concept of “disciplinary exnostalgia”, according to which anthropology lent its passion for exotic cultures vanishing against the modern world. Exnostalgia is indignation and a theoretical stance in the face of irreversible loss, and anthropologists who take an exnostalgic position deplore the paradigmatic changes in discipline. In most major anthropological traditions, the anti-primitivist perspective was adopted: “nostalgia for lost paradises was replaced by realistic perspectives about acculturation, incorporation and reinterpretation of new cultural elements” (Berliner 2015, 26). This study on the memory of socialism at the edge of time can benefit from this perspective.

The connection between nostalgia and longing for a lost political and social order in everyday life is encompassed in the concepts of *Ostalgie* (Berdahl, 1999a)⁵⁷ or *Yugonostalgia* (Lindstrom, 2005). Here, nostalgia is a defence mechanism against drastic change (Boym, 2001), and a capsule of emotional capital

⁵⁷ Berdahl (2010, 48, 55–56) describes *Ostalgie* as “identification with different forms of opposition, solidarity and collective memory . . . it can evoke feelings of longing, mourning, resentment, anger, relief, redemption, and satisfaction . . .”. *Ostalgie* practices “reflect and constitute the construction and expression of a kind of counter-memory”. Goods from the former East are endowed with meaning and, “came to stand for the meaning of transition itself”.

(Heady & Gambold Miller, 2006). Thus, nostalgia is about the production of a present rather than the reproduction of the past (Berdahl 1999a, 198).

Nostalgia and longing for a lost past is another study thread. Most literature emphasizes that nostalgia is crafted within “horizons of expectations” in the present (Boyer, 2012, cited in Angé et al. 2015, 30). A generation can long for a mixture of feelings and material things – and thus, nostalgia stands as a cultural practice and a discursive strategy. In her account on nostalgic narratives of “socialist workers” in Slovenia, Petrović (2010, 61) sees the past as an inventory of artifacts, images, sounds and flavours associated with everyday life in a common state, some longed for, some refuted. This kind of nostalgia offers a warm and pleasant symbolic background of the past, unburdened by any ideological pretext. In the same style, Pasięka (2012, 73) proves that nostalgia for “socialism” can be understood as longing for very concrete experiences and as a phenomenon that relates to both the past and the present as it provides people with the means through which they respond to ongoing changes. At the same time, for the elderly, nostalgia for the communist period – which some may categorize as strategic forgetting – is often linked to their more precarious circumstances since its collapse. Here, nostalgia is connected to delusion.⁵⁸

The nostalgic feelings of postsocialist subjects informed extensive anthropological work. The memory practices of socialist industrial workers stress the positive aspects of socialism, and this is derogatorily marked as postsocialist nostalgia and almost entirely interpreted as a strategy related to the present situation of workers and the difficulties they have in “getting by in postsocialism”. For example, David Kideckel stresses that “nostalgia for socialism focuses on security – of one’s job, of the community, of physical life”. For the author, such selective use of the socialist model is ultimately futile and frustrating for effective agency, as it elevates relations and conditions that are thoroughly discredited today. Collectivist practices make little sense in postsocialist institutional contexts and have little support among either globalizing elites or the hard-pressed, but energetic, middle classes (Kideckel 2008, 13). On the other hand, postsocialist subjects are widely delegitimized for their nostalgic feelings for the socialist past. Finally, from a gender perspective, nostalgia is a mechanism that plays a significant role in reproducing the female cultural repertoire of dependency and lack of initiative or “agency” as social and political citizens.

Nostalgia as longing for a lost home is particularly relevant for the analysis of deportations. As a longing for a “home” that no longer exists or has never existed, nostalgia makes people aware of the irreversibility of time. The “nostos”

⁵⁸ Much contemporary ethnographic research demonstrates the persistence of indigenous practices and beliefs and shows how people actively create continuity in times of social turbulence. Sahlin’s (1985) concept of the “structure of the conjuncture” accounts for the ways in which culture is reproduced through transformation rather than simple preservation (Angé & Berliner 2015).

of nostalgia is in a way always utopian: it exists nowhere. Above all, nostalgia is an essential part of human life, and its semantic field depends on the past being evaluated: “algia” – longing – is what we share, yet “nostos” – the return home – is what divides us” (Boym 2001, 41).

The connections between nostalgia and identity further enrich the scholarship on nostalgia. Both concepts are concerned with reflecting on the past in relation to the present, both can change according to individual, group or motivation and both seek authenticity in origin to legitimate the present. Still, nostalgia is a transcendent concept as it does not have to be justified nor does it require approval by others, whereas identity exists or is legitimized only when it is recognized by peers, superiors and subordinates in the same field. Nostalgia differentiates the present from a remembered past which is possibly “unreal” or only partly “real”. Identity seeks to establish itself by differentiation from contemporary peers, superiors and subordinates and can be legitimated by association with common origins or pasts.

Macro-level nostalgia

Boym (2001) distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia, both determined by the needs of the present. First, restorative nostalgia strives to reconstruct the lost home and is at the centre of national and religious revivals and thinks of itself rather as truth and tradition. It evokes national past and future, and it gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture. On the other hand, reflective nostalgia emanates from longing and loss, it is more about individual and cultural memory, and it is more oriented toward an individual narrative that savours details and memorial signs (Boym 2001, 41 seq.). Ironic, humorous, wistful and aware of the gap between identity and resemblance, reflective nostalgia affords a critical view of the past. In the light of reflective nostalgia, the relationship between the past, present and future is narrated with a sense of distance.

On the other hand, nostalgia is a form of performance and an ideological tool. It is never a plain expression of longing and grief, but a powerful ideological tool that enables those who articulate such a discourse to express their views, establish or retain certain value systems, or achieve goals. At the same time, nostalgia, according to Halbwachs, is a manifestation of collective memory that “offers a zone of stability and normativity in the current change that characterizes modern life”. The collective frameworks of memory appear as safeguards in the stream of modernity and mediate between the present and the past, between self and the other (Boym 2001, 54).

Nostalgia and consumption is another study thread, for example in the examination of food as a commodified nostalgic past. The dishes and drinks on offer at the Grutas (Lithuanian park–museum featuring recuperated Soviet-era artifacts) café, are in many respects catalysts of what Debora Battaglia (1995, 178) calls

“practical nostalgia” with “a connective purpose”. This nostalgia form “connects” the consumer to the daily life in the Soviet past, a great deal of which was sustained through quotidian commensality and sociability produced in networks of kinship and friendship (Lankauskas 2006, 40). Edward Casey (2004, 21) has observed that when we remember “things” – they could be madeleines or beets – we often invoke “whole environmental complexes, auras, and worlds (and how these are given)” (Lankauskas 2006, 30). In a similar vein, over the past decade, various ex-communist nations, in a style reminiscent of the former GDR, have witnessed a virtual explosion of what is known as (*n*)*ostalgie* – “the birth and boom of a nostalgia industry that has entailed the (re)production, marketing, and merchandising of GDR products” (Berdahl 1999a, 192). Finally, polyester clothing and popular music, laundry soap and the infamous Trabant, soft drinks and champagne – consumer goods that some two decades ago were produced and consumed in the administered economy of the socialist GDR – are all the rage again (Lankauskas 2006, 30).

Ethnicity

The chapter on the Roma economies applies Barth’s (1969) concept of ethnicity, according to which one’s ethnic identity is rather fluid and mutable, because both self- and other-ascribed labels change with the situation. Everyone carries a “portfolio” of ethnic labels, and ethnicity is a continuing ascription which classifies a person in terms of their most general and inclusive identity, and it is also a form of social organization maintained by inter-group boundary mechanisms (Barth, 1969). In the author’s view, an ascribed category constitutes an ethnic identity if “it classifies a person in terms of his most general, identity, presumably determined by his origin and background” (Barth 1969, 13). Barth’s (1969) assumption on ethnic identity in interaction stands midway between the primordialist (cultural difference, language barriers and so forth create an ethnic identity) and instrumentalist (every ethnic group develops its culture and social organization in isolation, through local ecological adaptation and only selective borrowing) dimensions of ethnicity. This double approach is relevant for ways in which the socialist state conceived the Roma, either as an undesirable ethnic group or as a social problem. At the same time, the Hungarian population of T., a quarter in size of the whole population, is transversally discussed in terms of property means (*tanya*⁵⁹) or confessional holidays and related work breaks from the collective.

The connection between ethnicity and social interactions informs the sections on intercultural relations in the multi-ethnic village. Ethnicity is the enduring

⁵⁹ *Tanya* refers to a unit of production and consumption spatially separated from larger nucleated settlements, which emerged in response to population growth and increasing pressure on agricultural land.

and systematic communication of cultural differences between groups considering themselves to be distinct. It appears whenever cultural differences are made relevant in social interaction, and it should thus be studied at the level of social life, not at the level of symbolic culture (Eriksen 2001, 58). Ethnicity is a category of ascription, and its continuity depends on maintaining boundaries and, therefore, on constantly re-codifying the cultural differences between neighbouring groups. In a Weberian understanding, ethnicity is not fixed but represents a category of identification that relies upon notions of both self and other definitions around a series of characteristics and what might be described as elements of diversity, and these can be articulated or manipulated through concrete social actions, primarily to achieve political ends and shifts in status.

Finally, Cohen (1994, 118) sees ethnicity as a form of voluntary association, guided by some common criteria and values, such as the use of common language, feasts and rituals and this is not a disinterested association. In the same interactional manner, Wimmer's (2013) theory assumes that ethnic boundaries are the outcome of the classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors situated in a social field. Three characteristics of a field – the institutional order, distribution of power, and political networks – determine which actors will adopt which strategy of ethnic boundary-making. The Roma chapter will further reveal how the concepts of kinship and people are also useful when approaching everyday interactions. In a similar way, scholars such as Olivera (2012) point out the importance of concepts such as kinship and people (*neam*), when referring to his group of studied Roma, the Gabori of Târgu Mureş countryside.⁶⁰

On the four conceptual lenses – memory, property, nostalgia and ethnicity

The four conceptual lenses introduced in this chapter – memory, property, nostalgia, and ethnicity – are not isolated categories but rather mutually reinforcing dimensions that together provide a rich framework for interpreting the socialist transformation of the Romanian countryside. Property anchors the analysis of quotas, land loss, and collectivization, while memory ensures that these events are understood not merely as administrative or economic facts but as lived experiences embedded in life stories. Nostalgia complicates memory by inflecting it with affective tones of longing, loss, or reinterpretation, which shape the ways in which villagers today recall quotas, deportations, or even gendered work relations. Ethnicity intersects with all these processes, since experiences of dispossession,

⁶⁰ Kinship (*rudă*) indicates horizontal relationships, while people (*neam*) indicate verticality. At the same time, *neam* (the people) is the place where the norm is defined (Olivera, 2012). At the same time, just how members of a Romani group mark and reinforce their differences from 'their *gádže*' is not only a matter of how they are located in relation to local institutions, ideologies and practices, but is also a matter of how Roma think of themselves in connection to local places and pasts (Lemon, 2000).

labour, or repression were unevenly distributed among Romanians, Roma, and Hungarians, and these interethnic dynamics continue to inform how stories are told and remembered.

By bringing these conceptual threads together, the analysis of each empirical chapter becomes more than the recounting of events. The chapter on quotas reveals how state power operated through property seizures, but also how such experiences are narrated in memory and coloured by nostalgia for pre-collectivization life. The revolt and deportations show property and ethnicity at their most violent intersection, while also producing long-lasting memory conflicts. The everyday collectivization campaign highlights negotiations over property and survival strategies, while nostalgia and ethnicity frame the ambivalence of these stories. Chapters on Roma, work, and gender reveal the reconfiguration of social relations where ethnicity, memory, and nostalgia intersect with professional and institutional identities. Finally, the study of the memorial and museum exhibitions demonstrates how memory, nostalgia, and ethnicity are curated in the present, connecting property loss and socialist transformations to broader narratives of justice and identity.

Taken together, these conceptual connections ensure that the analytical chapters are not read in isolation but as parts of a larger interpretative framework in which memory, property, nostalgia, and ethnicity illuminate the complexity of socialist and postsocialist rural life.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The narrative

Narratives provide a framework for how individuals experience the material world and how personal and local stories interconnect with larger-scale political, historical and social forces (Abu Lughod, 1993; Skultans, 1998). Narratives are the sum of experiences of people from a specific location and time, constantly being reinterpreted and recreated in an organic manner: they enrich the common stock on which everyone can draw to muse on past events, interpret their significance, and imagine them now (Basso 1996, 6).

First, the connection between narrative and identity is highly relevant for the study of biographies throughout this book. Narratives reflect one's personal identity at a given place, space and time. People narrate, according to the psychologist Nico Frijda (1997), because of their desire to locate themselves in time and space, which are both constantly changing. Thus, Frijda maintains, personal identity is reconstituted in the process of narration and in the resultant narrative. On the other hand, oral narratives serve as a rich source of historical data, especially if one is interested in studying the changes in personal reflectivity and identity from a historical viewpoint. With narratives, identities are constructed within a constantly changing landscape: physical, social and moral. Thus, identity, landscape and time interact in a series of mutual refractions in the sphere of a narrative. When life is recast as a quest, identities are transformed from personal to collective, and past lives can contain a mythical character.

Second, the narrative is both a verbal and a gestural resource. In some of the most well-known narratives and life histories in anthropology such as Shostak's *Nisa* (1981),⁶¹ Crapanzano's *Tuhami* (1980), Abu Lughod's *Writing Women's Worlds* (1993), the authors underline the intensity and flair of their subjects at moments of narration: their vivid facial expressions and body language, dramatic reenactment of reported speech, and hesitating volume or tone of voice.

⁶¹ *Nisa* exemplifies the classical lifehistory method in anthropology, drawing on the discipline's longstanding tradition of presenting an individual biography as a privileged means of accessing broader social and cultural processes.

Third, narratives can be approached in terms of their chronological dimension. One narrative, in all its manifestations – conversation, verbalized self-reflection, gestural repository, and life history – includes a natural tendency to tell things in a chronological manner. As people make sense of their social worlds, their thoughts and feelings about the various occurrences from their daily lives are contextualized and used as reference points during the ongoing cultural process of the negotiation of meaning. Narratives continue to evolve as they are enriched by new life experiences and one's perceptions of these experiences. The cultural process renders significance between the moments, feelings and sensations that compose human life (Rapport, 2015).

Fourth, narratives are a circular process, elicited at various moments spent in the company of the subjects (McCarthy Brown, 1991; Shostak, 1981). Yet they do not necessarily come ready made when it comes to putting them down into written text. Despite their linear progression, they are augmented by new life experiences which reinterpret or verify things. Established themes are repeated and prior events that are salient to the individual are cognitively re-visited. This re-visitation and repetition is highlighted by McCarthy Brown (1991, 17–18) on the story telling of Mama Lola, the voodoo priestess in Brooklyn: “She moves in a spiral fashion against the same ground when telling an important ancestral story. Each pass over familiar turf creates redundancy, but it also brings out some additional nuance or detail”.

How are narratives used methodologically? According to Riemann (2003, 120), narrative interviews should be based on a generative question which elicits a narrative of the interviewee's involvement in a constellation of experiences and events that are relevant to the interviewee. The author advises that the interviewer should warn the interviewee that their narratives unfold without any interruption so that the internal understanding of their experiences can be reproduced.⁶² At the end of the uninterrupted narrative, a series of questions and answers should elicit new material such as descriptions, and theoretical-argumentative statements can follow.

As a tangible result of fieldwork, the narrative conveys a reality within it.⁶³ In the analysis, the two axes of a narrative, syntagmatic and paradigmatic, as provided by Candida Smith (2002), offer an insightful base. The former is a hori-

⁶² The aim of the biographical narrative interview is to enable individuals to recount how they have experienced specific lifecourse processes and their own life histories. Central to this method is the generation of a spontaneous autobiographical narrative, structured not by the interviewer's questions but by the narrator's own systems of relevance.

⁶³ A life story, or narrative, can be understood as a form of translation: the translation of lives lived into lives remembered. This process is simultaneously mimetic, moral, and literary. Contrary to Bourdieu's (1986) critique of biographical narrative as an ideological illusion, the translation of lives into stories constitutes an essential – though individually constructed – bridge between persons and their cultural worlds.

zontal arrow that represents the emplotted, temporal dimension of narration: how a story begins and what problem is posed, what complications mark change in the development of the problem, what the turning point is that makes the conclusion inevitable, how the story concludes, with what kind of resolution. The latter focuses on recurrent symbols and other expressive motifs that can appear at any point in the story, describing and explaining symbolic vocabulary and the ways in which associational registers express both judgments and affective responses. On the other hand, narratives consist both of re-counting life and of evaluating it. Evaluation can be an explicit commentary by the narrator on past acts or characters, but it may also be revealed by the selection of past events included within the narrative. Finally, the narrative includes different communicative schemes of presentation (narration, argumentation and description), silences, hesitations and passages that mark the beginning and ending of the story. In the analysis, one should avoid the trap of generalization. When one generalizes from conversations and experiences with several different people in each location, one glosses over important contradictions, conflicts of opinion and belief, and fluctuating motivations and circumstances.

Moreover, narrativity is a tool perfectly suited to rethinking the relationship between agency and structure in studies of agency and collective action (Somers 1994, 614). Narratives are constellations of relationships (connected parts), embedded in time and space, constituted by causal *emplotment* (Somers 1994, 616; emphasis in the original).⁶⁴

At the same time, from the so-called storied research approach (Smith & Sparkes, 2008), narration is a social act and a cultural resource. According to this approach, people tell (or actively do) stories in a slightly different way every time they speak of themselves, to both accomplish social recognition in a certain context and produce meaning and coherence for themselves. Thus, when a narrative is produced, identities are both conferred and actively claimed and contested (Smith & Sparkes 2008, 16).

Finally, the narrative is a depository of the past. It is not simply recited in isolation from other factors but is shaped and informed by the needs of the present (Tonkin 1995, 5). Moreover, narratives are not verbal icons of the events they recount (Bauman 1986, 5). Each life story is unique as it reveals both the variety of experience in any social group, and how each individual story draws on a common culture. In addition, there are differences between lives lived, lives experienced and lives told (Brunner 1986, 6). However, it is possible to assume the existence of objective reality represented in subjective life accounts (Miller 2000, 13).

⁶⁴ The author argues that narratives – understood in their most basic sense as stories – operate across four dimensions: ontological, public, conceptual, and metanarratives. Ontological (or personal) narratives refer to the stories individuals draw on to make sense of their lives and to guide their actions within them (Somers 1994, 616).

Oral history, life stories, biographic interviews

Oral history, life story, or biographical interview are alternative names which don't do complete justice to the complexity of field data, for which this section provides a brief overview.

Oral history is a recent thing. Until the last century, the focus of history was essentially political; it was a documentation of the struggle for power, in which the lives of ordinary people were scarcely given any attention (Thompson 1988, 23). Later, when oral history research became research on everyday life, those social groups who do not play the leading roles on the historical stage were studied, their circumstances, values and life strategies. Workers, women, black people, various immigrant groups were the study targets in Western societies in the 20th century. Additionally, the interest in tiny social groups, their role and place in history has turned the scholars' attention to the family as a subject of research (Thompson, 1988). Research on daily life also brought up a focus on the common rather than different traits of nations and countries: the uprooting of "peasantry", the flight to the towns, the moulding of industrial working-class consciousness, and the changing position of women and the growth of the small, privatized family (Thompson, 1988). Thus, oral history brought up a variety of voices which are not heard in conventional sources (Tonkin, 1995). Overall, two major kinds of research benefit from oral history: one which seeks to explain some significant social change or movement and its construction in social memory by interviewing many participants, and one which explores subjectivity and is more concerned with the ways one subject tells his or her story than with some aggregate of results.

Kligman and Verdery (2011, 465) use the oral history label for simplicity's sake, but it does not capture the variety of oral research methods that one can employ in the context of ethnographic research, such as in-depth interviews and in-depth discussions. In this study, oral histories are in-depth retrospective interviews which shed light on how people who lived under now-defunct regimes attempt to reconstruct their life stories and make sense of them.

How about the life story label? For Bertaux (1996, 52–53), a life story is structured around a temporal succession of events, situations, projects, actions and the resulting long-lasting actions.⁶⁵ The author distinguished among three functions of life stories: exploratory, analytical (challenging hypothesis and an original work), and expressive (life stories published in an uncommented form, thus they do not have a research function but a communicative one). On the other hand, the life story comprises several levels: one internal to the subject (initial personality and behavioural structure), another rooted in the history of longterm relationships with parents and other significant figures (Mead), and a third situated in sociostructural

⁶⁵ The author prefers the term *life story* over *life history* in order to emphasize the subjective and self-reflective character of memories of the past.

relations within a particular social world, including its defining places, norms, and roles. Everything that modifies one of these three states is an event.

As for the biographic interview, biographical analysis and research were first done by the Chicago School of Sociology and focused mainly on the impact of and social transformations brought about by experiences of migration. In the 1970s and 1980s, Fritz Schütze developed a systematic method for the hermeneutic textual interpretation of biographical interviews, which reveals structures of personal and social processes of action and suffering as well as possible resources for coping and change. In the late 1980s, the method of “hermeneutic case reconstruction” (Rosenthal, 1993) brought some modifications and additions to Schütze’s (1982) method, as biographical self-presentations could be analysed from an interpretative perspective, in five analytic steps: analysis of biographical data that can stand independently of the narrator’s perspective (objective data, extracted from the interview transcript and ordered chronologically); division of data into separate units, while keeping the sequence of the units intact, also known as the “thematic field analysis”; the reconstruction of the life story and the generation of hypothesis about the meanings of specific experiences for the narrator; a microanalysis of individual text segments, which can test the hypothesis elaborated earlier; a contrastive comparison of the life history and life story.⁶⁶ The life story and life history are compared to determine, for example, which aspects of the narrator’s experience have been emphasized or minimized.

Moreover, biographic and social are the two dimensions of a biographic interview, as telling one’s biography involves individual and collective responsibility. In the biographical function, an event such as war has a strong impact of this kind.⁶⁷ The social function of remembering helps to re-build categories and boundaries or leads to strategies of inversion between roles, bringing up the issue of responsibility. The biographical function implies direct personal involvement in the events evoked during the narration whereas the social function reflects the consequences of personal or collective actions or non-actions during events.

Alternatively, biographic interviews are labelled as life narratives (Rosenthal, 1991), bearing three major functions: narrability, biographical function and social function of remembering. Narrability is the ability to remember in an articulate way: for example, we remember sequential events, events connected to places, not chaos. Our remembering is affected by our status in the experience we want to recall: whether we had to suffer passively or take an active role during events. Finally, there is a connection between participation in a traumatic event and the willingness to remember it: passivity and trauma are related, such that the more

⁶⁶ By *life history*, the author refers to the life as it was lived, whereas the *life story* denotes the narrated life, as recounted in conversation or writing from the standpoint of the present.

⁶⁷ Moreover, one’s biography could span all aspects of an individual’s lifetime over almost a century (Miller, 2000), so biography is a rich resource.

passive we are and the more traumatic the experience, the less we (want to) remember.

Finally, a biography can be regarded in both a realist and constructivist manner (Bertaux, 1981). In the former, biography is an integral part of social reality directly reflecting people's thoughts, plans and actions. In the latter, biographical narrations are pure constructions, which can be freely made up and changed depending on the ongoing situations of presentation. Constructivists argue that narratives are performances fully dependent on the interview situation and certain characteristics of the interviewer, such as gender, age and cultural background.⁶⁸

The analysis of collected biographic interviews throughout the chapters benefits from Bourdieu's (1986) claim that, rather than being an ideological illusion, the translation of lives into stories constitutes an essential bridge between individuals and their culture, but one which each individual constructs in his or her own way. Some biographies are carefully arranged in a sequential manner, others are more disparate, highlighting specific themes and omitting or briefly approaching others. The richness of biographical data confirms that biographic interviews, in combination with ethnography and historical analysis, can be imported into mainstream anthropology.

Methodological mix: life stories, archival research, and museum ethnography

Fifty recorded life stories and numerous non-recorded ones were collected within various fieldwork sessions between 2011 and 2015. The interviews lasted between one hour and thirty minutes and two hours. Fieldwork started in U. and C.M., followed by a separate session in T.⁶⁹ The names of villages are used with the initials to protect the privacy of recollections. This omission of the real names of villages stands in contrast with archival documents, where the real names of villages stand. In line with my reasons for omitting the real names, in my analysis of these archival documents I omitted the real names as well, except for situations when, in view of the used citation norms, this was impossible: for example, when citing the documents from the Village Council of Village C.M., the name of the village appears in the name of the file containing these documents. Some studies propose a distinction between the "extended stay" and the "back-and-forth" models (Brković & Hodges, 2015), and my fieldwork involved both types of stay.

⁶⁸ Some theoretical approaches emphasize the close relationship between biography and identity. For both theoretical and empirical reasons, biographical research often employs the concept of "biography" or "biographical construction" rather than that of "identity" (Fischer Rosenthal 1999). Within this framework, "identity" is understood as an ongoing accomplishment involving the construction and maintenance of continuity and coherence across changing situations, rather than as a fixed or static attribute.

⁶⁹ What about the meaning of place in fieldwork? The place is not a distinct whole: places are better understood as changing networks of hierarchically ordered relations (Massey, 2008).

My extended stays in the villages allowed a multi-dimensional ethnography, with studies of local archives and meetings with land tenants and local authorities. The transcribed interviews will be published in a separate work conceived as an oral history collection. The list of interviewees is available in the annex.

In my fieldwork, recollecting is an oral tradition, and, in a snowball style, narrators directed me to new ones with interesting stories to tell. Narratives stand at a point of juncture between oral traditional memory and autobiographical memory. Meetings started with a statement of my purpose in collecting biographies, engaging the interviewees themselves in recollections among them. At times, members of two generations were present at the interview, allowing for interesting exchanges, completions, and polemics. Meetings took place in private homes, yards and gardens and involved viewing photos, dining, household tours to catch up on the host's renovation plans or innovative gardening, or coffee time.

Interviewees belong to the generation born between 1935 and 1945, joined by some born between the late 1920s and 1935. In U. the first interviewees were the victims of repression: families with executed and deported members in July and August 1949. The next bunch of interviewees consisted of the former institutional leaders from the CAP, the SMT and the Village Council. Then, a miscellaneous group of interviewees, such as members of former agricultural cooperatives and a family of shepherds settling in U. in the 1990s during the summer followed via recommendations from previous interviewees. A fourth bunch of interviewees is made up of retired elementary school teachers, engineers and doctors.

In T., the chronology of meetings was established by my field host, an ethnic Hungarian, who first directed me to some families of ethnic Hungarians themselves. Among them were the wife of a former CAP president, former brigade leaders or just employees at CAP and SMT. I pursued fieldwork in T. by interviewing families with formerly deported members (in various deportation types) and families of non-joiners to the GAC and CAP. My other host used her extended network to build my group of interviewees. Some of these were her neighbours, and others, grandparents of her students. In terms of fieldwork among Roma, both the Village Councillor and the leaders of the community itself were great hosts. All narrators are Christian (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed and Neoprotestant – Pentecostals and Baptists). The interviews followed a pre-established guide, which was also adapted on spot, based on the story telling of the narrators. Newspaper clips, ownership-related documents, and photographs were shown during the interview.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ For an outline on visual anthropology, or, on the visual in anthropology, see Mac Dougal (1997). In the first half of the last century, the anthropological corpus included in fact much more, extending outwards from the person to include the social group, the physical setting, the fields and pastures, the dwellings, implements and other possessions. Photographs and artifacts helped fill this gap and took some of the pressure off the living person, who could now be assumed to

Svetlana Alexievich, in her “Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets”, writes about her method. “I don’t ask people about socialism”, she says, “I want to know about love, jealousy, childhood, old age. Music, dances, hairdos. The myriad sundry details of a vanished way of life”. Therefore, one should never start ideologically, for if one does, one misses the life story. The joint interview does justice to all generations involved in the storytelling. Moreover, the filter of trust (Torsello, 2004) impacted the gathering of interviewing data. The study’s central claim – that life stories are not discursively organized around a political rupture but around personal time – is fully confirmed by the research. Its three analytical levels – everyday culture, property, and institutions – capture the various dimensions of personal temporality, including time lapses and omissions. The second claim was that a verbalized selection of events is not a unique way of talking about the past. Attachment to objects, practices, rituals, or the commemoration activities at family level and their intergenerational transmission are also a form of stocking the past life. Overall, life histories reveal a constant negotiation between social scripts and personal agency, between the demands of the collective and the aspirations of family life.⁷¹

Additionally, thematic interviews were used for the Orthodox priest, the pastors of Baptist and Pentecostal churches (in this study, churches attended by a high number of Roma), Village Councillors, Heads of Village Councils and their Assistant Managers. Church services, commemorations and village feasts were occasions for participant observation.⁷² Institutional ethnography was applied to investigate “textually mediated social organization”, a method built on the examination of work processes and study of how they are coordinated, typically through texts and discourses of various sorts. The visited institutions – village council, NGOs, association of deportees, museums – were the target of institutional ethnography.

Archival research

Archives, together with museums or commemorations are *lieux de mémoire* which have come to replace the living contexts of memory, *milieus de mémoire* (Nora, 1984, 1989). Through archives, the past is materialized, and thus, modern memory is “archival” (Kligman & Verdery, 2011). An archive, in its turn, becomes a *lieu de mémoire* only if imagination has invested it with symbolic connotations.

exist at the fieldwork site. If anything, the absence of the persons strengthens the importance of the visual (Mac Dougall 1997, 277).

⁷¹ For more on intergenerational transmission and postmemory, see Inowlocki (1993) and Hirsch (2012).

⁷² Overall, Schütze’s method includes a close analysis of interview transcriptions, distinguishing textual, performative and affective dimensions of self-narration. It can provide valuable insights into the ways in which personal experiences and emotional trajectories, partially shaped by kinship dynamics, socio-economic and political processes, can influence identity development and the formation of life attitudes.

While social sciences and humanities have been considering issues of representation, objectivity, and power, archival thinking has remained largely isolated from this broader intellectual landscape, and archival practice has remained bound up in modes of thought and practice distinctly rooted in nineteenth-century positivism (Kaplan, 2002). Thus, archivists could draw meaningful comparisons by reading outside their field in disciplines such as anthropology, with which archives share key features, such as concern with issues of representation, description, and culture. Furthermore, to remain relevant and conversant with their partners and stakeholders, archivists must take the matter of their isolation seriously, exercise more comparative self-reflection, and devise practical ways to do archival work without the positivist blinders of the past (Kaplan 2002, 210).

Archival documents will be approached with an ethno-methodological critical analysis (Eglin and Hester, 2003; Lynch & Bogen, 1996; Coulter, 2001 in Tileagă 2009, 2012).⁷³ Texts will be looked at in actual social occurrences and in terms of what can be discovered in and from them (Eglin and Hester 2003, 90). Moreover, texts are treated as ‘phenomenal’ fields (Watson, 2009) whose discursive, socio-cultural and political details are socially occasioned, rhetorical and textual accomplishments. Speaking of differences between archival documents and ethnographic data, Șerban (personal communication) documented in his ethnography the strategy of a shepherd (follower of the shepherds from Mărginime) in the context of the yielding of his land to the CAP. He came back to his shepherding occupation; he improvised a sheepfold that he used to take to Brăila marshes together with his family etc. For the researcher, these data belonged to ethnography, with the claim that you don’t find them in official archives, for example (or if you do, they are briefly mentioned). In works on the memory of communism (e.g. Todorova, 2010), the use of multiple sources – institutional discourses, oral history and anthropology, archives and memoirs, visual memories – is recurring.

In the various archival documents (PMR, CNSAS, Village Council, Gendarmes Legion), the discursive means, their thematic compositions and their argumentative structure will be analysed. The first key year for the study of archival documents is 1949, via the various document types typical for each source: Council (minute), PMR (report), Secret Police (telegram, report, medical-legal expertise). The thematic transformations in time could be observed: for example, the PMR documents, after the early 1960s, address less the problems of agriculture and more industry and urbanization. Some files relate to the fieldwork villages, others to other villages from the county.

Overall, archives are a good base for studying legality in action, either in the everyday context or within repression. Reports can illustrate how the law is re-

⁷³ This analysis, grounded in ethnomethodology, follows the perspective pioneered by Harold Garfinkel, focusing on how social reality is produced in and through everyday practices and the argumentative work that accompanies them.

spected on the ground, or the difficulties that societies encounter when applying the new law. In personal memory, repression is associated with “the period up to ’65, when all those crazy things were done – when, for instance, a drunkard threw a bottle into a shop window in ’62 and received two years in jail – after Article 424 had been introduced. Or people were arrested for listening to Radio Free Europe”. (I.) In the archival documents of the PMR, for example, repression stands in the subsidiary of a discourse on small violence incidents. Second, archival documents provide a valuable resource for examining everyday forms of authority, evident, for example, in the use of abstract categories – such as poor or middle peasants – that are contested by narrators. Thus, authority is built with the mobilization of antagonistic categories. At the same time, as Vultur (2009b, 148) showed, tracking the different trails of paper sent up and across the Party or state hierarchy enables researchers “to study the relationships between the local and central levels of power, as well as the strategies used by the Party and the Securitate to strengthen their control over society and to prevent or repress any form of opposition”.

Finally, on the Securitate archive, Verdery shows that the task of the historian might not necessarily be that of navigating and making sense of the silences inherent in the archives [as Trouillot would have it], or to put it differently, to historicize its gaps and selections, but to understand and deal with its loquacity, not with its lack but with its excess, not with what is missing but with what is already present there (Poenaru 2012, 11, cited in Verdery 2014, 22). This stands true for the plethora of information in the PMR archives and its various sections. Moreover, the author compares the archive with an ethnographic base, not primarily concerning the lives of the people under surveillance but concerning the inner workings of this branch of the Party-state (Verdery 2014, 26). What the party understood by progress, cooperation or reluctance, village development and interventions, and criticism are addressed in every analysis chapter, either event-based or processual. The various documents highlight hidden cultural principles in terms of hierarchy and accountability.

Museum ethnography

The museum ethnography targeted two local museums – one memorial of the early communist years (the Resistance and Repression Memorial) and one disco museum of the 1980s – and reveals the multidimensional curating work encompassing various facets of communism, both repressive and “peaceful”. First, a close analysis of the curatorial concept was possible within several encounters and exchanges with the curator of the two exhibitions, as well as my participation at the memorial’s first inauguration. The richness of the curatorial concept is visible in the memorial’s three iterations, reassembling objects, boards, categories of political prisoners and memoir fragments. Second, via textual and interview

analysis, the ethnography revealed the principal messages presented to visitors and ways in which the multi-generational visitors perceive the museum. The Resistance and Repression Memorial crosscuts the concept of memorial museum. Indeed, a focus on memories is central to the concept of the “memorial museum”, a new form of experiential museum which puts suffering and victims at the centre of its displays. The memorial space functions like a hub in relation to temporary exhibitions on various phenomena of the communist period: the commemoration of the year 1949, or a thematic exhibition on the Pitești Phenomenon. When the exhibition can get changed (the whole narration or just few exhibits), the thread on repression is kept and reinforced at aesthetic and content level. The museum ethnography also allowed a discussion on memory politics, in the context of ongoing calls for the establishment of a “Museum of Communism” present in Romanian society since the 2000s.

The ethnography within the Disco Museum, through a close reading of state documents, paraphernalia of local DJs and museum boards reminds the visitor that communist principles and ideals permeated every aspect of life, even the most private corners of existence, and gives the visitor an opportunity to “experience” softer areas of totalitarianism. The exhibition gives the chance to explore a disco space and interact with objects such as recorders, vinyl discs, playlists and offers a photo corner. The ethnography revealed how the museum concept is transferred to school projects (invitation to host end of year parties in retro style), art projects or knowledge dissemination events featuring the interventions from the DJs of the respective era.

Fieldwork and reflexivity

This section addresses the ethnographer’s positionality in the field as well as the engagement forms triggered by fieldwork. The issue of friendship in fieldwork and its impact on data gathering has always preoccupied anthropologists. In some of the most well-known narratives and life histories in anthropology e.g. Shostak’s *Nisa* (1981), Crapanzano’s *Tuhami* (1980), Abu Lughod’s *Writing Women’s Worlds* (1993), the friendship of the anthropologist with his / her subjects is approached *per se*.

A major portion of Shostak’s (1981) work is told in *Nisa*’s own words, when the fifty-year-old new friend recalls, with great storytelling talent, feelings, events and the organization of daily life within her experience.⁷⁴ In the text, the vivid facial expressions and body language, dramatic reenactment of reported speech, and vacillating volume or tone of voice of the narrator can be felt. The author addresses *Nisa*’s relatedness to the researcher also in a utilitarian way, noting her repeated demands for money, which rankles the researcher and raises new ques-

⁷⁴ At this level of analysis, Shostak and *Nisa* offer rich and original material on childhood, adolescence, and adulthood in the social worlds of the !Kung of the Kalahari Desert.

tions about the meaning of friendship in a context not just of cultural difference but of glaring disparity in access to resources and social power.

Another account on the (im)possibility of ethnographic distance is given by Crapanzano (1980) who draws on phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and symbolism to reflect upon the nature of reality and truth and to probe the limits of anthropology itself in his account of Tuhami. His fieldwork informant, the illiterate Moroccan tile maker who believes himself married to a camel-footed she demon is a master of magic and a superb storyteller. The anthropologist deals with the bizarre accounts of his subject which lead to sensitive experiments of interpretive ethnography, as well as to a venture of self-discovery. The anthropologist is finally engulfed in a web of personal and emotional entanglements, when deciding to shift from researcher position to a curer of Tuhami, being no longer able to maintain ethnographic distance.

Shostak's (1981) and Crapanzano's (1980) works are inspirational for the created fieldwork connections, which involved help requests with paperwork, follow-ups on research advancements and work presentations. Writings that emphasize the role of experience in ethnography (Hastrup, 1995), the subjectivity of the ethnographer (Coffey, 1999) and, with it, the inter subjectivity of the ethnographic encounter have steadily increased since the mid-1980s and the literary turn.⁷⁵ The ethnographer is positioned between complicity and detachment in the field, while aiming to be "objective" and this will be the major perpetual fieldwork-related problem.

Finally, the immersion of fieldworkers in the realities of socialist Eastern and Central Europe reveals ethical challenges, methodologies and institutional settings, showing aspects of socialism which restricted and facilitated access to the field, suggesting ways in which socialism facilitated social relations. In attempting to re-imagine socialism not merely as a spatial and temporal entity but as a site of current anthropological debates, the anthropologists made new connections between history and memory, narrative and experience, past and present (Mateoc & Rüegg, 2020). The authors also pointed to the heritage of socialism – values, objects, and practices – as an object of study (e.g. the pig slaughter festival).

The halfie and engaged anthropology

The halfie label refers to the hybrid positions of ethnographers whose roots are in the society they are researching, like myself. "Anthropology", as Ruth Behar

⁷⁵ Central to the postmodern literary turn in American anthropology that emerged in the mid-1980s (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Behar 1995) was the recognition that ethnographic accounts construct rather than simply represent ethnographic truths (Clifford 1983). From this perspective, ethnographies were no longer understood as transparent mirrors of social reality, as assumed by realist traditions, but as situated and mediated textual productions (Behar 1995). For further discussion of the literary turn, see, for example, Goldstein (2008, 86).

wrote, “is frequently about displacements – displaced emotions are produced by the ‘hybrid’ positioning of the anthropologist” (Narayan 1993, 681). Others claim that being part of a community through ethnicity and heritage can be advantageous for the anthropologist, in terms of the authenticity of the gathered material (Kempny 2012, 45). On the other hand, Narayan (1993), and Abu-Lughod (1991) argued that we rarely conform to our home cultures. The dichotomy of “insider” vs. “outsider” in one’s field (Narayan, 1993) is also recurring in anthropological works.⁷⁶ The issue of trust impacts on the shape of fieldwork interactions, and ultimately, of knowledge production.

In the recollection of the socialist past, memories are full of moral ambiguities, and some patterns of remembering the socialist past can account for specific moralities (Gallinat 2009, 149). Some subjects were hesitant, claiming that at their age, they don’t wish to do politics, others wanted to know whether my findings will be public, while others were keen on giving plenty of accurate details or to criticize actual land state policies.

Finally, engaged anthropology is a ubiquitous dimension of fieldwork. In the 1980s, reflexivity deconstructed the invisible figure of the researcher, and disciplines like applied anthropology or feminism disclaimed the researcher’s superiority towards the informant. The public interest ethnographer is part of the studied world, is an engaged human being, sensitive to the problems of the studied society and becomes a mediator or intervener. Some anthropologists have called for more publicly engaged anthropology and admitted the contribution of anthropology to human thought, by going public.

Engaged anthropology was discussed in relation to Roma-related fieldwork (Spreizer, 2009), to applied practice, to institutions such as Cultural Survival, or the work of individual activists in the context of war, terrorism, environmental injustice, human rights, and violence (Low & Engle Merry, 2010). The morality of engagement, or whether one should take this stance in the field has equally been addressed. Crapanzano (1980, 10) justified his engagement in helping Tuhami by referring to his background in a culture of doers; as a result, his subjects became a sanctioned ground for rationalization. Engagement during fieldwork undeniably comes with a set of limits and expectations. In the field, I was certainly considered a potential mediator or problem solver, but this is not due to my position as an ethnographer, but to a common cultural framework with a shared understanding of help.

⁷⁶ For a discussion on native and foreign researchers in the Eastern European context of postsocialism, see Rüegg (2014). Rüegg shows that the belief that a native researcher necessarily makes a better anthropologist – on the assumption that insider access to one’s own society guarantees superior understanding – is a relatively recent one. By contrast, since its beginnings anthropology has emphasized the importance of analytical distance, later reformulated by Lévi-Strauss as *le regard croisé*, according to which the observer must maintain a critical distance from the object of observation (Rüegg 2014, 90).

Chapter 4

The quotas

The obligatory quotas, together with the agrarian reform of 1945, and the Decree 83 / 1949 were the most important moves preparing the ground for the collectivization of agriculture. In addition to the agricultural tax and expropriations put under the label of voluntary “donations of land”, under the quotas system, cereal cultivators needed to hand in to the state fixed quantities of five cereals: wheat, barley, rye, two-row barley, oats as well as goods such as wool and milk. Law 68 / 1946 on the obligatory quotas was introduced to a peasantry impoverished by the years of war, by the requisitions performed by the Soviet troops of occupation and by the drought and hunger which haunted a great part of the country during 1946–1947 (Rus 2012, 393). Due to the post-war diminishing of agricultural production, quotas secured food needs for the urban population (Roske 1993, 152). As of 1949, quotas were not set according to the harvest of the respective year but to the surface area of the land owned, causing high discontent among the peasants (Avram 2012, 241). Quotas *per se* were applied until 1957, as a drive for collectivization itself, in places where TOZ or GACs had not yet been established. After 1957, the quotas system was replaced by a system of “contracting and purchasing” (Ionescu 1964, 203) through which the state acquired agricultural products from peasants by using two to three-year advance contracts.⁷⁷ Both quotas and collectivization contributed to the consolidation of the Party control on the supply of agricultural products and on the peasantry as a social group. Due to the difficulties in meeting tax and quota obligations, peasants of all classes signed away their land without compensation or fee, throughout collectivization (Cartwright 1999, 78).

Kligman and Verdery (2011, 144) established the six main functions of quotas: to produce food supply for the urban population; to contribute to war reparations for the URSS; to convince peasants to enter the collective; to stimulate production of more goods on private farms; to foment war against various classes; to

⁷⁷ Peasants who agreed to sign contracts with the state were granted certain advantages, such as access to short-term credit and seeds at reduced prices. However, the officially fixed procurement prices for their products were often so low that they failed, in many cases, to cover production costs.

force agricultural surpluses into material for industrial development. Politically, the quotas hit the class enemy, the *chiabur*⁷⁸ and economically, the state obtained a high quantity of agricultural products and channelled the money to heavy industry, which was considered a priority. Cereals and food products were exported to the USSR, with deliveries under the market price, and towns were supplied with food at low prices, to keep the lowest salaries possible (Cătănuș & Roske 2004, 11).

Due yearly, quotas were adjusted to the peasant's social category: poor, middle or wealthy. Poor peasants with less than 0,50 acres were exempted from the deliveries and the *chiaburi* were subjected to the highest quota amounts. Individual peasants, state farms and GACs, and TOZ were obliged to yield a certain quota from the harvested agricultural products. The amounts of wool, milk, eggs, meat, etc. that they were expected to deliver to the state, especially in the early years of collections, were often beyond any reasonable ability to fulfil, thereby placing them in violation of the law. The "agricultural tax" functioned similarly, with the wealthy being heavily taxed, again beyond their means to pay. Quotas were adjusted on the ground as the authorities could resort, on the one hand, to imposing higher quotas on the middle peasants, and on the other hand, to registering middle peasants as kulaks and imposing higher quotas on them (Goina 2009, 372). Often, agricultural products were sold to the state at a fraction of the market price, and then the state sold it back to the peasants at inflated rates. The country average for deliveries per peasant was 3 ha, but in some regions (Dobrogea and Banat) it was 4–5 ha (Andrei, 2014). The non-delivery of the quotas was a criminal offence and delays in delivery were punished by additional quotas of 20%. To abandon production, conceal the size of a harvest or to fall short in the deliveries of produce meant incurring potentially severe penalties for "sabotaging" the economic plan. Examples of punishments introduced in 1949 include hard labour between 5–15 years together with fines ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 and correctional prison (Cartwright 1999, 73).

The collecting of the quotas was organized and implemented by local PMR leadership with the support of the administration, the militia, and the justice system (Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România [hereafter CPADCR] 2006, 426). Collectors were from the area where the activity was going to be handled, owned little or no land, and were submitted to full control and supervision. Therefore, the peasant did not yield quotas "with full heart", as the communist propaganda meant to show, and was not impressed by the

⁷⁸ *Chiabur* was the Romanian term used during the communist period to designate a "wealthy peasant", roughly equivalent to the Soviet kulak; the label was applied politically rather than strictly economically and was used to justify repression, confiscation, and exclusion during agricultural collectivization.

fact that “the quotas delivery represents a patriotic duty”. Collectors were seen as corrupt people by villagers, leaving them with nothing (Tănăsescu 1994, 73–75).

The history of quotas was divided into four historical periods during the collectivization campaign. In 1945–1949, they were enforced with a relative caution. The second period – 1948–1952 – was marked by acute legal instability, with unforeseen shifts from radicalism to relaxation, reflecting both the transition to a generally planned system in the Romanian economy and the fight for power within the ruling elite. The years 1953–1956 represented a period of openness with the launch of the contract system and acquisitions to compensate for the weakness of socialist agriculture, costly and unprofitable from the beginning. The last period, 1957–1962, marked the passage from quotas to contracts, and the pragmatism of party politics in ensuring state funding through contracts contrasted with the violent collectivization after 1958 (CPADCR 2006, 627). Additionally, Roske (1992) shows that quotas belong to a graph of repression enforced in the first and last years of collectivization. Strategy changes at PMR level, Stalin’s death, the admission of Romania into the UNO (1955), some amnesty decrees releasing the French prisoners on Romanian territory (1955) as well as the Hungarian revolution (1956) impacted the nationwide official elimination of quotas in 1957.⁷⁹

The quotas system caused peasant revolts in the years 1949–1950 in the areas of Arad, Bihor, Suceava, Botoşani, Teleorman, Vlaşca, Ilfov, Ialomiţa, followed by on-spot executions and forced displacements (Cătănuş & Roske 2004, 13–14). Countrywide, the wheat harvest was weaker in 1949, and the state authorities considered that the base for the collection plan were some counties of Banat and Transylvania. In U., the very high quotas, the payments in money for agricultural work, and the threshing in the fields were the reasons for the outburst of revolt in July–August 1949. In their turn, official Party reports blamed the *chiaburi* for the instigation of the revolt. The resistance groups spread the classicized rumour that the Americans would overthrow the Romanian regime, convincing the villagers not to hand in the quotas and not to join the collective. In parallel, media accounts reveal the arrest of saboteurs evading the quotas payments, and the pride of peasants who fulfilled their obligation and contributed to the strengthening of the peace camp. Throughout the collectivization campaign, the peasantry evaded the quotas delivery with concealment strategies.

Concealment strategies

Methods for evading quotas have long informed ethnographies on the Romanian socialist village. Kligman (2009) shows that in Ieud, her field village, some peasants under the cover of night hid cornmeal and other goods in the cellars of trusted friends and relatives who were themselves willing to bear the risk of discovery.

⁷⁹ Decree 728 / 1957 abolished quotas for all products, except for meat and wool (Goina 2009, 241).

Others tried to hide their property, declaring that they had less land, and fewer animals, often sending them to a relative in another area, or slaughtering them before they could be requisitioned. Those unable to meet the ever-changing, graduated quotas often retreated to the mountains where they joined the mix of fugitives i.e. “politicals” who were explicitly anti-communist, Uniate priests unwilling to convert, deserters from the military, and the like (Kligman, 2009). Similarly, peasants had sand mixed in their quota deliveries, and bribed officials to reduce their quotas. They expressed their frustration with new policies through rumours (for example, that the coming Americans would soon destroy the Romanian regime), slogans, critical poetry and jokes (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 276–281). They set fire to piles of grain to keep it out of the collectors’ hands, burnt down the houses of activists, or even their own, to prevent the possessions from being confiscated. In the light of the various evasion strategies Verdery (2002, 184) rightfully raises the following question: how much of the brutality of the process came from the centre’s inability to control subordinates, and to what extent did it tacitly encourage them? Shepherds bribing the local and district officials for their removal from the *chiaburi* list in 1949 (Stewart 2009, 252), or those improvising sheepfolds to make ends meet after livestock loss (Şerban, personal communication) are other resistance strategies.

In a similar vein, the collected life histories mention evasion strategies such as dividing the land among family members or making separate ownership forms, hiding the livestock from collectors, setting the pigs free into the fields, or hiding barrels of wine into earth holes dug in the yards. Instead of having the wine taken away, they would drink the unfermented wine. People showed how the executors came for the tax every week, that there was still more to pay, as they were on the list of *chiaburi*. For those who refused to join the collectives or turn in their quotas, or who instigated subversive acts against the regime, or who generally caused trouble through their recalcitrant behaviour, the regime made public examples, through negative mimesis forms (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 276). Frequent requests for a relaxation of the quota, and individuals petitioning the authorities to be allowed to make up their quotas in the following year appear in historical work. A state official reports in 1949 that with no access to pastureland the peasants were finding it very difficult to meet their milk quotas. As a result, the levels of infant mortality were rising in the area and, in the opinion of the author, would fall only if the level of the quota was lowered (Cartwright 1999, 79). On the other hand, the quota opponents are instigators, saboteurs or fugitives in the CNSAS documents analysed by Vultur (2003). The scholar further reveals how the Bukovinian and the Bessarabian colonists openly claimed to be against the quotas, considered as a Bolshevik type of measure recently experienced in the system they chose to escape from (Vultur, 2011).

Moreover, the strategies for evading quotas resemble the ones for evading collectivization. The quotas were a preamble to collectivization, and the first main change in the agrarian field between 1945 and 1949. Compelled to hand in their agricultural equipment without compensation, villagers disassembled it, hid the spare parts in the garden or left them in harsh weather. As land, cows, and all belongings were taken and used for starting the collective, people who sold their cows, caught in the act, ended up giving the money to the collective. The next sections show the specific themes that come up with quotas in the narratives, and the reflection of the quotas in archival documents.

Quotas and collectors: individual and family memories

For the eldest narrators, the recollections on the quotas are preceded by early post-war memories wrapped in childhood accounts. The village pasture full of trenches, people hiding their horses from the army, school kids knitting gloves and woollen socks for the wounded, huge army horses, so huge that you could sleep on their backs, come forth in the recollections. As the Axis had pushed the front and bombed the area, women and children seek refuge in nearby villages, with their carts filled with clothes, duvets, pillows. During my fieldwork, I encountered the only remaining “war veteran” of U., who had fought on the side of both the Axis and the Allies – referred to locally as “the Germans” and “the Russians” – across several war fronts. He recalls the fights in the area of Oradea at its liberation, the liberation of Budapest, stories about the retreat from Crimea and from the Tatra mountains. Soldiers were stranded on the battlefield and were taken out from there by planes, they were drinking water from pools and received 300 g of stale bread per day. Thematically, biographies continue with the quotas narrative. The previous overview of historical work showed that the quota and fiscal regimes placed many peasants in a relationship of perpetual debt to the authorities. In a period when the World War impacted on the life of all social categories, the peasantry in particular, quotas were exorbitant for the peasant household (Moisa 1999, 176).

In my three field villages, just like in previous ethnographies on other areas of Romania, quotas were a permanent constraint for the household, throughout the year, as people needed to buy extra products and do extra work for the necessary money or buy cheaper wheat elsewhere. People picture themselves as an undistinguished lot, deprived regardless of the family’s material situation, and opposing the deliveries means being against collectivization. The connection with the experience of co-villagers who had fought on the Eastern front and could see what the kolkhozes look like is recurring. Villagers put in their yearly calendars the delivery obligations: harvested wheat, in summer, corn and grapes, in autumn, wool at the sheep shearing time, and livestock products all year round. They delivered the quotas at the Reception Bases or collectors showed up in people’s homes, sealing

the lofts full of stocked corn sacks after the autumn harvest, or emptying hangars filled with corn. Villagers hid valuable stuff in neighbours' homes or in back gardens. With the wheat quota, all the other quota types – beef, pork, potatoes, beans, milk, corn, eggs, grapes, and “other seeds”⁸⁰ – are enumerated, and payment was required in exchange for the missing products. “If one had no cows, one had to pay for the milk quota . . . you bought the missing things when you could, when not . . . they came to take your wheat, at the threshing point, they had no worries, for the corn, the gendarmes came, and those . . . how do you call them . . . the collectors, and climbed in the loft and took everything and left you with nothing”. (S.) The good wheat was subtracted at the threshing point, while people were left with the remainder of the worst quality: “We did not have left any wheat of the first or second category, but only of the third, full of dirt, we could only give it to the poultry”. (M.) One could hardly sieve such wheat after the threshing and had to buy it for sowing. Furthermore, quotas bring recollections on the missing bread, on the family status, and on the behaviour of the authorities.

First, due to the high wheat quota, there was not enough flour left for bread, and not enough seeds remained for sowing the next harvest. The bread on sale was dry and black, and young men working on construction sites outside the village brought back home sacks full of white bread. Villagers kept on eating the “black bread” and saved the white flour for making dough and noodles. They sifted the wheat for weeks on end with a small sieve, keeping grains for sowing and for bread. When there was no bread at all, people ate grilled corn flour. For buying the small, black, and flat loaves of bread, villagers woke up at 4 or 5 a.m. to queue in front of the shop, and one could buy only two of these. Thus, joining the GAC looked like an escape from this situation: “And I was thinking, I would be the first one to subscribe to the collective, to eat good bread finally. And I ate and had it, if I worked, but while the quotas lasted, they did not let you eat”. (E.) The heavy burden in meeting the quotas led many peasants to freely renounce their land and to migrate to the towns. In addition, illness and old age, as well as the departure of the younger members of the family to work in the towns, were frequently invoked motifs for land donation.⁸¹

Second, narrators relate the everyday strategies for securing the missing quantities for the quotas, that Kligman and Verdery (2011, 25) portrayed as challenges to the ethical person. People left aside their private farm work and spent time finding strategies for accomplishing the deliveries. In years when not enough harvest could be secured, and when there was no wheat left for sowing, families

⁸⁰ The administrative category for referring to beans, peas and non-cereal grain-based harvests.

⁸¹ Hence, while in the early 1950s about 75% of the total population lived in rural areas, by the mid-1960 the rural population had decreased to 61% of the overall population (Georgescu, 1991; Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). In the words of Sandru, quoted in Cartwright (2001, 76), “the Communists had managed, through their politics and economics, to produce in the heart of the peasant a repulsion towards the land”.

sold livestock, horses or sows. Women weaved hemp on the loom, to make rugs, sheets, or sacks for sale and men took wood for sale outside the village. Younger men travelled to other regions to buy cheaper wheat, with complicated procedures to follow, as one could not formally deliver the wheat quota outside the home county. If one had no possibility to carry the wheat home, the State Committee for Deliveries issued a notification that quotas were paid and sent it to the home administration. Buying wheat on the market to pay for your quota was not always helpful, as the market was quite expensive and sold back acquired cereals at inflated prices. Those from the hilly regions, where consumption was not so big, had more products to sell. On their return from military service, young men worked on construction sites to earn money for the deliveries and brought back home bread for the family. Or they did military service in a work detachment or worked at a SovRom from a uranium extraction area and made good money for paying quotas.⁸²

Third, the narrative on quotas reinforces one's family status, as do the ones on the revolt and the deportation. "We had two rows of mangers – 12 heads of livestock. From the others they had nothing to take. . . . they came with the second course home, as this is how they called it . . . people came home crying from the threshing point". (E.) Metaphorical accounts of rich possessions and therefore high quotas also come up: "We had piles of wheat as big as that house and came back home with empty sacks as we had to give away there a lot. We had a lot of livestock, 12 horses, as there were no chemicals back then, we used manure on land, and our land stretched until there, by the forest. And only with two horses, we had more than ten hectares of land". (S.)

Fourth, state agents are labelled as collectors, gendarmes, activists, taxmen or simply "they". At times, local executors are ironized and more personalized: "With those, you could not reach any understanding (. . .) and there was one collector with a wooden foot, and he climbed the ladder to the loft like one with normal feet. (.) You could hide from them in the loft, but the baby cried if you stood with him too much up there". (I.) The collectors showed up in people's homes in autumn to take the corn and sealed the loft where the corn sacks stood, leaving people with no corn to feed the pigs. Dogs felt the presence of the collectors and did not let them enter the yard. Examples of the authorities' practices range from humiliating delivery procedures to ad hoc confiscations. The Vil-

⁸² SovRoms were joint Romanian-Soviet enterprises operating between 1949 and 1954 across a range of industrial sectors, from mining to banking. In this context, labor in mining exploitations functioned as a form of punishment, particularly for individuals whose family members had been classified as *chiaburi*. As one narrator recalled, "They were not taken to Dobruja or Bărăgan but to a work detachment during their military service". (A.) Other narrators, by contrast, remembered the SovRoms primarily through the lens of consumption, emphasizing the privileged access to goods available there: "In S., the shops were full, but only the Russians entered".

lage Council sent the delivery obligation (*obligația de predare*) with one's quota amount, "it was like an ID card to carry with you". (I.) For clearing the obligation, one had to deliver the wheat at the threshing point which functioned as a reception base for the wheat. Taking the merchandise to the base was not enough, one had to lift it and empty it in a barn, in a storage room. The cereal owners were scarcely paid "with 30 *bani* (the subunit of the Romanian leu), almost charity. They were slaves, bondmen". (F.) As so many people roamed around at the delivery bases, sacks were lost, or the storage space was not enough and the cereals that did not fit in were thrown into the river. Those who did not yield their quotas were punished with ad-hoc confiscations: "They grabbed your clothes from the house and took them away. There was a cart travelling through the village, loading the clothes, pillows and duvets, and they did not give them back to you until you went to pay". Others show how collectors confiscated goods such as new house windows or sewing machines and put them in the cart, and one had the basic citizen rights cut off. "If you did not honour your obligation, it made no sense to go to the mill, as they would not grind your wheat, or you could not go to the Village Council for any paper, as they did not give you one". (S.) Other times, the collectors randomly grabbed goods: "I was plucking the geese and put the feathers in the sun to dry, as usual. They took the feathers to the village council, until I paid my tax". (F.)

The reflection of quotas in archives

In the quota regime, the peasantry was subjected to mounting social disparity and aggravation of the economic situation. In this context, the Party and Village Council archival documents of 1949 and early 1950s bring background information on the lack of basic needs in the cooperatives, on the ideological role of quotas, on antagonistic vocabulary or on storage problems.⁸³ In response, peasants undergo tactics to disrupt the party, such as not attending meetings.

A six-page situation analysis approaches the general state of the peasantry in various *plăși*.⁸⁴ "The economic situation in our plasa is quite bad. Inhabitants in general lack wood for heating, clothing and shoes, especially the poor population; prices on the market are high: 100 kilos of wheat cost 300 Lei, 10 kilos of corn 650 Lei, more than last month (. . .) The poor population that has no coupons and works nowhere cannot provide the necessary things for the existence of the fam-

⁸³ The National Institute of Cooperation oversaw the buying of agricultural products from producers. Decree nr. 133 from 1949 gave way to cooperation. Cooperatives for consumption-supply, processing and sales, craft production, agricultural production were created.

⁸⁴ *Plasă* functioned as a Romanian administrative unit from the 19th century through the interwar period and into the early communist period. It was abolished in September 1950, when the communist authorities implemented a major administrative reform which eliminated counties (*județe*) and their subdivisions (*plăși*) and replaced them with regions (*regiuni*) and districts (*raioane*), following the Soviet model.

ily”.⁸⁵ The analysis further shows that cooperatives lack cotton and other materials for clothes that peasants ask to have in wintertime to use on their looms, mixed with hemp. Moreover, poor villagers are content to receive food cards, corn collections cannot begin due to a lack of storage capacity, and socialist competitions related to the maintaining and cleaning of nationalized mills started.⁸⁶ As in most of the Party documents on the collectivization drive, the reporting comes with self-criticism, criticism of Party colleagues and exclusions from the Party due to fraud.⁸⁷

A thesis plan⁸⁸ of 1949 from the propaganda section addresses the role of quotas. “Collections of this year have a largely patriotic plan. Through these quotas we must conquer the hardships affecting our country, because of the drought that destroyed the harvest in South and Southeastern Europe. Collections must reach the following objectives: to provide the minimal amount of food for the working population and for the army; to assure the minimal number of seeds for the seed campaign in autumn; to assure the raw materials for the food industry”.⁸⁹ Peasants are differentiated in terms of quotas due among those owing less than 1 ha who are exempt from them, regardless of production, the poor and middle peasants, who will have a minimal quota, and the *chiaburi*, who have a lot, and will give more.⁹⁰ The situation of the poor peasantry owing less than 1 ha is particularly addressed: “For improving the situation of the agricultural proletariat and of the poor peasantry who had up to one ha of land and works on the threshers, the Government decided to supply their whole bread for a year, giving cards both for him and his families”.⁹¹ Factual data is followed by an antagonistic tone: “With the minimal bread assured per year, the poor peasant will not be obliged to work for the *chiaburi* for a piece of bread. He has, from now on, as a waged worker, the possibility to buy clothes and all the necessary things for the household, with the earned money”.⁹² The alternative to working for the *chiaburi* is the cooperative: “The cooperative, as the CC resolution of PCR shows, must become a mass operation of the working peasantry, and contribute to the improving of the material situation of the working peasantry. Through the Cooperatives, villages will have the possibility to provide themselves with cheap industrial merchandise and will be able to dispatch their agricultural products in good condition, thus making an

⁸⁵ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 499 / 1949, f 8.

⁸⁶ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 499 / 1949, f 8.

⁸⁷ For more on the reasons of the exclusions, see Zăinea (2012).

⁸⁸ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 501 / 1949, f 22.

⁸⁹ *Idem.*

⁹⁰ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 501 / 1949, f 23.

⁹¹ *Idem.*

⁹² DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 501 / 1949, f 24.

exchange between village and town, without mediating, speculative, businesslike and corrupt elements”.⁹³

Documents from 1953 from the Sector of State Collections⁹⁴ such as the five-page summary (*referat*) “on the way in which the measures of the CC regarding the impetus for the quotas, acquisitions, contracting and tax cashing are applied”⁹⁵ reveal the practical problems related to the implementation of vegetable and livestock quotas. First, the economic problems are related to the slow or fast rhythm of collections (potato, sunflower, etc.) based on the pre-established regional plan (per raion) sustained with quantitative data. The differences among raioane in terms of the parallel collection of all products are revealed.⁹⁶ Second, the summary points at communes where none of the citizens are present at the calling of the Popular Council and the militia in the commune took no measure, even if it admits having received instructions in this sense. Additionally, the militia took measures against a chiabur who attacked the fiscal agent with an iron bar due to an auction-related issue.⁹⁷ Third, the supply problem within the cooperative is revealed: “The missing things are timber, tiles, textile products, and in some cooperatives even oil. (. . .) Some peasants had valued their products through the cooperative and until now did not get any unique basic products in exchange”.⁹⁸ The problem is similar for the “livestock contractors”: “The cooperative did not receive so far the unique basic merchandise specifically planned for the livestock contractors, such as insoles, boots, which could have a mobilizing effect for the peasants”.⁹⁹ Finally, the bad storage conditions are addressed, such as potatoes standing on the ramp in the train station and risking freezing because the leadership of the cooperative did not take any measures for obtaining the necessary wagons for transporting them.¹⁰⁰ Previous work shows that on the government’s side, the insufficient support and inadequate grain supply were not a result of poor economic policies but because of saboteurs and incomplete administration (Bell 1984, 112). In conclusion, within the collection process, those who apply the measures superficially, who stagnate or who go backwards, are opposed to the successful ones.¹⁰¹

⁹³ Idem.

⁹⁴ It includes activity results, information, situations regarding the achievement of collections, supplies, contracting, cashing the taxes from the GAS and the population.

⁹⁵ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul Colectărilor de Stat, dosar 64/1953, f 11.

⁹⁶ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul Colectărilor de Stat, dosar 64/1953, f 11.

⁹⁷ Idem.

⁹⁸ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul Colectărilor de Stat, dosar 64/1953, f 12.

⁹⁹ Idem.

¹⁰⁰ Idem.

¹⁰¹ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul Colectărilor de Stat, dosar 64/1953, f 13.

Another typical document on the collection situation reveals that the rhythm for summer collections was achieved, the worker delegates on the threshers were trained and measures were taken for all storage houses to be cleaned, disinfected, unclogged and repaired.¹⁰² The help of the press in the “collecting work” is praised. One problem is the humidity of the corn, which increased by 30% because the producers opposed the delivery, saying that too many cobs of corn were taken for the targeted grains. Then, in the raioane from the plain area, firewood and fuel is missing, the wood supply is difficult to sustain, and the producers raised the problem of corn that they use as fuel.¹⁰³ Moreover, a chief of the Reception Base was beaten by a chiabur, and many collectors were cursed during fieldwork in the exercise of their duties by some of the producers. Quarantine and calamity – related problems are also present, as well as the “invasion” of cereal buyers.¹⁰⁴

The minutes, reports, decisions, and instructions from the Village Council have a similar tone. One minute describes in parallel the quotas, the situation of villagers subscribed in the GAC, or “the socialization of agriculture”. Each deputy is assigned a sector for doing persuasion work to show the advantages of the GAC. One minute addressing the tax collection and the quotas shows that, “to impulse the meat quotas, charts with milking cows will be made and the delivery of quotas will follow, and for the delivery of meat quotas groups of citizens will be organized. The importance of delivering quotas will also be worked out in popular gatherings”.¹⁰⁵ The document has an antagonistic tone as well which presents the quotas delivery as a competition: in every village and commune the collectors should write at the wall gazette about the patriotic duty of the producers in delivering the obligatory quotas. The champions in quotas delivery should be popularized and the chiaburi unmasked as well as their “axe handles”.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Idem.

¹⁰³ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul Colectărilor de Stat, dosar 64/1953, f 19.

¹⁰⁴ Idem.

¹⁰⁵ Sfatul Popular al comunei Cheșa, Dosar 41 / 1954, f 33.

¹⁰⁶ Idem.

Chapter 5

The revolt of 1949

Less than five months after the Central Committee Plenary of 3–5 March 1949 which marked the official beginning of the collectivization campaign, 17,500 villagers from 54 Western Romanian communes (the present counties of Arad and Bihor) engaged in the first overt protests. In early August 1949, revolts burst out in Moldova (former counties of Rădăuți, Botoșani and Suceava) and in the following summer, the second wave of revolts occurred on the Danube line, in the former Vlașca and actual Giurgiu and Ilfov counties.

Amidst a quick and disorganized campaign, the power of peasant groups who opposed the agricultural policies lay not in their strength or organization, but in the numbers of protests that took place during 1949–1962. As villagers were unable to organize sustained and repeated protests at regional level, their actions were confined to the village or commune level (Andriescu 2012, 234). The 1949 revolts are portrayed as a form of civilian anti-communist resistance, as opposed to an armed one (Ciobanu 2014, 2015).

The huge wheat quotas, the confiscation of the wheat harvest at the threshing point and the use of the GAC as a pressure to join the collective were some common reasons for the revolts in the early collectivization phase (e.g. Dobrinu, 2004). Secret Police and border guard battalions, militia troops, civil activists, and supplementary groups were part of the crackdown on the revolt, followed by arrests, sentencing, deportations, on-spot executions or hiding. Despite the nationwide elimination of quotas and the advancement of the campaign, the late 1950s brought up a new wave of revolts due to the failure to use a more relaxed strategy at local level, with instigators urging people to withdraw from the collective or to spread rumours that the Americans would come and communism would be overthrown. This third and last revolt wave of 1958–1959–1960–1961, based in Transylvania and Wallachia, was against the campaign itself.

The revolt of 1949 in historiography

The examination of the revolt brings forth a discussion on the concept of resistance. After analyses of power and hegemonic asymmetries from the 1970s–1980s

(Ortner, 1984; Sahlins, 1999), a counter-hegemonic concept that allowed for social change and transformation arose. Members of subordinate groups had to be given the capacity to challenge – that is, resist – the power of dominant groups. From the 1980s on, ethnographers and historical anthropologists have actively sought “cracks” in systems of dominance and sites of resistance by subordinate groups, ranging from opposition to conditions of slavery and colonialism to everyday forms of resistance, or small acts of defiance and dissatisfaction with the status quo (e.g. Comaroff, 1985). The study of anti-communist resistance in the early crisis of the late 1940s and early 1950s leads to an understanding of resistance as anti-hegemonic practice. At the same time, everyday resistance practices in the communist regime of the 1970s–1980s inform specific ethnographies.

At the same time, the latest scholarship reveals that, within several countries in Eastern Europe, resistance movements are characterized in two ways: as courageous actions of individuals and groups fighting for freedom from Communist oppression, or as inconsequential acts of criminals and hooligans. Consequently, resistance is analysed as a form of asymmetric warfare, considered a subset of social conflict involving value commitments (related to prescriptive norms and beliefs) related to a change in relative power between actors or groups based on the mobilization of a collective identity (Dickson 2020, 12).

A review of Romanian post-communist historiography reveals that the anti-communist resistance, the state violence and the defeat of the revolts are the main thematic focuses related to the peasant unrest in Western Romania in 1949. First, the anti-communist armed resistance became the catch-all term to describe geographically disparate groups engaged in open confrontations with the communist authorities between 1944 until 1962. The status of “partisan” and the complicated loyalties deriving from it, the glorification of the movement as a myth of an anti-communist and anti-Soviet heroic national movement, the demonization or trivialization of armed resistance in post-communist narratives, and the biographies of these group leaders are some popular themes related to Romanian anti-communist resistance (Ciobanu, 2014, 2015). The civilian revolts themselves are a form of opposition to the Soviet-type communization of the country based on the forced collectivization of agriculture, the dismantling of private property and the elimination of political pluralism (Bejenaru, 2003; Dobrinu, 2006).

Second, the revolts of 1949 are seen as a form of state violence, in which quick and disparate repression techniques are used. The monopoly on the use of violence (legitimate or illegitimate) is one of the key dimensions in any modern state, and political violence is one of its tools. In non-democratic regimes, predominantly physical violence used by the state against its opponents is higher in the early stages of regime consolidation, characterized by despotic powers, low infrastructural capacities, brutal physical violence mixed with “softer” surveil-

lance techniques.¹⁰⁷ Once the regime is consolidated, its inherent institutionalization facilitates the use of other, more diluted forms of violence (e.g. psychological violence) (Andriescu, 2012, 2013).

Third, studies on the defeat of the revolt reveal how, during the revolts in the Bihor County, the local media shows an antinomic image of joy and brotherhood among “peasant workers” (Moisa & Pușcaș, 2014). At the same time, scapegoats were identified, as admitting the spontaneous nature of the revolts would have posed a legitimate problem for the state. In the state narrative, the events in Arad and Bihor were counter-revolutionary actions, driven by the *chiaburi*, who rely on legionary elements, remnants of traditional parties, elements released from the army, on some of the village priests, especially the Catholics and some leaders of the Baptist denomination (Andriescu 2012, 225).

Finally, the various intensities of the revolt countrywide informed essays under the heading of “family memories”. One such essay recounts the pressure form for founding a tillage association (*întovărășire*), and ways in which villagers ploughed, sowed and harrowed their land overnight, startling the authorities who meant to plough the land with the tractors the following day (Roșca, 1995). Women’s riots after families were enrolled in the CAF without their free agreement further reflect the local colour of the revolts (Barbu 2009, 53).

Participants and reasons

Backwardness in terms of agriculture development, fragmented agricultural property, a local conservative tradition which rejected the reform and innovation in agriculture, and the continuity of peasant revolts in the respective regions are the local conditions favouring the emergence of a revolt in other parts of Romania. At the same time, the peaceful acceptance of or opposition to the campaign is linked to the degree of instruction from the interwar period (Șerban 2010, 325).

Moreover, the Russian peasantry in 1930 rebelled under three conditions: when authorities forced them to act in a way inconsistent with their tradition; when they were forced to do something that they did not comprehend; or when some source proposed a false directive to them, or the authorities concealed from them things which were in their interest. Failing to understand the program of collectivization, the peasants engaged in “non-violent” responses such as slaughter of livestock, flight, and petitioning as well as violent ones: murders and assaults on officials and local activists, arson, and riots and disturbances (Viola, 1996; Tauger, 2004).

For most of the inhabitants of U., storytellers who had lived through the revolt as kids, collectivization is associated with arbitrariness, unreasonableness and injustice. These feelings and ideas are embodied in memories of harvests ne-

¹⁰⁷ Imbusch (2003) distinguishes between direct violence (used by agents), institutional violence (employed by institutions) and structural violence (enacted through structures).

glected, wantonly spoilt or appropriated. In U., in the last days of July 1949, arable landowners had to deliver the wheat quotas at the threshing location (*arie*), where the quantity due for quotas was automatically subtracted from the harvest, unlike the previous year, when the wheat quota was delivered separately. The harvested wheat was thus weighed at the threshing point and the quantity due for quotas was automatically subtracted and taken, leaving the villagers with no wheat for baking bread. Then, the payment system for the threshers changed to the highest resentment of the peasants, who received money instead of the miller's fee (*uium*), an inherited practice for generations. Overall, the peasant revolts were caused by the two policies related to the transformation of agriculture: the imposition of obligatory quotas and the organization of GACs. The revolt and the deportation events play a major role in the autobiographical accounts. The personal narratives I collected fused history and memory, fact and fiction, and the landscape of the village in the revolt days represented a fusion of mythical images and reality.

On July 31st, at a popular gathering at the Village Council, with the purpose of distributing the delivery obligations, villagers expressed their discontent, as the wheat was harvested and piled up, while it was forbidden to use the threshing machines for individual harvests. People demanded that the threshing machine be put into motion to thresh some wheat to take to the mill, to which the Village Council Head answered: "Tighten up your belt, and eat plums and cucumbers instead".¹⁰⁸ While these words were the spark that lit up the flame, the local authorities had lighted the flame themselves so that the uprisings could be repressed, people terrified, and the collective consolidated.

In the background, three anti-communist resistance centres functioned in the actual counties of Bihor, Sălaj and Arad, and two of these are connected to U. One was made up of state clerks, removed officers, pupils, workers, and intellectuals of the rural communities while the other consisted of politicians, especially "legionaries", removed officers and intellectuals from villages which were closer to the mountains, organizing meetings in the village into which moles were infiltrated by the state (Ardelean 2007, 72–73).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ The resort to such verbal intimidation is also discussed by Dobrinu (2004) in his account of the July 1950 revolts in the former Rădăuți county. When villagers asked, "What shall we eat? What shall our children eat?", the response of the "activists" was blunt: "You will eat weeds and nettles".

¹⁰⁹ The establishment of the category "enemies of the people" by state authorities is a pedagogy of knowledge production and contestation and a way of instrumentalizing difference. Those explicitly categorized as political enemies by the authors were: 1) legionaries, members of the fascist movement; 2) members of the historical parties such as the National Peasant Party, the National Liberal Party, and the Social Democratic Party; 3) army deserters and anti-communist partisans, sometimes affiliated with historical parties (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 105). The use of the label "legionary" for the revolt instigators is discussed by Vultur (2003). Legionaries, but also members of interwar political parties of democratic orientation were accused by the Secret Police of inimical attitude, and the accusation of legionarism is in many cases intentionally

The real opponents met the moles dressed up in *sumane* (traditionally embroidered autumn-wintertime vests) at the edge of the village. People brought food to the latter in the forest, and later they led the hasty interrogations, executing their former supporters. On the first day of the revolt, a defence committee – made up of the Orthodox priest and prominent landowners, actual members of the Secret Police – was set up, encouraging the population to persist.

Despite the local power entanglements, narrators are convinced that the resistance was backed up by a strategy to forcefully execute the collectivization: “They infiltrated here and there to be able to do what Moscow was dictating”. (T.) Moreover, the narrative labels of revolt participants are “poor” or “middle” peasants, as “the wealthy ones did not take part in the revolt, they minded their business”, they are “legionaries or not, hard to tell”, or young lads with no brains, falling in the trap of fake partisans. The revolt is also put in a Biblical frame: “There are people, who talk in all kinds of ways, but I follow the Scripture, and the Scripture says that all the rulings are allowed by God. And those who do good have nothing to fear, only those who do evil. And you must give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s, you must pay your tribute, pay your debts, and then no one can do you harm (. . .). Obey the ruling, the Scripture says. And then there are people who, when being nervous, they let their mouths speak”. (E.) The village authorities that the revolt participants opposed are labelled as “communists”, “atheists”, or those “who dared to publicly claim that there is no God”. Although people describe real events, collective and religious perspectives are introduced, which transform them into a new kind of reality, pictured in a moralizing tone.

The two revolt days

The visualized atmosphere

In the villages of plasa L. to which villages U. and C.M. belong, the greatest deployment of authorities for cracking down the revolt in Western Romania was applied (Moisa & Pușcaș, 2014). At the same time, there was a sense of pride among narrators showing that village U. was the first among the neighbouring communes to rise and all the villages involved follow the same pattern. Amidst a quick and disorganized campaign, in late July 1949, these revolts gathered the highest numbers of protesters on their streets, paralleled by villages in the north of Bihor, in the plasa of Marghita.

The beginning of the revolt is recalled amidst peaceful childhood memories: kids playing football in the July heat, or coming back home, by cart, from a school trip, riding home in the horse or cow-drawn cart with the harvested beans or wheat,

exaggerated or used in the absence of another argument. For latest historiography work on the Legionary Movement in Romania, see Boia (2011) or Djuvara (2012).

when suddenly the bell tolled “on one side”.¹¹⁰ The feeling that this regime would not last was uttered more and more overtly among the elderly in those days. Children were taken by the parents to see the dead bodies of the four executed villagers or see from the back gardens the dead bodies lying in the streets, fire burning, or people beaten up. Prior to the revolt, on Saturday, people went to the village slaughterhouse as meat was on sale, and all was peaceful, until the next day.

For those living the revolt as children, the event does not have a meaning; it is only perceived through affect, through feelings of terror, fear, shock, loss of comfort (Caruth, 1991; Kaplan 2005, 38). These memories confirm that, the more passive we are, and the more traumatic the experience was, the less we want to remember. Here, trauma is understood as a psychoanalytic and individual notion, as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind (Caruth, 1996; La Capra, 2001). In their turn, Kligman and Verdery (2011, 451) note that memories of those who were children at the time of collectivization are not generationally distinctive. Torture or physical abuse is embodied in memory regardless of the age at which it was experienced. One of Kligman’s respondents recounted how the Securitate had abused him when he was ten years old during their search for his “enemy” father, whom they later fatally shot. Viewing the high accuracy in which all villagers in U. recall the revolt, this chapter relies on testimonials of villagers with formerly executed or deported family members, as well as on those of their co-villagers.

Narrators present the atmosphere of the two revolt days in two chronological sequences, before and after “the army” entered the village. Accounts of people attacking the headquarters of the Provisory Committee and of the Village Council, tearing down all the delivery obligations, taking out the archives, and burning everything in the middle of the road all come up in the recollections. Villagers broke the entrance of the culture house, of the school, of the cooperative, and sawed down, chopped down with axes and burnt down the “triumphal gate” in front of the Village Council. Glass was flying from the windows of the Council building, as well as the painted portraits of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. People trying to attack the headquarters of the gendarmerie were calmed down and told to leave the militia alone. Someone climbed an electricity pole and cut off the cables, others broke into the cooperative and took out all the alcohol. A plane was flying over the village, and the phone lines were cut off. The leaders of the Village Council and party members, after being caught and beaten up by villagers, escaped and hid in gardens, barns, or haystacks.

¹¹⁰ When a bell is tolled “on one side”, the clapper strikes only a single side of the bell rather than both, a practice typically used to signal danger or misfortune, such as a fire in a village household.

Still in the first day, people barred the road with big logs to prevent the army from entering the village, singing the anthem “Trăiască regele”¹¹¹ as well as “Deșteaptă-te române”,¹¹² or marched through the village and shouted out slogans at crossroads.¹¹³ Women forced the entry at the milk collection centre, took out, tore and burnt the milk delivery obligations, planning to shout out loud, to the army, that they need bread: “And then somebody called for the army. And the army came, and people put big logs over the road, as wide as the road. And they said that they didn’t fear the army, as the army is their children. But the army still stepped in and then, it was worse”. (F.)

The army patrolled around the village from the previous night, to take the pulse, they infiltrated the crowd, dressed up as civilians, planning to enter the village the following day, when the spark would be off. “A colonel said, that the following morning, when all are tired, we will enter the village . . . if we enter now, a lot of blood will be shed, if we enter now when they are revolted and gone crazy . . . and so it was, there was not even a quarter of them left the following morning, and then, when they surrounded the village and when they went in all the streets, they beat whoever they found outside, they beat, they slaughtered, they took them all to the militia station”. (I.)

The display of the army, as well as of the Secret Police arrival is pictured in terms of soldiers standing every ten meters, surrounding the village, as they were so many that you could not see though them. The army settled in people’s back gardens, went from house to house to ask for food, and in the houses of richer people, they took the pig or went into the loft and took the fat for them to eat. People hid their guns, for fear of searches. The next level of the repression was operated by the Secret Police, who came in a “black car, an IMS (the first off-road vehicle manufactured in post-war Romania) with a tarpaulin”, and demonstratively shot in the air while people were shouting that they needed bread. People put stones on the road, to stop the cars from passing. A few cars of the Secret Police stopped by the cemetery, at the edge the village, with their lights on at night, and people used their weapons left from the war: “The Securitate, and those people shot as well, foolishly, from a distance, as they had those GB weapons, rifles, as it was then”. (P.) Inquiries, psychological pressure, withholdings, detentions, executions followed. In C.M., where the revolt was more “peaceful”, the Secret Police did searches in people’s homes, and people hid away from the village for days or weeks, in the fields, and slept in the open air.

¹¹¹ The anthem of the Principality of Romania and later of Kingdom of Romania (between 1866 and 1947).

¹¹² Poem published during the 1848 revolution, sung during all major Romanian conflicts. Since 1989, it became the national anthem.

¹¹³ The slogans evoke both bread shortages and nostalgia for the former monarchic regime, as illustrated by the rhyme “de când regele-a plecat / pâine albă n-am mâncat” (“Since the King left, we have eaten no white bread”).

Detention and on-spot executions

Among the repression forms enforced by the Secret Police, army and militia during the revolt of 1949, identifications, arrests and executions are categorized as short-term measures, opposed to long-term measures such as forced dislocations and deportations (Andriescu 2012, 228). More than 1550 people from Western Romania were to be detained, tortured, judged, condemned, or deported, because of the revolt in July 1949 (Dobrincu, 2004). 16 demonstrative on-spot executions in Bihor and 12 in Arad ended the revolt, preceded by detention and inquiry in the head city of the county. This chain of punishments led to situations when villages were simply isolated and put in a kind of quarantine (Dobrincu, 2004). The narratives from U. reveal the detention types and the chronology of the crackdown.

The ones involved in acts of vandalism during the revolt had a soft, “disciplinary” form of detention. Imprisoned in the city, they were freed in autumn and, when coming back to the village, afraid to walk home on the main road, they walked through the back gardens. Or, people were randomly detained, as the army grabbed everyone who was protesting in the village streets and took them to the Village Council and locked them in the cellar of the militia station in U., which used to be the shop of one Jewish family.

The on-spot executions were preceded by the second type of detention. Men were put in a cellar in the gendarmerie unit with water high up to their knees, for an undefined time whereas women, kids and elders were locked early in the morning and released in the afternoon. The wives and families of locked men “sent children to give them, through the windows of the cellar, things to eat: tomatoes, green peppers, as they had nothing to eat there”. (F.) Witnesses recall the detention circumstances: “I saw that old man with his *opinci* (sandals worn with woollen or felt foot wraps or woollen socks) all wet . . . he said that water was high up to your knees, and steam was coming out, as there were many of them . . . and someone holding a three meters long pole hit us like you would hit animals, at random, and thus people were climbing one on top of another, not to be hit”. (S.)

The village authorities handled the selection of the detained villagers in the cellar from Sunday to Wednesday, when they handed them in to the Secret Police who conducted the next level of punishments: deportation and the on-spot execution. The deported families were boarded in a truck, while, in parallel, four villagers were executed on the spot. In the narrative of the Secret Police, the revolt was put off in two stages: the anti-revolutionary actions of the *chiaburi* had to be stopped and the extension of the unrest halted. Then, the natural course of the threshing campaign had to be ensured (Moisa, 1999).

The five on-the-spot executions in U., labelled as punishments of the first category in the vocabulary of the Secret Police and carried out in the main public spots of the village – by the fountain, by the school, on the main road – are narrated with great precision. One innocent elderly father was escorted from his home

and shot by the fountain due to his son's presumed connection with the partisans. The son, caught in the trap of the forest resistance meetings, was executed two weeks later, on his return from the hideout. Refusing to disclose the whereabouts of his father, he delivered himself to the militia station, dressed up in tidy clothes, with a suitcase, a fresh haircut and money on him, envisioning his deportation. The following morning, at around 7 a.m., he was taken to the village edge and executed, the body being discovered by a villager going to the fields in his oxen-driven cart for the wheat harvest. And as the oxen felt blood, the cart stopped by the ditch where the dead body was lying. On the way to the cemetery, the family walked behind the cart where their son, brother, uncle, lay "thrown as a dog" and women's scarves fell off their head, as an ultimate gesture of pain.

All executed villagers were deemed to be the instigators and heads of the revolt. The dead bodies were left in the street and watched over by two guards each, from early in the morning until late afternoon. Those returning home on cart from the wheat harvest, were threatened, cursed and told to vanish instantly otherwise they would be shot as well. Witnesses recall the suffering of the execution circumstances. "They beat that one so much with the butt of the rifle that all his bones broke. And they shot him then. (. . .) The fence of the church was all stained in blood" (F); "they left him in a ditch and did not let anyone approach to bury him". (F.) The families vainly begged the guards to let them put beautifully woven towels on the faces of the dead bodies. After the executions, the drummer (announcer of community matters in the village centre) loudly invited people to the butchery, to buy more beef, while the real intention was to make them see the dead bodies lying in the streets. At the Village Council, a militiaman climbed a table announcing that the chase was over, and that all those who had run away and hid should come back and no one would do them any harm.

Villagers were forcefully appointed to prepare the burials. A carpenter was called to make wooden campaign cases for which the wooden planks came from a deported family's house. The dead bodies were put in wooden cases, one on top of one another, to scare people. The richest people of the village, among them notary, were compelled to dig the graves, and the victims were buried two in one grave, without a cross or ritual, and the family presence was forbidden. A. recalls how, as at the burial of her grandfather it was impossible for the family to do a Christian burial, the family put a sour cherry tree at the head of the grave, as a cross was forbidden. The erasing and the anonymization of killings was part of the strategy.

The executed villagers met the trusted partisan colleagues and future authors of on-spot executions in the forest and village houses. The latter are recalled facing their victims with the words: "Do you remember me? We shall never meet there again" or searching their homes and saying: "His yard was cemented, he is well-off". Being involved in the revolt preparation and described as a traitor,

the village priest who was supposed to be the sixth victim, mysteriously escaped. Three possible reasons were put forward in the village monograph: he was recruited as an informer, he paid his release into freedom with 2000 Lei, or the one in charge of the shootings was afraid of God and did not want to have on his conscience the killing of a priest (Ardelean 2007, 78).

The social pattern and emotional load of the revolt memories reveals a specific group memory form. Recurring flashes come out in all narratives, as a common property of the whole group. Episodic memories, procedurally and chronologically organized, are intertwined with semantic memories, or the abstract knowledge of the world, mediated by categories and shared meanings (Cappelletto 2003, 36). In other words, implicit memory, consisting of feelings rather than words, alternates with the explicit one, made up of conscious, intentional recollections of some previous episodes (Tobias et al. 1992, 68). Moreover, the revolt constitutes an event-oriented form of memory, in which the event itself functions as the central reallife reference of the narrative. At the same time, these stories are structured around a plot through which narrators' identities are articulated (Gergen 1994, 242).

Finally, the memory of the revolt largely overlaps with the memory of collectivization itself. Kligman and Verdery (2011) show that what people remembered – or chose to recount – were specific, often highly selective situations rather than broader general processes. They demonstrate that some respondents focused on the 1957 revolt in Vadu Roșca, even though the researchers were primarily interested in collectivization as a whole and not solely in the role of the revolt within it.



4. Ucuriș, place of one on-spot execution (August 3rd 1949)

The revolt in archives

The year 1949 in the actual county of Bihor (Moisa & Pușcaș, 2014), the application of the Decree 83/1949 in the whole North-Western Romania (Țărău, 2009a), or the peasant riots in Arad County (Andriescu, 2012) are the latest historical works informing the study of anti-collectivization resistance in Western Romania, either based on new archival sources or combined ones. The clashes among oral testimonies, Party documents and media are reflected in the above. My analysis of oral testimonies is completed by an outlook on the revolt and its participants in the PMR and the Secret Police documents. While the first documents slightly mention the revolt atmosphere, the second ones include a chronology of the repression.

The PMR report of the propaganda section¹¹⁴ is a three-parts field testimony on the atmosphere in various revolted villages, including village C.M. In the latter, on Friday evening, July 29th, people started to walk to and talk in small groups by the Village Council, beating the Party delegate and throwing his bike on the ground. The second day, when the Miliția arrived in the commune, people rang the church bell and alarmed the neighbouring commune. At the same time, the Party mem-

¹¹⁴ DJAN Bihor, Fond PMR, Secțiunea Propagandă, Sesizări privind manifestațiile dușmănoase, dosar 13, f 14–15.

bers were blamed because of their “reserved attitude”, fear of the chiaburi, and of formal attendance of meetings. “Even the watchman admitted that he did not mix in the affair as some of them have weapons and shot at the militia”.¹¹⁵ Finally, a “working plan” for persuading the poor peasantry is set, so that such cases (i.e. the revolt) would not happen again, and the influence of the chiaburi, that the poor peasants secretly supported, is admitted. Specific examples of so-called “evildoers” are given: for example, P.M. (a villager) is accused of concealing the fact that he worked land in tithe for a chiabur, even though his wife admitted this. Cleansing the Party of those who hinder its work is another recurring idea.

The reports and telegrams from the CNSAS archive reveal the revolt chronology and related crackdown strategies. In the one-page report of July 29, written by the Secret Police raion-level unit, in three villages from the plasa T., people “revolted against authorities, were all organized, and attacked the Village Council, broke windows, took out the archive from the Village Council and they destroyed it by burning. They destroyed the triumphal gate in front of the Village Council”.¹¹⁶ Three trucks, one jeep, 25 militia agents faced 2000–3000 villagers, who, armed with iron pitchforks, hoes, axes, scythes and weapons, attacked the cars, while the militia backed them up. In another village, 5000–6000 armed people attacked the cars and blocked the road with bricks. “Being attacked from all sides and having no means to escape, the militia agents used fire guns and the automatic weapons they had and shot in the air for intimidation. The cars could hardly get through the attacking crowds, and, with more militia agents hurt by blunt objects and stones, the militia agents could reach the Circ. of Miliția in village T”.¹¹⁷ The report ends by showing that around 200 armed inhabitants of commune X. followed the cars up to the Village Council where they manifested: “Down with the Jews. Down with the Communists. We want bread”.¹¹⁸

In a similar vein, two telegrams of the Secret Police present the field atmosphere and the consequent intervention. The “heads of the revolt” – chiaburi owing more than 10 iugăre (0.5775 ha) of land – are noted in capital letters with their names and surnames. The rioters (termed as the rebels) shot at the car of the authorities and randomly attacked two villagers – one died, another one was severely wounded – or beat the night guard to death. The telegram then confirmed that 13 people were detained so far in the respective village, stating that a new report will follow since the atmosphere was very agitated, and that, based on latest information, the population prepared new attacks.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ DJAN Bihor, Fond PMR, Secțiunea Propagandă, Sesizări privind manifestațiile dușmănoase, dosar 13, f 14–15.

¹¹⁶ CNSAS, Starea de Spirit a populației cu privire la reforme agrare, rebeliuni țărănești, gospodării agricole de stat din 1949 până în aug. 1952, dosar 25, f 64.

¹¹⁷ Idem.

¹¹⁸ Idem.

¹¹⁹ Idem.

The second telegram reveals the intervention of the Secret Police, a team of 100 people travelling to the commune X, plasa L. to re-establish order and peace.¹²⁰ Villagers shout slogans such as “*trăiască legiunea și căpitanul*” (long live the legion and the captain) or barricade roads and bridges with building stones, and the authorities are said to be too few, compared with the revolted masses. At the end, the telegram requests “to approve the sending of the Border Battalion cantoned in the forest (. . .) to be used for the occupation of the communes X, Y and Z, and we mention that village X is on the verge of plunging into disorder. We shall report the sequel of operations”.¹²¹ The next telegrams confirm the arresting of “instigators” from the first lines, and villagers threatened to put the authorities to death, should they remove the arrested ones from the village.

Finally, a Secret Police report proposed the inclusion of those guilty of provoking the disorder in the category of deportees (category II). These had disturbed meetings at the Provisory Committee, offered drinks to a poor peasant and incited him to start the revolt, and one villager of German origin who was deported to the USSR continued systematic propaganda against USSR. The document ends with the proposal that “viewing those of the above, we propose that their families are picked up as well, in order to be sent to the ordered destination”.¹²²

The “chiabur” label

In the PRM files, revolt instigators, exploiters, speculators are some arbitrary categories used for the chiaburi, sometimes labelled as chiaburi with more than 10 hectares of land. A fivepage thesis plan (*plan de teză*) highlights the problems of the “working peasantry”, among which were riots in which the chiaburi played a central role – described as “bandits and hooligans” (sic!), “constituted in organized and armed bands” and engaging in “terrorist, legionary, Arrow Cross actions. They attacked peaceful people in full daylight, beat the president of the Provisory Committee, burnt archives, threshing points and threshing machines, and shouted out loud slogans against our country and the USSR. Within these terrorist hooligan actions, the chiaburi were unmasked once again in front of people. Aiming to defend their interests, the chiaburi and their tools aimed to attack the working peasantry, those who work, our government, they try to regain their former positions, from which they can continue to exploit the working peasantry and increase their wealth on the back of the poor”.¹²³

Consequently, the document shows “the concrete steps for limiting the economic power of the chiaburi: the cancelling of the agricultural tax, the new law of

¹²⁰ CNSAS, Starea de Spirit a populației cu privire la reforme agrare, rebeliuni țărănești, gospodării agricole de stat din 1949 până în aug. 1952, dosar 25, f 65.

¹²¹ Idem.

¹²² Idem.

¹²³ Idem.

agricultural tax, the organization of the cooperative, the new wage system in the agricultural field for harvesting and threshing, the application of the collections in the spirit of class fight”.¹²⁴ In other words, the situation from the past will be improved: “Under the bourgeois-moşieri regimes, high tributes were on the back of the working class and peasantry. (. . .) The moşieri and chiaburi paid very little tax, and, what they paid as tax they received back as production and export payments”.¹²⁵

In view of the dependency on the chiaburi, the solution for the poor villagers is the founding of the cooperative. “Through cooperatives, villages will be supplied with cheap industrial merchandise and will be able to sell in good conditions its agricultural products, thus making an exchange between village and town, without speculating, businesslike, corrupt intermediary elements”.¹²⁶ The very poor peasants with less than 1 ha, working at the threshing operation, will receive bread cards for the whole year. “With the assured minimal amount of bread per year, the poor peasant will not be obliged to sell to the chiaburi for a piece of bread. He has now the possibility that, working as a waged worker, with the earned money to buy clothes and all that is needed in the household”.¹²⁷

The chiaburi are bandits who incited villagers to toll the bells, spreading lies that the village is burning. To lighten up the spirits, some chiaburi and hucksters tried to buy alcohol at the Cooperative, so that, afterwards, drunk, they engage in terrorist acts. “The legionary X instigated the villagers against our Regime, cut the phone lines, and threatened honest people with knives; in village S., a band of hooligans surrounded the militia station and the school. They burnt the triumphal gate, cut the phone lines, and shouted legionary, Arrow Cross slogans; the people in the terrorist band shout that they will be helped by Tito’s partisans, who are hiding in the forests in the area”.

The thesis plan ends with an outline of the reasons for the chiaburi’s behaviour: “The bandits started to overtly manifest themselves against our democratic regime, as they see their end is near, that they have no more possibilities to exploit the working peasantry”.¹²⁸ At the same time, “the aim of these legionaries and Arrow Cross supporters is to isolate the working peasantry from our Government, and the RPR, they would like to transform the working peasantry into an enemy of our Republic, of our government, so that the poor peasantry have no more protection and defence from the State”.¹²⁹ Finally, the PMR members are themselves victims of the “terrorist bands”, some of them being “former right-

¹²⁴ Idem.

¹²⁵ DJAN Bihor, DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Judeţean Bihor al PCR, dosar 506 / 1949, f 5.

¹²⁶ Idem.

¹²⁷ DJAN Bihor, DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Judeţean Bihor al PCR, dosar 506 / 1949, f 6.

¹²⁸ DJAN Bihor, DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Judeţean Bihor al PCR, dosar 506 / 1949, f 7.

¹²⁹ Idem.

ist social-democrats”, therefore the passage from capitalism to socialism needs to continue with full effort.

Four rioting villagers labelled as *chiaburi* and the proposals for their arrest are features in the one-and-a-half-long-page minute released by the DGSP unit in Oradea.¹³⁰ Typical attributes – longterm instigation among the poor population and resistance to persuasion work on wheatquota deliveries – reinforce the label. A former deputy of the National Liberal Party, the *chiabur* admits having been an instigator as his material situation was affected, owning 50 *iugăre* of land and not having left a grain of wheat from last year’s harvest. Despite his nonparticipation in the revolt, he is considered the moral author for its outburst. Finally, the villagers are charged with instigation and participation in the revolt and recommended for arrest. The document contains the declaration of a villager who admitted having participated in the revolt and who urged the poor population to demonstrate and claim wheat, recounting how he entered the Village Council shouting: “Here we have no place, only at the quota payments”.¹³¹

Memory and memorialization

The revolts in Arad and Bihor are part of commemoration efforts within local and national institutions, which periodically reiterate and reinforce the memory of the event. The exhibition “75 years since the Bihor Peasant Revolts” (August–December 2024) within the Oradea City Museum features portraits of prisoners and executed individuals, the communist propaganda and its silence about the revolts and photographs of the revolt (archive A.N.I.C.), for example, with the destroyed interior of the Village Council, or with a comrade wounded in the confrontations between peasants and the members of the Provisory Committee. Additionally, the featured documentary film “The lesson of dignity” within the series “Forgetting is a new condemnation” launched in 2015 provides the testimony of a local anti-communist resistance group member. As the group is made up of college students, the memory of the peasant revolts is extended and included in a larger frame of anti-communist resistance. The names of executed peasants from 11 villages and the reasons of their execution are listed: e.g. “manist *chiabur*”, “*chiabur* with 18 *iugăre*”, “he beat the secretary of the PRM organization”. The historical representation of the revolt relies on the “spirit of the place”, embedded in the material building and not subjected to historical change, as the exhibition is set up in the Oradea Fortress, where a selection and internment camp for various opponents of the newly installed regime (members of ethnic groups, fugitives, others) functioned in 1944–1989.

¹³⁰ CNSAS, Starea de Spirit a populației cu privire la reforme agrare, rebeliuni țărănești, gospodării agricole de stat din 1949 până în aug. 1952, dosar 25, f. 77–78.

¹³¹ CNSAS, Starea de Spirit a populației cu privire la reforme agrare, rebeliuni țărănești, gospodării agricole de stat din 1949 până în aug. 1952, dosar 25, f. 81.

Two associations, an educational institution and a museum stand among the exhibition project partners. The 40 Martyrs Association has an educational purpose, aiming to educate the young generation through the conservation of memory for the political prisoners who fought for democratic values in Romania in 1945–1989. In a broader frame, the Association of Former Political Prisoners in Romania, Bihor Branch, established in 1990, promotes a culture of memory centred on all those who opposed the establishment of totalitarian regimes in Romania with dignity and who suffered repression at the hands of state authorities. At the same time, the Association conducts a project in partnership with another association named after Nistor Bădiceanu, the initiator of an anticommunist organization formed by college students in 1948. The project, entitled “Totalitarianism for Youth” (resources for history teachers), is complemented by a research initiative on postmemory and cultural trauma.

In November 2024, at another event dedicated to 75 years since the peasant rebellion in Bihor, the above-mentioned exhibition was “moved” into one revolted village, within an event organized by the Orthodox Parish of the village together with the Țării Crișurilor Museum, with the financial support of deported families. A newly erected cross replaced the old one which had decayed, erected in 2003 by the Association of Deportees and Victims of Communist Oppression, Bihor and a private individual. The liturgy, the requiem, and the hallowing of the cross were followed by the launch of the exhibition gathering nine boards “on the courage of the peasants in Bihor who dared oppose the communist abuses, followed by the hasty execution of peasants and the mass deportation of revolt participants” (cf. exhibition curator). The written testimony of one deported individual, I.T. (nicknamed Wilson) archived in the Oradea City Museum is part of the exhibition and the city’s intangible heritage.

Ten years earlier, on the commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the revolt, the historical work “1949 in Bihor: The Eradication of the Chiaburi Group – A Manifestation of Class Struggle in the Rural World”, based on media and PRM archives, was launched. Five years before, or, at 60 years since the completion of collectivization, the Village Museum in Bucharest hosted the multimedia exhibition “Requiem for the Romanian peasant” featuring nationwide resistance forms. In 2018, as part of its refurbishment, the Sighet Memorial published the list of executed peasants in Arad and Bihor, 1–3 August 1949. Earlier, themes such as “armed resistance in the wake of the communist regime instauration”, and “deportations, exoduses, exiles” were part of the summer School of Memory (1995 edition) organized by the Civic Academy Foundation since 1997 at the Sighet Memorial.

Moreover, March 9, declared through Law 247/2011 as the Day of the Former Political prisoners, consecrated in the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic calendar as the Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastia marks the launch of the exhibition “The

Caravan of Heroes” in 2022 within the Oradea City Museum. Dedicated to the former “martyrs” of the communist prisons, the exhibition presents the installation of the communist regime in Romania by historical stages, in a map of the “Romanian Gulag”: the destruction of political parties and of the monarchy, the repressive legislation and destruction of the Romanian Army and Romanian Police, the Secret Police, the communization of the Romanian educational system, the collectivization of agriculture and the peasant rebellions, the student movements, the deportations, the Danube-Black Sea Canal, the Pitești Phenomenon, the anti-communist mountain resistance. Local personalities are featured, such as an Orthodox bishop and several Orthodox and Greek-Catholic priests. The children of former political prisoners donated to the museum objects related to the detention and forced domicile of their parents: photos, letters, sketches and drawings, release tickets, books written by former political prisoners. The communist carceral system is outlined (with a total of 450 detention and repression centres in Romania), with a focus on the Penitentiary of Oradea and detained personalities, locals or those who passed through it. Overall, the memory of the repression of the revolt is recurring on commemorative days and within thematic exhibitions on heroism.

Furthermore, research institutes and platforms on the history and memory of Romanian communism feature reports on the repression of the revolt, such as the volume “The Romanian village in communism (1945–1989)” published by IICCMER. The Sighet Memorial, on its new page as of 2006, “from the sea of bitterness” (din “marea de amar”), initiated a section dedicated to the victims of communism, with life stories from people who suffered for their faith and character, including a testimony on the execution of I.B., peasant from U. (interview taken in 1996). The series *#deportees* broadcast on the national TV channel in 2015 features an episode on the revolt.

In addition to temporary exhibitions, commemorations, and national research institutes, the Oradea-based 40 Martyrs Association set up in the 2010s “The memory of resistance” (www.memoriarezistentei.ro) platform dedicated to the local memory of communist repression and carceral system and featuring historical research and firsthand accounts on the detention of Greek-Catholic and Orthodox priests (“the church in chains”), on the peasant revolts, and on several anti-communist organizations to which people from Bihor paid tribute. The report “The peasant revolts of 1949 stifled in prison cells” relies on testimonials, state policies, and the Penitentiary of Oradea, where some revolt participants were detained. Among the 779 prisoners under common law that the Penitentiary gathered in 1949, with high fluctuations, revolted peasants, together with those illegally retaining weapons or attempting to cross the border, were labelled as “saboteurs” or “criminals to the state security”. The 48 indexed saboteurs were also millers, traders, workers, ploughmen, or housewives. In the narrative of state bodies, the

revolt from the summer of 1949 was due to some actions taken by forces hostile to the new democratic government form. Even if statistics reveal the massive participation of poor or middle peasants at these manifestations, the communists saw these reactions as an instrumental manipulation of the chiaburi, the “exploiters” of the peasants.

In a timeline of the revolt, the platform further shows that the pacification of the Bihor villages was made through a vast and disproportionate intervention of the order forces: border battalion groups, and militia and Securitate members. Medical legal reports are cited, as well as the table with the total number of participants: 17,441 participants from 54 communes. 13 communes from the plasa Marghita, with 4800 participants, and 14 communes from the plasa Tinca with 5,400 individuals. Out of 17,441 participants, 12,368 were poor peasants and only 1,004 chiaburi, and the number of party members was 601. Within the rebellion, 28 comrades and party activists were beaten. The agricultural campaign was supported by a well-coordinated media campaign, meant to distract the attention of public opinion from the “rumours” on the payment in money for the threshing. 6 daily propaganda articles report on threshing, the repairing of threshing machines or the setting of cooperation commissions.

In parallel, the first structures coordinating the cooperative were set, and together with reporting on the “voluntary work” of peasants for the construction of roads, fountains, and “community work” the first resistance actions are mentioned, and class conflict gains more and more contour. Declaring less livestock and being denounced by neighbours, chiaburi bribing mayors and being denounced in an article on the wall gazette, paddy field owners not irrigating the seeded land, sectarian chiaburi advising peasants not to work their land are new sabotage means, and the examples could go on. In June, the saboteurs were unmasked, and their deeds were exposed publicly, while in July, they were sent to court for matters related to collections and clandestine harvesting. Putting iron into the threshing machine, burning the wheat crosses, burning the field, failing to glean, and slaughtering clandestine beef are other arrest reasons. There is a consistency between the remembered past in U. and the shape of the revolt as a historical event. The memory of the event is educational, religious, and for society at large. In terms of setting and exhibition narratives, the memory of peasant rebellions is tightly linked to the one of detention. Civil society actors, families of victims and state institutions (museums and universities) are omnipresent memory actors. The recurring memory imperative is that forgetting/amnesia is a new condemnation.

Chapter 6

The deportations of August 1949

The first wave of state-enforced deportations took place in 1945, when about 75,000 people, mainly Swabians from Banat, and Germans from Transylvania were displaced to the Soviet Union for hard labour in the mines of Donbas and in Siberia. At that time, Romania had reached an agreement with Russia that did not involve war reparations based on daily work, and, at the same time, Romania was fighting with the allied forces (Radu, 2012; Vultur, 2000b).

In 1951, the second wave of deportations took place due to Stalin's conflict with Tito's Yugoslavia, and ended in 1956, after their reconciliation (Abraham, 2016). Without warning, the Romanian government enforced the deportation of around 40,000 people from south-west Romania, along the Yugoslav frontier, to internment camps in the Bărăgan plain, in 18 newly established communes covering the actual territory of the Brăila, Călărași, Galați and Ialomița counties. Ethnic Bulgarians, Serbians, Jews, Romanians from Banat and Olt, Bessarabians, Bukovinans, Aromanians, Vlachs, Megleno-Romanians from 203 villages of Timiș, Caraș, Mehedinți counties were subjected to a mandatory domicile policy. Through the Amnesty decree 176 / 1964, stipulating the liberation of political prisoners, the "deportation centres" were abolished, the houses were torn down, and the place was cleared.

Alternatively, the deportations of July 1949 in Western Romania concerned 863 persons aged from one month to 74 years old, coming from 76 villages (Moisa & Pușcaș, 2014). Around 1500 individuals were displaced from all over Transylvania to the Constanța region, and the villages entered a kind of social epidemic (Dobrinu, 2004). Deportation hit the countryside particularly hard, with some sixteen percent of farms consequently destroyed.

Historiography themes

Forced movements of people, exile, or migration were examined in frameworks offered by the anthropology of removal, of citizenship or of governmentality. The deportee, like the refugee, is a legal category applied to individuals in vastly different circumstances and often for limited periods of time, therefore "illegality"

and “deportability” as sociopolitical conditions generated by law should inform an ethnography of a legal process rather than one of individuals (Peutz, 2006). At the same time, Holocaust-related biographies enrich the anthropology of violence and dispossession (Waterson, 2005), and narratives of deportations taken in the freshly independent Latvia unpick specific memory forms and connections, with both metaphorical and factual accounts (Skultans, 1997).

The political grounds of the deportations from Banat to Bărăgan between 1951 and 1956 and the absence of an ethnic criterion (Vultur, 1997a), the Germans from Banat and their deportation to USSR (Vultur, 2000a, 2000b), or the identity and differentiation from the Other, through the depiction of cultural practices and mentalities, mainly those linked to the family and to culinary practices in Bărăgan for deportees from Banat and Oltenia (Vultur, 1995), or trauma discourse (Vultur, 2011) reveal important insights into patterns of deportation themselves, as well as on the overall relationship between memory and identity. The use of a non-focalized interview method, as well as the identification of subsidiary topics such as solidarity were the main methodological tools in the above-mentioned works. Moreover, freshly available documents of the C.N.S.A.S. Funds on the 1951 deportation wave showed that the dislocation and obligatory domicile policy were labelled as “administrative punishment”, and that the deportees themselves bore its effects as well as their entourages (Vultur, 2007).

Furthermore, the oral history archive set up by the Cultural Anthropology and Oral History Group within the Third Europe Foundation gathers life stories of various ethnic groups of Banat, either majority or minority ones, but all belonging to the elder generation. The processes of memory reconstruction and related reflections of group or individual identities, historical anthropology and linguistic anthropology are used in the analysis of these interviews. Later, the online project “Biblioteca Memoriei (The Library of Memory)” dedicates its first webpage – available at <http://www.deportatinbaragan.ro> – to the memory of the deportees to the Bărăgan (1951–1956), as well as to those assigned compulsory domicile there, including former political prisoners.

More recent work shows that deportations are pedagogies of knowledge production and contestation, aimed at modelling by example, such as taking people to a successful model GAC in another region. The use of exemplary disciplinary techniques such as public humiliations, deportations, arrests and executions is designed to frighten people into submission to the group and influence the pace of collectivizing. For example, in a commune, the first GAC president refused to execute the deportation order, since he depended on the “work ethic” of the Germans in the village (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 215–216). Moreover, deportations lacked a legal basis, as Decree no 83 / 1949 did not contain any stipulations enabling authorities to arrest landowners and place them under house arrest (Iordachi & Dobrinicu 2014, 399). Paradoxically, while the right to freedom of movement was

recognized in the Constitutions of 1948 and 1952, displacements existed prior to decisions establishing the labour units, colonies, battalions, and forced residence. Later, by means of governmental decisions of 1950 and 1951, the deportations of 1949 were considered as illegal acts of settling political scores and purging political rivals (Vultur, 2007; Andriescu, 2012; Iordachi & Dobrinu, 2014).

At the same time, some deportations were not based on assigned guilt, but on material status, or were simply a consequence of the deficient organization of collectivization. Nonetheless, there was a lack of coordination among the local activists of the PMR and the Secret Police and the Militia, which pushed villagers to boycott the campaign (Vultur, 1997a; Andriescu, 2012).

Finally, starting with the 1990s, deportations are at the core of transitional justice politics, associated with periods of political change characterized by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of preceding repressive regimes (Teitel, 2000). Some organizations reuniting the former victims of human rights violations during communism, including deportees, are the Association of Former Political Prisoners in Romania (1990), the Association of Owners Abusively Deprived of Their Property, Former Deportees and Refugees (2009), or the short-lived Citizen's Opinion Tribunal (2016). The latter found the communist regime guilty of all charges, genocide and crimes against humanity including premeditated murder, extermination, forced deportation, arrests, torture, disappearances, and ethnic and religious persecution. Victims and intellectual groups challenged the legitimacy of this opinion tribunal, calling instead for a "Trial of Communism" in the courts of law, although an ideology or a political regime *per se* cannot be indicted (Stan 2013, 525).

The deportations on the ground: portraits, chronology and memory politics

Following the revolt, in Bihor County, 238 families made up of 863 people aged between one and 74 years old from 76 localities were deported to the colonies in Constanța County at the other edge of the country. In conclusion, in Bihor County alone, between 800 and 1000 individuals were removed. Once removed, their entire fortune of 3.341,96 ha went into the possession of the state. In village U., 31 villagers or 13 families of two or three generations were abducted from their homes in the night of 3 to 4 of August and taken to the Peceneaga, Nicolae Bălcescu and Poarta Albă work colonies, for five to eight months.

The six interviews informing the next sections reveal similarities among and nuances within the deportation patterns. F. (born 1939), A. (born 1926), from U. and V. (born 1943) and M. (born 1945) from C.M. recall their deportation to Dobrogea. F. (born 1942) recounts the information given by her deceased husband on his deportation in Poarta Albă. Z. (born 1943) was removed at the age of twelve,

in a displacement action enforced on March 3rd, 1949.¹³² Deprived of their estate (of 700 ha) in the present Cluj County, the three generational family had to move to two rental homes in proximity of their home village.

F. was deported at the age of one, with her mother and sister, for an obligatory period of five years and seven months. Her father was detained and killed in an on-spot execution in the morning of their abduction from home. Detention, execution, and deportation are the three inter-connected punishments that Florica's family underwent, within less than a week's time. A. was deported together with her parents-in-law at twenty years old, being randomly in their home on the morning of the execution. After three years of forced domicile, her fiancée sent a memorandum to some influential connections in the Party and had A.'s mandatory domicile shortened. Still, A. recalls the deportation period in the darkest way of all the narrators. For F.'s and A.'s families, the deportation destination was the colony of Peceneaga, now part of the city of Constanța. V. was abducted at the age of six with his parents and sister and lived for eight years in Nicolae Bălcescu, today still a village in the periphery of Constanța. M.'s grandparents were displaced to Nicolae Bălcescu as well.

Portraits

Life stories, the village monograph and archival documents reveal contradictions and similarities in the portraits of the deportees.

In the narratives, deportees were hardworking, diligent people who helped their co-villagers deliver their quotas by lending them cereals, which they gave back on their return from the obligatory domicile. They raised fat pigs for Christmas and fed their daily workers well by offering them big pieces of pig fat. The interview with F. is completed by her daughter's account (E., born 1958) on who the deportees were: "Tell the truth, mom, they were people who worked. For Christmas, we used to kill a pig, and the next family to kill a pig lived at the other end of the street. And then you would share food with everybody, as not everybody could afford raising a fat pig back then (. . .). Only weak people entered the collective. Over the time, they bought more and more land, could build solid houses

¹³² Z.'s family fell victim to the Decree of March 1949, which targeted all properties exceeding 50 hectares and their owners. Officially, the law was directed against the so-called *moșieri* – a derogatory social category employed by the communist regime to stigmatize landowners as a decadent pseudoaristocracy, derived from *moșie* (landed estate). In practice, however, the decree also eliminated a segment of the middle peasantry, particularly those who employed mechanized agricultural technology. Under Decree no. 83, the state confiscated not only land but also agricultural equipment, livestock, and all bank credits or income generated through agricultural activity (art. 2). The authorities acted without prior warning. Beyond the confiscation of their houses and land, landowners and their families were subjected to deportation and placed under house arrest in various locations across the country (Iordachi & Dobrinu 2014, 255).

and changed their world views (. . .) they were not liberals, nor supporters of the Peasant Party, they were people who worked”.

Furthermore, E. refers to all displaced families in the village whose children built bright and successful careers, in communist Romania or abroad. As shown elsewhere, narrators engage in a form of justice making, of a justice that never came, when divine justice compensates these families with the successes and achievements of their children, who have intellectual professions (Vultur, 2007).

Other narrative portraits sketch the reasons, mixed or singular, for the abduction of the families from U. Some were people who owned little land, “around one hectare and a half”, but opposed the Head of the Village Council. Others owned little land but had their son killed because of his supposed relations with the “partisans”. Families with executed and detained members were removed, and one villager was abducted as his son-in-law was singing the anthem of the Principality of Romania and later of the Kingdom of Romania in the village centre. Then, deportees were not rich people, “but with an eye against the communists, and kept on arguing with them”. One deported family member settled in the USA, and therefore the younger generation bore the label *chiaburi* in administrative documents. Sometimes people unrelated by blood, such as parents-in-law, are taken as well, together with the main victim, because of their engagements as “legionaries” in their youth. Overall, the deportees were often denounced by their co-villagers – and they were informed on, all of them, you know, “as Judas is among the people” (I.) – and the revolt was a pretext to abduct them, to reinforce the collective with their land and belongings, and to lodge poorer people in their homes. In addition, all narrators, regardless of direct involvement, remember the deportation of their co-villagers in highly accurate detail. Accounts on the deportation of children convey the community’s sense of victimization.

In F.’s deported husband’s portrait, a larger frame, beyond the village world, is set up: “He did not do any harm to the village, he did just good. And he was on the front-line up to Odessa and walked from there back home. Barefoot, with sandals, reaching the Budapest area, in Hungary. The front in Hungary. From there God brought him back home safe and sound. (. . .) After coming back from the Eastern Front safe and sound, he was detained by the Romanians and obliged to do forced labour for the building of the Canal. Front, war, within six years”. (F.) F.’s husband took a sleeved sheepskin coat with him in Poarta Albă, in full summer, to use it in winter, by insulating it against cold with the paper of the cement sacks on the construction site.

Another resource for the portraits of deported individuals and families is a monograph of U. documented and written by a local historian, supported by archival documents. Six deported families are made of *chiaburi* and seven of “middle peasants” (*mijlocași*) and their behaviour, family or economic status, or connection to the revolt are brought up as reasons for deportation. For example, one

villager “did not take part in the agitation, that day he was away in the fields. He is known as a quiet man and had a nice behaviour in the commune. (...) His son was an anarchic element who did not listen and had bad relationships with his parents. The members of his family as well as the relatives tried to keep him away from the agitations taking place but failed”. Another participant at the revolt “was a trader, a horse dealer. He took an active role in the agitation, advising the agitators to beat up the president of the former Provisory Committee, which he did. He is known as a bad and vicious element”. Other portraits explicitly refer to the chiabur label: “He is the son of the chiabur P. T. who owns 5 ha of land, one threshing machine and an ironsmith workshop. He was detained for six months for a hostile attitude to the regime and spreading of fake news” (Ardelean 2007, 84–85).

Similar portrait styles – “enemy elements”, “subversive elements”, or “dangerous elements” – are found in relation to the deportations of 1951. Families of those who fled from the country before 1951, or with imprisoned members are stigmatized, in Goffmann’s (1963) understanding of tribal stigma of race, religion and nation affecting all members of a group, and deportation/dislocation becomes the ultimate punishment. Grandchildren whose grandparents were displaced could not continue schooling or benefit from accommodation at a boarding school. The houses of deportees could be put under distress, and the family members who remained had to move out as well or rent the neighbours’ houses.

In a similar vein, in every revolted village, not only the revolt heads, but also persons labelled as chiaburi were deported. Interviewees ironically use the label chiaburi for the deportees, and never bring it up spontaneously, whereas in official documents it is a legitimate category.

Finally, some identified archival documents also show the grotesque and messy side of deportations. A Party report on an “exemplary confiscation” reveals that the daily estate workers “were simply in rags, others with no pay received, so they were maximally exploited by the estate owners”.¹³³ At the same time, the employees of the Penitentiary in Oradea appropriated the confiscated livestock and used state resources for feeding.¹³⁴ The estate owners (*moșieri*), were already affected by the expropriation of 1945, and the nationalization act of March 1st, 1949, in contrast with the chiaburi who had to continue to work their land but were said to “follow next”. Some executors of abductions and confiscations were criticized for not letting the estate owners (name, commune) take their things or money left on them.

The narrative, monograph and archival portraits reveal specific deportation patterns. Two or three generations can be abducted at once, while only one member of the three generational family is accused, for example, of having participated

¹³³ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949, f 28.

¹³⁴ Idem.

in the revolt. Then, the decision can involve members of the family physically present in the house, such as in the case of A. and her parents-in-law. Or, the elder generation is abducted, while the younger one hides in other homes or are fugitives. Moreover, deportation comes as a punishment to a family with a detained or arrested (with or without condemnation) member, or to those who are children of émigrés or of former legionaries.

The narrative chronologies of displacement

The abduction from home

The abduction narrative addresses the impromptu manner of removing people from their homes, with the interdiction on taking any belongings with them. State agents, impersonally referred to as “they”, removed people from their homes and from the militia underground cellar where they had been detained following the crackdown of the revolt. F.’s mother was visited by the authorities at dawn, “at the time when cows go to the pastures (. . .) – and they told my mother – she was coming from the stable, as she had milked the cows – my father had been incarcerated since Sunday evening – they told us to get ready, as they would take us to the militia station. My mother had some money on her as she had sold things on Tuesday at the market, she had sold chickens and eggs, like women, and she took that money and kept it at her chest and took a little bread with us and a little piece of fat, what could I know”. (F.) F.’s daughter, E., completes the account. “They took nothing, they didn’t let them to, they were not allowed to, and they only had on them the clothes they were wearing. They did not know exactly where they went”.

Deported families were reunited at the militia station of the village and boarded in an open truck with a red flag, with benches to sit on, either in the village centre, by the school (village U.), or at the edge, by the cemetery (village C.M.). For F., the boarding moment coincided with the on-spot execution of her father: “Then they put us into the truck. My father boarded the truck, barefoot, as they had been kept there in the cellar in water (. . .) and he sat on the bench and started to put his shoes on. When he had put one shoe on, one militia man came out of the station and said that M. F. should get down and then my father got down, with only one shoe on. And then they closed the gate at the militia station, they closed the gate after putting them down, and the truck proceeded. (. . .) We were sitting with our backs towards the school building, and as we were near the school they said ‘heads down’, and they held the butt of the rifle so that we all put our heads down not to see, and then, at the militia station, before we left, we heard a gunshot. Then they shot all of them and my father and, as we left the militia station, he was shot right there with his face down to the earth near the school, that’s why they told us to keep our heads down, heads down”. (F.) One co-villager, who

also boarded that truck, could see F.'s father lying dead, but did not tell her family anything. After a year, when allowed to receive parcels from home, F. and her mother received a baked bread, with a letter in the middle announcing the death of her father.

A. was abducted with her future parents-in-law, in a stroke of bad luck, being caught in their home on the respective morning and was forced to leave the home with the clothes she was wearing and the scarf she slept with. In tears, she recalled the militia man crushing her husband's toes, as he wanted to put his shoes on. When boarding the displaced families on the truck, the executors made the other villagers see them, by rounding them up. After the abduction from home, the next stop was the headquarters of the Gendarmes Unit in T., for the paperwork. Then, at the East train station of Oradea, a convoy of train wagons bound for Medgidia had been organized for their transport.

Z.'s three-generation family was removed in the night of March the 3rd, 1949, when the authorities, randomly labelled as "communists", "Securitate people", "police", showed up at the estate, in two trucks, giving them around 30 minutes for preparation. They could not take any belongings and access to their bank account was blocked. After initially being hosted at the militia station for two-three days, they were transferred for a while to a rented house, in the closest town to their estate. Subsequently, the parents were subjected to the forced domicile policy, consisting in the obligation to live, for fourteen years and a half, in a new town. From that moment on the lives of the three-generational family unfolded elsewhere, away from their former estate, to which they never returned to live.

The deportee's journey

In the institutional language, the journey to Constanța is presented by the Secret Police as a professional and well-organized action. The freight carriages departing from the East Station of Oradea gathered people from all the villages in the county where uprisings had occurred. The train, composed of a car for the accompanying guard, and of a cattle car for a group of 30 people, with 31 cars in total, functioned as an express so that until Medgidia, the terminus station, stopped very few times. For the two-day-long journey, the convoy included a sanitary assistant and according to the rules set by the accompanying guard, after all the people were embarked, the cars were hermetically closed, while the airing shutters remained open. Water supplies were going to be provided before and during the journey, on longer stops. Every traveller was responsible for his/her own food, while shopping for milk for children during the journey was allowed (Moisa & Pușcaș 2014, 87).

In the narratives, sensory deprivation, visual impairments such as "night blindness", spatial disorientation, and a general feeling of being "out of place" were recurring. Such treatment of prisoners is a deliberate strategy to render them powerless and docile. Travelers picture themselves in physically shameful and pitiful

states. For their biological needs, a hole in the wagon floor was made with the butt of the rifle, and they drank water from a jar that the guards filled for them when stopping at a station. The account on the deportation to Poarta Albă is similar: “People were boarded in a car, with glasses on, and were not allowed to talk. And in the car, they asked each other who they were, as they could not see one another”. (F.)

After a continuous journey lasting one full day and night, they disembarked and spent three days at a warehouse: “Then they put us down and there was a warehouse as the big one at the collective farm, a storied warehouse. And they put straws on the ground floor and upstairs in the loft of the warehouse, the warehouse was big . . . and we slept there, you had no sheet, nothing to cover you with, nothing. Some women were pregnant, some had small children. (. . . .) Then they told us they would take us to the seashore and put us facing the water and push us from behind. We were speaking among us that they were taking us to be shot”. (F.)

In the deportations enforced within the USSR, the journey occurs through physical and imaginative place, it is a traversing of places. The materiality of a place is given by rolling hills, trees, openness, sounds, and smells. At the same time, both fear and objects are magnified (Craveri & Lozonczy, 2012). In a similar vein, the systematic and targeted deportations of 1941 and 1949, and the sporadic ones which continued throughout the post-war years in Latvia, leading to dispossession, exile and ambiguous returns are also recalled through magical coincidences and idyllic landscapes, revealing the resources and strategies upon which individuals draw to make sense of a disrupted past (Skultans 2001, 91). The impairment and powerlessness that governed the journey to Dobrogea left no place for idyllic description. Other narrators avoid describing the journey and conclude by saying: “What a shame, they took us just to be able to make the collective farm here, to scare the others, they could not do otherwise to scare the people, to soften them”. (V.)

Life at the deportation destination

Life during the deportation is pictured in terms of deadlines, duration of the obligatory domicile, and releases. Displaced families lived either with a local host or were placed in the houses of families having been deported in their turn, while other houses were turned into medical units or cooperative farms headquarters. Some acquainted families could organize to live in the same house. The deportee body is doubly stigmatized – polluted and polluting, both in the host society and at “home” and is put permanently outside the ordinary social system, as outcast (Douglas, 1966).

In Constanța, the IDs of the deportees bore a stamp with the “obligatory domicile” mention and presence had to be confirmed every Sunday at the militia station.

After a year, when visits or parcels from home were allowed, they received food and pillows, and after three months, they could have legal employment.

Work, hunger, unfamiliar geographical and weather conditions and estrangement from home are constantly part of everyday life stories. Unfamiliarity is projected onto all aspects of life – for example, it was a matter of chance to fall upon a good or a bad host, and the host could be mean and stingy, owning a tiny house, as in A.'s case. Other times, displaced families were first put in the homes of “wealthy” people who provided them with the bare necessities until they could start work. Or, families acquainted with each other felt lucky to be able to live in the same house. Over the summer, women worked in the farm gardens, picking vegetables, or helped with household chores such as knitting or weaving. Men worked at the stone quarry for the building of canals, the Cernavodă one and then the Canal in Poarta Albă.¹³⁵ Children worked at their parents' side after school hours.

Work took place in a semi-detention atmosphere. To go to work, people were boarded in trucks and had to work outside in any weather. “You had no shadow, you had nothing, and it was such a heat, for God's sake. Even in winter they also took us in trucks to work 12–15 km away, in snow, rain, it did not matter. And they had some sort of benches, in the truck. And you would sit on those benches in this weather”. (F.) In winter, when the duffel clothes they wore on the way to work froze and their buttons fell apart, they put them on a “blind stove” (a stove made of earth) for the ice to melt. A. points in tears at the lack of proper clothes, and the impossibility of obtaining some: “We were on the way back from work and a hard rain started to pour, and . . . what clothes could I buy, they could not send me anything, they did not know where to send something, then I walked all soaked, under such a whirling wind, so were the winds out there, I was wet all over when I reached home and put a blanket on me until my clothes dried”.

Food, at home and at work, was frugal, with a cup of tea and a slice of bread, or sour milk and polenta, in the morning, and boiled beans, and cheese, and polenta again in the evening. At work, they received the food in “kettles like the ones in the army”. (F.) Similarly, in Poarta Albă, people ate porridge and stuff, becoming skin and bones. Every month they had the right to receive a parcel from home, and sometimes, on purpose, it was given to them after the content got rotten, and some boiled it and ate it as such.

¹³⁵ One key rationale for these deportations was the mobilization of labour for the construction of the Danube–Black Sea Canal, an inland waterway linking the Danube to the Black Sea across Dobruja. The project, imposed on the Romanian communist leadership by Stalin in 1948, relied on a mixed workforce of civilian and military labourers. Between 1949 and 1953, the Canal also functioned as a compulsory work site for individuals labelled “class enemies”. In this predominantly rural region, labour demand was high, and by November 1952 detainees constituted 82.5 percent of the Canal's workforce (Abraham 2016, 74–76).

Overall, household, cooking and working styles are viewed in opposition to the lost home and lifestyle. People proudly talk about their more solid houses, tastier food, ways of making haystacks, unlike the habit of eating sheep cooked in big earth-made pots instead of pork, as “this was their pork”. While back home the pork was fried, dried, or smoked, and fed the whole family for months, here, it was chopped in a messy and random way and finished in two weeks or over one dinner. Deportees showed the hosts how to pluck geese feathers to stuff pillows and duvets, instead of using just wool blankets, or how to make haystacks (*căpițe*).

V. has an ambivalent account of everyday life and related paradoxes. For example, they had a stone quarry but did not know how to raise a pig, as pigs were kept in earth holes covered with tree branches, and not in a pigsty, like home. Instead of using wood fire for cooking and heating, they used manure, which was cut into shape when it was soft and then left to dry over winter. The kiln for making bread was not placed in a separate corner, like at home, but in a corridor in the back of the house. Machines were used for harvesting the wheat, unlike at home, where wheat was still harvested manually. There was electricity as well, and the supply of consumption goods was generally better than at home. At the same time, people out there did not know what the *porție* (a piece of land with a single cultivation type in the collective) or the taxation system on land was, and in the newly formed collectives, they planted orchards and vineyards that were later knocked down by the strong winds. The soil was so hard that they could dig it to make a fountain, and: “You only needed to be able to work . . . this stone *macadam* (paved road with successive layers of small stone pieces) that they broke with the crushing mill, we used to break it with the hammer . . . they worked it over at the lime-processing oven”. (V.)

In a similar vein, the Bărăgan plain, at the beginning a strange, hostile, almost wild place, was gradually tamed and transformed, appearing just like the flourishing Banat forcefully left behind five years before in 1956. The regional identity is built up of stereotypes present in the collective thinking for a long time. At the same time, lifestyle differences between the home region and Bărăgan are not the expression of a regional pride but are rather a compensation for the injustice and absurdity in which people were living (Vultur, 1995).

F. shows that, in Poarta Albă, at family visits, they were allowed to speak for 20 minutes at the speaking corner. “He was the only peasant in his work unit, where he was joined by intellectuals: a notary, a lawyer. The elite of Romanian intellectuality was there: army generals, doctors. (. . .) People were talking among themselves that tonight, in a certain barrack, someone was going to give a talk on a specific topic. They were not allowed to walk from one barrack to another, so they walked hiddenly”. (F.)

After five years and seven months, F.’s deportation time ended abruptly: “And then one morning we went to work, we didn’t know anything, neither the evening

before nor in the morning, they put us in the truck and we went away . . . and we suddenly saw two riding militia men approaching us on two red horses, it's like seeing them now, with that bag on their shoulders. And they got down, greeted us, and told us, 'good luck with your work', and many other things. I don't know what they asked us out there, and they said, 'those of you who hear their names, come out of the field. Come here to us'. And then as soon as we heard our names we went to the police and left the hoe, and everything there. So, he said, from today you are free. From today you are free he said, look, the truck is coming and taking you home to wash up, to get prepared, he said, as you are free. Only that on Sunday we meet again, he said, as it was Friday or Saturday, I don't know exactly what day it was. On Sunday come over, he said, to have a lesson at the militia station, before they free us. And then on Sunday all of us who heard our names went and they strongly told us that when we arrive home, we should not talk about how we lived there, we should not tell how we suffered, how we resisted". (F.) Similarly, this obligation also concerns political prisoners released in 1964 (Ciobanu 2015, 116).¹³⁶

After being deported from their estate and obliged to live as tenants, Z.'s family was hosted by some acquaintances, five people in one room, until they found accommodation. They asked for pieces of furniture as they had nothing to sleep on and slept on the floor. People from their home village collected and loaded tables, cutlery, furniture, or food in a cart for them. "For eating, we only had a piece of bread with green onion, now when I see green onion I always remember that". (Z.) The difficult career advancements are then revealed. As an agricultural engineer with graduate studies in Halle, Z.'s father was not allowed to work in state or cooperative units, so his emergency solution was daily work. Z. himself, after finishing high school, could enrol in the technical post-High School of Trade and Finance by declaring that his father was a farmer, for fear of being accused of "unhealthy social origin". Due to the latter, two of his work contracts had been broken. By pointing to the administrative language – "the contract is broken due to unhealthy social origin, according to the last paragraph" – Z. reinforces the absurdity of the legal decision to break the contract. Later, as a head accountant at a power plant, against his will, he also became the UTC secretary on the administrative level. Because of it, it was easier for him to find a job in Aiud and be with his parents. After moving to village T., to his parents-in-law's house, the lost estate became a place of no return.

¹³⁶ In 1964 political prisoners in Romania were released. Upon release, they were required to sign a declaration pledging not to disclose any details of their interrogation, arrest, or imprisonment. They were also obliged to submit periodic reports on their work and personal lives to the Securitate. Some caved in to these pressures and became informers (Oprea, 2003; Ciobanu, 2009).

The return

The families who returned came either altogether or in series, when more adults were involved. Later, F. and her husband worked on their previously owned mill at the CAP. The wheat harvest from the summer of 1949 remained in the field for others to use. On their return home, people “did not find even a nail in the walls, only the empty walls”, or the wind blowing through, and later re-made their houses, as “hardworking people are working hard wherever they go”.

Z.’s account reveals the lost possessions at magnified scales, and the confiscations look like a plunder. “We had wine barrels of 2000 litres capacity, so huge that you could not store them under the house . . . we kids played hide and seek in them (. . .) the cave was so big, that the unfermented wine was poured directly in it. You could drive a truck in it, that big it was. (. . .) Nothing remained after investing in machinery to work the 700 ha of land . . . so many people lived from that, earned their existence from there and you break it . . . ”. (Z.)

In this situation, state and collective farms were established, with possessions taken from the deportees. On their return, V.’s family found newly erected buildings belonging to the GOSTAT on their land. As for A. ’s parents-in-law, their confiscated house was used for the dairy collection point. Overall, the houses left behind turned into school buildings, boarding schools, milk collecting points or school annexes in which silkworms were kept. Wood planks, and high-quality tiles stocked for extending the household were used for building the local administration offices or farm buildings. “Weaker people who had no place to stay occupied these houses, and the relatives who remained home were chased outside, while the last needle in the house was confiscated: clothes, sewing machine, and all the maize in the loft”. (A.) The homeland forever escapes the grasp, as so many returning émigrés, refugees, detainees are painfully discovering (Skultans 1998, 52).

On the deportees’ return to the village, people waited on them with carts full of flour, wheat, or stewed fruit in jars. Some travelled back with sheep, pig and donkeys in the wagon, and were the single family in the village herding sheep. Others maintained friendships with people from Dobrogea, named the children with the names of the host’s children or simply proceeded with the courtship and marriage narrative, leaving the dark memories behind. The professional success of the generational peers, as they all became professors, engineers, and doctors, is underlined. At the same time, as shown elsewhere, returns are also ambiguous, due to the ostracism from cowed neighbours and relatives terrified of possible repercussions from their association with the returnees (Skultans, 1997). The conflicting views between generations on triumph (the heroism of the uprising) and the trauma (expulsion, and what comes with it), either public or private (Giesen 2004, 30), are occasionally part of the recollections. While F. and her daughter

E. jointly praise their family status, they differ markedly in tone: F. is serene and forgiving, whereas E. is vindictive and vocal.

Finally, the return comes with the capacity to forgive. M. shows that her family never hated the ones who decided on the deportation and that now, unlike then, there is much more hatred among people. At the same time, the return of displaced families also needed to be formally approved by the villagers: "As they were a very good family, people had a kind of remorse and received them back". (E.) F. points at the enmity of the latest house occupants who refused to hand them the house keys. Ostracism is certainly extended to the relatives of the deportees. F., with a displaced husband, two small daughters, eight cows to take care of in the stable and unnamed hardships, felt people were avoiding her, not greeting her.

The return is also recalled in connection to deportation-related claims and missing evidence. Despite the Law 118 / 1990 endowing rights to persons persecuted politically during the communist regime, documents attesting the deportation and shooting order are missing from the Village Council archive and are supposed to have been ripped out on purpose: "There was at the Village Council a secret file, and after the revolution everyone's amount was written there. The Head of the Village Council back then, gave it to S. who was king enough to rip out the page of M. F. (. . . .) We went to look everywhere, at the state archives, but it was impossible to find something about the commune of U. So, there is evidence that he had been deported, that he had been shot, as I re-constituted his death certificate after so many years, the shooting decision is mentioned, Decision 364, but no reason for the shooting is stated. If you look for all deportees, you find every page, but the one of M. F. had to be ripped out as he had the greatest amount of land, most pieces of machinery and livestock, and thus he had to disappear". (E.) Everything was sold, from tractor to tiles, and people could not find out the whereabouts of the confiscated possessions.

In his turn, Z. confirms the difficulty of finding evidence on the value of the lost estate. Based on the limited number of documents that could be saved upon removal, the family could claim back some hectares and parts of the farm and of the house. Due to lack of further evidence, more than 150–200 ha were lost. They looked for evidence in the archive of the CAP in the village, to find out the stock value of their house but none of their goods had been registered. Furthermore, a large part of the estate became waste, due to lack of investment, and was therefore sold at a very low price. Moreover, 70 ha from the lost land now belong to an aerodrome, and the claim for that land is still pending. This situation leads Z. to describe a chain of losses: "In the First World War we were also plundered. And this was the final blow. When we started to gather things up, to buy animals, machinery, you know, you needed agricultural equipment for 700 ha. There was a small farm with tenants, neatly arranged. So many people earned their bread there, had a place to work".

Together with failed claims in redressing the lost property, the tax exemptions on the house and on TV tax, free medical care and tickets in spa resorts are mentioned. F. is formally entitled to all these, but the Village Council does not discuss these issues in their meetings. The monthly sum based on the time spent in the camp is not a worthy monetary compensation: “After five years and seven months, I get ten million lei per month”. (F.) The families pay a monthly contribution to the county-based Association of Deportees, but there is a long way for their claims to be solved. Others doubt the “good will” policies of the state when monthly compensations of 30 million are given to various kinds of deportees, displaced, arrested, being seen as part of a hidden agenda. Overall, the accounts indicate that Romania’s retributive justice was uncertain and unsuccessful, and that the trust of citizens in the country’s democratic institutions, in the court of justice, in the parliament, and in the political elite was undermined (Luleva, 2011; Stan, 2013).

Museums and memorialisation

Law projects for villages to become “martyr villages of anti-communist fights” (2014), the “Deportees” series on channel TVR 3 presenting testimonies from those deported in Siberia, Transnistria, Donbas, Bărăgan, Dobrogea, Lunca Prutului, covering all ethnic groups involved (2021), as well as the nationally declared day for the victims of the deportations during the communist regime (as of 2020) are some recent memory practices and moral reparation forms.

AFDPR is a leading actor in setting up memory places related to deportations nationwide, in which the deportations to Bărăgan play a central role. A pilgrimage monument for political prisoners and those deported to Bărăgan, a monument in the meadow where, in 1951, the carts with deported individuals from 6 villages were gathered, and a cross on a mountaintop, in the place where village anti-communist fighters were arrested are some examples from the Mehedinți county. Furthermore, in Orșova, a monument in a park, in the memory of the uprooted ones, who scattered on the Bărăgan fields, was erected. A commemorative plaque at a college with the names of the teachers who suffered or were killed in communist prisons was added.

The vocabulary of AFDPR and its emotional language reveals a need for healing and surpassing trauma through memory ways. In the language of AFDPR, Bărăgan is an epitome of suffering that deserves symbolic justice and recognition. “The Banat gave its contribution of tears, sacrifice and suffering on Romania’s altar. In memory of those deported, imprisoned and persecuted by the communist regime simply because they were the foundation and elite of Banat, the deportees in Bărăgan erected monuments as an eternal barrier against oblivion”. An emblematic monument for the whole region to the deportees at Bărăgan was erected in the Justice Park in Timișoara in 1996 and was consecrated by the Metropolitan of Banat. Related to a monument to the deportees from a commune in Timiș

county, erected in 1991, AFDPR states: “We erected this monument as if we were building a house in which all our tears could live in peace”. The memory work of AFDPR reveals a transnational engagement. A Romanian wooden cross was erected in 1996 near the wooden Orthodox church in Thonex (Geneva), in memory of those who, in the country or in exile, fought against communism. The memory work of AFDPR reveals symbolic justice forms at civil society level emerging in the early 1990s as well as punctual memory interventions to reveal the complexity of deportations at the level of the whole society.

On the county level, the Association of Deportees and Victims of Communist Oppression (ADVOC) was founded in 1990 by two founding members, together with other members concerned by the association’s aim. From 1991 until 2025, it had around 9500 members. In 2025 it counted around 3000 members, as descendants of deportees, refugees or victims of communism. At county-level, the Association of Deportees and of Victims of the Communist Oppression and the Office for the Refugees in Transylvania, victims of the Vienna Dictate, 1949, has 8,500 members, out of which 7,420 are Northern Transylvanian refugees. Set up as a tiny museum of deportation, the Association has three victim categories: (1) the detained, condemned and arrested former high-school students who in 1947 and 1948 belonged to specific anti-communist resistance organizations; (2) the formerly deported families to the Constanța countryside in August 1949; (3) the deportees of the 1951 wave who had moved to the area. Through repeated public calls, the association invites children of former political detainees (of deceased ones as well), deportees, displaced and prisoners, to register in the association, so that their children benefit from the provision of the 118 /1990 Decree. In a broader typology, 30% of the members bear the label of “deportees”, and 70% of “refugees” (displaced individuals).

Moreover, the association headquarters stands as a tiny museum of deportations. A map which pinpoints four types of prisons – extermination camps, death prisons, forced labour camps, and psychiatric asylums – stands in the main room of the Association headquarters. Two diplomas for the former president and founder of the Association stand below the map: one received from King Michael, “for merits and the initiatives related to the finding of the historical truth about the Monarchy”, and another one for the courageous attitude and example, awarded by two local organisations: the Association of Former Political Detainees in Romania – Bihor headquarters and the 40 Martyrs Association. On the opposite side stands “the song of the deportees”, a typewritten poem recounting the deportation to Bărağan through the abduction from home, the despair and the acceptance of the divine will, the mockery of the authorities, or the new house “without bed and table, just a square tent”.

The Association headquarters shows another map. On another augmented map, the locations that compose two detention areas – the Danube–Black Sea

Canal (13 villages) and the villages of deportees in Bărağan (16 villages) – are marked, with adjacent black-and-white photographs of earth-made homes and thatched roofs, under the “Romanian Gulag” heading. A wall-displayed newspaper article published in 2021, marking 70 years since the deportation in Bărağan relies on two testimonials on the abduction of 58 families made up of 256 persons from nine villages in the county. The account brings typical insights into the deportation experience. Offspring were going to be subjected to abuse all through the communist regime, and the interdictions followed them until 1990. People say that kids were not admitted into college and could not hold positions later. The four destination villages of the deportees from Bihor are mentioned, with the fear that they would reach Siberia.

The deportations museum also features testimonials. One witness told that in the Bărağan plain, he found people that had been there for a year. They received parcels of 250 square meters to build homes, and a numbered picket marked the settling place of each deported family. Just empty cereal fields were all around, and finding potable water was a problem, as it was salty. The bad food supply influenced health and work potential. Regarding baby food, the situation was even tougher: in 1955, for example, mothers’ milk was collected and sold to the deportees needing it. After living for two years in the Bărağan plain, his family was only allowed to live outside the deportation locality. The second witness shows the drama of some deported families, when the family heads and the aged members were not allowed to return. On another wall, pictures under the heading “The Romanian Royal House” showcase King Michael and Queen Anne of Romania in their Versoix home, in December 1989; King Michael and Pope Jean Paul II; or Romania’s princesses in Bucharest in 1997.

In terms of memory practices, especially in the 1990s–2000s, the association raised in several villages and communes from Bihor around 150 wooden crosses currently administered by local authorities or churches. One of the founders was a member of the G4 organization. After escaping from his home, he surrendered to the Securitate Officer who was keeping his mother under surveillance. He was condemned for 2 years and passed through 6 prisons. His publications address the memory of resistance and were published on his behalf, not in the name of the association. The association focuses on administrative approaches, facts and juridical acts for defending the juridical interests of its deported and refugee members, and especially of their successors. The former president of the association, A. B., a former member of the G4 organisation made up of college students, caught by the Securitate and condemned for two years, passing through six prisons, gave his testimonial within the documentary series “Forgetting is a new condemnation” launched in 2021 on March 9, the Day of the Former Political Prisoners, by the platform “The Memory of Resistance”. In the 4th episode, the “Lesson of dignity”, his detention experience is exhaustively narrated and featured on the Memory of

Resistance platform (2013) and published in an oral history volume edited by IICCMER.

Lat but not least, the association is engaged in a fight for democracy. In the words of Barbara Mizstal (2010), paraphrasing Adorno (1986), “without memory, that is, without the checking of, and reflection upon, past records of institutions and public activities, we will have no warnings against potential dangers to democratic structures and no opportunity to gain a richer awareness of the repertoire of possibly [sic] remedies” (Mizstal 2010, 28).

Finally, at village level, each locality has its own commemoration forms, at village or county level. Deportations and on-spot executions are commemorated in the Orthodox Church of village U. every Sunday on July 31st. In the centre of the village, in 2003, a cross was erected in memory of the deportees in the centre of the village.



5. The inscription says: “In the memory of Mateoc Flore killed by the Securitate troops on August 3rd, 1949, because he participated in the peasants’ revolt in Ucriș against forced collectivization of agriculture and against obligatory quotas. This roadside crucifix was dedicated today, August 3rd, 2003”. The Association of Deportees in Bihor. President: Aurel Brazdă. Grandchildren: SFT, SGS

Chapter 7

Giving up one's property: the everyday collectivization campaign

The gradual control of the state over private agricultural property started in 1945, with the founding of the Supreme Council of the National Economy. With it, the gradual compulsory surrender of agricultural equipment to town councils and the sharing of grain started. On the 2nd of March 1949, with Decree no. 83, the collectivization campaign officially started and all land properties larger than 50 ha were subject to confiscation. The Decree broke the agrarian reform law of the Petru Groza government in 1945 by confiscating all landed property given then, opening a well-orchestrated process of giving with a hand and taking with the other. In the campaign rhetoric, “the rich” – the exploiters and evaders – and “the poor” – the underprivileged – were constantly opposed. Then, regional and local contingencies contradicted the official timeline – for example, in 1962, the official year the collectivization campaign ended, some households based in regions deemed suitable for collectivization were still private (Iordachi & Dobrinu, 2009). At the same time, the campaign was dependent on a variety of factors, such as the general patterns of the villages in terms of space, time and difference; religious diversity; ethno-national identity, colonization, ecology and economy, national political and economic factors, local politics, or variations based on history (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 5).

Before 1957, techniques such as propaganda, contests, and mimesis, were used by the state to persuade and coerce peasants into giving up their property. Such “pedagogies of power” stirred “counter pedagogies” among the villagers, who undermined the efforts of peasant cadres, party officials, or socialist youth, by spreading rumours about life in the collectives and the imminent demise of communism, especially around the time of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, or by disseminating anti-regime slogans and composing and circulating folk poetry that mocked and discredited collectivization (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 213).

At the same time, petitioning was a tool of the regime which allowed a certain space for the expression of peasants' grievances. At a meeting in Bucharest on 15 May 1951, when listening to the complaints of peasants about local cadres who were forcing them to join collectives, Party General Secretary Gheorghe

Gheorghiu-Dej and the head of the Agrarian Section of the central committee Alexandru Moghioroş reiterated the importance of voluntary collectivization and promised to investigate the case (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 262–4). On the other hand, the non-registered villagers in Domaşnea (1962–1966) travelled in groups for the petitioning, annoying the Securitate. Moreover, people had the tendency to openly state their discontent and appeal to higher bodies in an area of the former Habsburg Empire, which had a real petitioning tradition and the belief that understanding and justice can only come from the emperor, when they are against the local authority (Vultur, 2003). Overall, the campaign reveals that the communist regime was essentially an occupation force that did not set its own political agenda and never managed to build political legitimacy (Iordachi & Dobrinicu 2009, 27).

Disrupted inheritance practices, comparative collectivization models, the meetings of villagers with propagandists, or the ignoring of the collectivization purpose and its pragmatic adaptation have informed studies on the campaign from the last three decades.

First, in the whole Romanian society, before collectivization, some fixed rules dominated land inheritance: the privilege of the youngest child, who should live in the parents' house and take care of them; the patrilocal or neolocal residence¹³⁷; the geographic endogamy; the sharing of the parents' fortune at marriage. The importance of the land and goods sharing at marriage, of the bilateral (patrilineal and matrilineal) transmission of goods, and the absence of written documents within this transmission are part of the inheritance rules (Gaborean, 2008). On the other hand, according to the system of inheritance, all land was equally divided among the sons in one family, so the aim of all rural inhabitants was to increase the amount of land they owned (Yancheva, 2012). At the same time, the amount of inherited and owned land could determine political ascension (mayors were elected from the wealthy), children's marriages (depending on the land amount), and could condition the control of labour (work was exchanged among families, also depending on their social and economic statuses).

Second, comparisons between the Hungarian countryside where land was consolidated and the landowners received the so-called "exchange land" and worked on it independently until the end of socialism, and the Romanian one, where no private farming remained, reveal the undercurrents of the campaign (Thelen 2005, 24). In Romania, the last remaining "private peasants" were still beaten up at the local office, kidnapped at night, and taken away in cars blindfolded, and beaten up again and again until they signed the entry declaration. In the Hungarian village, one woman, to protect her father and brother from physical harm, used to go instead of them to the local office, as women were not beaten. In conclusion, the pattern of classification as a kulak was more arbitrary in Romania, and this use of arbitrary power had a deep influence on social change (Thelen 2005, 101).

¹³⁷ The newly formed families went to live in the husband's parental household.

The power relations between villagers and propagandists make up a third study theme. In the Hungarian Autonomous Region (Corund), collectivization was the engine of the pure professional ambition of village elites, who requested that the district authorities include their village in the collectivization plan, and then were blamed by the villagers (Bodó, 2009, 399). Documents were mailed directly to individual families, public readings of newspapers and propaganda materials were organized, and fences were painted. Generally, the cadres visited individual households and as a rule, the team leader who oversaw the visit was from outside the village. But such gatherings were rather the exception than the rule, as official meetings rarely took place in households. Instead, local officials used to go around alone or in groups of two and three, engaging in persuasion work that often involved force and threats. In a similar vein, in the Bulgarian countryside, collectivization was executed with a brass band. The music was meant to show the joy and happiness of becoming collectivized, but also to cover the shouting of those beaten up (Yancheva 2012, 232).

Fourth, in one local setting, the ideological content of collectivization was ignored, and its expressions were translated into pragmatic terms, partly because the new political elite was springing from the previous one. The elimination of *chiaburi* had a strictly administrative meaning, and there was no cultural club for persuasion work (Șerban, 2001–2002). Finally, the German ethnic minority perceived the collective as a site of marginality and joining it as a social degradation or as a punishment. The use of ethnicity as a political criterion in the collectivization process was perceived by the community as a regime-orchestrated repression against it and contributed to its successive emigration waves (Vultur 2009, 159).

This chapter studies the cultural attitudes about land and livelihood in village U., where “people were so afraid of the collective after the rebellion, as of fire”, and in villages T. and C.M., where the campaign was executed more peacefully. A study of execution teams, of encounters and reactions, of campaign execution narratives and of non-collectivized villagers, followed by a reflection of the village atmosphere in archival documents, brings new insights into the everyday campaign.

The executors and their teams

Party cadres or members of the militia or the Securitate, state functionaries of People's councils, teachers, school principals, village notaries, doctors, engineers and even priests, students, factory workers, agitators from industrial centres near the villages being collectivized, peasants from already established GACs, not necessarily party members, formed the wide spectrum of the executors (Kligman &

Verdery 2011, 296). By the end of the second wave (1958–1962), even *chiaburi*¹³⁸ or others having strong influence on villagers conducted the campaign.

The campaign executors in U. – a member of the Youth Village Organization and future brigadier, a village councillor and Party member, elementary school teachers, or the future head of the association formed after the CAP dismantlement in the early 1990s – are portrayed as scornful or opportunistic people: “They were without education, without common sense (. . .) they were people who did not think – people you could pay, in the sense that, ‘I’ll give you one glass of moonshine; kill that one’”. (G.) In folk poems, propagandists are good-for-nothings second rates, having risen to power from the “dregs” of the village (Ardelean, 2004). On the other hand, the executors from outside the village are “persons from other counties, or even from Bucharest, who come and do not say who they are and what they do. But you could see that they are not ordinary people but rather . . . Securitate people or . . . they were something, as you could see on their behaviour and on their accent, that they were not just anyone”. (P.) For the executors (locals or non-locals who did not believe in what they were doing, knew nothing about it in agricultural terms, or had no practical answers), truth had to lie in performance, not in conviction (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 213).

In U., C.M. and T., the team composition varied between two or three members or a larger group of thirty or even more, depending on the timing of the campaign, which was more intense at the beginning. The joint participation of local Party members and administration staff together with staff at district level reveals that persuasion was flexibly organized, and so were the tactics involved (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 215). Historical work on the county-level execution reveals that operative teams made up of 3 to 5 people, with at least one-Party member among them, were organized to travel to the houses of landowners to confiscate their goods. In each commune, the mayors, already members of the Workers’ Party, the militia people from the local *Miliția* station as well as 1–2 trustworthy locals, usually Party members or members of *Frontul Plugarilor* were added. In the whole county, at around 12 p.m., all operative groups were set up and could start their activity. Between 12 and 1 p.m., they went to the houses of the targeted families, informing them that they were no longer in possession of their land. The following day, the villagers were informed about what had happened during the previous day, giving the official version of the regime concerning the exploitation within the village world (Moisa & Pușcaș 2014, 58).¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Even though the official ideology presented the kulaks as enemies of collectivization, the party didn’t allow them to join the collective farms until 1956 (ANR/CC of PCR 93/1956, 97–98), a decision which shows that at least some of the kulaks were ready to cooperate with the regime (Micu 2014, 139).

¹³⁹ DJAN Bihor, fond Sfatul Popular al Regiunii Crișana, Secția Agricolă, dosar 8 / 1949, apud Moisa & Pușcaș (2014), Anul 1949 in Bihor.

Countrywide, the team composition varied from two-three members to thirty, forty, or even more, depending on the timing of the campaign and the tactics involved, and the field time lasted between a few days and several months, depending on the degree of resistance encountered (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 296). In some places, persuasion was also highly organized by the Party Secretary of a region setting up several commissions, each responsible for a sector containing several houses. Depending on the campaign timeline, it happened that outsiders were more numerous in the final stage, due to the wish to make a final, more aggressive push. As the outsiders could encounter more resistance, they ended up being fortified by regional security forces and by the locals (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 296).

The encounters between villagers and campaigners

In T. collectivization started in 1959 with the best land on the river side, in the lower part of the village, followed by the land by the forest, of worse quality, one year later, also used as “exchange land” for those reluctant to join. Ethnic Romanians and Hungarians refer to the two places as Nagy T. (Big T, in Hungarian, or the part with with tanya owners), and Kiss T. (small T., hilly part, with less interesting property). In U. and C.M., collectivization started with helmets at the edges of the villages.

Appointments at the Village Council, impromptu visits in people's homes, and public meetings at the Culture House or random ones are the encounter patterns between villagers and campaigners in T., U. and C.M. The meeting space is less present in the narrative, the focus being on the behaviour of the propagandist and the reactions of the villagers. The encounters in the homes are pictured in terms of absurdity and mockery: “He said that people who do not want to enter the collective should climb a tree and sing from there” (Z.) or “he said that even if I would walk with iron sandals, my daughter would not succeed in her admission exam, but she did”. (F.) Others focus on the reply to the executors: “There was one man who came to my father to tell him to subscribe to the collective, and he did not attend even one grade. And my father told him: brother, go and study to earn at least a quarter of my education, and then come over to talk, but like this, we have nothing to talk about”. (P.)

Grabbing the livestock, the machinery, the tools, or the wine-filled barrels as pressure forms for compelling people to register are also part of the encounters in private homes. Selling livestock, slaughtering it or hiding it in neighbours' homes or drinking the whole wine home production are some evasion strategies. People minimized loss in the best possible ways: they sold their cart and horse, particularly if these were of good quality, and bought others of lesser quality, or hid their farming tools.

The other meeting place – the Village Council – is the place where people are summoned repeatedly, several times a day, held for several days without food or drinking water, or beaten up. “Over ten families were summoned at once at the Village Council and put into the cave, one after the other. And those who were there, policemen, I don’t know who was there, as I had not been there, but my father, at 75 years old, to be slapped for not having subscribed to the collective. For not having given his fortune, he was beaten, slapped, and he returned home at night: what did you do? How was it at the Village Council? He had two big sons, my brothers, of 18 and 20 years old. My dad did not say anything as he was afraid that the boys would take revenge and do trouble about this. (...) This was collectivization. And you know why? Because you did not sign that you would give away your land and your house at the collective, so that others rejoice from them. This was collectivization. Nothing happened; people were calm, both in village U. as well as C.M. and T”. (F.)

Others refer to one core aspect of the encounter, such as blackmail, shaming and humiliation acts, or invented reasons. One villager was featured on a wall gazette in a sketch with four oxen, due to his refusal to deliver the oxen at the collective “as those who had nothing gave nothing so why should he give them anything at all”. (M.) A blackmail technique followed, namely the hiding of a gun in his home, as a ground for the accusation of weapon possession. Others were appointed to carry wood for the school or stone for paving the roads as compulsory labour. The surpassed delay for gleaning was one “reason the communists invented to scare people”. (P.) Moreover, a villager recalls running into the executors and being told: “From now on, you are in the collective by default”. (F.)

Finally, the encounters are paired with lost possessions, pictured in mythical and metaphorical terms, and the wealth status of a family is no longer relevant, as many admit that there was no difference in the constraint for those with little or a lot of land. “And dad had a seeding machine with 18 pipes or more, and he seeded with it for himself and his friends. And he could not give it away, it was special and good. People were attached to machineries and livestock. They keep the plough, the harrow, and the seeding machine even today, they cannot separate from them. I would sell it, or give it to a museum, but nobody wants it. It is now dirty, it needs to be washed and painted. He bought it, did not steal it from the collective. It is two meters wide”. (F.)

The reactions and subscription reasons

Countrywide, those who joined first were non-locals (in-migrants, colonists), people from respectable families with a problem (fascist past, involvement in commerce, combined with personal ambition – they would make him president) and people who entered state employment (clerks, schoolteachers etc.) (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 155). The chronologically emerging collective organisations –

TOZ, GAC, and CAP – make no sense for villagers, who uniformly see collectivization as a forcefully imposed measure.

The impossibility of working one's land, the threatened education prospects for children, the wish to escape the quotas (and the black bread and the coupon received in exchange) or the repeated appointments at the Council convinced some villagers to subscribe. Others joined to avoid travelling back and forth daily for ten kilometres or more to work on the "exchange land" received when putting in the private land for the consolidation of the first GAC. "They took theirs and gave them another, somewhere near the forest, of weak quality and infertile. And they ploughed it as they could, with the cow, with oxen, and so on, for one year or two until they gave that land a better consistency. Then they took that land as well, and put them somewhere else, and gave them an even worse piece of land so that in the end, they proposed them to go on the hill 20 km away, between B. and U. But there were no means of transport, to go there by cart was difficult". (F.) As shown elsewhere, the negative impact of over taxation and reallocation of land far away from the village, and the promise of benefits to GAC members (e.g. the best quality fields in the area and access to various social services), especially appealing to poor peasants, were part of the everyday incentives. Apparently, approvals for leaving the collective were given to those who had brought little or no land to the cooperative (Chelcea 2009, 144).

For those with family having fought on the front towards Odessa, having seen piles of cereals rotting on the ground, or piles of harvested wheat, hundreds of tones, stocked in kolkhozes, while people died of hunger, or people rubbing the gold layer from their icons in order to sell that gram of gold, collectivization was not a piece of cake. "He did not know communism so well, but he understood what kind of life people are living there. He was a man with principles, I don't mind your business, don't mind mine. He had liberal principles. Even if they would put him with his head on a log, he would not have subscribed. He was a genuine, honest man. Instead of delivering the oxen to the collective, he sold them. And if the collective did not own oxen, why didn't it breed its own?" (F.) In all ways, Romanian peasants had few positive experiences with collective farms, unlike Macedonians with *zadruga* or Russians with *mir* (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 5). For others, persuasion work was simply a working task that the local campaigners could not avoid.

The inherited land is a cherished asset passed along through several generations, and refusing to join is a symbolic act. "You know why people were attached to their land? As it was an inheritance from their parents, as in T. there was a forest. And there were so many old trees that several people could not surround them, they were as thick. And those that could, went and cleaned that land and occupied a piece of land, hundreds of years ago. And for this reason, they cared for the inheritance from their parents – they were not against the collective, as they

did not know what the collective was, it was about their right and their parents' labour, their inheritance. Who wants to understand, does". (F.)

The division of land on "separate positions", among family members of two generations is another reaction to the campaign. This division brings a new living form, as parents and children end up living separately, often shortly after. E. shows that, as she got married, even if her parents made separate positions for her, this move did not change the family's respectability: "Those who made the positions were those from the Village Council, who knew everybody's worth". Overall, registration was a threat to the daughters' bridewealth, for which land was the most important asset. Joining late is a source of pride, as the lazy and the poor joined first, and it was frustrating that regardless of possessions, the GAC membership brought equality among villagers.

The forceful registration is symbolically paired with loss of prestige and humiliation and with the empowerment of the unworthy. T. recalls that, while in the army, he found out about the family's loss of land from a letter, after repeatedly telling his family not to subscribe until he's back home: "My grandmother sent me a letter – I even feel like crying (he cries), as we had a lot of land and I was determined to stay home and mind my own business – and my grandmother sent me a letter, censored or not, I don't know, saying that she must subscribe to the collective. When I was home, I had told them not to subscribe until I would come back".¹⁴⁰ Persuading people to join meant dismissing their capacity to work their own land. "It was not only about yielding, but it was about people having to explain that they were unable to work their land, and that they need to join the association. And then the people who had some brains said: 'How could I say that, when I have my harness for the horses to till my own land – when I have got everything'"? (T.)

Overall, the campaign brought dependency and empowerment for the poor. "For those who had nothing it was easy, and they only had to win. (...) Those people did what the Party said, they could not do this with others, only with those who were more stupid". (T.) The propaganda is a "well-orchestrated thing, so that they are able to take everything. The state was coordinating everything, and people just executed and were paid as the authorities wished: so you had nothing you could call your own". (T.) After subscription, "life followed its pace, they eliminated the stupid ones, and people normalized their life track. They were replaced by competent people, but still servants. They executed what they were told". (T.)

¹⁴⁰ The invocation of the fact that the fortune belonged to the parents, parents in law, or a family member temporarily away from home as a reason for delaying the subscription comes up in other work (Vultur, 2011).

The changing status for family men

Collectivization brings new living patterns for family men. P., formerly the son of a chiabur, could not do regular army service and was submitted to a special working measure: work in a coal mine for 3 years, with one furlough per year to come home to visit. In 1953, when returning from mine, P. worked a bit in the fields and then went to Hunedoara for three more years to work in the steel industry, at the furnaces, where dolomite was melted and used for steel, as there was no better source for financial gain close to home. In 1956, when returning and getting married, his parents favoured the idea that he should live at his wife's place. With the money earned in Hunedoara, P. chose to build his own house, pointing out that he got no help from anyone, not even his father. Despite being the eldest child, he was offered no concessions.

Moreover, after land loss, men reconverted to service, construction or industrial jobs. Creed (1998, 108) reveals the strong motivation of young married men living with their in-laws to join the collective: the latter was a way out of their situation, regarded as very non-prestigious. For Kligman and Verdery (2011, 325), joining the collective coincided with a loss of authority for the man: no longer controlling the children and organizing the household. In the transition from patriarchal households to nuclear ones, the power of parents over children was diminishing, as young male employees were earning more than their fathers and power relations among generations were altered. In a similar vein, Olson and Adonyeva (2012, 44) reveal the social expectations from a man in the 20th century Russian Village, before and after the Soviet regime. Before, society was highly interactive and oral tradition and observation of living examples and rituals were the most important ways in which young people learnt what was expected from them. Fathers devoted much time to raising sons: they took them on fishing and hunting trips for many days when, apart from obtaining specific skills, young men also learnt much from listening to the conversation of older men. Audacity, risk, and the transformation of resources into symbolic capital were the main values transmitted intergenerationally. Relations between men of different generations changed considerably with the arrival of Soviet power, and the Soviet authorities dismantled the male age hierarchy.

The stories of two former campaign executors

A typology of four collectivization models – Stalinist collectivization, collectivization abandoned, neo-Stalinist collectivization, Hungarian collectivization – reveals that Romania, together with Albania, belongs to the “Stalinist model” (Swain, 1998). Agricultural purchase prices were low, peasants and co-operatives alike were subjected to oppressive compulsory deliveries, and incomes from the co-operative were low, mainly in kind, and based on a “labour unit” rather than

a wage. Machinery was held in state-owned machine and tractor stations; private household plots were barely tolerated and there was minimal diversification out of agriculture. Against this model, two former campaigners – a former CAP head in U. (I.) and a retired biology teacher from T. who conducted the campaign in the village where he worked as a schoolteacher (A.) – recall their everyday work and reevaluate their former mission, giving precious insights into the (un)worth of collectivization and everyday sociality and solidarities.

A file with petitions to join the GAC, thoroughly indexed according to the house numbers and kept as evidence for those who might need them for the calculation of their pensions, belongs to the paraphernalia kept by I. Agricultural registers, award-winning diplomas as a CAP chairman, or photographs with the president's visit in 1977 also belong to his private collection. The beginning of the campaign was quite abrupt: "No, after the revolt no one told anything. Everybody knew there was a slogan: go where they send you, give what they ask for, and keep your mouth shut. This was the slogan (laughter)". (I.) I. joined the "Party activists" in their daily work until the full collectivization of the whole village, having an assigned target of ten successful requests at the end of the fieldwork day, while being also secretary of the Village Youth Organization. Those resistant to the kolkhoz idea, thinking that like there, you would not be able to take anything with you from the fields, were the first persuasion target. The campaigners told people that the kolkhoz model was good, as land was concentrated, and the productions were big.

On the other hand, propaganda was a game, and the local campaigners overtly discussed with villagers the real change that the subscription could bring. "We used to say that they shall live better, that productivity shall grow, that they will work in a mechanized way, and finally, that livestock farms will be established, things like that. There was this neighbour who came up to me crying, like why do you keep on coming to me and telling me to join the collective? So that you live better, I said. I have three kids, and they died of hunger, he told, but now I count on you. And he joined, and in 4–5 years he came to me and said: you were right. I don't work so much but I have all I need". (I.) I. secretly gave attestations to parents who were not yet farm members for their children's school enrolment. Finally, I. pictured the campaign as a joke: "Ana Pauker and Gheorghiu-Dej were appointed by Stalin, and they told they cannot execute collectivization in six months, according to the given term. And Stalin said – bring a hatching hen, with chicken. He took the chicken from the hatching hen, pinched them, and they ran under the hen's wings. You see, you pinch them a little . . . and this is how it was done then. There was such a threat, yes". (I.) At the same time, facing the disdain and crying of villagers at the GAC gate, when the campaigners took their carts and oxen inside was part of the everyday work.

For A., the campaign came up as an assignment from the Village Council during his three-year employment (1957–1960) as a sports teacher in a village school close to the town of Huedin, Cluj County. “There was nothing quite main in the village, just a cooperative.¹⁴¹ We were like the leaders of the village, and, as teachers, were assigned to persuade people to enter the collective”. (A.) A team of thirteen campaigners – the headmaster, teachers and elementary school teachers, three men and young girls employed in the newly founded school – met one or two families per week in the village of around 300 souls and were respectfully invited into the homes, as school staff. Or they pretended to work, in case they were controlled by superiors from the county or raion level but were simply invited into people’s home during fieldwork and talked a little about the campaign, and then about something else. “And people did not want to join by any means. And then, what the hell could we do, as the people from the Village Council came to us and asked us if we went here and there. (. . .) We had to do this work, as we were hired. In other words, they obliged us”. (A) There was no sense in lying about the surface of land, as everyone knew everyone’s amount of land. There were 2–3 *chiaburi* in the village, without pre-established lists, and the campaigners received the task of caricaturizing them, and sticking up in the public space slogans such as “saying that here lives this *kulak*, in Hungarian. They used to call them *kulaks*, *bourgeois*”. (A.)

The campaign was an exchange occasion, when people took a bottle of wine and invited them over to talk, “but would not subscribe by any means. As it was a commune of farmers, taking the land meant taking their minimal income” (A.), and people were sticking to their land and to their buffalos, they consumed buffalo cow milk. The whole family welcomed the team on their visit, but the last word belonged to the husband. The persuasion itself is described as a fake mission: “We did persuasion work, as this is how the Party called it. We told things like it will be better in the collective, that the force unites, things like that. And after a while, as no one wanted to subscribe by any means, we told them that a TOZ would be made, and with that, it worked a bit”. (A.) In parallel, A. recalls how his hosts gave him the beautiful, front room to sleep in, while they slept in the room at the back, and children never ate at the same table with the teacher. The beautifully ornamented plates in which the soup was served were for the guest

¹⁴¹ The consumption cooperative (*cooperativa de consum*) was the primary outlet for purchasing staple foods, fodder, tools, and other necessities throughout the communist period. Villagers, as cooperative members, supplied goods (e.g., cereals, eggs) that were then sold through the cooperative network; in return, they received modest payments – often up to four times lower than prices on the black market. In practice, access frequently depended on exchangetype arrangements: customers were expected to pay and bring a specified item in order to obtain the desired product, or to buy an unwanted good together with the needed one (e.g., purchasing nails in order to obtain lamp fuel). For broader discussions of consumption cooperatives, see Gudeman and Hann (2015).

only. At school, when requesting that children wear sports equipment, there was a little conflict with the parents, as girls would dress up with seven skirts at the time, and A. sees it as a proof of backwardness: "This is how they were, lagging behind". (A.)

The non-collectivized villagers

The life patterns of two non-collectivized families reveal the survival strategies that these families undertook with the loss of land ownership. P., a retired veterinarian and former village councillor is from the single family in T. who did not join the collective. His father ended up on the chiaburi list, due to the tavern he owned, large amount of arable land, livestock, and possibly a vehicle for carrying the wine bought in another region.

The family's status is reinforced with a reference to the treatment of daily workers, who used to come from villages around to work for them in spring and left in autumn with their carts full of wheat, maize, or fat pigs, or all that there was. And even now, when they go to that village, they meet some of those old people who are happy to see them. "I know that we had lots of guests, they ate and drank all they wanted, and we had servants who did not stay in the stables with the animals as it used to be here in the village, as many Hungarians would host the servants in the stables, with the animals. We had a separate room where the workers lived". (P.) In opposition stood the people "who had nothing to do with anything, tramps, who gradually became PMR members, and were turned into leaders in order to make the exploiters – as this is how they called them back then – subscribe in the TOZ, the association of small producers". (P.) P.'s father joined the TOZ himself, as he had nothing against delivering the livestock, being appointed as president of the association. But when the TOZ was transformed into a CAP, he withdrew, delivered all documents and the stamp, and from this moment on, the problems related to non-joining began.

First, to avoid the persuasion team, P.'s father went to do building work in Bucharest, being able to send money or letters home only through messengers. The usual tactics and confiscations continued: "There was no day without a team coming to our house to persuade us, this is how they said, to persuade, but this was no persuasion (laughter), but it was beating as well. He was arrested, and then released, as they could do nothing to him. They confiscated everything, everything, even the duvets and pillows from the house, so . . . for one week, until they gave us back one duvet and one pillow, me and my sister, we slept on mattresses filled with hay, not a proper mattress, but one filled with hay". (P)

Then, P.'s father yielded his land to the state, but did not subscribe to the CAP, despite being promised key job positions, and his children risked removal from high school, or had to pick far away cities for graduate studies, to avoid entrance admission problems. Meanwhile, the campaign stubbornly persisted: "My grand-

mother used to sit by the stove, as we did not have terracotta stove, it was an ordinary stove – she would sit by the fire and put one log after the other in the fire (laughter), until it was so hot in the room that they had to walk outside”. (P.) A disposition that children were not dependent on the income of their parents anymore, and a ministerial measure saying that there were no more *chiaburi* in Romania relaxed the situation.

T. (born 1942, village E., former driver at CAP and other state units, and independent farmer at fieldwork time) did not belong to a family of huge landowners, but of “regular” ones, who wished to follow their way. T. is more passionate about the issue of land restitution in the 1990s, while the siblings are still fighting over land division, for which collectivization is the “silent” reason.

Despite repeated refusals to join the TOZ, the GAC, and later the CAP in exchange for chairman job positions, the executors summoned T.’s parents day and night to the Council and took all their duvets and pillows until they would give in and subscribe. They confiscated their tiles, pipes, all building material and used them for building the Council, took away the stored beans from the loft, and three sows from the pig-herder, and after a while “they actually had nothing more to do to them so that they subscribe, as they had already done enough”. (T.) The private land of the family was used for consolidating the GAC, and, in exchange, they were given land in village S.: “It was maybe a state reserve, hell knows, they just moved us so that we have no possibility of working it”. (T.) Sleeping with their cow-driven cart under a pear tree at night, as the way was too long to come back home every day, the family stayed away from home for a week until they finished ploughing the poor land, in which maize hardly grew. Later, in exchange for some moonshine or money the brigade leaders of the CAP ploughed their land with two-three tractors and two years before the dismantling of the CAP, they regained their initial land.

In a similar vein, Goina (2009, 131–145) showed the reasons and incentives used by activists: the negative impact of over taxation and reallocation of land far away from the village; the positive benefits to GAC members (for example, they were promised work in the best quality fields in the area and had access to various social services). The first measure had a greater impact on middle peasants, while the second on poor and landless ones. Approval of leaving the collective was given to those who had brought little or no land to the cooperative. T.’s neighbours were envious of the family’s courage in non-subscribing but now, when looking back, subscribing could have been an easier thing to do: “It would have been better for them to subscribe, as they would not have tormented you that much, you would get back home and they would call you repeatedly at the Council, this is what they did to my parents, treated them for fools”. (T.) In a humorous manner, T., as he did not like the tractor-driving school and ran away back home from it, recalls how

he told the villagers he met on the way that he had been expelled because of his parents' non-subscription.

The campaign in archival documents

The entry petitions

The entry petitions written by villagers and stocked in the personal archive of I., the former CAP Chairman, reveal a specific rhetoric and writing patterns. Party cadres wanted subjects who seemed to consent, but they had to *produce* those subjects. Certainly, the signatures on petitions to join the GACs are not in and of themselves sociologically revealing, as they do not allow us to distinguish between villagers who signed up in public meetings and those who signed in private, or those whose signatures were obtained through coercion as opposed to lighter persuasion. The leaders insisted that the villagers must join the collectives only by their free consent (*liber consimțământ*) and this is reflected in the writing style (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 284).

Some petitions have a “telegraphic” type, and the name of the petitioner, the assets (surface of land, inventory, as well as number of working hands), and the request to join the GAC based on these assets are mentioned, together with the slogan “Long live the fight for peace / the RPR” at the end. In the “personalized” type, villagers develop the reasons for joining, based on either real or invented needs. Being part of a praised regime, the impossibility of working the individual land anymore, or faith in the economic model of the GAC are among the stated reasons. A hand-written petition, dated 5.12.1958, says: “To the GAC Drapelul Muncii (The Flagship of Labor), village U. I (name of petitioner), living in commune U., I hereby request to be subscribed to the GAC Drapelul Muncii thinking that I will be able to earn my existence and escape poverty and exploitation. I will bring to the GAC an area of 0, 80 ha arable land, out of which 0,40 ha is sowed with wheat. I have no live inventory. In the GAC, I will work alone and commit myself to respect the model statute regarding the necessary seeding plan based on the subscribed area. I hope that my request will be favourably processed”.

The campaign in PMR reports

The selected PMR documents from 1949 – an activity report, a working plan, and a field report – reveal the organisation of persuasion work, the class fight, the enlightenment of the population, and the mission of local organisations. The creation of the GAC and the campaign itself are not addressed *per se* but are embedded in the discussion on the holistic involvement of the PMR in organizing events, literacy courses, or public testimonials on life in the military service.

An activity report¹⁴² from a commune of Bihor County with a high Slovak minority gives an insight into everyday persuasion work and field activity: “We first worked over, with the Base Organization office and the agitators in the commune, the problem of expropriated estates through the agrarian reform of 1945 and through their nationalization act of March 1st, 1949 (. . .). We divided ourselves in three groups, each of us being joined by two agitators, and we worked over this problem by paying visits to the houses of poor and middle peasants”.¹⁴³ In the village with few chiaburi and a majority of poor households, the rich peasants are demonized: “Young and old, show, with a lot of hatred, the mean methods that this scoundrel (a former estate owner) used with them, in every interaction”.¹⁴⁴ In the report, people are positive about the joining prospects: “No matter what house we entered, or if we talked to villagers on the street, we were convinced of their warm welcome and the great satisfaction with which they received the act of nationalizing the last remains of estate ownership”.¹⁴⁵ In addition, sowing preparations were almost finished, the seeding plan per household was established and the ploughs, the harrows and the other tools were distributed to each home.

The problems of wood fire, the forests and the one related to the Slovaks in the commune who were repatriated in Czechoslovakia (no reason for this repatriation is stated) are mentioned. They left land, houses, livestock, tools etc., with family, or those from the village who paid more for them, and many households remaining behind are in decay. Animals and tools are estranged, and the lands, and mainly orchards, are left and are not worked. Villagers without land ask to be given these lands for work.¹⁴⁶

The other document – a working plan¹⁴⁷ for the interval July 1st – September 30, 1949 – is made up of lists with ideological and practical resolutions: “We will liven up the wall gazettes by releasing new articles; we will unmask the chiaburi through articles on the wall gazette; we will continue the course for agitators in order to raise their political level; we will support the work of ARLUS in order to propagate the achievements of the USSR; we will prepare and support harvesting, threshing and collecting; we will support the organization of cultural teams; we will work on all deviations from the proletarian morality; we will send the cultural teams in communes (7 communes) in order to enlighten the population and attract the population to the Culture Houses, by drawing them out of the influence of religious sects”.¹⁴⁸ The support of “mass organizations” – Frontul Plugarilor, U.F.D.R. (Uniunea Femeilor Democrate din România, Union of Democratic

¹⁴² DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949, f 2.

¹⁴³ Idem.

¹⁴⁴ Idem.

¹⁴⁵ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949, f 3.

¹⁴⁶ Idem.

¹⁴⁷ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949, f 12.

¹⁴⁸ Idem.

Women of Romania), the Red Cross, and U.P.M. (Uniunea Populară Maghiară, Hungarian People's Union) – in achieving this plan is mentioned.

A field report from 28 November 1949 takes the pulse of the campaign and reveals the internal struggles within the PRM. Colleagues are unmasked for passivity and lack of dynamism and “there are some comrades who do not even know the significance of the day of November 7”.¹⁴⁹ Then, the report reveals the mobilization of villagers for the celebrations of December 21 (no reference to the kind of celebration is given), as well as several areas of village life. “We worked over with the agitating comrades on the importance of cultural work in winter, as well as on the engagements of peasants for the day of December 21st. Every agitator engaged to paint the houses in the attributed sector by December 21st, and to clean and decorate them; every house will even have a red flag on this day, if possible, from cloth, if not, from cardboard. We will finish building the communal stable with voluntary work by December 21st. The culture club will have a fixed program for every day, and even the comrade agricultural agent, who is also an agitator, engaged in delivering 1–2 weekly conferences on ways of working the land and other agricultural issues. XC engaged to train women within the work of UDFR. One comrade who just returned from the army will organize reunions at the culture club with recruits-to-be and will show them life in the Army of RPR. They also engaged themselves to procure letters for comrade Stalin from the peasants. How many newspapers come to the village, how many literacy courses are held? They engage themselves to organize reading circles with the inhabitants of their sectors. There is no Red Cross in the commune and not even a first aid medicine kit”.¹⁵⁰

The number of newspaper subscriptions, literacy courses and cultural circles follows. “In the commune, there are 22 collective subscriptions to newspapers and 23 individual subscriptions. Newspapers come regularly, but the mail carriers in the villages do not pick them up regularly. There are 26 literacy courses with around 80 illiterates. These come regularly to the courses. Some illiterates live far away from the commune, on a hill, and 8 courses were organized there, run by the literate people out there, but they have hardships, as they have no oil and wood. I advised them to ask for these at the Provisory Committee. The agitators engaged to have reading circles twice a week with the inhabitants in their sector. The members of the Base Organization did not have culture circles up to now, but from now on, they fixed some, every Sunday and Wednesday night”.¹⁵¹ Finally, the report discusses the other organizations in the village: UTM (*Uniunea Tineretului Muncitor* – Union of Working Youth); Frontul Plugarilor (*Ploughmen's Front*);

¹⁴⁹ Idem.

¹⁵⁰ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949, f 13.

¹⁵¹ Idem.

and UFDR (*Uniunea Femeilor Democrate din România* – Democratic Women's Union of Romania), in terms of meeting frequency and leadership.

Chapter 8

Gendered family memories: courtship, work, empowerment

This chapter studies the identifications of women through courtship and marriage rituals as well as through everyday work in or outside the collective, followed by a discussion on consumption, nostalgia and archival representations. The narrative reconstructions of women's past reflect a standpoint on gender, and an interplay between previous social statuses (worker, housewife, etc.) and present situation (elder women, retired, or still professionally active). Life stories travel back and forth from macro-events – deportation, land grabbing – to personal ones, either painful (e.g. illness, death of a spouse) or liberating, triumphal (e.g. rewards in everyday work). Moreover, women's experience is constructed in relation to plots and scripts, which are discourses offered by society. When examining the worlds of three generations of women in the Russian countryside, Olson and Adonyeva (2012, 44) restate the broad sources that inform their narratives: values and norms from rural culture, city culture, and official state culture, and the worlds of researchers, when entering their social space. Courtship, marriage, work, consumption, nostalgia and the representation of women in archival documents are examined in this chapter. In a similar manner, former ethnographies look at changing family roles, consumption practices or forms of self-fulfilment though work during socialism (Todorova, 1994; Tóth, 2005; Penn and Massino, 2009). Lobodzinska (1995) argues that socialist industrialization and its accompanying ideology simultaneously promoted women's employment and reinforced traditional family roles, producing contradictory expectations that continued to shape women's work and family lives after socialism.

The chapter is informed by several theoretical strands on gender. First, gender is an identity form constantly reproduced through linguistic exchange and social practice and based on socially and culturally constructed ideas of differences between men and women. The reproduction of these differences in the institutionalized practices of society is accompanied by power and inequality (Gal & Kligman 2000, 9–12). Second, gender and nation exist in part as an aspect of subjective experience that orients people in specific, distinctive ways, according to the nationness and gender attributed to or adopted by them. This subjectivity is, in turn, the

joint product of prevailing cultural understandings and people's social situations (Verdery 1996, 14). Third, in the context of major social and political transformations, women are a downplayed, undermined, or a risky category. For historian Michelle Perrot (1998) the specificity of women's memory stems from the fact that women are invisible in archives, notably public archives. Women's presence faintly appears through personal diaries seldom preserved, legal columns, or in all so often stereotyped newspaper articles (Vinel 2010, 116).

Moreover, Leydersdorff et al. (1994) argue that memory is never a neutral repository of the past but is deeply structured by gendered experiences, silences, and power relations. They show that women and men recall, narrate, and transmit memories in ways shaped by unequal access to public space, differing social expectations, and the historically gendered division between private and public life. Oral history, they emphasize, reveals how gender influences not only what is remembered but how it is remembered – highlighting the affective, relational, and embodied dimensions of memory work. At the same time, gendered memories expose the tensions between dominant historical narratives and personal or collective life stories, allowing scholars to see how marginalized voices negotiate identity, agency, and belonging. Ultimately, gender is positioned as both an analytic lens and a constitutive force in memory practices, demonstrating that understanding the past requires attending to the gendered ways in which individuals and communities construct meaning, continuity, and historical consciousness.

All narrators are retired and were employed in various units of the CAP (livestock unit, the “big” agriculture, gardening, egg production unit etc.), at the IAS (such as the GOSTAT) or in the cooperative services (baking, cooking, selling, etc.). Work started when the collective was established, as soon as childcare was organized within the family or when the child was old enough to be taken to the fields as well, walking or in a basket. The husbands remaining in the village worked at the SMT (Machine Tractor Station) as drivers, loaders, carriers, or in the CAP administration and leadership, and others commuted for service or construction jobs. In the first phase of the CAP existence, families were organized so that one spouse was a waged worker and the other was “going” to the CAP, with a pay based on the amount of work (the types of work at the CAP are outlined in the section on everyday work below). During the glorious years of the late 1980s when the CAP in U. merged with the one in the neighbouring village, women worked in several units often in parallel. When the husband earned enough from service or construction jobs, women raised children and took care of the house and garden.

Courtship and marriage

Courtship and marriage rituals are rituals at the coming of age, when, as in any ritual, one gives up an ordinary sense of freedom and intentionality (Humphrey &

Laidlaw 1994, 64–70). In the liminal phase of a ritual, the person undergoing it is passive, humble, obedient, and accepts arbitrary punishment without complaint. At the same time, rituals are a framed discourse in which one temporarily gives up agency to perform the ritualized act (Turner, 1969). Against these theoretical models, the courtship rituals in the form of agency and intergenerational clashes in the choices for partners will be examined, as well as their embeddedness in larger issues related to changing inheritance norms and postwar hardships.

Ethnographies on Eastern and Central European socialist societies (e.g. Pine, 2003, on socialist rural Poland) reveal that, to counteract the fragmentation of partible inheritance, villagers perpetually attempted to circumvent the rule and consolidate their holdings by marriage strategies. Marriage was traditionally arranged by parents and senior kin and was viewed primarily as an economic and practical union. The bride's trousseau had to include linens, quilts and pillows, clothing, kitchen ware, and ideally a bed. Both the bride and the groom were expected to bring land to the marriage, which should include a suitable house plot. Usually, the house plot comes from one family, while the other supplies the necessary building materials. Narrators undergo forms of self-discovery, which, at the time of the events, also involved experiencing crisis. In some cases, women find the definition of their selfhood in what amounts to a kind of rebellion (Olson & Adonyeva 2012, 122). Women maintain or enhance kinship relations, give or accept gifts, rely on others, temporarily allow others to decide or lead in their lives, and seek external approval, advice or support.

F.'s marriage happened with a stealing of the bride and a "secret" wedding party. There was a rumour among the young lads saying that the beautiful daughters of I. were back from deportation. Her husband, a good bet owning a threshing machine, chose the young F. wishing to "grow" her, and not her sister, who was older and shrewder. After meeting at several *șezătoare* (evening meetings where village women demonstrated their craft of weaving and needlework) the couple ran away at the end of a party at the Culture House, animated by brass bands of Gypsy violin players. At the end of the party, when morning fell, F.'s suitor enabled the runaway of the couple: "He gave him (the musician) 25 lei so that he keeps on singing until the sun goes down and he could steal me". (F.) Then, the couple walked on a back street up to the garden of the groom's sister where a sleigh with four attached horses waited on them to take them to the groom's home village. Finally, the groom went back to take the Godparents to the wedding party secretly prepared in his home: "And we went to M. (the groom's village) driven by four horses. When we arrived there, I did not know about anything: *sarmale*,¹⁵² preparation, as for a wedding. My mother did not know that I would get married and asked the neighbour who took me to the party where I was (. . .) And then my mother cried, and thought of how all happened, as my sister was not there, to stop

¹⁵² Cabbage rolls filled with rice and buckwheat, part of traditional wedding meals.

me from going away. (...) And I prepared some clothes myself. (...) He told me to prepare some clothes and place them in that house, in a hidden spot (...), so that he could be sure of my decision. And that night, there was the wedding party, they sang, they shouted, went outside”. (F)

The wedding narrative is dotted with the one on the braiding of the bride’s hair, a midnight ritual when the female relatives “covered the bride” or attached her hair and hid it under a scarf, with a lamenting song. “At that time there was a beautifully carved piece of wood for making a chignon. The hair was drawn into that piece of wood and knitted. Then they put me in the middle of the room, and they all started singing so loud that the tiles moved. And I started to cry like hell. And I thought, ‘no worries, I will walk home in the morning. I am going to run away’. And I told my husband, ‘I, I am going home with those guests who are leaving the wedding. How could you do that and fool me?’” (F.)

A few days later, when F.’s husband visited her mother, he was received with anger and curses, as F.’s unannounced marriage was a sign of disregarding her approval. After a prophetic dream in which the mother held a piece of meat in the garden, she went to see her daughter at her new place, bringing sponge cake, donuts, food, in a small bundle. Crying and jumping in her mother’s arms, F. returned to live with her husband forever. This story reveals the transgressive role of the bride in ritual terms, and the conflicting loyalties she lived.

For A., the real marriage lasting for a lifetime is preceded by one against her will, as her parents “wanted a bigger fortune. Her unwanted husband had no parents, and thus A.’s parents thought he had a bigger fortune”. (E.) While the temporary marriage was formal, the courting of the loved one continued with a complot set up by A.’s best friend, who oversaw the exchange of letters between him and A. and later planned the runaway of A. to him. A.’s assets – a hard-working woman ploughing the land with her father while her loved one was in the army, and her kind parents who would give their soul for her – are the reasons that the matchmakers, and the future Godparents brought up in favour of their union. When genuine love finally emerged, the wedding ceremony itself mattered little – two friends were brought home as witnesses, some lard, bread, and onion were set out, and the meal was shared together.

F., the fifth child of her family, having four brothers, insists on the stubbornness of her choice: “I told my dad, that if he would not let me marry, if he would not let me have the wedding, or would not let me marry this one, I would never marry. (...) This, I can recall. But other things, no”. (F.) As an only daughter, F.’s parents loved her a lot and made all her wishes come true. E. got married in 1949, when her aunt and uncle were deported, and her parents thought that, after a four-year relationship, they should get married, as, in case they were displaced, they would be displaced together. “Luckily they did not take us anymore, and my mother’s brothers came, and my father’s sisters, only here in the family we gave

a meal and went to the Village Council and made the union . . . they did not dress me up as a bride, as back then, you would not do the wedding dressed in white dresses and fix your hair in tails as girls do now”. (E.) I. recalls the ritual of faith (*credința*), an engagement, a promise, or a test, in which the bride and the groom gave themselves the deadline of maximum twenty-one days until planning their wedding.

In a similar manner, Olson and Adonyeva (2012, 100) talk about ideal grooms and brides in the stories of women born in the 1920s and 1930s in rural Russia. A girl had to be a good worker, from a rich family, from a good *rod*, modest, pretty and not “fast”. For later generations, the list of desirable qualities also includes self-assertiveness. In contrast, boys should possess skills (dancing or playing an instrument), be brave, gang leaders, and good fighters. Also, the bride had been creating her dowry under her mother’s tutelage for some time (since age 8 or so); now she must embroider the shirts and the towels that will be given to the members of the groom’s family. Then, wedding rituals in general mark two different transitions, each centred on the bride, symbolizing the horizontal movement of families toward one another, and the vertical movement of the bride from the role of daughter to the role of wife (Olson & Adonyeva 2012, 96).

Everyday work: between hard beginnings and adjustment strategies

Ethnography from the last three decades on women’s work in socialist Eastern Europe reveals that the combination of work and family was natural, and a way of fulfilling multiple roles, rather than a “double burden”. In a study of rural Bulgaria, the “double burden” is viewed as part of a cultural tradition deeply embedded in rural life, where women did carry out this double function and where an alternative viable role model was, for all practical purposes, non-existent. At the same time, the double burden was the result of men’s participation in domestic duties (Todorova 1994, 75). On the other hand, in the ethnography on the industrial workers from the Jiu Valley, Romania, in the late 1970s, women wield power in household and village, in part because of their exclusion from the upper echelons of factories and agricultural cooperatives. At the same time, while all villagers hope for economic prosperity, men and women often have different ideas about both how to achieve prosperity and which commodity symbols best reflect their achievements (Kideckel 1993, 76).

The inter-relationship between gender and national identity during socialism and ways in which this interrelationship affects the dismantling of authoritarian structures and of paternalism as a system, changing gender relations, and representations of national myths, as well as the de-eroticization of national sentiment informed the work of Verdery (1996). At the same time, the drive to bring women into wage labour was fundamental for the idea of the socialist body politic and for socialist modernity, including in the rural zone (Lampland, 1990, 1995). More-

over, with the founding of CAPs and IASs in communist rural Romania, the feminization of agriculture emerges, and the changing position of “peasant women” can be examined under three headings: (a) the woman’s economic role as a family provider and labour resource; (b) her status as wife; (c) her role and influence as mother. Unlike before, there is an increasing occupational differentiation during the work process and spatial separation during the day between the husband and the wife (Cernea, 1978). Finally, consumption (e.g. Sitar, 2106; Berdahl, 1999b), work (e.g. Vodopivec, 2010) or controlled reproduction (e.g. Kligman, 1998) are common topics informing women’s lives under socialism. Additionally, women are portrayed as one of the principal risk groups of postsocialist transformations, together with Roma or elders (Einhorn, 1993; Pasca Harsanyi, 1995; Łobodzińska, 1995).

How are women’s everyday lives changed and challenged by the founding of the collective thought to be the focus of almost every aspect of the social existence of its employees (Clarke 1999, 57)? After the initial years, paired with hard work and disrupted childcare and family life, later the collective became a source for investment and innovation. The initial working years relate to manual tasks – digging, harvesting, piling corn and wheat etc. – termed as work outside, in the “big” agriculture, usually on one’s former land. Work was measured in norms, or assignments such as rows of corn to be picked, rows to be dug or delimited with sticks, and payment was based on the number of accomplished assignments. At the end of the harvest, norms were paid, in money and in kind. Those working at the livestock farm had monthly pay. Generally, narrators refer to work at the CAP as going “to the days”, “to norms”, or to the CAP, but not to work. The early working years are also paired with the reconciliation of working time with family life and motherhood. When the child was three years old, the mother started taking the child to the fields, “on the back, in the basket”. Children dug the ends of the rows, filled the sacks or earth pots with wheat grains, or tore out flax. Wheat was cut with scythes, and put into bunches, bales or crosses. Women cut the corn stems and men tied them together.

Work teams were organized in brigades, based on street numbers, and a whole brigade went together to the fields, on foot, by cart, by bike, or by collective transportation vehicles, working from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., when the commuting bus arrived. Or the cart drivers took women to the fields and in the evening, they walked back themselves, crossing the river in a shortcut in summer. Brigades were assigned to specific village areas, as in T., where “brigade one” worked on one riverbank, “brigade two” on the other, and “brigade three”, from the main road up to a neighbouring village. Brigade leaders are pictured in terms of concessions, accommodation, and complicity with the villagers. When they took work seriously and gathered the highest number of points, workers were encouraged not to work as much, or others dug superficially and got higher pay than those who worked

more. Arable lands are recalled with their pre-collectivist names, related to their remoteness from the village. The pear and cherry trees planted in the middle of the fields were a shelter from the sun during lunch breaks or naps.

Starting with the early 1980s, the agricultural domains of the CAP in U. diversified, and work in solariums, gardening units, basket knitting units, sowing lots and overall agricultural innovation prevailed. Workers were given a few acres of land termed as portions (*porții*) for digging or for picking vegetables, in various areas, not on one's former land like before. Brigades were abolished, workers were grouped in teams and work was measured individually, becoming financially worthier. With the earnings from CAP and the money from products cultivated on the house plot, villagers renovated their homes and supported their children's education. Some admit that they worked at the CAP just to be able to have a house plot and money for the retirement pension. During this period, villagers consistently represented the house, the agricultural division of labour and the alternative domestic rituals, as structures in opposition to, and more important than, those of the state (Pine 1996, 443). Additionally, a sense of acceptance is present in the life story: if one was healthy, one went to work.

With the expansion of the collective, women did parallel jobs – cook at the farm canteen, baker and milkmaid; chicken unit employee and digger; vendor and caretaker at the nursery – which brought them emancipation and liberation from the routine of everyday life. Travelling throughout the country for leisure trips offered by the CAP or for selling the paprika cultivated on the house plot offered a chance for independence and autonomy. As women milked the cows and cleaned the stables in the morning and in the evening, there was time for other jobs in the time left. When V. cooked at the canteen of the CAP and worked at the chicken unit and bakery, her husband T. was at the livestock unit as well, dug portions, and mended houses, before turning into a tractor driver. At the livestock unit, in the late 1980, the ratio of electricity is recalled in terms of a specific atmosphere: “We had lamps when the electricity was cut. We had lanterns or we lit up those lamps and milked the cows in the darkness, like ghosts”. (T.) Overall, the gender roles were redefined in the family, as it was T. who stayed at home taking care of the girls while V. took advantage of the trips paid for by the collective and travelled throughout the country.

This norm or portion-based workstyle brought up clashes between state power and the constitution of self, as people had no control over their private time. E. was appointed by her daughter's teacher for a school-related activity on the Sunday when her first communion was planned. Elementary school teachers were compelled to organize matinées with children at church service hours. Bakery employees were called out during the summer to work on Saturday and Sunday as well, to help those at the CAP to dig, or sweep the dirt, or the hay. In the summer campaign months, gardening, knitting or cooking, are squeezed before

or after the working hours.¹⁵³ Thus, personal time is seized, and people's bodies are compelled into activities. In another ethnography, the priest was obliged by the authorities to begin the liturgy sooner, so that women can go to the farm to plant onions (Şişeştean, 2012). Required political meetings in the evening mobilized the farm leaders at work as well. Appointing people to work on Sundays was a well-orchestrated move as it reduced the time spent on visits and other activities. Overall, the Romanian state seized time from the purposes that many Romanians wanted to pursue, leading to an etatization of time, or a way of seizing time through rituals, calendar, decrees, curfews, workday schedules. In the socialist system, which accumulated not profits but means of production, "time wasted" did not have the same significance (Verdery 1996, 25). Moreover, the author points at the seizing of time during the 1980s, impacted by lay political decisions related to the external debt payment: village women could not do the laundry when they wanted as electricity was cut etc. Time spent waiting in lines was not a cost to the socialist state (Verdery 1996, 39–40).

Additionally, ethnic Romanians of Orthodox confession and ethnic Hungarians, either Roman Catholic or Reformed Protestants, had tacit understandings among themselves about skipping work on religious holidays. In T., ethnic Romanians and Hungarians skipped each other's work on Easter and Pentecost when these fell at different dates. Overall, holidays were dismissed by the state as on Christmas Eve, people were still selecting corn or on the second day of Pentecost they sheared the sheep. Patriotic holidays such as Harvest Day¹⁵⁴, August 23rd¹⁵⁵ or May 1st made no sense for narrators who used that time for catching up with housework, instead of going to the parties provided by the employer. Moreover, work at the CAP was dependent on the availability of resources (e.g. fuel, storage capacities) and was disconnected from a natural work rhythm dictated by the weather. For example, if tractors received no fuel allotment, there might be no planting until well into November or June.

This ethnography meets the findings of Malysheva and Bertaux (1996, 38–39), who, in their work on the social experiences of a countrywoman in Soviet Russia claim that women ended up thinking about themselves through the universalistic, gender-blind categories of the official discourse. The presence of women in jobs related to construction work and steel work proves that socialism abolished the gender division of labour. At the same time, echoing Engelking's (2014) insights into Belarusian *kolkhozniki*, my findings indicate that women's adaptation strate-

¹⁵³ Hershatler (2004) speaks about a hidden domestic time, versus a public working time. For women, the visible productive labour performed on campaign time was inextricable from the invisible productive and reproductive labour performed in the household, in a temporality that had no longer had a language.

¹⁵⁴ The Harvest Day, instituted in 1966, is a celebration taking place at the end of October, marking the end of harvesting.

¹⁵⁵ 23 august 1944 is the day when Romania changed its military alliance.

gies to work emerge within a community that, although initially bound by fear, gradually reintegrates its aims and attitudes around a “peasant ethos” grounded in everyday solidarity.

Itinerant work

After the merger of the CAPs, and the building of a canteen, of new stables, and with the introduction of innovative cultures, itinerant workers from non-collectivized countryside in lowland and in peripheral areas, came to U. to work on the summer campaigns. *Moți*, with violins, or people from Bistrița came with their own carts and horses and oversaw maize transportation.¹⁵⁶ The CAP arranged for them to sleep in dormitories at the Culture House. How did the Party extract loyalty from the villagers here, even if they were not “captives” in the same way as those who were collectivized? Marginal communities, while left to their own devices, were similarly the victims of the Party’s neglect. To survive, their residents had to migrate, whether permanently or seasonally (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 367).

After working seasonally in CAPs throughout the country, seven families of in-migrants settled in U. in the 1990s and 2000s, labelled by the natives as *maramureșeni*, as they come from a Maramureș hilly countryside area, where, because of the small amount of arable land no collectives were founded. Two of these families are related. Maria is the eldest of the *maramureșeni*, coming from the village of Bârsana, settling in U. as there was plenty of unworked land. She is Pentecostal, and after moving to U. she attended the Baptist church, as there is no Pentecostal church in the village. In the 1970s and the 1980s, families of two generations travelled together throughout the country to find job opportunities at farms, wherever there was a demand for work, mostly at the livestock units in Constanța, Arad or Timișoara, staying for 2–3 years in one place. Five families from the same village worked at the same stable, being accommodated in an empty stable. In addition to the pay, they received a small portion (piece of land for individual cultivation) from the collective. Taking wagons of wheat and corn home and investing in houses are the main gains of itinerant work. Culinary differences e.g. ways of smoking the sausages and eating more polenta and cheese than bread come up. M. has no retirement pension based on all the working time, as she had no formal contracts, just indexed days for which she did not have a chance to gather proof. The daughters themselves work abroad, and they all have wealthy houses and fortune. Mihăilescu (2011) showed how people who had created networks of internal migration while looking for physically harder work (forest-related, scything, on building sites), but were well paid, paradoxically became richer than their co-

¹⁵⁶ The *moți* form a mountain community based in the Apuseni Mountains. Due to the ceramic and textile industry that they engage in, they travelled throughout the country in carts with sleeping and carriage space, to sell their products.

villagers and started investing in their households. After the fall of communism and while profiting from their migration experience, villagers of Maramureş were the first who went, in an organized manner, to work abroad, and established the so-labelled “proud villages”, such as Certeze, Negreşti-Oaş or Borşa, with sizeable homes financed with migration remittances.

Another in-migrant family moved to U. in the early 2000s due to the easy access to water, as in their home village they carried the water for half a kilometre by hand, or with the oxen, to their house up on a hill. Besides, their “soul son” (e.g. an unofficially adopted nephew or neighbour) had moved to the city and they had no more help in the household. Up to the early 1990s, they followed the same nationwide pattern of work mobility, moving between GOSTATs and CAPs across the country according to seasonal cycles: hay piling in summer and corn harvesting in autumn. Digging and working at the livestock unit were easy to find. During their temporary work missions throughout the country, their sleeping place was at the bottom of the stables. With the money earned they bought land in the home village. No one ever made a work contract for them, the days were counted, and they were probably not enough for a pension, and I. believes that you spend more money on travelling to obtain those papers than the pension you would get for them. After moving to U., I. and her husband did digging or harvesting work as daily labourers and cultivated paprika as well. Now they own six pigs, two cows and a mare with a colt.

The ambivalence of work: between worth and liberation

Regardless of the working ways – norm or salary based – work at the CAP is paired with peculiar aspects, provision of goods in addition to the pay, worthlessness, or empowerment.

First, work at the collective is associated with a lack of choice, work and stealing went hand in hand, and after working day in day out, people came back home “with the hen in the bag. That is what people lived out of. This is how people made fortunes, and houses and everything. If there was a collective now, they would do the same”. (F.) Work at the chicken breeding unit is not only recalled in terms of routine, but also of peculiar aspects: “The eggs were of two kinds: those with two yolks, no one wanted them”. (F.); we threw them on the walls, in the stables (G., son of F.); “the engineer said that we don’t need these eggs, you go and sell them . . . why sell them, we made noodles out of them and ate them”. (F.) Sending local products to hierarchical superiors in Bucharest is also recalled: “On Saturday, they used to bring here 20 hens. They brought 3–4 women here at our house, they prepared the hens and sent them to Bucharest, you know. A car took them to the airport in Oradea, at 5 they were put on the plane and at 7 they were in their homes. They sent them to those gentlemen, to have favours; you know how

it is . . . and pigs, and calf, and all that. The president used to send them; he had Ceaușescu's personal number; he was a smart guy". (F.)

Second, work at the CAP is paired with a lack of trust, as women doubted that they would get a pension based on indexed norms and portions.¹⁵⁷ Payment was weak, therefore people tried to have the maximum number of norms on the graphs, and the graph was manipulated by brigade leaders who put down norms for people not having worked a single day in the CAP and who now have a pension based on them. The payment in kind was worthier than the one in money. On the other hand, the CAP remained a total social institution that encompassed a whole range of political, cultural, and economic relations, including a model of power relations, nominally egalitarian but in fact hierarchically stratified (Trevisani, 2008). It provided bread coupons (if you did not work on your portions, the farm manager did not stamp your coupon), raw materials (cereals, flour), as payment in kind, housing for people moving into the village for work, or leisure programs: "If you went to the collective you got everything from there . . . you got bills for the bread, if you didn't go to work, you didn't get anything. You did not have the stamp on your bill. No tomatoes, no flour. (. . .) They gave you 20 kilos of flour if you went to work. (. . .) You left the house empty here and had to go to work to have food. I have to say that the one who did not work lived like the one who worked because afterwards, I saw: the hardworking people, you would see who they were, and you would see who the lazy ones were as well. (. . .) Now it's the other way round". (F.)

Third, with two incomes in the house – 2 Lei per working day, one kilo of wheat and one of maize, plus the 2000 Lei monthly pay earned in the roads building industry – the family of S. and P. could hardly make ends meet. To have a larger garden plot, P. got a portion at the CAP as well: at 5 pm, back from work-related commuting, he went to carry hay bales or load corn, working on Sundays as well. Also, he helped his wife finish the digging day by making hay bales. For the house plot, the family rented the horse-driven cart from the collective to sow and plough. Work-related recollections are paired with worthlessness and there is no boundary between the socialist and the postsocialist years. In 1990, at the dismantling of the CAP, S. worked at a basket weaving unit for five years, which were considered in her retirement plan like employment at the CAP. Like before, payment was based on the amount of work, men made the handles and women the basket itself, and for weaving one basket bottom, you could afford a kilo of sugar. Even when planting more corn, barley and clover to raise their livestock, money was never enough. "You know how women were dressed back then? With a single skirt. In working days, they turned it on the back, and on Sundays, they turned it on the good side and went to church". (S.)

¹⁵⁷ In the sub-chapter "from persons to subjects", Kligman and Verdery (2011, 381) reach a similar conclusion, that terms such as "norms" made no sense to the peasants.

Fourth, for E., the collective brought empowerment and worthiness after the initial suffering from land loss and from physically hard work, continuous throughout the seasons: “Winter came, summer came, and found us on the fields, and I would go at the end of the bridle, shod with sandals (*opincute*) as we had no means and no place to buy shoes from . . . I had a pair from who knows how many years . . . and I took care of them, to wear them in church . . . I would go shod in small sandals, and with hemp protection, they would keep dry only until I got down from the cart, as I would step on dew they would soak”. (E.) In the late CAP years, when E.’s husband was a brigade leader at the livestock unit, and supervisor of wheat harvest stocking, work became worthier. At that time, with the fusion of CAPs, people began working in an industrial style; innovative crops – such as “elite tomatoes”, coriander, and lupine – were introduced, and a sowing lot was set up. A sense of togetherness, laughter and mutual help was part of everyday work. People got good payments in kind: maize and wheat, as there was plenty.

Then, E. maximized the use of the house plot and secured fifteen additional acres in the name of one elder in the family, on which paprika was cultivated. Breeding and selling livestock – piglets, lambs, and geese – were women’s affairs, while husbands were busy with service or administrative jobs. As the market was good, every year they got the value of one set of furniture from selling paprika. E.’s family applied the innovative trends from the collective on the house plot, for example by planting sorghum and making brooms. In parallel, E. proudly mentioned her participation in the medical group of the village. The narrative on work, youth and affordability can quickly slide into one on today’s social realities and is drowned in nostalgia.

Work preferences, magnified scales, and stealing

Work preferences and seasonality are described in sensorial terms and body pains. C. liked best the work in the hothouse which started in February-March, with monthly pay until September-October. She did not like to harvest corn, because of the long, endless lines. May was also a good month, when wheat was sown, and the sheep were sorted out. The best time for picking green peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, and cabbage was rainy or fresh weather. As herbicide was used against Colorado beetles, workers could not enter the hothouse and received milk as an antidote. When tomatoes were reddish, with no growth solution used, they were picked and exported, and there were so many of them, unlike today, when we import them from Spain. Sensory memories of physically demanding labour – carrying wheat down from the loft in baskets and hauling it back again – as well as of harsh weather conditions (the heat in the hothouse was so intense that one could barely endure it) dominate, with manual tasks such as cutting stems, tying them, and gathering corn are recalled as the most exhausting. Today, the back hurts from carrying so many cases, and the feet hurt from so much digging.

With old age, C. chose to work in places closer to her home, and the narrative slides into nostalgia for youth when she could work. And the story repeats itself, with C.'s granddaughter picking strawberries in England and complaining about the heat in the hothouse.

Piles, buildings, crops, rows, storage houses are described in magnified scales. Endless rows of carts ridden by huge horses bring the corn and wheat back from the fields late at night. The corn storage pillars are so high that one can hardly throw the corn in. Plentiful parties with dances, live music, and slaughtered pigs and calves are organized by the collective. The beet roots were "all piled along the road edges, from the train station up to the road leading to the forest" (F.) and in the hothouse, the portions of egg plants, tomatoes, green peppers, cabbage, and huge cauliflower are endless. After the two CAPs merged, "there was a canteen, then they made stables, new stables, all full . . . there were thousands of chickens here. (. . . .) There was so much wheat there, as you had no place to put it. They were carrying it to send it to the reception base in T., and at the complex in P., and everywhere they had a contract. The wheat never finished". (T.) The village was full of people, running to work in the morning, or the kindergarten was full of kids lighting big fires in the collective yard when making feasts. Huge quantities of gas and fertilizers remained unused, so people took what they needed from the surplus. Waste was also huge, and the presumably ill or old animals, approved by the vet to be liquidated, were used for selling their meat.

The recollection of everyday work and of stealing with pockets, briefcases, or cars go hand in hand. Former leaders did not register the whole harvest and sold it. At GOSTAT, some privileged employees could sell suckling pigs in markets in or outside the county. Overall, people took things as they were about their work: "When I worked on the tractor, it was autumn by the time of the corn harvest, and we would plough at night as well . . . then I had a larger briefcase, I filled it with corn, to be able to fatten a pig . . . not only me, but everyone did that". (S.) Taking corn, vegetables or milk is also encouraged by the supervisors themselves, as "one should live from where one works". When there is too much manure and fertilizer scattered on the fields around the CAP, stealing goes by default. Stealing is also explained as a form of preventing waste, for example, by not leaving the unpicked corn in the fields, also feeling embarrassed at the idea of being caught.

Stealing was prevented by random controls of "activists", searching workers in the evening at key points in the village. "We were working in that hut (by the SMT), and women came back from the harvest. And they were all carrying corn in their armpit, everyone took what they could take . . . the activist was staying by our hut and women came back through that pasture . . . how could I let them know that this one would catch them, and put them into jail . . . I took a stick in my hand and make signs that that guy was there (. . . .) they understood and each left the corn down . . . the activist was dumb, as if he had noticed something, he would

have gone behind them and seen the corn, but he didn't. And then, when they reached him – it is like seeing him now – he says, 'wait, stop (...)'. They were dressed in thicker clothes, as they had gone to work early in the morning, in cool weather... 'let's see what you have here... what should we have, the clothes we are wearing – but are we thieves, or what do you want with us?' They welcomed that one so well". (S.) Those who took chicken home from the chicken breeding unit were checked upon and fined. Others ground the corn in the field and put it in jars, or piled it and hid it on the riverside, ending up covered in snow. Stealing also meant passing over resources like meat, to which workers at the GOSTAT had access. The dismantling of the CAP is like a fallen Babylon, when everything from crops to buildings was grabbed with the belief that "there will not be one stone left upon another that will not be thrown down".¹⁵⁸

As indicated, only theft from private property was seen as reprehensible, taking someone else's goods, someone made of flesh and blood, not from an abstract and impersonal entity such as the state (Verdery 1996, 25). Others show that, in the late 1980s, peasants used stealing (appropriation of what one was entitled to, after the given effort), sabotage (people were intentionally late with the harvest, so that they could take corn home), and neglect (no one cared about the CAP's fortunes, but about their own fate) in their everyday work (Șișeștean, 2012).

Standing apart

Most narrators admit having gone to the CAP to be able to have a garden, to grow cereals and raise some poultry, and to have a retirement pension. Others dismiss work at the CAP and rather identify with a passion such as knitting, or workplace empowerment, or used the CAP as a springboard for a future career.

Standing apart and giving up employment at the CAP soon after its founding and engaging in a tolerated form of entrepreneurship is one dismissing strategy. For F. and her husband, the temporary work at the CAP was a compromise until finding an entrepreneurship opportunity: truck driving and grinding at their previously owned mill, while they were the ones who initiated the paprika cultivation in U. E., F's daughter, reveals the worthlessness of work at the collective: "There were some poor norms, and at the end of the year they did not get more than 400 kilos of wheat or 300 of corn, and that was it. And they got 400 lei for the norms from the whole year. 400 lei was very little". (E) Getting annoyed by the idea of working at the CAP, F.'s husband attended the driving school in Oradea and worked as a truck driver at IRTA. After his death in 1974, F. attended the driving school as well, bought an IMS and gave rides to village women to the market, to sell geese, chicken or corn, paprika, and whatever they grew on their house plot. At the same time, they ground paprika and flour in their previous mill, as well as food for the animals and flour for the whole village. After her husband died,

¹⁵⁸ Bible, Mark 13: 2.

F. kept on grinding a lot in the mill by herself: “People from other villages used to come, there were full of carts waiting in line to grind their paprika. And on Sundays we used to grind for Adventists”. (F) And she used to cook for them, as you could not keep people waiting outside in winter. At the same time, it was a privilege to find some work in winter as then, the protégés of the president could divide the corn, based on its size and quality. In contrast to the dismissal of the CAP work, transport, medical services and school equipment were praised.

For Z., work at the CAP came after the job as an assistant kindergarten educator paid no more, and she rather identifies with the knitting skill. They went by car when the portion was far, with a slice of bread at hand, and were too tired to eat when coming back home. In the fields, they drank hot water the whole day. In parallel, she did hand knitting work, in the light of an oil lamp, after whitening the thread. From her income, she could buy herself shoes, a dress, a watch, or a new oven in the house. On the loom, she knitted carpets and bed covers. They cultivated hemp and put it in the water, and made skirts, dresses, sacks and towels that “now, no one wants, now we sell them to our neighbours, the Gypsies”. (Z.) Her husband was a tinker and pipe maker, and they had to get a portion at the collective just to have the garden plot.

Anthropologists have frequently argued that under socialism, the private domestic world of intimate, face-to-face relations, was the site of resistance to the state and the centre of moral economy. The latter consists of “solidarity”, “alternative” or “informal” practices that seem to emerge in the cracks of the market.¹⁵⁹ In this sense, moral economy is synonymous with an organized field of values, where economic practice appears “embedded” in moral obligations and social norms. At the same time, Abu-Lughod (1990, 42–43) claims that we have the tendency to romanticize resistance, to read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of power systems and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated. In her work on the changing situation of women in a Bedouin community in Egypt’s Western Desert in terms of marital relations or consumption practices, the author claims that we should understand resistance as a diagnostic of power.

But the morality and obligation of kinship tend to emphasize collective good; it was often only in their work outside the domestic domain that women, particularly, were able to realize a sense of autonomy. As skilled weavers and seamstresses, they were able to bring earnings into the household, which fulfilled their obligations as mothers and wives. They were also able to define themselves positively, as individuals, in terms of their work (Pine 2002, 103). Additionally, women defined themselves in terms of a passion. As M.’s husband, a cooperative president and employer for thirteen years at the hothouses selection unit in Oradea,

¹⁵⁹ For a revisitation of the concept since the seminal works of Thompson and Scott, tracing the origins of the concept, see Fassin (2009).

had an income which sufficed for the whole family, M., in parallel with her kindergarten help job, could pursue her inherited passion for knitting. Her mother used to take the entangled threads thrown away at a textile factory, in great quantities, in sacks, and disentangle and knit them on the loom to make trousers, pillow covers, all kinds of things. M. recalls how the national folk costume that she knitted for her daughter was seized for an exhibition showing its beauty and accurate needlework, and the jealousy of her husband about her singing performances and encounters with Party activists. In her turn, M. identifies with her project management work on a construction site, which involved laborious office and fieldwork, ways of dealing with drunkards or flirtatious men, accounting responsibility in a men's world, and helpfulness with paperwork for an illiterate Roma employee. This situation matches those described by Kligman and Verdery (2011, 197) in relation to female cadres. Traditional paths of male bonding – particularly those built on drinking and socializing – were closed to them, and women were especially vulnerable to rumours and physical threats. At the same time, (Boneva 2010, 191) shows that social solidarity, including mutual help between peasants as well as helping the poor and the orphans, was a significant part of village daily life, and it affected the peasants' attitude.

P. worked at the CAP to save money for the educational school she aimed to attend. The CAP was treating the young employees with disdain, compared to the ones having worked there for a longer time. Doing the cashier's job (delivering the payments to the employees) in a day was worth only 60 points (100 points made up a norm), and the cashier and the one bringing the chicken to the market got one norm and a half. Thus, financially, it was always worthless: when working at the childcare centre of the CAP, P. also washed bedclothes and prepared meals for the children, and got less points than the cook, who got one norm and a half. "Had I not been taken for a fool, I might have remained at the collective forever, but when seeing that there was no future, I needed an exit from there... and then I went for a hearing (...)" (P.) In order to pay one hotel night during her educational program, P. had to work for ten days at the collective, and for paying for the schoolbooks, she picked mushrooms from the woods and sold them. P. defends at various times her membership in the Party: as an UTC and later Party member, she is proud of it, as "this is what I believed, that it was the Party of the poor ones and of the ones who wanted to work". (P.) She still has the membership card, the tiny red notebook, reversing the myth of other former members burning this card.

Consumption and affordability

This section speaks about the role of consumer goods in building the identities of female workers. Different goods and artifacts acquired by women workers – a plot of land outside the city, a rural house, a Dacia or kitchen furniture – played symbolic roles. Women attempted throughout their life to maximize what they

could gain from their physical labour but at the same time, in their life history, a kind of work ethic is present. The workplace was key to establishing social networks, shaping family life, and fostering local community integration.

Previous work reveals that the socialist system of consumption was based on satisfying people's basic needs rather than their every consumption desire (Verdery 1996, 26–29). The inability to satisfy these desires turned consumption into a political act as people rioted against increasing food prices in the Soviet Union or created a second economy based on prestige goods like Western clothes and music (cf. Pine 2002a; Yurchak 2006). At the same time, capitalism creates specific desires and specific goods to satisfy them, while socialism creates a more general desire for goods that cannot be fulfilled (Borneman 1990, 35). In early postsocialist years, those who cannot participate in the new forms of consumption, rejecting consumerism and retreating to household-based production and consumption practices is a politicized act, similarly to how participating consumption was political under socialism (Pine 2002).

In terms of consumption habits, the 1970s are associated with affordable goods and the possibility of sustaining children's education away from home, and the 1980s, with the shortages related to the state's policy of rationalization. In the 1970s, the purchase of high value goods, investments in the house, or supporting children's education are personal triumphs over sacrifice and scarcity, as in the postwar years, women wove clothes in the loom and made trousers out of wool and sack. "When I got married, I had no place to buy myself a scarf. And when washing it, all the colours went off (. . .). And the dress, now they gave one dress to one buyer, then to another, this is how it was, the evil did not end and will never end". (E.)

In the 1980s, everyday food consumption was based on negotiations and adjustments. Viewing the lack of sufficient white bread at the CAP bakery, people brought 3–4 kilos of flour and put their name on the "order" to have their bread baked, in a practice called exchange. People with no bread oven at home did this flour exchange to eat some white bread as well. As there was not much yeast on the market either, the bakers shared it for people to bake their bread at home. Consumption at weddings highlights wealthier villages where cabbage rolls, chicken soup, and cakes were served, unlike meals without meat, and undrinkable water, in less wealthy ones. Moreover, the 1980s brought changes in supply and consumption. In the preparation of confectionaries, a substitute for sugar, something like honey, "a surrogate made by the Russians, brought in some great barrels" (A.) was used, and good quality butter was replaced with watery margarine, altering the recipes. Confectionary labs also made ice-cream and Christmas candy, even if, officially, there were no Christmas candies on the market, being sold informally based on pre-ordered quantities. In the early 1990s Turkish sweets with a fascinating wrapping arrived on the market, not better than the confectionary

cakes, and replaced the demand for the latter. Overall, consumption was based on the sharing of merchandise. The assistants at the *Alimentara*¹⁶⁰ saved the supplied meat or salami for the confectioners, while the customers were waiting in line. Milk was delivered at 4–5 a.m. when 20 people were already waiting in line, and after the *Alimentara* opened at 6, it was finished in 30 minutes. Everyday shortages and provision strategies come forth in the stories. Christmas was coming and you had no place to get sugar for the cakes, and P. recalls how she sweetened her coffee with candy while saving the sugar for the toddler and ended up drinking coffee without sugar up to this day. Children born in the 1980s did not know what tea meant, because there was no place to get a kilo of sugar from “and you were obliged to have at least four-five children”. People could hit each other’s head when queuing for sugar. When getting by, people get products from the vendors secretly, in exchange for monetary tips. When seeing a queue, people waited in line by default, after sharing rumours on what was on sale. Then, workers had a food card, and, to get extra bread, one had to bring eggs from home; there was probably a plan for egg, meat and poultry acquisition.

The rations of the late 1980s were messily distributed, as those with a domicile in one place and working elsewhere did not get the ratio, so it could be given to someone else. In parallel, state propaganda hid those shortages: “But it was also people’s fault. When they (the state leaders) came to visit, they filled the shelves with meat, loaves of bread, everything. They should have left things as they were so that they can see we have nothing to eat. They thought it was so full”. (F.) In parallel, at the weekly training within the County Party Cabinet, the alimentation units presented their food. In the context of food ratios, when people in the cities were short of sugar, flour etc., being able to steal was a privilege. While villagers just bought their sugar and rice, and found alternative ways for supplying missing staples, such as making noodles and using a stronger dough for making stuffed green peppers and cabbage rolls instead of rice, urbanites were more affected by the scarcity of resources. Maintaining relations between urban and rural kin was one survival strategy, identified by the Canadian anthropologist E. Smollett (1989) as economy of jars, or a private production and preservation of food in rural households and its subsequent distribution among close members of the kinship group. Forms of “domestic communism” led to the configuration of a new household type, that Mihăilescu (2000) termed as mixed diffuse household, combining urban and rural resources. In late Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, when the desired consumption was not possible due to recurring scarcity of goods, people had their house economy rituals and engaged in Do-It-Yourself practices and informal use of resources (Vasilyeva, 2012). The exchanges between urban and

¹⁶⁰ *Alimentara* was the state-run retail network for food products in communist Romania, comprising grocery shops that distributed basic consumer goods under a centrally planned system and were closely associated with shortages, rationing, and long queues, especially in the 1980s.

rural world were also part of an “industry domestication” process (Creed, 1995). Overall, there was an ambivalent outlook on the rations, as some thought that people had enough, that it was just a bad policy, and that the electricity cut lasted just for one year.

As one was allowed to travel to Hungary every two years, trans-border mobility provided for the missing goods in both directions. Hungarians took leather boots, coats, stoves, stove doors made of cast iron from Romania, and Romanians brought from Hungary a bit of butter, cocoa, chewing gum for the kids, soap, spray or Pampers. Additionally, parents passed on to their children the habit of saving money on CEC accounts and opened such accounts for them when they were underage. Overall, the socialist system of consumption was based on satisfying people’s basic needs rather than their every consumption desire (Verdery 1996, 26–29). In early postsocialist years, for those who cannot participate in the new forms of consumption, rejecting consumerism and retreating to household-based production and consumption practices is a politicized act, similarly to how participating consumption was political under socialism (Pine 2002, 102).

Explicit or diffuse nostalgia

This section examines how women’s nostalgic memories are mobilized in contemporary contexts, through both precise and diffuse accounts. In work narratives, private nostalgia (disposition of longing for something) is informed by the collective one (cultural narratives institutionalizing practices with a look behind). The “nostalgic mood” caused by a feeling of loss alternates with a “nostalgic mode” which brings in fragments of the past that do not necessarily correspond to the evidence of experience (Jameson, 1991, cited in Berliner, 2014).

First, some nostalgic accounts are related to sociality. “When we were kids, the village was full of people of all ages, when you killed the pig, people were impatient to come and drink a glass of moonshine. Now when you kill the pig you must go to another village to bring people as here there isn’t anyone anymore, there is no butcher anymore”. (G.) The changed rituals, such as catering companies replacing homemade meals at the funerals or changed kinship relations due to migration to Western Europe also come forward.

Second, nostalgic accounts refer to village landscapes. The current derelict buildings and empty barns are contrasted with the railway station, the big stables for fattening calves, nation-wide famous factories, chemical aggregates and plenty of land to work on from before. “Those people fought to bring all this land together, to be able to work it . . . even the forest margin was worked, now since these comrades came, they left it all damaged, no one is working it . . . there are some hundreds of hectares here near the forest”. (G.) The full village with people running to their workplace is opposed to the lonely and deserted one of today.

Third, past village life was vibrant, and many services were available. Before, there were a Miliția station, two schools, a culture club, a pharmacy, a huge market, as well as a pig market on the pasture. Potters used to come with vessels from mountainous villages in autumn, and villagers sold eggs, chicken, hens, cheese, sour cream, beans, paprika, pigs. Every Saturday evening, each family swept the grass in front of their house. On holidays such as August 23rd, people placed a flag at the house gate and painted the trees by the house. The grass was cut, and flower patches were planted in front of each house. There was a hardwood floor in the village school, and in winter, kids wore slippers and had a water basin on the corridor. Electricity has been on since 1964, and in the medical unit there were public baths underground. Everybody had heated rooms, and the possibility to procure wood. The Gypsies took back wood from the forest and sold it for potatoes, for food, corn flour, grease, or flour.

Finally, nostalgia is related to a time when everybody had a workplace, when work was well paid, and when there was respect within the hierarchy. E., as an engineer in a water administration unit, had 18% of her salary retained, as in a share-based game. “The president wanted to bring things that far so that they become shareholders. Like a kind of privatization, but through shares, a hidden one”. (E.) Streets were safe, one had easy access to a gas cylinder, everyone had a piece of bread, and the electricity shortage lasted only a year, and it was not a problem. Unlike the good pay from before, now E. is paid just enough to cover the gas bill, a pack of cigarettes and coffee.

Women in PMR documents

In PMR documents from 1949 such as “analysis of reunions” (*ședință de analiză*), women’s voices are separately outlined. While the collectivization campaign was in full swing, the document reports on the problems per commune, in a specific plasa of the county, with embedded remarks about women’s literacy and political instruction. Women were responsible for the sharing of cooperative merchandise: “Another problem tormenting people is the one of cooperation, as the received merchandise was not correctly distributed. In this sense, a committee made up of poor women was instituted, to control the distribution of merchandise in the future. At the demand of these women, as they cannot write well, a man entered the commission made of 3 women”.¹⁶¹ In another document, “the UFDR delegate shows that the raising of political level for women is very low and there is no class struggle in this commune”.¹⁶² Then, women are pictured in terms of the economic problems they raised in the meetings: goods at the cooperative are distributed based on cereals, which they don’t have any, and thus they can’t receive any. As they cannot do the gleaning after the wheat harvest, they will have no flour. They

¹⁶¹ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949, f 20.

¹⁶² DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949, f 24.

wish that the payment of the wheat threshing is done in kind and are unhappy with the payment in money. “They all got enflamed and said that they do not trust the Government, as it always promised, and they did not get anything”.¹⁶³

In a report of June 1949,¹⁶⁴ “the poor” and “the women” are placed antithetically: “Poor people are content and see with good eyes all that happens in the country, and one citizen tells us: we have many shortcomings but we are waiting, we know there was a war and a lot was spent then, but we have a government which cares about us. The comrades got the task to persuade their wives about what happens in our country”. On the contrary, “women are very much backward, they do not want to understand anything, and they just say they want textiles as they do not have any. Our task is the persuasion of women on all that happens in our country (. . .)”.¹⁶⁵ Other documents show how they received a quantity of cloth (e.g. 1550m), given to members with cards, and to the poor workers in reduced quantities. An “activity report” mentions the meetings organized by women.¹⁶⁶ The UFDR members held a meeting on Women’s Day, they have subscriptions for the magazines *Săteanca* and *Femeia*, and they collected things for Greek children, food, towels and money that were received at the centre. Personal stories on denounced clandestine love, jealousy and revenge fill in other documents. Overall, in the PMR documents, the *chiaburi*, the poor and the women are persistent categories.

¹⁶³ *Idem*.

¹⁶⁴ “The poor” are a separate category, when speaking, for example, of the poor who state that they are ashamed to send their children to the kindergarten as they lack clothes.

¹⁶⁵ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949, f 27.

¹⁶⁶ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, Comitetul de Plasă PMR Cociuba Mare, PMR Tinca, dosar 1282 / 1950, f 12.

Chapter 9

The Roma social worlds

This chapter looks at the past and present social worlds of Roma in the three villages, through the lens of institutional and self-ascribed labels, through the kinship, housing and ritual nexus, and through work understandings and conversions to neo-Protestantism. Living side by side with the Romanian majority, the Roma have not been landowners and were not collectivized, being part of the CAP workforce while pursuing informal economic activities.¹⁶⁷ This study acknowledges the situated nature of ethnicity, according to which ethnicity appears whenever cultural differences are made relevant in social interaction, and it should thus be studied at the level of social life, not at the level of symbolic culture.

Moreover, the *longue durée* ethnography following the Roma social worlds from late communist years until the present day will reveal how, in a Weberian understanding, ethnicity can be articulated or manipulated through concrete social actions primarily to achieve political ends and shifts in status (Eriksen 2001, 58). For the three Roma populations, ethnicity is a form of voluntary association, guided by some common criteria and values, such as the use of common language, feasts and rituals, and this is not a disinterested association (Cohen, 1994). Finally, in the Roma social worlds, ethnic boundaries are the outcome of the classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors situated in a social field. Three characteristics of a field – the institutional order, distribution of power, and political networks – determine which actors will adopt which strategies of ethnic boundary-making (Wimmer 2013, 45). For Giordano (2002, 45), on a supranational level, the use of ethnicity comes from the ways in which nations of Central and Eastern Europe were politically organized according to the principle of *Staatsnation*, on the model of nation states from Western Europe, namely France and Germany. Thus, belonging was built on ethnicity and territoriality.

Talking about Romani people calls for new notes on terminology. The Roma have been in Europe for centuries, and while having been key cultural agents across the continent, both historically and in the present day, they are Europe's most marginalized minority group. Both ethnonyms (Rom/țigăna or țigăna/Rom)

¹⁶⁷ See Hașdeu (2005) for an ethnography of such activities.

are insufficient: they are umbrella terms unable to capture (but only to suggest) the vast mosaic of groups that they encompass. Despite the lack of a nation state, and the huge internal differences, the Roma (țigani) are imagined as being the same, both by the Romanian majority and the Roma activists (Matei 2012, 15). Latest work shows that, although Roma is an ethnonym representing the group's name-giving practices, the European Commission used flexibly the label Roma as an umbrella term. In a sense, "Gypsy" is, in contrast, a non-politically correct term, upholding or just accepting an identity, a self-reflective relation. Conversely, art offers a reflexive space mirroring specific terms; for example, Daniel Baker uses the term Gypsy in an art installation (Egri et al. 2024, 106).

Roma in the three field villages

40 subgroups of Roma were identified in Romania alone (Burtea, 2002), and the most important cleavage is the degree of assimilation among different Roma groups, with a high diversity among Roma subgroups with medium depth in the cleavages between them (Rostas 2019, 99). In my fieldwork villages, Roma distinguish themselves from the groups in neighbouring villages in terms of crafts, wealth, level of assimilation and sometimes physical traits together with traditional occupations ("the *cetârnari*/pipe makers have white skin, they are beautiful"). Distinctions from groups outside the village, as well as forms of togetherness, are sometimes articulated through the term *neam*, as in: "Those from the Arad region involved in vegetable growing are other *neamuri*"; and, when referring to connections among members of the Roma diaspora in destination countries: "We are all related, we are *neamuri*". From an emic perspective, belonging to a *neam* (our *neam*) means belonging to a larger group, with common origin and cultural practice, but with an ancestry impossible to establish (Necula, 2012). *Neam* indicates verticality, and kinship horizontality in relations (Olivera 2012, 164). In Romania, the main institutions for identity representation consist of Romani language education system developed by the Ministry of Education, which includes two schools where the Romani language is taught, and the National Cultural Centre of Roma which is supported by the state budget. A museum of Roma culture was also established in 2010 as a private initiative; lacking any form of government support, the museum closed in 2015 (Rostas, 2019). The platform ARTivist by Alina Șerban is an example through which the artist, by using her own Roma voice, based on her own experiences, sheds light into a world and a community that was previously completely vilified, pointing out the bigger problems of racism and anti-Roma structural violence.

In U. (12, 55% Roma out of the 2.773 total population¹⁶⁸), the first Roma family moved from a neighbouring village in the early 1970s due to the opportunity to work as milkmen/milkmaids in the local CAP, as the youngsters had moved to

¹⁶⁸ All figures come from the latest (2022) census data.

town and the job was too difficult for elders. I. (born 1953), the eldest member of this first family, claims that he had “brought” the other families and the approximately 100 families currently living in the village are “all related”. Both women and men worked at the CAP (gardening, field, or livestock unit) which provided them with houses, and the men traded horses informally. Water pipe makers still practice their craft in an authorized form. Law 18 /1991 stipulated that those who had worked for more than three years for the collective farm were also entitled to a share of its land if there was enough land at the disposal of local land redistribution commissions. As the Roma in the village (or their ancestors) were not landowners prior to 1949, they could not benefit from the provision of this law. At the collective’s dismantlement, they received some livestock that they quickly sold. Since the early 1990s, the families pendulate between daily work in agriculture, assembly line work in a cable factory for a neighbouring town and work abroad, be it newspaper selling, begging, or carrying of merchandise. In this pendular migration style, they return home in summer, being entitled to various forms of social aid in Romania and in their migration countries.

In the early 1990s, with Germany as initial migration destination, the Roma in U. started to be divided according to migration remittances such as cars, phones or electronic devices. Starting with the early 2000s, the migration destinations diversified – France, Italy or England – and two storied houses with aesthetic forms such as roofs with multi-sized towers were built on acquired garden plots. The entrance into the houses is directly from the front pavement, and one can see specific designs in other villages from the area: for example, in Șoimi, the house has an iron fence with the name of the owner forged in it, and a front yard. In parallel, the Roma buy the decayed houses that remained after the elders passed away or moved to the city with their adult children. In another village from the commune, in the early communist years, Roma made adobe houses on the pasture, up to the dam, while the drinking water in the village is of poor quality. The Village Council has now a plan to restructure the housing, while they have been living there for at least three generations.

Church attendance is split among the Orthodox, the Baptist and the Pentecostal churches. The first two attend the same churches with the majority population, the latter are setting up their own church in the village and meanwhile, in summer months, they are using the former Culture House as a gathering space, where the service is held by a pastor from outside the village. They have no councillor representing them in the Village Council, due to a lack of mobilization, even if numerically they are enough to have one. This situation meets the argument of Rostas (2019), according to which, in spite of the widely held belief that the exclusion of Roma is due to their high poverty rate that causes a dependency trap, the problems faced by Roma in Europe originate primarily due to their persistent lack

of power in influencing the public agenda, in the defining of their own interests, and in their ability to negotiate their priorities.

In T., with a total population of 7,793, the ethnic groups are split into 15, 5% Roma, 18% Hungarians and 66, 44% Romanians, being the second commune in the county with the highest number of Roma (approx. 1500). Media accounts reveal the pivotal role of migration to France (Lyon) for the community since the 2000s. For example, the Roma in T. make up 70% of all the Roma migrants in Lyon, and around 800 community members have been to Lyon at least once. Because of the low pay per day back home (20 lei per day or approx. 4 euros), community members esteem that in France, you live better, even in camps, as at home you have no workplaces. For three generations, the Roma have been living in four separate streets, in local and media parlance, in the “colony” situated by the railway. All roads were unpaved at fieldwork time. Some Roma families are brick, pipe, or spoon makers, even if these crafts are practiced less and less. In the communist past, those involved with the goose feather trade were praised for their incredible wealth. They have been working for long at the CAP (women) and the IAS (men) in the village or around the country, during the summer campaigns. At fieldwork time, four people in the community were formally employed as street sweepers, the rest being entitled to social aid, with partial cuts, and lacking medical insurance. France, Belgium, England, and Scotland are the migration countries they have gone to since the 1990s. Here, migration wealth is visible in formal (authorization to sell, to open a shop) or informal trade of devices, phones, bicycles, second-hand clothes and furniture, displayed in local market stalls at the bus stop junction. Most community members have completed three to four school grades. Between 1950 and 1955, a Roma school functioned in a nationalized villa which belonged to a lawyer. There were 25–30 school-aged children in the community, but only 15–16 of them attended school, joining the music and sports lessons with pleasure. A local monograph shows how the local schoolmaster tried to fit the curriculum and managed with great effort to help some Roma children gain basic writing, reading and counting knowledge. After the death of the schoolmaster, the school interrupted its activity, and consequently some of the Roma students attended the Romanian section from the village school (Turla, 2012). The Roma class resurged in the 1980s, gathering children of all ages, from 10–11 to 17. Teachers were assigned to this class as voluntary work and see their mission as something that had to be done, without expectations of a meaningful change in Roma’s lives, due to the everyday life crisis in the 1980s. They reveal that Roma children wished to be able to write letters from the army and to do the driving school, having difficulties in recognizing some objects from shown images.

In the living quarter, adobe houses stand in the front row, and brick ones, in the back one, raised by the second generation, behind which stands the pasture with some mud huts. The highest number of church goers are Pentecostals,

followed by Baptists and Orthodox. Around 80–85% Roma attend the first two churches, with buildings raised inside the community. The Baptist church is autonomous, being funded and managed by the community members, absorbing the initial one established in 1989. It is an “umbrella” organization, gathering a kindergarten, a community centre and a feeding centre based on partnerships with transnational NGOs. In parallel, since the 2000s, local foundations and a private Christian school in partnership with state institutions set up educational programs for two generations (kids and mothers), art, science and photography programs, and debates and presentations on the Roma history, migration in the European space, slavery, Holocaust, or ethnic personalities in arts, literature or science, giving Roma a chance for positively acknowledging their ethnic identity and, as declared, for “growing their self-esteem”. The International Roma day competition, ongoing since 2018, makes folk, dance and cooking heritage visible. Roma were represented in the Local Council for three legislatures, losing their place because of random voting. A sanitary mediator, a community mediator and an educator of Romani language are the new institutional roles in the Council targeting the community.

Finally, in C.M., the Roma population represents 12,26% out of the total one (2.724).¹⁶⁹ A two-generational Roma family moved to the village in the late 1990s and their married children currently live in three other acquired houses. Having previously worked in CAP agriculture (digging and cow herding), the families now occasionally migrate to France with their children. They are Pentecostals and attend the same church with the Romanian majority, in a joint preaching service between a Romanian and a Roma pastor. The ethnography below will reveal that Roma in C.M. are the most discreet, and somehow most “assimilated” group among the three. The groups in U. and T. differ in terms of marriage practices as means for children’s financial security and wealth display, housing, and occupations in migration countries.

¹⁶⁹ A shift in the recorded size of the Roma population is observable between the 2011 census, used at the time of fieldwork (7.65% Roma out of a total population of 2,798), and the 2022 census.



6. Pipe-makers, Ucuriș, ©Alex Mara



7. Fieldwork time, Tinca, 2015



8. Tinca, handmade embroidery



9. Cociuba Mare, front yard

The Roma in Romanian socialism

During communism, the state authorities viewed the Roma less as an ethnic minority and more as a marginal social category, affected by poverty, lack of education, or nomadism, and the political measures aimed for their social integration and assimilation, while ignoring their ethno-cultural specificity. After the 1920s and the 1930s, when the Roma had their own organizations, theatre, or press, the Soviet-inspired policy dismissed their ethnicity. Without a common language and territory, the Roma did not correspond to a definition of an ethnic minority as conceived in the USSR (Matei 2016, 691). During the communist period, Roma-related state policies were distinguished into temporal blocks: 1945–1949: the emergence of some organizations and the denial of minority status; 1949–1977: the existence of some non-concerted policies; 1977–1989: the elaboration of some policies. Overall, the socialist authority approached the Roma as a social class but tacitly treated it as a distinct ethnic group or even a race (Beck 1989, 69). At the same time, the tendency of the communist regime to see the Roma just as a social problem, while ignoring the ethnic component, was a failure (Matei 2016, 692).

First, in the early communist years (1945–1949) state power pragmatically tried to attract the minorities and the poor to its side. After August 23rd, 1944,

when 25, 000 Roma deportees from Transnistria returned, the measures from the war period against the Roma were abrogated, and the nomads could come back to their traditional occupations.¹⁷⁰ This change offered some the chance of a fast social ascension, not based on ethnic origin, but on the social background. Those in public functions were not representatives of Roma, but of the Party, which needed trustworthy cadres and later, as the PMR extended its recruiting base, Roma were put aside and replaced with better prepared people. When the land reform of 1945 granted around 20,000 Roma with 35,500 ha of arable land, it was the war participants, the landless people, and those with dwarf land category, not members of an ethnic group *per se*, who had priority (Achim 2010, 4 in Necula, 2014; Matei, 2016). The framework document “the problem of the Roma in the RPR” made in 1948–1949 by the Central Committee of the PCR, openly imitating the Soviet model, focused on the elimination of nomadism, inclusion in the work force, and literacy (Matei 2016, 695). Nicolae Gheorghe claims that the long history of associating Roma with criminality is in direct connection with the nomad image attributed to them. Marking the uniqueness of Roma through nomadism is a wrong approach, even if it was the most used concept in solving the Roma dilemmas and explaining their relationship with land (Gheorghe 2013, 41). In 1949, the Central Committee of the PCR made a framework document named “the problem of the Roma in the RPR” which traced the policy of the state regarding the Roma, with a stated imitation of the Soviet model (Achim, 2010; Necula, 2012).

Second, a change in state policies occurred in 1977, when the National Demography Commission, the Committee for the Problems of Popular Counsels, the General Prosecutor’s Office and some resort Ministries established “a study regarding the socio-economic situation of the Roma population in our country”. The birth rate among the Roma that was four times higher than among the Romanians, the high child mortality rate, the problems related to the census of the population, school attendance and illiteracy, poor health, crime rate, formal occupation and the role of women in child rearing and their consequent non-employment, or insalubrious living places were some of the indexed problems. In 1977, the Roma population consisted of over 540,000 persons, mostly sedentary, 66,000 semi-nomad and only 470 nomads (Necula, 2014). In 1983, out of the 65,000 nomad and semi-nomad Roma, only 5600 worked, and only 900 did qualified work. Later in 1983, the Propaganda Section of the CC of the PCR published the report “Platform of measures regarding the work and social integration of Roma” (Grigore et al., 2005, cited in Matei 2016, 697).

Third, at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, Roma scholar and activist Nicolae Gheorghe stated that a common interest for the Roma is necessary, and that their integration in society needs to be done as members of an

¹⁷⁰ Recent work addresses the memory of Roma deportations to Transnistria in 1940–1942 and their return (Kelso and Eglitis, 2014; Matei, 2022).

ethnic category with specific cultural traits and tradition of cohabitation with the Romanians and other populations. Consequently, the presence of ethnic group representatives in the local power bodies where the population was high was recommended. Nicolae Gheorghe was thus reacting to the abusive identification of Roma with a deviant and poverty culture and suggested that the values and models of Roma should be used in fighting stereotypes through the media popularization of some cases where Roma had socially succeeded. Shows and festivals displaying costumes and other identity markers organized up to the mid-1980s, beyond their inevitable appreciative references to the PCR, were also forms of ethnic legitimation.¹⁷¹ As the Securitate was unhappy with the invitations sent to some Roma who were foreign citizens and was suspecting Nicolae Gheorghe of an intention to transform the gatherings into a festival of singing, dancing and folk outfit for the Roma population, the festivals ceased in the mid-1980s. Overall, the paradigm of interpreting the Roma problem changed from that of a marginal social group, to one of an ethnic group with organizational potential. Due to the fear for the possible emergence of some anti-Romanian activities, and because of the economic difficulties of the 1980s, measures of integrating the Roma were stopped. Even if quantitatively reduced and lacking an organized framework, some Roma intellectuals and some of those converted to the neo-Protestant cults engaged in dissidence forms during the 1980s. For example, in memorandums sent to Radio Free Europe or to the UNO Representation in Bucharest and to the Romanian authorities, they complained of the absence of some freedoms, they wanted similar rights to the ones attributed to some minorities, they denounced abuses, the brutality of the Miliția in gold confiscations etc. (Matei 2016, 702).

Fourth, the collectivization of Roma in the CNSAS documents informed the study of Necula (2014), revealing that some employees of the Secret Police were speakers of Romani, as all documents written in Romani have a translation in Romanian attached. Additionally, the “working-class agents” label enforced by state and PMR / PCR documents included both Romanians and Roma. In 1949, the small number of Roma landowners, as well as owners of tools and crafts workshops were subjected to confiscations with similar effects in the social and cultural dynamic of the Roma communities to those for peasant landowners (Necula 2012, 42–44).

For the peasants, the socialist state did not achieve the transition to the state workforce in practical terms, and stopped somewhere in the middle, between peasant and worker (Kideckel, 2006; Mihăilescu, 2013). In a similar vein, the social Roma is stuck in a transition process, from the Roma status to the Romanian one,

¹⁷¹ These activities took place in the context of the founding of the Roma International Union in London in 1971. A Romanian delegation first participated in the Union’s congresses in 1981, in Göttingen, and consisted of three delegates, including a native Roma (*rom vâtraș*), the lăutar Alexandru Țițuș, and the căldărar Ion Cioabă (Necula 2012, 45).

while the lived historical and social context (serfdom, assimilation policies etc.) is acknowledged. The social Roma is not recognized as Roma by the members of the native communities, could not preserve specific ethnic traits (language, values, cultural practices etc.), and fails in being recognized as a Romanian by the Romanians (Gheorghie 2012, 28).

After the fall of communism, the concept of social integration continued to be used in connection with government measures towards Roma (Friedman 2014, 2). What distinguishes the use of the concept of social integration in the two periods is the coercive feature of social integration policies during communism, and the participatory dimension of Roma social integration policies in the post-communist era (Rostas, 2019, 52–53), with local nuances, aspirations and failures.

Rom and țigan: narrative and institutional labels

As an important aspect of ethnic identity is how it is communicated in public (Eriksen 1993, 3), this section briefly examines the vocabulary used for self-designation in free discussions in ethnography and in archives, mobilized both in local and global belonging forms. L. (born 1970) uses the term țigan when pointing to the denial of legal rights by the local authorities: “I don’t know if one țigan received the 50 acres they were entitled to” (at land restitution); “they (the Orthodox) don’t let a țigan be buried in their cemetery”. M. (born 1958) proudly uses the self-defining label țigan as an immutable identity form: “I wore this name since I was little. I was born a țigan. I am not ashamed of this name”. On the other hand, L. speaks of Rom when pointing out lifestyle characteristics, wits or brotherhood, as defining features of a group: “At a Rom wedding you don’t drink at all”; “(. . . .) until one day, when all Roma united”, or “Roma people are inventive”. On the other hand, the label țigan is used in opposition to the Romanian one: “We are all equal in God’s eyes, people make the difference, not God, pointing that you are a țigan, and the other one is a Romanian. A nation is a nation”. (C., born 1969)

Moreover, two archival documents – one notice and one order – of the Gendarmes Legion (*Legiunea de Jandarmi*)¹⁷², of January 1948, reveal the preferred ethnonyms for nomad Roma. Starting with 1946, the Gendarmerie supervised the nomads more strictly, focusing on the public order rather than on an ethnic policy towards Roma (Matei 2016, 692). The notice addresses the situation of “nomad Roma” (țigani nomazi) who “managed to vanish due to their watchmen, and the Gendarmes were not efficient in their actions of fire opening”¹⁷³ and continues with a “correction” aimed at the use of the term țigan: “In the documents of the judiciary police, and in every public document, the origin of the criminal should

¹⁷² DJAN Bihor, Fond Legiunea de Jandarmi Bihor, dosar 92/1949, f 56.

¹⁷³ Idem.

not be mentioned. This mentioning is a racist act and is punished with prison”.¹⁷⁴ The term *țigan* is also used in the “order No 169 / 1948 referring to the establishing of family cards (*carte de familie*) for nomad Roma”.¹⁷⁵ Based on the raids made in the sector, “6 carts with 6 nomad families were identified, for whom 6 family cards were released, in which all their goods found on them were indexed”.¹⁷⁶ The heads of the family are listed, as for example: “Ciurar Traian, with 5 family members, one carriage and one horse (. . .). There were 35 people in total”.¹⁷⁷ The comments on nomad Roma belong to a file addressing problems related to the social order such as those on the “Baptist sect”, which is not among the dangerous sects, but the gendarmes are advised to follow the possible subversive, instigative activity of the *chiaburi* of this “sect” (circular order, March 1948). Another document is a complaint written by a husband against the wife who was found living in cohabitation on his return from the front. The husband requests his material goods and the right to leave the place until the decision on the divorce is pronounced.

On the ground, the nexus between housing, marriage and wealth, on work, on conversion and on intercultural relations give precious insights into the identity struggles of people whose notion of themselves is to various degrees imposed from the outside (Beissinger 2020, 108–109). The study of three groups provides an illuminating viewpoint from which to probe problematic issues of institutional approaches, ownership and cultural heritage in a historic framework of discrimination.

Housing, marriage and wealth

The nexus between housing, a marriage ritual and wealth reveals the differences among the three groups as well as related forms of social mobility and multiple belonging. In U., the living pattern – home in the summer months and away for the rest of the year – confers to the Roma an in-between status. This “double rooting” – in a house where one lives a few weeks per year, and the other residence – informed a recent ethnography of the domestic space, be it residence places, objects, family relations and their extensions such as neighbourhood relations (Benarrosh-Orsoni 2019, 13–14).

In U., since the 2000s, owners invested in expensive doors and window frames and thrillingly speak about the short deadlines in which the two-storied houses, dubbed in local parlance as “villas”, will be finished. The houses in the making will be inhabited by two generations and the elderly refer to the number of houses that they used to own and sell, or that they currently own, and which are inhabited by their children. The connection between housing and marriage comes from the

¹⁷⁴ Idem.

¹⁷⁵ DJAN Bihor, Fond Legiunea de Jandarmi Bihor, dosar 95/1949, f 51.

¹⁷⁶ Idem.

¹⁷⁷ Idem.

recurrent thought that the wealthy houses were partially funded with money from the “bride’s wealth”, such as the house of a Roma whose three daughters got married. The bride’s wealth was defined as a kind of compensatory payment given to the girl’s family when leaving her parental home, aiming to define precisely the social status of the children born from the union, and to guarantee patrilineality regardless of the fate of the marriage (Pamporov 2007, 473). The housing-ritual connection reveals here too that marriage-making constitutes an excellent heuristic device to understand the life and values of the Roma populations, as well as their relations to the surrounding world (cf. Chirițoiu & Tesar 2020, 10).

From an emic point of view, the ritual is described in transactional terms, with intergenerational variations, generally aiming to secure wealth for the future family. The parents of the spouses agree on a sum, between 5000 and 10 000 Euros, officially dependent on the bride’s beauty, and the parents of the bride safekeep the money as a source of investment, saving, or a way to secure the future life of the daughter. In a similar way, prestige objects (chalices) passed on by the *cortorari*, reveal future-oriented family relations and not an immutable ritual (Tesar 2018, 618). One generation before, the groom’s parents had to give double the agreed sum if the virginity of the bride was not proved. It is interesting to note the ways in which this ritual is dismissed within and outside the community. The pastor of a Baptist church in a neighbouring village “forbids” the ritual in a justiciary tone and connects it to underage marriage: “We have a decree given by the church, stating that, if the girl marries underage, she must be detained in the church, with a written legal form”. (L.) On the other hand, a local NGO denies the existence of such a ritual in the villages it assists, as if it is revealing a negative group trait. The economy of the ritual consists of securing the wedded couple’s future well-being as well as providing them with a higher social standing visible in the wealthy houses. However, Roma villagers show that bride wealth-based weddings are not the richest ones, as the princely weddings in Sibiu are much more luxurious.

In T., the housing accounts reveal the downside of development projects. A housing project conducted by a foreign organization in the 1990s is described by community members as fragile and short term: “The Dutch made a housing project on the pasture, but a bad housing project: small space, like pigs in a pigsty. If one house burns, the other one does too. And the Dutch did not even come to see how the project ended”. (I.) On the flip side, a story in the local media shows that the Dutch came as many times as needed until the roof was left in place. The pasture at the village edge was not restored to its previous owners and was rented to Roma for building houses on it, in exchange for votes. Twenty years after the housing project was accomplished, adobe huts with no windows, heating facilities or electricity were built on the pasture. Inside such a hut inhabited by a single elderly woman stands a bed with piled wood under it and carpets on the walls.

She is shunned by the others who lived longer in the front, who do not let her use their facilities. The houses are made of adobe, timber wood, and increasingly bricks and concrete, with new furniture and equipment. Treasured objects, such as a 500-euro worth harness brought by the son in Marseille, hanging in the vineyard, or a safely kept handmade costume are kept inside the homes. “The garden plot, we needed to sell for funeral money, this is our dear village T.” On the other hand, the Roma in T. proudly reveal the high prices that Roma buyers were willing to offer in house transactions in neighbouring villages: “In B. a house that was not worth 2 Lei now you buy it with 5000 or 6000 euros. The ones that come with money from somewhere else buy them. Last time, someone asked for 600 million for a house, and another one came and offered 700. It was not about negotiating downward but about offering more”. (G.)

Finally, housing accounts reveal the significance of kinship ties, through which the future well-being of kids is secured, and parental authority is displayed. M. secured houses and gardens for six of his kids, while two still live with them: “For me there is one thing. If I want to buy something today, all children listen to what I say, and if I say I want us to do this, we all contribute to help. By helping this way, no matter what would come out, hardships etc., you escape them. And if you want to help the other one escape difficult times, you do it. And there should be no hate among them, God forbidden, I don’t want that”. (M., born 1958, village CM). The following section will reveal the relation between the reliance on kinship and a vulnerable structural position (e.g. Bauman, 1995), and the immutable nature of kinship despite the transient feature of state institutions.



10. Ucuriș, house in the making, main road



11. Ucuriș, house in the making, side road

Work – now and before

The relationship of the individual with work is the main criterion through which the locals claim full status as society members and gain respectability within that society. Work is the touchstone, the foundation of subjectivity and morality (Lampland 1995, 11). Against this definition, Roma's understanding of past and present work, at the boundary of formal/informal, and of migration as a solution of last resort will be discussed. The findings will reveal that the Roma and Romanian co-villagers share a work ethic, in contrast with Stewart's (1997) assumption that the "Gypsy" and the peasant ethic are made of a series of structural oppositions at once economic, social and moral, and that, for them, identity is constructed and constantly remade in the present in relation to significant others and something inherited from the past (Fosztó 2009, 35–36). In one coffee time meeting, a non-Roma villager said that the first Roma family who moved to C.M. earned a decent position in the village through work: "This family was poor; I say it without shame. It was a poor family which raised through work and now they own four houses". (P.) The host is proud of the garden plot and its use for home consumption: "We grow things home as they taste better than those on the market". (M.)

Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, the Roma in T. did contract free work and travelled to CAPs, mainly in the Timișoara area, for planting, digging, harvesting, work in livestock units, vineyards, building sites, mending and painting. Coming back home in autumn with money for wood and food, they prepared bricks, in coal-fuelled ovens. Women moulded them and men prepared the mix. All winter they lived from the summer work and brick selling savings, or sack knitting and building work, and men were tinkers. Women were at the CAP and men at the IAS: "Cows and goats herding, for 20 years, and I am not ashamed of it". (M.) After the CAPs were closed in the 1990s, they followed the same work pattern, and went to "farms", in the same regions. The work from before in agricultural cooperatives is opposed to work in migration. "It is over with crafts and work, especially for the young ones, who run to Western Europe as there they earn money easier. They run away from work, unlike before. Before, people were employed on farms, collective farms in the Arad region; they went there in spring and did not come back until autumn, full of farm products. They used to enjoy work but now it's over with work". (L.)

At the same time, unlike before, work is currently insecure and unavailable: "It was a commune with many Roma, now there are around 2000, as the commune had all that it needed: workplaces, an IAS which had in charge cattle and a pig unit, and they were good at such things. Almost 50% of the Roma here worked before, now out of 1500 only 6 persons work. Some are street sweepers". (G.) The younger generation is put to shame for dismissing the value of work by a non-Roma neighbour: "They are Pentecostals, they steal, while their parents worked

at the CAP, have a pension, and they hang out doing nothing like fools. The other families down there are hard workers: one scythes and organizes the transport of the other Roma in the village to France”. (A.) In terms of informal activities, horse dealing was a source for investments, and at a given moment I. owed nine houses in village and had good relations with people from the leadership of the CAP: “We lent each other money at any time”. Bricks, pipes, spoon making are not worthy anymore, and those involved with agribusiness and owning vegetable farms are said to be well-off. When the sorghum was manually cut, with the knife or the disc, there was more work, but now, not anymore.

In the 1990s, M.’s family worked daily on the lands of non-Roma villagers and was freely appointed by the Head of the Village Council to work on his private land, with an endlessly delayed pay. In a conflict with the local authorities, the wheat was secretly harvested and the gleaned field, received from the state reserve (the extra land kept from the owners of over 10 ha) was burnt. “We dug even 30 hectares per year, or one hectare and a half per day. There were 10 of us working. Children grew, and started to go to other countries, it was hard for them indeed”. (M.) Work conferred on them the financial power to own four houses and to lend money “without interest” to co-villagers for setting up pig farms, which he got back.

Collecting iron, working in gas stations, selling newspapers, sweeping, and security jobs are the occupations mentioned in migration countries, and begging stands at the bottom of the ladder, and it is the publicly declared source for financing the wealthy houses in U. One can earn up to 300 or 400 Euros a day, while children never beg. Others say that they spend the income from begging, as they do not cut off their eating and drinking pleasures. Beggars are foreigners, not only “Roma from Romania”, as well as aged Romanians, with miserable pensions back home. Begging also comes as a lack of choice due to the insufficient education – 4 or 5 classes – and missing certificates for 8 classes which would have entitled them to a work contract. The Ramadan time, as Muslims who respect it follow a pillar based on giving gifts, makes begging worthy. Begging builds a division line among Roma in T. and in U.: the former are considered backward by the latter, while those in T. consider that they do not do bad things, as they just beg. At the same time, the latter use migration remittances for entrepreneurship, such as mechanical shops, second-hand shops, or market stalls with electronic devices and spare parts, and repair their homes.

The non-agricultural informal work in communist years reveals prestige, wits and independence. Hidden distilleries and workshops, stocking re-usable materials and empty bottles, and organizing rehearsal rooms for the *tarafs* in one’s home are informal economic practices that Roma engaged in, developed because of excessive centralization, and the unwillingness of the state to provide resources for the formal economy (Kideckel 1993, 152). On the other hand, informality for

Roma people is a part of their assigned and assumed identity and contributes to forming the stereotype which has stuck for years, in the negative light of vagrancy and laziness or, positively, as the expression of their freedom and detachment from or even contempt for “bourgeois” values (Rüegg 2013, 298). In neighbouring villages, the *lăutari* practiced the inherited skill of playing an instrument (since the age of six) in parallel with brute labour.¹⁷⁸ Once per month, music, and the rest, building sites, vineyards, making bricks, “all the bullshit. With Ceaușescu we did all we now have”. (S.) Generally, *lăutari* perpetuate their skills through the male kinship line. Sons begin to learn the art of music-making as young boys within the home, often assuming professional standing by the time they are in their late teens. They learnt from the great violin players of the time, who had supremacy over an area and sang every Sunday at weddings and baptism parties. The tandem with the harmonica and violin player, and the full bands of keyboard, drum, guitar, harmonica and violin players went all over the country. Before and now, the *lăutari* needed to belong to a group which ensures recognition, economic means and professional exercise. It is an affective form of economy adapted to the constraints of the social and economic environment (Necula 2012, 178).

Currently, the *lăutari* are in the background, viewing the accessible ways of producing music: “Yes, before they stopped you from singing in other zones, and there was a tax on music playing (. . . .). The third generation sang before as well, his grandfather was the only one who sang here, and everybody invited him. Back then there were no music players, now there are many. Then there were no tape recorders, Internet, or *manele*.¹⁷⁹ Now there is everything, and they don’t call us anymore, now they just play the recorder, the CD”. (L.) The profession is partly re-invented, through the playing of Christian music within the church. Still, the music making talent transcends the political orders: “The songs are played just based on their hearing, on the ear, as they don’t know how to play based on notes, they sing even in the dark, no problem at allthey adapted now, they took music from one place and adapted it with Christian words – you take it from the Internet and play from the negative. (. . . .) The music players were always music players. Even Ceaușescu needed music. Gabi Luncă was once saying on TV that she converted herself. He liked music, Romica Puceanu, Gabi Luncă. . . .”. (G.) The adaptation of *lăutari* to the Christian music sphere reveals how innovation, hybridity, and market forces all operate within Roma communities (Silverman 2014, 10).

Finally, in the 2010s, Roma in T. were the target of a transnational project set up between the local authorities and those in Lyon, consisting of the electrification of sixty houses and of a multifunctional centre (communal bath, washing

¹⁷⁸ *Lăutari* were professional traditional musicians in Romania, often of Roma origin, who performed at weddings, festivities, and other communal events.

¹⁷⁹ *Manele* refers to a genre of popular music in Romania, associated primarily with Roma performers, combining Balkan, Turkish, and Middle Eastern influences; it has been widely consumed since the 1990s and is often socially contested and stigmatized.

machines, kindergarten, and counselling for job search), with the promise of street paving and sewage as well. A mushroom and berries factory and processing unit was planned as an employer for the Roma returnees, while the latter still regard migration earnings as worthier, in view of the lack of jobs and low wages back home. Of the 1,300 Roma repatriated from France in the latest two years, only five are employed. Beyond continuous political decisions on work solutions, the three Roma groups anchor their aspirations and needs in the space of conversion.

Conversion as boundary maker

The Roma conversion to neo-Protestantism was understood in the literature as a lifestyle and culture transforming agent (e.g. Fosztó, 2009; Ries, 2007; Slavkova, 2014), and Fosztó (2009) established two types of converts: one disengaging with the world and the other accommodating. Overall, Roma are attracted by neo-Protestant churches as they provide them with a sense of belonging and community life (Gog 2009, 158). The Roma in T. reveal that conversion is a boundary maker between past and present life, setting up new norms related to consumption or use of resources, and the church provides a physical and symbolic space for the development of a new community ethos, at home and in migration countries. Additionally, the church is a hub for developmental projects such as kindergarten, a feeding centre and a cultural workshop.

The founding of the Baptist church in T. in the early 1990s is like a rite of passage and a redemption process for pastor G., Orthodox by inheritance: “Two Roma put their souls in this work. They are Americans, țigani from America, they speak the same dialect as us. I was a music player and led another kind of life. My wife had changed her faith two years before me, and after a fight, she told: I will want you back, I will forgive you if you come to church as well. She invited me in the church they had at that time, a four square meters room. What should I do at this church? You will do what we all do. I had an easy trial. After a while, they had started praying together as there was this separatism at the Romanian churches. They once invited me to these churches, and Romanians were standing at the entrance door; when Romanians stepped in, they were directed to one side, and the țigani to another. And I thought, ‘These are your brothers? Did you bring me to see this? I will never repent’. But God worked in his own way, and when I was in that tiny room, two people came. I had said my prayer with my eyes closed, and when I opened them, they told me, ‘We are the people for whom you are praying’. (...) I don’t think it was by chance; it was God’s will, and from there God changed village T...”. (G.) Slideshows of baptism events – held in church buildings or outdoors, featuring immersion scenes and inserted biblical citations (e.g. Mark 16:16: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned”) – are published on Pastor G.’s Facebook profile. Other posts reveal the transnational connections of the Baptist church, with the testimonial of

an American missionary/evangelist from 2018 who reports on the joint baptisms with pastor G. in several churches, under the heading “blessings in Romania”. At the same time, the report addressed the poor housing situation of some church members in T. Around 20 people from the homemade mud-brick houses area attend the church, and the costs for the house renovation project are announced and a call for fundraising is made. Furthermore, the humanitarian role of the church in providing food, clothes, and other necessary supplies, is mentioned by all pastors.

A double leadership form – political and religious – was encountered in the T. and the neighbouring villages, as M. and G. are both pastors and local councillors, one with a long-held seat in the village assembly and the other unofficially appointed as councillor, without popular vote. The projects under the church umbrella involve several family members of two generations, community mediator (wife) and educators (sons and daughter-in-law). During a Sunday morning church service, pastor G. revealed the liberating role of conversion: “We have been discriminated for long, and many times doors were closed in our faces, but now, as the Scripture reached us, no one can stop us or persecute us”. In a similar vein, a posted live song inside the church says: “Lord knows how long you cried”. In another village in the area, pastor L. reveals the educational chance given by the church, fears that migration will diminish church attendance and sees our discussion as a fundraising chance: “We have 300 children coming to church and with the help of God we set up a foundation to secure a kindergarten for them, and we have no possibility to finish it. They go to the kindergarten in the village, but there, they learn just the alphabet, but with us they learn songs, poems as well, and from there girls like you who can sing and do things come out, and preachers can be trained. As time goes by and we die, we are leaving this stage and there will be no one left to move God’s work further. (. . .) It would be good if someone could help us with this”. (L.) In terms of the job opportunities for the Roma, L. mentions “gathering paper, rubbish, grass, cleaning up the cemetery, and not much agriculture, as now they gave the land to the people”.

Moreover, the pastors and members of the church committees advise the newly converted in setting up new moral standards. “We do not help them with money, so that they spend it on drinks and cigarettes. We help them the way we know. The idea is not to attract them to the church, but to prevent them from wasting money. And thus, they realize and think – we must do like these ones, if we want to move forward”. (G.) Similarly, migration remittances are used for repairing the houses back home, and not on cigarettes and alcohol, and pastor G. no less ironically, points out, that the Roma have, due to church attendance, an “adequate behaviour”. For others, conversion stands above material wishes: “What we want more is Jesus Christ as looking for God’s kingdom is the most important thing, as then, God will give you the things you are looking for. Health is the most important, if you have it, you have it all”. (M.) Additionally, the baptized ones do

not pray to icons or offer meals at funerals and at the latter, two or three meals are given away for the soul of the deceased. Lending money with interest is a sin and forgiveness, not doing harm, constantly improving oneself, and repenting one's deeds govern everyday life. At weddings, people drink no more alcohol, don't dance or smoke anymore as they gained "the spirit of kindness". M's family attends the same Pentecostal church with Romanians in C.M. At the joint service with a Romanian pastor, he said: "The aim of the faithful is not to reach material goals, like buying a tractor, but reaching inner peace and peace with the peers". The converted Roma in T. also distinguish themselves from other groups on ritual lines: "In some places, a woman cannot walk in from of a man, she must turn her face and ask for forgiveness; in the morning, the woman cannot talk to a bunch of men before tidying up. But this does not happen in T."

In migration settings, conversion provides a space of interaction and mutual help. The Roma in U., when in Lyon, attend a church in Geneva, with an Ethiopian pastor, or rent spaces for church services. Foreign families "sharing the same faith, repentant, like us", help the newcomers with housing and work tips. The Roma in the Diaspora help each other more, unlike Romanians, and connect with other nations, such as the Moroccans. The church inclusiveness is paralleled with the belonging to the large Roma diaspora: "We are all related (*neamuri*), this is what the Scripture says: the people of Israel, that God chose. That one is a single people chosen by God. But the rest, we are all related, but I want to say that when the țigani left India in 1284, they all settled in Bulgaria, Serbia, Germany, and are divided, but they speak the same language. Wherever we meet, we talk. But I noticed a difference, Romanians, if they meet among them, they do not talk much. We the țigani we talk even if we don't know each other". (M.) In a similar vein, Gay y Blasco (2001) shows that The Gitanos of Jarana intentionally avoid fixed genealogies, using a flexible, nongenealogical view of the past to preserve group unity and define identity through lived moral relationships rather than inherited descent. The forthcoming discussion on intercultural relations reveals key moments and contentions in the interactions between the Roma and the non-Roma.

Intercultural relations

Changing perceptions in terms of transfer, exchange and openness govern the intercultural relationships in the three villages. During the ongoing PhD fieldwork, a book chapter (Mateoc, 2014) screened the contexts in which the elder Romanians in U. fear the presence of Roma in the village: noise, cleanliness, ambiguous views on migration-related work and the use of gains for the building of opulent homes. Further along, ethnography revealed the everyday life situations when the two groups approach and collaborate. In other ethnographies from rural Romania, The List, the Godfatherhood, and trust are three strategies of collaboration with the non-Roma community (Toma 2009, 198–199). Conversely, Roma are ex-

cluded from village social life (for example, from *pomana*¹⁸⁰) and from work exchange circuits in the village itself (Dorondel & Şerban 2014, 144). Continuously, trust and mistrust can be considered as strategic means to define relatedness and to achieve control of economic transactions (Torsello 2004, 515). Overall, it is important to understand the day-to-day interactions of Roma with their neighbours, primarily peasants to whom they relate through extended barter (Engebrigsten 2007, 73).

In T., the relationship between Roma and non-Roma is placed into a mythical past, with clearly defined roles and absent social mobility. A locally born chemistry scientist shows that in the 1950s–1960s, “each family here had its trusted family of țigani; women were helping with housework, washing, and men were in the fields. As for those with specific professions, their names tell this. Rostás? Téglás? Does it come from the term ‘brick’, their names? (. . . .) They tolled the church bells when my parents died. (. . . .) In their language, do they have terms for referring to the future at all, like tomorrow, today, future?” (A.) The Roma from the 1970s are described in terms of their rebel behaviour: “My mother was penalized as the țigani in her class skipped school a lot. Those in my class did not come to school either. The schoolbooks were free, and they said, ‘my dad makes cigars out of them’”. (A.) Making a bridge through time, the narrator mentions the organized begging group from her French migration town. In U. and C.M, since the 1980s, the Roma participate in the household chores of Romanian families, who have trusted clothes washers, harvesters doing daily field work, or boiler makers for the moonshine distillation. In the years before, there were those who travelled and begged, carrying a bundle with separately knitted spaces, for flour and the rest.

In U., a point of contention is that the late CAP president brought the Roma to the village, and everyone curses him for that reason. Here, the general perception is that Roma manipulate great cash sums and indulge in ostentatious consumption. A father received a bride wealth of 15 thousand Euros for his daughter and had a wedding with most of this sum. Once, a relative was driving back home on his off-road vehicle, stopped to greet his family and showed his pile of cash Euros. At the baptizing parties they order extra pricy cakes at refined confectionaries. And how could 30 thousand Euros cash come from begging? The Romanians both question the origin of their wealth and praise their wits, as the Roma with a four-grade education reads the forgiveness at the funeral. This amazement does not impede trust and respect. The Roma leave the house keys with the Romanian neighbours, to look after it and the stocked building materials inside while they are away for months or leave with the neighbours a bag with a secret content for

¹⁸⁰ *Pomana* refers to a ritual gift or charitable offering in Romanian Orthodox practice, typically involving food or goods distributed in memory of the dead, especially on funerary occasions and commemorative dates.

a few hours. The money for the bride's wealth stays with a trusted non-Roma co-villager for a few days. The non-Roma villagers give them woven rugs and mats, too many and outdated, in exchange for blankets or curtains. When they ask for a bottle of home-prepared tomato juice, they offer to pay in exchange, and do not just ask, like before, or they are ashamed to steal as they are now rich. At events such as funerals, the non-Roma villagers help with the preparation or pomana-related shopping (cookies, juice etc.). They exchange tips on work possibilities in migration countries.

In a neighbouring village, a non-Roma social worker from the Village Council helps Roma build up their claims for Social Aid and carries their files to their respective town, receiving in exchange I-phones or perfumes at discount prices. In exchange, they wittingly obtain the latest types of iPhones, by contracting the subscription with a pre-paid credit card, paying the first rate and then leaving the country. In exchange, they promise to give their votes to one candidate at the Council leadership. Also, the țigani are said to talk with one another wherever they meet, unlike Romanians. Lăutari frequently express kinship with majority society, declaring that they are "just like Romanians" when it is a question of being "civilized".

In U., non-Roma villagers point out a reverse situation, in which "now the Romanians are the ragged ones, and the Roma, the perfumed ones". Those with wealthy houses are opposed to the poor ones, or to those who "still beg". This matter of fact contradicts the ethnography of Toma and Fosztó (2018) which shows that, even when housing segregation is lessened, for example, with "migration houses" built by Roma in non-Roma residential proximity, the economically successful Roma may still face the stigmatizing attitudes that have historically been applied to the entire group. Another ethnography shows that, while migration became the main mechanism for climbing the social status system within each group, it did not ultimately change the local ethnic hierarchy. Even though some of the Roma became richer, their position in the local social order did not change (Anghel 2016, 39). In U. the non-Roma co-villagers acknowledge positive change in their behaviour and cooperate in everyday life situations as above shown.

Other accounts on past intercultural relations bring up grievances and injustice, as when one Roma entered a bar, even nicely dressed, he / she would not be served. "Twenty years before there were great incidents, when non-Roma would not let the țigani enter the Culture Club and see a film. At the exit from the cinema, big fights always occurred. There was a band here in T. that made great scandals. Until all Roma united, they went prepared, whatever will be will be. There was a great scandal then, with some hospitalized people. Later, we all gathered and talked to their parents, who were afraid of God, and all problems solved". (G.) At a Village Day Feast, when the Roma team was not allowed to participate in the football championship, they were finally allowed to participate and even won it.

On a side note, in a Southern Romanian countryside from the early 1980s, the *spoitori* (tinkers) mended copper vessels, in summer months, living in tents set up on an empty field by the village, with their horses attached. Their carts were beautifully painted and drawn in green and red. The communist state provided them with housing three villages further, but they kept on sleeping outside, in the tent set up in their yards, while using the house as a shelter for the horses. Through the lens of the studied themes, this ethnography revealed how Roma population acquires new ideas and a sense of agency and dignity, through horizontal moves, in migration countries and back, and diachronically, through two political regimes.

The ethnographic material presented in this chapter can be productively read through Fredrik Barth's seminal notion of ethnic boundaries (1969), which emphasizes that ethnicity is not defined by fixed cultural content but by the boundaries maintained and negotiated in interaction with others. The behaviour of Roma communities toward local authorities, their strategies of adaptation in work and housing, and their relationships with majority Romanians all illustrate precisely this dynamic. For instance, kinship-based settlement patterns, economic niches in informal trade, and conversions to neo-Protestant churches did not erase ethnic difference; rather, they reconfigured the ways boundaries were drawn, crossed, or reinforced. In this sense, the chapter's findings show that ethnicity among the Roma was not a static marker of marginality, but a relational process shaped in everyday encounters, where both Roma and Romanians acted as reference groups for one another. Situating the ethnography within Barth's framework thus highlights the Roma not simply as passive objects of policy or discrimination, but as active agents in redefining the terms of belonging under socialism. Moreover, Rüegg (2005) argues that Romania's local experiences with ethnic coexistence – particularly among Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, and Roma – show that multiculturalism as a policy model is limited, because it tends to treat ethnic groups as fixed, separate, and internally homogeneous. Instead, he proposes that interculturalism better captures how people actually live together in Romania: through everyday interactions, negotiations, shared practices, and fluid boundaries.

Chapter 10

Work, professions, institutions

After the collectivization campaign, the agricultural economy was totally reorganized, and a more systematic approach to production was introduced, with the planting of new crops taking advantage of local geography. Economies of scale were applied in all parts of production, with greater use of agricultural machinery and fertilizers and after 1964, the term “collectivization” itself was replaced by “cooperativization” (Cartwright 1999, 33). During Ceaușescu’s presidency, the construction of a national identity with the homogenization of ethnic, linguistic and religious levels, and with peasantry as a part of it, emerged. The countryside became a supplier of humans and products and with a re-arrangement of territory, tiny villages without development prospects were grouped into localities which became cultural and socio-economic centres.¹⁸¹ Before the 1970s, the increase of production, the extension of irrigated zones, the production of chemical fertilizers, and the more rational use of land were the main critique topics in relation to the collectivized farms in the party press.

In the 1970s, the modernization of agriculture was difficult to achieve, and agriculture performed poorly, as the sector suffered from consistent underinvestment. The state sector, that is the state farms, and the machine tractor stations consistently received more funds than the co-operative farms even though the latter accounted for around 60% of the agricultural land of the country. Failure is also linked with the rigidity of state-centralized planning, and the system of international trade that Romania was locked into (Turnock 1989, 267). In 1977, in a change of conscience, it was decided that, in each cooperative, the work team should be collectively responsible for its results, and that employment should be assured at all capacity. At the same time, the agrarian discourse in the press is full of repetitions and exhortations and the state is stuck in some ideological constraints by neglecting the private sector, which could also be an important supplier of agricultural products (Masson 1985, 117). One of the social consequences of

¹⁸¹ From the beginning of the 1960s to 1989, a second campaign was introduced which was no less radical, meaning to systematize the countryside (*sistematizare*), or to erase differences between the towns and the countryside (Turnock 1991, 251). Unlike the collectivization campaign, it was never completed.

the neglect of agriculture was the growing disaffection of young people. By the 1980s, labour shortages were critical, and the idea of agro-towns meant to halt the drift of people from the villages by raising rural living and working conditions to the level of the towns and cities emerged. Finally, a press campaign showed that there was no poverty, but that Romania consumed out of pleasure, and a scientific nutrition program was proposed, accompanied by a trend toward growing vegetables in the cities. A principle of self-provision and of regional self-sufficiency governed society, although Romania was one of the countries where food shortages were persistent, both in rural and urban areas. Against this background, this chapter proposes an ethnography of the collective and its social, economic and cultural dimensions in the 1970s and 1980s.

Former CAP, MTS and Village Council leaders, retired schoolteachers, new landowners and land tenants show how formal institutions function in social interaction, when enmeshed in local patterns of cultural and personal expectations of morality and trust. A transversal section on the politics of moonshine gives precious insights into the role of the ubiquitous home-produced plum brandy in social interactions. An outlook on agrarian strategies in early postsocialism reveals the adaptation strategies, hurdles and ways of empowerment for the new land holders, opening the way to new research avenues. Finally, the archival picture of the collective in PRM and Village Council documents will reveal material and ideological representations.

As previously shown, collective farms were amalgamations of private holdings and remained the property of their owners, while state farms were the property of the Romanian people. Ethnographies conducted in the 1970s address collective farm delegate assemblies as secular rituals and criticisms of citizen behaviour (Kideckel, 1976), the de-centralization of the CAP, worker alienation and poor organization (Kideckel, 1983), or folk poetry as a means of discontentment (Kligman, 1983). Later, the seminal work of Kligman and Verdery (2011, 445) reveals that the CAP was not flexible, because information did not get from one place to another quickly enough, it could not adjust quickly to demand, and it was not efficient (for example, it withheld piles of cereals not properly stocked). Then, macro-economic decisions were made by the “party elite” who had little or no expertise in agriculture. This impacted on the quality of work and the work directives. In a similar vein, the collectives were a failure, based on worthless efforts, due to bad organization and mistakenly repeated actions e.g. tractor drivers ploughing the land in useless repetitions (Cătănuș et al., 2000). Overall, the country’s collective farms remained among the least successful in the block, resulting in the gradual pauperization of rural areas, favouring the process of internal migration that accompanied industrialization.

Conversely, other ethnographies reveal the benefits and the successful functioning of the collective. For example, the CAP enabled people to expand their

home economies outside agriculture (Goina 2009, 206). Comparatively, in socialist Bulgaria, the collective was seen as a source of security. It used to provide for its members in various ways undertaking social and welfare functions, such as distributing ration cards for bread and consumer goods, supplying construction materials or firewood, allocating to the villagers plots for private farming and viticulture, buying their produce, organizing festivities etc. (Koleva, 2010). In some areas, collectivization led to the economic development of farming via capitalization and an injection of modern technology, also leading to an increased social mobility and a new division of labour. In parallel, traditional solidarities were preserved, as well as petitioning to central authorities on local abuses, and clientelist networks were developed (Iordachi & Dobrinu 2009, 36). At the “New Life” collective in Sântana, a skilful local leader ignored the Party’s directive to exclude the German population. Since the German members of the collective conformed to the Romanian image of Germans as hard workers, their presence increased all members’ motivation for working harder (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 392–3). Consequently, successful collectives that did not welcome de-collectivization emerged. Finally, Kligman and Verdery (2011, 448) show that if the regime had provided more resources for the collectives and granted greater autonomy to farm officials, many other collectives might have performed similarly.

The collective cooperative: cultural, spatial and economic dimensions

The names of the three farms: *Drapelul Muncii* (The Flagship of Labor), *Viața Nouă* (New Life), *1 Mai* (First of May) invoke symbols and promises of the construction of socialism. The CAP offices and storage facilities were placed on the main street (U.), on the riverbank (T.) and at the exit of the village (C.M.). The SMT (offices, maintenance hall and parking space) were at the village edge, by the pasture. The Village Council – the administrative, commercial and cultural centre – is placed in the central village area. The lands of the three villages are of uneven quality, but most of the area is covered with rich soil. All land belonged to the three collective cooperative farms. Village T. also hosted one state farm (IAS), with a large GOSTAT unit. All three CAPs had a variety of grain crops, but mostly wheat and corn, vegetables, and fruits. A sizeable portion of their land was used as pasture for cattle and sheep. Poultry and swine were also raised, and a vegetable growing and hothouse unit belonged to the three collectives.

A local monograph reveals the shortcomings of the CAP in U. After the repression of the revolt and the deportation of 17 families leaving empty homes and lost possessions, a Provisory Committee placed poorer villagers in the homes of the deportees, giving them ploughs and oxen to use. Each household had 15–16 livestock and stocked wheat piles. Based on the confiscated fortune, the first GAC made up of 56 families was founded one year later, on August 6, 1950, and functioned until 1962 when it was turned into a CAP. In the monograph, the inaugura-

tion of the CAP is pictured like a masquerade: live performances of folk singers, brass bands and megaphones, the speech of a “semi-analphabet” Party secretary who informed on the co-villagers to the Securitate during the 1949 revolt, and a long waiting time. In a similar vein, in U., “the appointed head of the Village Council, after the revolt, is a former motorman, promoted by the communists”. (I.) The monograph further reveals the social order changes brought about by the collective. Until the 1950s, a rare and powerful ox type (the grey steppe kind), with good meat and sought for in the important markets of the former empire, was bred in the village. As the collective ignored its potential and replaced it with Simmental cattle, it disappeared and by the late 1980s there were around 100–150 such cows left in the village. Before the founding of the CAP, the village of 400 households (*fumuri*)¹⁸² had around a thousand cows, ten times more than the collective. People lived well and drank good milk. Oxen were used as dowry for brides and losing them changed dowry norms. When the collectives were formed, cows and oxen were put in big cold stables, like caves, while at home they were protected from hits, bees, and their food was checked. Immutably, remembrances about collectives are based on pairs of contrast, such as nature-loving farmer versus technocratic ideology. The monographer further shows how the communist authorities dismissed the historical and geographical heritage of the village. After the Great Union in 1918, villagers had requested to be annexed to a more distant administrative unit (*plasa*), as it belonged to a poorer area, and it was more advantageous for them as agricultural taxes and taxes in general were smaller. The communist authorities changed this geographical belonging. In official parlance, the heads of the CAPs, together with collectors, agitators, educators, locals or not, all those in the official capacity who compelled the peasants to join are dubbed as “cadres”. They are subjected to internal surveillance, which sharpened the fierce competition among them (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 429).

Everyday leadership

Village U. is central to the ethnography of this chapter, revealing everyday life at the collective, autonomies and dependencies, contrasts between now and before, as well as subtleties of political rituals on the ground, in the context of the president’s visit. Kligman and Verdery (2011, 446) vividly showed that the state failed to establish a modern impersonal bureaucracy because cadres and peasants continued to interact through personal relations. The resulting overlap of power and personal relations corrupted friendships and kin connections. Party secretaries were chosen as Godparents, and the Party membership was just a façade, as revealed after the fall of communism: “He then burnt the membership card, started

¹⁸² In the presocialist period, *fum* (pl. *fumuri*) was used in censuses in Transylvania as a unit for counting households; the term literally means “smoke”, referring to a household identified by the smoke rising from its chimney.

going to church, and turned into a good believer”. (F.) The accounts of former leaders reveal that the latter are people with a history, a social identity, and individual qualities and there was no separation in the minds of villagers between these two people. The leaders did not share their preexisting personhoods when entering office, quite the opposite. The formal position was yet another aspect of themselves, a further development from and of moral strength, diligence and competitive individualism, another personal asset. In a similar vein, in her ethnographic study of life in a Siberian kolkhoz (collective farm) during late Soviet socialism, Humphrey (1983) shows that the kolkhoz was a negotiated space. Rather than being passive subjects of socialism, villagers creatively interpreted state demands, producing a hybrid system that was neither fully “socialist” nor simply “traditional”.

I. held both economic (CAP and future Association chairman) and political (Head of the Village Council, vice Head, Councillor) leadership positions from the 1960s until the 1990s. After his high-school studies in the zootechnical field, he returned to the village and, as a secretary of the Party Organization of the Village Youth, he was a member of the campaign teams. He ironically refers to this former mission by saying: “I did that kind of propaganda”. After being a vendor help at the cooperative, in 1962, when the CAP was founded, he joined it with his share of land and became a brigade leader at the livestock unit. His presidential terms at the CAP were between 1967–1971 and 1975–1984, and he was Head Councillor of the commune the time in between, as assigned by the county-level PCR organization. After the former chairman was denounced for violent behaviour by another Party member who wanted his position, I. was appointed as CAP chairman following an unannounced decision: “It was a Party task, no one consulted you (laughter)”. The local Party organization preferred to appoint I., as it was easier for the ones who nominated him to have him as a leader, as a hidden form of control, and the one who appointed him was responsible for the orchard. He was continuously re-elected by the farm assembly every two years. From 1990, I. was Head of the Village Council for two legislatures and ran for a while the Association resulting from the collective. His private collection includes files with handwritten and typed petitions, diplomas, registers, biographies and photo albums with the president’s visit. The petitions are indexed based on house numbers, and villagers request them for retirement pension claims. I. mentioned having changed all house number plates and renewing all uninhabited houses with gardens as Head of the Village Council. Moreover, he preserved in his vocabulary working terms such as collectivist or unity.¹⁸³

Overall, supervising the land work (1250 ha), the orchard (22 ha), the vineyard (2 ha) and the boiler were no pieces of cake and I. proudly speaks about

¹⁸³ In her ethnography, Humphrey (2002) discusses how the term “peasant” was marginalized or displaced during socialism.

the collective's peak years and progressive role when the mechanization of agriculture reduced the physical burden of peasants. The CAP in U. – a successful model, in terms of salaries, income, and production – owned 1250 ha of land and 300 ha of personal lots. After ploughing the land with oxen-driven ploughs in the early 1950s, tractors, discs, mills, fertilizers were introduced in the early 1960s, and a lot of domestically produced fertilizer per hectare could be used. "After 1962, when the entire village had joined the CAP, production was lower – at around 1,200 kg of wheat per hectare, as the land was tilled with ploughs and oxen. From 1966 onwards, production began to increase, reaching 1,600 kg of wheat per hectare". (I.) New tractors were brought (UTS ones), disks, milling machines, and the mechanical workshops were better equipped, and when the harvesters were brought, those who used scythes were afraid of losing their work. At the same time, the loss of private property had lost its emotional relevance: "After 5–10 years, people forgot about the lost cart and oxen" and for bringing home the harvested hay, they used the trucks of the CAP which transported it for them up to the house front. Fertilizers were given, 400 kg per hectare of urea and in spring, 300–400 of nitrate. The 1970s were years of praise and diversification, as the collective made investments, stables, offices, and bought 1500 sheep. They had 540 cattle and a lamb fattening unit as well which were delivered in the 1st trimester, at 30kg, and people were happy with the pay. The house plot and contracts with the state were the ways in which private initiative was tolerated. In U. there were 300 ha house plots, and one was entitled to 30 acres.¹⁸⁴ In U., the collective owed a lot of land, and few young people remained in the village, while in the neighbouring village from the commune, the situation was the other way round. The two collectives merged in 1983, in what I. described as a political move, when people outside the collective secretly influenced the cadres in the agricultural direction and the party for the collectives to unify, so that things are better controlled. After the unification, I. was transferred to the Village Council as a vice mayor.

At the same time, the 1970s were years when various hoarded materials were at the disposal of peasant workers. The various kinds of free-to-take surpluses are hoarded materials in the sense described by Verdery (1996, 20): socialism's fragility begins with the system of "centralized planning" which the centre neither adequately planned nor controlled in its implementation. Central planners would draw up a plan with quantities of everything they wanted to see produced, known as targets. If managers somehow ended up with more material than needed, they hoarded it, and hoarded material had two uses: it could be kept for the next production cycle or could be exchanged with some other firm. For I., hoarded materials are part of the collective's gains, as, for example, the collectivist could

¹⁸⁴ Starting with the 1970s, every homestead could deliver contract-based agricultural products and livestock to the state, and this became a defining feature of the relationship between public and private in the Romanian rural milieu.

take as many haystacks as needed. There was enough bread, and the members got grain from the collective and fed the owned pigs, calves, and cows. One could also freely take fertilizer for their house plots and fuel for their gardens, while today you pay 100 RON on a sack of nitrate. Other pairs of contrasts between now and before are made in terms of land cultivation, discipline and control. The CAP was “a perfectly organized structure which now went to hell (. . .) from the 1200 ha worked before, now not even 300 ha are worked”. Unlike now, brigade leaders cleaned the dug plots and had a marked ruler and controlled the land which had to be re-worked if it wasn’t properly ploughed. Today, tractor drivers plough the land the way they wish to, while before, they were paid based on the amount of ploughed land and even their wives ploughed during the day while they worked themselves during the night. Additionally, I. presented the incentives of collective work to the villagers and collected contracts for raising pigs or calves, having good results with the milk quantity and pigs and poultry delivered to the state. Other narrators complained about the low price received with these contracts or did not trust the contracting opportunity.

In addition to the economic gains, the collective is praised for its social life and empowerment opportunities, and everyday life situations are recalled humorously. The “wall gazette” listed drunkard villagers who missed their working hours and drinking in general is recalled humorously. “A wife came to complain about the husband’s violent behaviour, that he got drunk and broke all the plates. And I went to talk to him, and he told me that he would not break any plates from that day on . . . and in the evening, when he came to me, he said, ‘Comrade president, I bought myself tin plates’ (laughter)”. I.’s examples confirm that sexual behaviour, theft and drinking are the three areas of special concern for policing morality at Party level (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 392). Humour also governs the narrative on everyday obligatory tasks: “Yes, we had to read the obligatory article (*articolul de fond*), like in the army”. (I.) Then, the collective stands as an all-encompassing organization, as from the salary, one could modernize and re-build the home, and only 10 houses in the village were not renovated. One could use the collective to go on vacation, but not many did. On May 1st and August 23rd, the collective machines took the best workers to the spa and covered room and board expenses, and there were also coupons for the sea or for the mountains, 2–3 per unit. Kindergarten kids did voluntary work with the older pioneers, like picking bluebonnets in wheat fields, and the CAP gave the school some modest funds in return. There was also an artistic brigade joining the vocal band *Cântarea României*,¹⁸⁵ and a choir. Fifty kids were attending kindergarten, unlike now, when only 2–3 kids are

¹⁸⁵ A larger political and cultural movement, hosting public manifestations with the purpose of creating a mass culture. It functioned as a propaganda machine which in the end included all formerly non-politicized cultural activities, such as *Cenacul Flacăra* (originally a platform for folk music promotion).

attending it. Others complain how propaganda was obligatory, unpaid and time consuming, as you had to go to the rehearsals for *Cântarea României* to other villages far away, by bike, by cart, or on foot.

The relationships with villagers are described in terms of genuine help for providing school certificates to parents who were not yet collective members. At the same time, I. covered up for villagers in Party reports on church attendance. During I.'s term as mayor, new Orthodox, Baptist and Pentecostal churches were built in the commune. Some opposition to the Baptist church in Călăcea was expressed, and Party superiors said that it should be blown up, or turned into a nursery, and finally it remained a church. I. once made a fake report for his Party superiors on the Baptist church attendance at its inaugural event after renovation. When being asked to look at how many cars with CAP members attended the service, or whether there were Party members present, I. reported that he had seen just elders: "And they never asked me anything else since then". Otherwise, surveillance happened in softer forms. 50–60 people ate together when working on their norms, and the everyday mood could be seized. Social life was peaceful, and there were no constraints on church attendance, as young people did not attend church service much anyway, just like today.

Moreover, hierarchical relations are connected to constant forms of control. An engineer from the Salonta raion to which the CAP belonged came to the village up to 2–3 times a day, and those from county-level agricultural direction and Party secretaries came as well, more rarely: "Everybody was giving advice". And here in the village, they had a representative from the raion council, plus a party activist: "They watched on us so that we could not make any move". Additionally, the chairman role involved a constant need to play a double game: "As a Chairman, you needed to lie, to work in two analytics: one that you showed to the Party activists who did not know the reality (.) and another one to the bank representatives, who followed you, as you took their funds, to whom you showed the reality. These had to be bribed as well, with *pălincă*,¹⁸⁶ lamb, or some cheese so that they keep their mouths shut. And at the end of the year, when the line was drawn, then you told the reality, you had no choice. You could only give people 2 kg of wheat, but we had to do as such to have two extra kilos, to give them four". Indeed, firms overstated both their material requirements for production and their investment needs. To be effective, socialist work organization had to improvise in the face of the fluctuating quantity and quality of input on the one side, and the pressure from plan targets on the other. Then it happened that the CAP threw away the previously ordered extra oil and diesel oil for the cars of the collective when

¹⁸⁶ *Pălincă* is a traditional fruit brandy from Romania, typically distilled from plums but also from other fruits, and commonly produced in rural households for personal consumption and ritual or social occasions.

the inspectors from the bank arrived. Drivers were declaring more kilometres to earn more, as they were paid per kilometre.

Finally, in the early 1980s, the ones who initially subscribed got old and did not want to do the work at the livestock unit, despite the good pay – 1500 monthly per cow stand, plus 2000–2500 kilos of wheat per year. Their children had left the village for the city, working at the *Înfrățirea* enterprise (producer of high precision machine tools) in Oradea, among other places. “And I brought the Gypsies, I had no choice. I brought 2 families, now there are 100 of them. In their village the pay was lower and here, life had improved. You had prizes for milk, breeding, livestock care, and you benefited from all these 2000–2500 kilos of wheat. They bought a house here, brought their brothers, families, and finally there were more Gypsies than Romanians with the cows. This was the problem with them, they stole milk, they needed it for the kids”. (I.)

In addition to accounts of everyday routine, the visit of the president highlights subtleties of political rituals on the ground. In the summer of 1977, a delegation made up of President Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Agricultural Minister paid an official visit to the CAP of U. Initially, the delegation was supposed to go to another place in the county. As some linden trees had been cut down there, the Securitate rejected the visit idea, and the delegation came to U. because of the good growth dynamics in various products. When preparing for the visit, CAP members harvested the field, harrowed it, took water in a cistern and wet it. Then the collective mobilized around 250 people to pull out the grass from the wheat field. The ice cream van travelling to a pioneer camp was passing by and the management bought all of it for the villagers. A commission came to check the “cleaned” wheat field before the visit. For a whole week, the machinery of the army screened the field on which the delegation was going to land, in search of metals. The president arrived with three helicopters, but no one knew in which one he was. Only a few Party members, mayors, and journalists could enter the zone. Fifty soldiers and thirty militia men came and stood in three rows and lay down when the helicopter landed.

Big 40m boards stood from the wheat fields up to the road representing figures of sheep, corn, wool production, and the dynamics of production growth during the past ten years (as I. accurately remembers, 3560 kg of wheat per hectare on a cultivated surface of 540 ha). As the director of the Agricultural Direction was describing this increase, the president stopped him and said that it was an exaggeration: “And the director of the Agricultural Direction said: our technicians worked all night long, and here a mistake sneaked in . . . meaning that it was swollen . . . as evil as he was, Ceaușescu was not stupid”. (I.) The Securitate people had a present prepared for the official visit, a stag hunting trophy made in Austria, that they gave to I. to hand in. The latter had prepared an answer on the provenance of the trophy, saying that a retired co-villager crafting weapons, pitch forks, or clarinets made

it. Years later, I saw the trophy on display at the Romanian Peasant Museum in Bucharest, labelled as a present from the CAP in village U. On the visit occasion, I was offered a grant for the CAP extension and refused it, for fear that there were too few working hands to count on and thus he avoided being accountable. In the other village from the commune, where more young people remained (“10 people were living in a house”), the grant was accepted and used for the CAP expansion.



12. Ucuriș, photo taken in 1977. Visit of the delegation including president Nicolae Ceaușescu, Minister of Agriculture Petre Glăvan, Ilie Verdeț, Gheorghe Blaj. These met the local authorities: First Secretary of the County, Head of Village Council, and CAP Chairman.

Diligence and power display

If I.'s account is an epitome of triumph and progress, in great amount aligned with his former professional mission, the accounts in this part are more moderate, revealing the diligence of work regardless of the political regime, sensorial aspects of work as well as forms of power display in the farm's work.

S. (born 1945), a former MTS leader, initially worked in construction on a uranium mining site, at a phone unit, and at the Sugar Factory in Timișoara, helping his parents pay land taxes and quotas. At the age of 23, back home after completing military service and getting married, he performed norm-based work for

the collective, i.e. work counted against labour quotas, such as tree-planting, or sowing with horse- driven ploughs.¹⁸⁷ In 1960, as soon as the MTS was opened, he attended the tractor-driving school and due to his bright exam result, picked up the tractor he wished for, being the only one in the team to get a new tractor: “I can even feel its smell of paint now”. In 1965, S. was appointed as helper to the brigade leader, being advanced to another salary category. The MTS started with twelve tractors, and ended up with twenty-three, used for all the arable land of the village and other surrounding villages. It started as a small workshop in the middle of the fields, made of adobe and wood that S. built himself. Here, workers who felt their hands too cold in winter in the open air while doing the maintenance and repairing work, lit a fire of rubber tires to heat up. Then the CAP president invited them to settle in the village centre, but this was annoying for the villagers, as the first tractors had a small engine which made a big noise when being started. “One pear tree giving sweet and tasty pears grew there . . . all the rest is dust”. (S.) The section was clean and tidy, and the tractors were freshly painted and aligned. After the dismantling of the CAP, the SMT provided the machinery to the emerging Association. Tractors were given to a scrap metal collection centre, and villagers pointed out that the two former leaders did not take tractors for themselves. In 1994 S. applied for Phare funding¹⁸⁸ and got himself a tractor for working his own land and the land of six-seven families in the village. S. ploughed and harrowed land and the members of those families did the manual work: sowing, harvesting etc. His children are still involved with agri-business and accounts on the building of new annexes in the household highlight a refusal to get old.

S. further reveals the professionalism he showed in everyday work and impromptu visits from superiors. Until 1974, the pay for the work at the SMT was based on *hantri* – a measurement of ploughed land representing 18–20 cm – and not on the harvest, and the purpose was to work a lot. Everyone had a working plan, depending on the state of the tractor. After 1974, the idea was to work profitably. Based on the expenses – oils, salaries, engines, all that you received – one had to show how much was ploughed, harrowed and the resulting harvest. The expenses (in red) and the income (in green) were manually put on a graph. Twenty percent of the salary was withheld until the end of the year and returned if production targets were met. By contrast, the CAP long relied on normbased remuneration rather than fixed wages. Supervising fourteen tractors, manipulating fuel, distributing diesel oil to the drivers, and helping with the measurements was part of everyday work. The main challenge was to make the business plan and to report it without calculation mistakes. Despite his seven- grade education, S. was

¹⁸⁷ Working at the CAP is not referred to as starting work, but as doing norm-based work (*mers la norme*).

¹⁸⁸ The Phare Programme is a pre-accession financial instrument of the European Union (EU) for cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries to support their transition to market-oriented economy and their accession to EU.

always praised for not making a single mistake, while others who were engineers or technicians did it wrong. Those section heads that repeatedly made mistakes were downgraded to mechanic or driver jobs. In terms of hierarchical relations, impromptu visits happened every now and then. During one visit of a delegation including country-level leaders which occurred “when the wheat without thorns first appeared”, all the family got involved in cooking and the meal was served inside S.’s house, not outside, under the vineyard, so that no one could see them and hear them talk. In other situations, such as the training in Sinaia, the trainers are referred to in terms of their childish teaching manner: “1300 sections would have to work harder to fill in for the 1700 ones, as not all sections worked hard. The county-level director gave us examples this way, as if we were kids”. (S.)

Another leader’s narrative revolves around diligence and authentic involvement in the village life. After being an accountant and an agricultural agent, T. was head of the Village Council in Olcea (the commune that U. is part of) for twelve years, from the 1980s to the late 1990s, while also being the secretary of the Central Party Committee. After the last mandate at the Council, he worked in the cooperation sector for fourteen years, as a vendor, together with his wife, from whence he retired. He pointed out that “I always liked to do my work diligently, wherever I was”. About the need to play a double game for the Party members, he reveals that “in every evil there is a positive side as well”. During his term, he revived the choir at the Culture House at the request of regional authorities, provided it sang in the church as well. In his view, children who go to church are more intelligent and have a richer vocabulary, thus he repeatedly pointed out to the schoolteacher that children should be encouraged to go to church. He organized the Christian blessing of the new school and protected the Baptist church from demolition. Then, T. paved the sidewalks in the whole village, had a block of flats built in the head of the commune, and maintained the medical point and the pharmacy.¹⁸⁹ T. resumes his creed as such: “I was never an adept of the communist regime, and I could do nothing about that. And the one who says that he was not a communist is a big scoundrel. This is impossible. All the country was communist, if it was the Socialist Republic of Romania, we were all the same”. Being a Party member was a pre-requisite for the cooperation job, a formal act. The Village Council established a budget for the collective as well: “It was a trick, it was diplomacy, we gave the money to the collective, the collective had money, but paid people in kind”.

Raising communes to urban status was one PCR objective adopted in 1972, based on which 300–500 new towns would be created this way.¹⁹⁰ In T., the cre-

¹⁸⁹ By 1970 every commune, covering an average of 4–5 separate villages, had its own general store, medical facility and commercial organization and some 80% of all villages were supplied with electricity.

¹⁹⁰ Overall, the programme envisaged the demolition of between 5,400 and 6,400 villages. In practice, however, these plans failed. Although numerous new settlements were constructed in the

ation of such a town was voluntarily obstructed, as the Head of the Village Council did not accept that the commune be declared a town, for fear of losing his position. Should the village have been transformed into a town, it would have been visible that the leader only had four grades and a traineeship in mechanics, and he would have lost his position. Then, the two following Heads of Councils, together with the CAP president, did not accept that a hemp and flax factory be built in the village, for fear of losing the working hands at the CAP. Additionally, one failure of the modernization attempt was the rigidity of state-centralized planning and strict adherence to the national plan. P., a former vet at the state farm in T., recalls how the interventions of the PCR obstructed the technical side of work: “The most foolish thing was that everyone came up with an idea, especially those from the Party, such as to make fertilizer from bird droppings. And animals died in great amounts”. (P.) Other fatal mistakes happened out of the wish to reach a high production level: “They worked with artificial insemination. The initial mistake was to do it on weak and small animals that had to give birth to a huge calf. Many of them did not survive and were taken to the slaughterhouse”. (P)

The economies of moonshine

Alcohol was ubiquitous in Eastern bloc states and frequent attempts to regulate its consumption are documented in PRM reports of the 1950s–1960s on the conduct of Party members, CAP discipline and family problems. In *Everyday Stalinism*, Sheila Fitzpatrick (1999, 84–85) shows that in the early 1930s, Soviet authorities used reports of excessive drinking to address social inadequacies. Drunkenness in communal homes or trains was understood to symbolize unresolved issues in housing, work, transportation, and public morality (Wahlen 2017, 186). In a similar manner, the *chiaburi* were those whose moonshine-related economic activities brought them to the attention of the communist authorities for example, ex-publicans who continued to sell alcohol, or the owners of *țuica* (traditional plum brandy) stills. Together with the lazy, the poor, the Gypsies, the communists, or the tractor drivers, the moonshine consumer is among the first joiners of the GAC. At the same time, the “cadres” engaged in heavy drinking both in their assemblies or when doing the campaign (Kligman & Verdery 2011, 393). For Kideckel (1983, 31), alcohol was part of the social estrangement in the village, where people retreated into their homes. The collectivization executors of the campaign are offered *țuica* on their unannounced visits and one could find a replacer for digging norms and portions at the CAP in exchange for moonshine. Or you could have your work done on your family plot by paying the tractor driver with moonshine, unlike today when “everyone wants money”.

1970s, their number fell far short of the targets set by the plan: instead of the 300–500 new towns envisaged, only 129 rural settlements were upgraded to agroindustrial towns (Cartwright 2001, 35).

In the 1970s, distillery owners were joking about having stopped the distillery for 24 or 48 hours, in order not to hand in so much liquid, as I. recalls. An understanding was reached with the producers, so that they are profitable too, as they were providing the Village Council with moonshine on visits of delegations. Once, the Party secretaries asked I. for a hundred litres of *pălincă* from the local production for a delegation. During late communist years, villagers distilled the plum harvests in hiding, while the local authorities got their share. At the public distillery, after the state retained its share, one had 20% or 30% left. Recent works on the politics of liquidity (Tulbure 2012, 252) address bodegas / taverns as key spheres of material and symbolic exchange in the 1980s, associated with the barter of goods and services “taken” from state enterprises and circulating informally. Similarly, in postsocialist rural Russia, moonshine is a non-monetary transaction in ethnographies of bribes, gifts, and informal connections accruing around access to goods and services. Also, it is considered as a form of domestic production, in which the rural population withdraws from purchasing in stores. Moonshine is not an item to be stoked, or transformed, as it is consumed very shortly after the exchange. Any bottle of moonshine was rarely long for this world (Rogers 2005, 324).

Producing, consuming or exchanging moonshine is part of the everyday life-world in the socialist village and beyond. Due to the suitability of the area in terms of plum tree cultivation, moonshine (*pălincă*) is permanently present in formal and informal social interactions up to this day, as a gift to be taken at one’s second home abroad, as a giveaway (*mărturie*) in customized bottles (small thank you gifts for wedding or baptism party guests), or as a marketed local product.¹⁹¹ The best moonshine producer and supplier is prospected long before the family event. When buying *pălincă* in the producer’s home, the client serves shots on the spot, and the ones who do not pay right away have their debt marked down in a notebook (*caiet*). Sometimes offering shots to a first-time guest is a resistance test, and *pălincă* drinking accompanies the yearly pig killing ritual. The moonshine production engages the extended family, starting with the manual picking of the plums, in early autumn, and ending with the preparation itself. Women and children oversee plum picking while men oversee the fermentation and distillation process. The freshly made moonshine is stocked in wooden barrels in the loft of the house or in its annexes. The taste of a true *pălincă* is proudly acknowledged by connoisseurs by the bubbles it makes when poured, termed as beads (*mărele*). Then, the yellowish colour of the drink is given by a cherry plum type, or by storage in a mulberry-wood barrel. Moonshine production is part of the diffuse

¹⁹¹ The fieldwork area is well suited to plum cultivation. After moving to his new house in the early 1950s, P., one of the wealthier villagers in C.M., established a plum orchard; in his most productive year, he reportedly produced 600 litres of moonshine.

mixed household practice (Mihăilescu, 2011), involving both the rural and the urban family and blurring the boundary between the two spaces.

Finally, stories on *pălincă* as a non-monetary medium in postsocialist Romania speak of a villager who paid 20 litres of moonshine for one sheep, or of a car selling transaction, when a potential buyer suggested paying for the car partly in money, partly in moonshine. Now, in U., two or three distillers operate, and the distiller keeps one litre per stout, which is more convenient economically.



13. Cociuba Mare, wedding, late 1970s

Land restitution and institutional sequel

In U., at the breakup of the collective, villagers did not wait for the enforcement of the restitution law, grabbing livestock, tools or horses, taking haystacks out of the storage facilities, and using their former individual plots, in a spontaneous asset-grabbing. One villager recalls this break as such: “There will not be one stone left upon another that will not be thrown down.¹⁹² It was foolishness, one builds, the other one demolishes”. (M.). For I., the former chairman, the breakup separates the winners (“not people from the village, outsiders . . . they went there and broke the stable gates and took the animals . . . and the ones who worked all their lives had 4–5 sheep, only what was left at the end”) from the losers (“the elders who worked at the farm before and who retired when it broke”). As the free use of

¹⁹² Bible, Mark 13:2.

resources stopped, one former shepherd admits having sold the sheep in the early 1990s, as the CAPs dismantled, and he would not graze on anyone's land. Some regret the breaking of the CAP as it offered you "bread". Throughout the year before the passage of Law 18 / 1991 – the first law addressing postsocialist land restitution – spontaneous acts of reform took place throughout the country.

In 1989, around 28% of the total agricultural land in the country was in the state sector, the collectives accounted for around 65% while the rest was held in private, usually mountain farms and in small personal allotment plots. To many peasants, the revolution turned into an opportunity to right the wrongs committed during collectivization. The fall of the Communist Party was a chance to return to their old plots and to work independently once again. As in the towns and cities, much of the initial popular unity dissolved as different interest groups appeared, for instance, old peasants who wished to return to the pre-Communist system, those who saw the profits that could be made in the turmoil and those who were indifferent in political terms if they were economically secure (Cartwright 2001, 174). In 1991, 1995 and 2001 the Romanian Parliament passed laws for property restitution to their lawful owners who lost their possessions during the Communist regime (1945–1989).

Overall, Verdery (2003) shows how the shift from collectivized land to private property in postsocialist Transylvania exposed land as a political symbol and a complex web of social relations and argues that postsocialist property reforms were shaped not by a clean break but by the enduring logics and constraints of socialist-era property forms. On the other hand, David Kideckel and Steven Sampson, both refer to the rural transition as a process of decollectivization, governed by a chain of restitution laws which generate new relations between the state and the subjects (Fay & James 2009, 4). Land restitution underpins an important turbulence of the post-communist era (Șerban, 2016). In the Romanian countryside, the trace of private arable land was lost due to the building of facilities, cropping strategies and plots of land also shifted between the neighbouring collective farms. Therefore, tracing the boundaries of former individual land is impossible. Law 18/1991 created the organisms which administered and controlled the stipulations of the law regarding the land, claiming both to "constitute" and "re-constitute" ownership rights. The initial reform design presupposed the restitution of one's property in the historical boundaries, allowing former landowners and former collective farm members a share of the collective's land, and there was a 10-hectare ceiling on restitution claims. At the same time, the law stipulated that those who had worked for more than three years for the collective farm were also entitled to a share of its land. Specifically, Law 18/1991 gave rights for setting up the "private-type associations with legal personality", taking over all assets of former CAPs. Consequently, as shown by Cartwright (2001, 110), during the im-

plementation of this law, there were examples when peasants were, once again, pressured into joining farming organizations “voluntarily”.

Law 18/1991 was amended by Laws 169/1997, 54/1998, and 1/2000, aiming to increase the average size of private farms and to create a legal framework for the land market in Romania. Among other provisions, Law 169/1997 extended the limits of land for restitution to 50 hectares of arable land, including 30 hectares of forest. Where the land was not available for restitution, compensation had to be paid for the non-returned land difference. In addition, the law removed restrictions on the sale of land within ten years, which had been introduced by Law 9/1990. Furthermore, Law 54/1998, the Land Circulation Law, increased the limit of land ownership from 100 hectares to 200 hectares per family, at the same time legalizing free land transactions. At the same time, land ownership by non-resident foreigners as physical persons was forbidden, and only the foreign legal persons registered in Romania could own land (Cartwright, 2001). However, many potential beneficiaries did not receive the claimed land, and, in addition, there were many other conflicts over land. As a result, a new law was finally issued, Law 1/2000, stipulating the implementation rules of both Laws 18/1991 and 169/1997 (OECD 2000; Sabates Wheeler, 2004).

For the local administration, the restitution brings with it deficient procedures. “The restitution is something that never finishes, mostly due to their fault. Law 10/2001 first used the agricultural register with lying declarations, not the CF (Cartea Funciară).¹⁹³ The foolish thing is that the 2001 Law should not have stipulated full restitution. Only the surface covered in the CFs should be returned, not fully. And then the Association chose its leaders, and the leaders did what they wanted”. (V.) In my field setting as well, the Associations are short-lasting institutions using the resources left from the collective. In U., after the break of the CAP, an Association with 160 families (the CAP had 400 families) was formed, working the joint land with the tractors of the SMT which closed in 1994. After the tractors were quashed and the spare parts sold, the Association made it for four more years, unable to sustain the costs of tractor rental from the Machine Tractor Stations (SMT), the price of works, and the high fuel price. In Călacea, the Association functioned for a year. Here, as the young people remained in the village due to available workplaces at the CAP, they got their equipment and work hundreds of hectares in tenancy.

¹⁹³ Law Decree no. 115/1938 established the system of land registration based on the *Carte Funciară* (CF) and was applicable in Transylvania, Banat, and northern Moldavia. The CF constitutes a system of immovable property registration that records all legal acts and juridical facts relating to a given property. From a legal standpoint, this system has been regarded as superior to those in other parts of Romania where it was not in force. For this reason, the Law on Cadastre and Real Estate Publicity (Law no. 7/1996) extended the CF-based system of land publicity to the entire country.

On this background, the restitution process is governed by mistrust in the local and central state institutions (Giordano & Kostova 2002, 153). Verdery (2002, 6) argues that the delay in restitution came not primarily from a government that intended to postpone land restitution but from obstructionism by officials in the administrative units (communes) charged with implementing restitution. First, the restitution is made to the benefit of the CAP liquidation commission who manipulates the restitution process, as they are free to restore the individual plots of land according to both the residence and the mechanical equipment of the owners. Then, the commission members encourage cooperation and the setting up of associations, and the balanced distribution of the tractors would facilitate their most efficient use, but neighbours might not want exactly that, a fusion of lands. Alternatively, the restitution is manipulated to the single benefit of some committee members, or even higher above. Situations when the whole surface of one commune was sold and nothing was returned to the villagers, is recurring in the narratives. One villager from C.M. said: "Here, at least, people got back some livestock and tools, but there, nothing, they sold everything".

Second, the unavailability of written evidence (stock value of confiscated goods, livestock) which fuelled open group conflicts, or conflicts between kin, is often mentioned. Evidence was intentionally destroyed to obstruct the restitution process: "The page with my grandfather's name was removed from the register at the Village Council. The animal production engineer did this. I went to the state archive but nothing; from our village no information could be found. (...) His page was taken out as he had the greatest amount of land, of livestock and machinery, so he had to disappear. (...) Land is suspended and is probably in somebody else's name. So, the ones who did not have land they have it today, and us, the ones we had, don't have any". (E.) Additionally, the CAP leadership is criticized for refusing to return sheep until these were sheared, and after using their milk, cheese, and wool. "Cows and veal remained there, and they sold them, and the village people got nothing. They got rich due to the fortune of all ... they got flats, cars ... if I had taken anything, they would have sent the police over". (E.) Third, others point at the random restitution manner: "3.60 hectares they gave me ... there were 10 hectares, but everybody occupied it, and they told they have no more left to give me ...". (E.) Owners of high amounts of arable land and pasture are requested to show further evidence: "I have the *Cartea Funciară* and all, and I asked if everyone needed it here in order to get their land back ... but they told that no ... but me, they asked me for it ... probably, the ones having over 10 hectares, needed to take out a CF ... and no one gave me land". (A.) These examples totally confirm the "elasticity" of the land and issues of local identity (Verdery 1999, 172) as well as the influence of the local elites and group interests (Giordano & Kostova, 2001) which impacted land restitution and the work of land tenants.

The archival documents in the annex of the Village Council in C.M show the specific vocabulary and arguments used in the restitution claims / petitions for the Commission for the Liquidation of the CAP.¹⁹⁴ For example, one petition says: “I hereby claim to be reimbursed for the harness, plough and harrow, which were abusively taken from me during collectivization. I can point to these with two witnesses: names, and house number”. Another petition is more vocal and is not signed by the president of the Commission but is still indexed: “Thank you for considering my petition with which I subscribed to the collective, being pressured by the Communist Party. I don’t want to be part of this Unity anymore and I don’t want to be ruled by this Unity, which is not capable of making justice, but only of keeping you under the pressure of communism which is still in vigour in this Unity. At the same time, I claim to have an attestation saying that I am no longer member of this collective. I don’t ask through the present request for the collective to dismantle, I just want to be free. If my request is not approved, I claim to be informed on the article of law stipulating this”.¹⁹⁵

Finally, the former buildings of the collective were put to different uses. On the premises of old collective buildings in C.M. a land tenancy is in place. In U., the sheep herding unit is now rented by a family of sheep breeders and land tenants (tractor owners) who, since the early 1990s, have been based there in summer, producing cheese. The rest of the year, they live in a different region of the country. The other buildings are sold and re-sold, they now belong to the bank, or their trace is lost in villagers’ minds. “The liquidation commissions of the CAPs sold and re-sold them. Right now, in Călacea they do a forced execution, the one who bought the place pledged it and did not pay the sum and now it’s auctioned. It is the situation everywhere. The SMAs were bought by those who were section heads at that time and with valued shares. At that time, it was possible to place somewhere the shares you bought, dividends, or how they were called”.¹⁹⁶

On this background, villagers point out the aspects which hinder agricultural development for private landowners. The first problem is caused by bureaucratic hurdles, and many applications for European funding were rejected because landowners still had a part of their land indexed at APIA,¹⁹⁷ and parallel requests were not allowed. In 2015, U. was part of G.A.L (the Euro-Crișana Local Action

¹⁹⁴ Dosar cu cereri pentru dovedirea bunurilor aduse în CAP Cociuba Mare la înființare, 1991, f 2.

¹⁹⁵ Dosar cu cereri pentru dovedirea bunurilor aduse în CAP Cociuba Mare la înființare, 1991, f 9.

¹⁹⁶ State Agricultural Enterprises (IASs) have been differently privatized, being “included in the general framework of privatization of state-owned assets.” It is useful to point out that the state farms were excluded from restitution. In this light, Law 15/1990 provided the basis for the former IASs to be converted into either commercial limited joint stock companies, eligible for privatization in accordance with Law 31/1990, or “Regii Autonome” considered to be of national strategic importance.

¹⁹⁷ The Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture (APIA) was established in 2005 as a need of organizing European funds allocated to agricultural development.

Group Association), which, through funds from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, invites applications from farmers of up to 40 years old with an agricultural exploitation ranging between 6–40 UDE situated on the territory of the member communes. The Association claims to follow a bottom-up approach, as the villager knows better what is missing from the backyard than the Ministry of Agriculture or the County Council. The first eligibility check is made at G.A.L. level, and the projects are either vegetable or livestock-based, or mixed. “On the TV they say that European funds are not absorbed. How come, if you meet so many obstacles? The problem is in these obstacles and all these interpretations. There is a bunch of consultancy firms, and it’s based on negotiations – if you get the funding, you offer a percentage, or you pay for the documentation and then if you win, you get a percentage of its value”. (Village Council employee) At the same time, the use of the subsidy per hectare is fuzzy, as it depends on who is declared as working the land.¹⁹⁸ There are situations when the owner whose field is leased hands in the request and gets the subsidy, or the tenant hands in the request and the owner gets the money. The one who does not work the land is happy to receive at least the subvention. These examples confirm that practices on the ground have changed the flow in subsidies funding, shifted its main purpose and made the agriculturally inactive population important recipients of subsidies. Subsidizing peasants on the one hand, and their evasion of state taxes and social contribution on the other, might generate what is called a free rider problem (Dikovic 2025, 187).

Second, land tenants complain about the high fragmentation of land. The current land tenants in U. and C.M. address the complicated geographical layout of the land they are leasing. A. (born 1950, village U.), owner of a land tenancy, shows his mistrust for the CAP as an institution: “The CAPs were forms with a very low rentability as they were regarded with disinterest by the ones ruling them. Their only interest was to cover themselves with lying reports and to steal”. A.’s tenancy separates itself from this model: “The Administration Council had very strict control measures. The conceived form of control was a matter of personal pride: everyone in the business practiced it. Anyone who caught another stealing would reclaim ten cartloads of corn from the thief’s rights”. (A.) The tenant is critical on the way in which the land restitution was implemented and shows that people had lost their sense of property when they had got back their land. Moreover, they did not do notary and registration forms on the new property and the entry petitions of the CAP in which not all the amount of land was declared complicated the situation even more. Then, the ownership titles were established based on some possession awarding papers with no juridical value. Overall, A. mistrustfully reveals a connection between land ownership and potential foreign buyers as owners of territory.

¹⁹⁸ In the period 2014–2020, a Romanian farmer received subsidies per hectare of 136 euro/ha.

At his turn, I. (born 1950, village C.M.), owner of a tenancy and mayor for three legislatures from the 2000s onwards talked about the difficulty in merging the highly fragmented land at restitution. “It was merged with great difficulty, and we finally have parcels of up to 50 ha, most of the parcels were of 50 acres, 2 ha or one ha. They are not merged up to this day”. In 2012, the tenancy had 400 hectares and 400 parcels. Having at least parcels of 500 hectares would be better. The predominant harvests are the same as those before the 1990s: wheat, corn and sunflower. I.’s machinery park stands in the former CAP area and his example meets the recent studies in anthropology that have dealt with powerful individuals in rural areas who have risen after the collapse of socialism and built their influence and networks partly by relying on the former structures and acquaintances, and partly on new clients (Giordano, 2010; Verdery, 2002). In establishing their networks, they follow the model of behaviour of socialist bureaucrats who created their power base “by accumulating clients and dependents and by cultivating far-flung networks through reciprocity” (Verdery 2002, 18).

Finally, direct and unreported sales that peasants practice continue to dominate, despite state attempts to curtail the unreported money flows. Villagers show that there is no direct market for the pigs and no slaughterhouse in the area, therefore they need to sell them to the middlemen, and are unhappy with the gains. Or they choose to kill the calf instead of giving it away for little money. Peasants are afraid that they would compete with low prices on the market and would not have the chance to get back the investment. Direct and unreported sales that peasants practice continue to dominate, despite state attempts to curtail the unreported money flows. Sophisticated peasants’ understanding of cooperation led to a blatant failure of producers’ cooperatives and associations, despite generous subsidies provided by the state (Dikovíc 2025, 193). Moreover, the high centralization of services is criticized. In T., the finance unit was detached from the village, and the water consumption unit is based in Oradea. In a neighbouring Hungarian countryside, a villager working in a factory and having his own geese and duck farm can receive his fodder at home, unlike in T, where one must go and get it. Cars for collecting poultry for sale are available, and one gets the pay on one’s bank account. Further ethnography in the villages will reveal how young villagers go about their agricultural work by adapting state and transnational norms to local settings. Previous ethnography shows that EU integration policies assume a linear transformation from “traditional peasants” into “modern European farmers”, but this transformation largely fails on the ground (Fox, 2011).



14. Ucuriș, former CAP building, now rented in the summer by a two generational family of shepherds



15. Ucuriș, former CAP building



16. Ucuriș, former SMT building



17. Cociuba Mare, merchandize supply, early 1990s

The institutions in archival documents

The key years when the situation of the farms (either GAC or CAP.) is an issue in archival documents are mostly the late 1950s and the 1960s. The 1970s records contain a lot of information regarding industry, and very little on agriculture. The PMR documents grouped under the Agrarian Section are periodic reports, charts, or situation descriptions related to the G.A.C, S.M.T., G.A.S., and State Collections (*Colectări de Stat*) sectors. An enormous machinery of bureaucrats oversees the multi-layered reporting activity on collections, persuasion work and reactions or competitions among farms, brigades, households or individual members. The advantages of the GAC compared to individual households on the level of taxes, quotas, work or contracting are mentioned in “the model status of the CAP” (*Statutul model al cooperativei agricole de producție*).¹⁹⁹ In the 1950s, competitions took place between enterprises and in the 1980s between hospitals to increase the number of births. Terms such as “betrayal”, “enemies of the people”, or “chiaburi” persist in documents on the building of the organization.

For example, a PMR document – a guide to good practice (*Îndreptar*) – presents, in a question-and-answer format, the purported benefits of the GAC for its members. These are illustrated through indicators of rising material and cultural standards, such as the number of collectivists who purchased furniture or owned cows (compared to the precollectivization period), the number of their children attending school, those holding state or military positions, including officers, teachers, and professors, and, finally, the number of Party members and candidates among the workers.²⁰⁰ Other questions relate to the ones who worked most for the creation of the GAC, asking how “the enemy” worked to obstruct its creation, or to the everyday work: the agro-technical methods, the livestock and the inventory, the organization of labor, the leading brigade and the top workers (*fruntașii*).²⁰¹ Documents from 1960, such as a four-page summary (*referat*)²⁰² celebrate the life of the new collectivist: “in the past, XY was a forest worker and servant for the chiaburi. Due to the material possibilities offered by the GAC he could finance the education of two kids. (. . .) Besides having built a new house with two rooms and dependencies, he bought a bicycle, furniture, and kills pigs every year not just for himself but for his kids as well. All these possibilities are created by the GAC. He currently works as a guard in the vineyard”.²⁰³ Conversely, a documentary material (*material documentar*) outlines the “aspects and flaws in the consolidation and extension of cooperatist sector of agriculture” and

¹⁹⁹ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul GAC și Întovărășiri Agricole, 1956.

²⁰⁰ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul GAC și Întovărășiri agricole, dosar 46 /1956, f 13.

²⁰¹ Idem.

²⁰² DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Regional PMR Oradea, Secția Agrară, dosar 45 / 1960, f 180.

²⁰³ Idem.

criticizes the GACs not yet accustomed to the work in common and the raion Party committees for not convincing the GAC members about the related advantages.²⁰⁴ On language and politics of difference, Kligman and Verdery (2011, 134) claim that the language invoked to express the Party goals and mobilize the masses emphasized celebration, construction and transformation on one hand, and perpetual struggle and combat, on the other. The Party documents analysed here very much meet this statement.

The documents from the Village Council have a similar tone. A minute from 1956²⁰⁵ addresses the meeting of the executive committee of the Council with the following Q&A: (1) What is the difference between the GAC and the current agricultural cooperative (i.e. the TOZ)? In the current agricultural cooperative, the citizen enters with the whole land, machinery, and the products are divided based on work and on the area of land with which one entered, while in the GAC the day of work is considered, and not the surface with which one joined. (2) Can the chiaburi or the ex-chiaburi enter the GAC? The chiaburi cannot enter any socialist form, and the ex-chiaburi can be accepted if the General Assembly accepts them and if they meet the conditions shown in the resolution. (3) Can the sons of chiaburi living separately from parents enter the TOZ? They can, with the approval of the General Assembly. (4) According to the modification of the GAC status, the citizen is left with 20–30 acres of land and the personal yard stays in private possession.

Another Village Council document (report) approaches the cultural activities supporting the agricultural summer campaign in 1957 such as popular gatherings on the law against speculation or the reading of newspapers at the threshing points. The reading topics – threshing, harvesting, care for the bread of the people, or international events such as the fight for disarmament, the actions for the unification of Germany, “events from Oman”, and “the Festival in Moscow” – are outlined.²⁰⁶ Slogans regarding the summer campaign were written by elementary school teachers on boards set up in the commune and the efforts of pioneers and students gathering stems giving 140 kg of wheat are indexed. This document con-

²⁰⁴ DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Regional PMR Oradea, Secția Agrară, dosar 45 / 1960, f 33.

²⁰⁵ Sfatul Popular al Comunei Cociuba Mare, Dosar 5, 1956, cuprinzând Procese Verbale de Comitet Executiv cu deciziile aduse și deciziile organelor superioare pe anul 1956, dosar 2, f 31.

²⁰⁶ The quoted expressions reflect the political vocabulary of socialist agitational materials of the period. “Events from Oman” refers to the armed uprising in Oman in 1957–1959 against the British backed Sultan of Muscat, widely portrayed in socialist media as an antiimperialist struggle. “The Festival in Moscow” denotes the 6th World Festival of Youth and Students, held in Moscow in 1957, a major international event promoting socialist internationalism, peace, and cultural exchange. “The actions for the unification of Germany” alludes to Cold War socialist campaigns advocating German reunification on antimilitarist and antiNATO grounds, opposing West German rearmament and presenting reunification as part of the broader struggle for peace and disarmament.

firms the economic and social role of the organisation in the community. As time advances, documents from the Council are more and more lucrative. One report of 17 November 1957²⁰⁷ shows the execution of “contribution plans”, stating the number of days and people contributing to work with harness or with working hands and differences of days between the plan and the achievement. Building and expanding the livestock unit, the culture club, and the contribution of the employees of the section Roads and Bridges of the raion are the mentioned activities.

Documents released in winter, i.e., outside campaign time, like the report of January 18, 1957, address the general topic of socialist transformation of agriculture.²⁰⁸ In the daily agenda, the role of deputies in attracting new members in the TOZ is mentioned, and some deputies and members of the Executive Committee are criticized for not having signed up, and for having a negative influence on the potential joiners. In this respect, each deputy will summon the committee once every 10 days for an analysis on the improvement of mass political work in view of the collectivization of agriculture.

²⁰⁷ Sfatul Popular al Comunei Cociuba Mare, 1975, dosar 5, Cuprinzând documentele ședințelor de Comitet Executiv și deciziile aduse pe anul 1975, f 121.

²⁰⁸ Sfatul Popular al Comunei Cociuba Mare, 1975, dosar 5, Cuprinzând documentele ședințelor de Comitet Executiv și deciziile aduse pe anul 1975, f 7–8.

Chapter 11

Communism in two local museums

The memorial “Resistance and Repression in Bihor” was first inaugurated in December 2015, in the basement of the Oradea Fortress, a medieval fortress used between 1944 and 1949 as an internment and selection camp for ethnic Germans and several categories of people who were uncomfortable for the communist regime. Set up by the 40 Martyrs Association, which was founded in 2013 and promotes the local memory of communism through exhibitions, books, research, events and a digital platform, the memorial is one of the few museal spaces in Romania exclusively dedicated to the memory of the former political prisoners who endured the horrors of the communist Gulag. Endorsed by the Oradea City Hall, the IICCMER (the Institute for the Investigation of the Communism Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile), a private foundation and the Centre of Study on Contemporary History from the University of Oradea, the memorial does symbolic justice to the political prisoners and serves as a platform for the redoing of memory, heritage and ways of knowing.

Ten rooms equal in size, termed as “cells” in the curatorial concept, symmetrically displayed along the two sides of a corridor with a cylindrical ceiling, hosted the initial exhibition inaugurated on December 21st, or the day when, 26 years ago, at 12h, amid the revolution, people were shouting: “Oradea is free”. Initially open once a week, for two hours, the rooms of the memorial preserving the damp wall atmosphere, resembling the Jilava prison in the words of former political prisoners, were left unaltered, apart from the layout of a cement stratum.²⁰⁹ In 2016, museal-technical elements consolidated and concretized the concept and mission of the memorial, before its re-inauguration in early 2017. Two years later, due to its re-affiliation with the newly opened Oradea City Museum, the memorial moved to its current setting.

The timeline of the memorial covers the height of Stalinist repression in Romania (1947–1964) when between 500,000 to 2,000,000 people were persecuted

²⁰⁹ Jilava is one of 44 prisons and 72 forced labour camps set up under Romania’s communist regime (1945–1989) to jail more than 150,000 political prisoners, according to the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes.

for political reasons by the Romanian Communist authorities, and the number of prisons and other detention places was more than 130. From an ideological perspective, political prisoners from communist Romania (according to memoirs) were liberals, members of the Peasant Party, social-democrats, legionaries, or communists and in terms of social origin, the Romanian Gulag was made up of intellectuals, peasants and workers. From a religious point of view, the Romanian Gulag was “ecumenical”, consisting of Greek-Catholic and Orthodox prisoners mainly, but also of Roman-Catholics, protestants, or more rarely, members of other cults (CPADCR 2006, 310). On this historical background, the memorial presents categories of prisoners (women, priests, peasants, students, lawyers, or famous local personalities) who were investigated, arrested and detained in the city’s three detention centres – the Securitate, the Penitentiary and the Labor camp – as well as local anti-communist organizations and the peasant rebels of 1949.

The three iterations of the memorial will highlight the relationship between the built environment, memory, and debates on identity, from a curatorial perspective. In addition to its normative meaning, curation will be moved into realms of subjectivity, social creativity, and material commemorative culture (Crowley & Reid, 2002; Todorova & Gille, 2010). The curating lens provides an outlook on the enduring afterlives of communist material remains in postsocialist times, and the connected practices for their mobilization for ethical, political, ideological or touristic purposes. The etymological derivation of the term from the Latin *curare* (to care for, to look after) and *custos* (guardian) demonstrates the complexity of the associated fields of activity for a curator. Curation, as developed and understood here, stands as both a practice/method and an analytical/conceptual lens. As practice and method, it entails material-spatial (re)constructions and visual (re)organizations, as well as the related ideological (re)apprehensions and the foundational *curare* or caring for memories, stories, pains, and the wounds of history. As an analytical and conceptual lens, curation is deployed to study the ways in which resistance and repression is spatialized, materialized and visualized in a memorial museum. In what ways is communism curated in the memorial in the context of an (ongoing) absence of a state museum for communism? How can the memory of communism be studied as a process that is materially and spatially fixed and deployed, i.e. inscribed in and expressed through material-spatial settings such as memorials? What are the curatorial practices for representing specific phenomena and events of the communist era? When/how do (formerly) communist environments become travel destinations? When answering these questions, this chapter frees “curation” from its regular museal framing and carries it into a web of constellations. The museum is a *lieu de mémoire* shaped by specific memory constellations which constantly reassemble the organic relationship with the represented past and related spatial, material, visual, and aesthetic dimensions.

The three iterations of the memorial mobilize vehicles of memory to make sense and use of an insufficiently represented recent past.

First, the chapter will discuss the curatorial concept of the three exhibitions, in their usage of space and architecture and in the basic argument they strive to convey about the communist past, through a museum anthropology perspective. The exhibitions are evaluated in terms of their symbolism, rhetorical apparatus, attractive and persuasive power and aesthetic value. Second, the chapter will examine the specific memorial context when the memorial was created and its educational, introspective and touristic role. Third, the chapter will analyse an exhibition representing another facet of the communist past, namely the discothèque of the 1970s–1980s, and related rhetoric and visual tools, reflecting the multi-level engagements of the curator with various memories of communism. The following literature review situates the memorials in current debates about museums of communism in Central/Eastern Europe or on the cleavage between museums and memorials.

Literature review

The latest work on the representations of the Romanian communist past looks at how monuments, memorials, and museums were instrumental in forging a suitable politicized/ideological image of the communist past in postsocialist years (Dobre 2021, 179), and at the role of recuperative memory – oral testimonies, autobiographical writings, literary works, and cinema – not only in facilitating the process of coming to terms with the past, but also in offering the material necessary to sustain a viable politics of memory (Mitroiu 2015, 752). In a more pluralistic and diverse approach to the communist past, the chapters in Ciobanu and Șerban (2025) trace the construction of post-memory in post-communist Romania through museums, political trials and retrospective justice, or the digital context.

In terms of memorials of Romanian communism, the Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance, or the Sighet Memorial – the main museum of communism in Romania – inspired the highest research interest, with a focus on its history, achievements and place in the fight for the knowledge and diffusion of historical truth (Herlea, 2018), on the gendered representation of political action under the communist regime (Haliliuc, 2013), or on how young visitors experienced empathy for the victims of communist-era violence (Cretan et al., 2018). Furthermore, Bădică (2010, 85) reveals how the representations of communism in the Sighet Memorial Museum and in the Romanian Peasant Museum revolve around “the black hole paradigm” which depicts the 1945–1989 period as “a black hole” in Romania’s history, as a time when Romanians were “out of history”. Vatulescu (2012, 331) claims that Sighet’s complex weaving of memorial

art with documentary history reminds us how important it is to consider who does the aestheticization, in what context, and for what purposes.

Museums of communism from Eastern and Central European countries and the post-Soviet space, and related representations of two dominant approaches – remembering vs condemning communism – inform the work of Iordachi and Apor (2021). With case studies from twelve Eastern European, former Soviet countries and China, the volume treats museums as complex public fora in which narratives of historical experiences are continuously shaped and reshaped through the uneven interaction of a variety of state and non-state agents, such as political elites, various institutions, museum curators and other types of collective actors at international, national and local levels. The museums examined vary between those resulting from efforts of local communities and private individuals and official patterns of representation. Moreover, the volume of Norris (2020), examining fourteen museums of communism in eleven countries from the old Soviet bloc, reveals that a focus on memories is central to the concept of the “memorial museum”, a new form of experiential museum which puts suffering and victims at the centre of its displays. The examined museums turn to memories, stories, and viewpoints whispered around kitchen tables, instead of artefacts and paraphernalia. When doing so, Norris (2020, 10) ascribes a healing role to memory, and overcoming trauma in this sense means curing society and protecting it from itself.

Memorial museums *per se* are new institutions and cultural spaces worldwide which seek to research, represent, commemorate and teach dreadful, violent histories (Williams, 2007; Sodaro, 2018), being also part of a trend of focusing on the negative past, termed as “politics of regret”, emerging at civil society level (Olick, 2007). Others (e.g. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, 2002) show that the focus on the negative past turned into a “cosmopolitan memory” that creates a transnational and transcultural “memory imperative” that shapes how individuals, groups, and societies around the world remember their own violent pasts and those of others. Moreover, memorials are part of the ever-growing trend of “dark tourism” and reflect a significant shift in the late twentieth century in how societies, nations, and groups memorialize past violence (Sodaro 2018, 3).

Finally, the chapter benefits from the recent paradigm of the so-called “counter-monuments” that are a less institutional, and more self-reflexive way of bringing people to remember traumatic events and losses (Habit 2021, 33). Examples of such monuments come from post-1990 non-institutionalized and civil society engagements with the socialist environment in Bucharest, through creative-aestheticizing practices such as the “imapp” festival, with video shows on the facade of the Parliament Palace, held since 2014, or the installation, “Cio-can vs. Ulyanov” – a pink-tinted statue of Lenin made of wheat paste – presented ten years after the Lenin statue’s removal, in front of the House of the Free Press.

Reassembling the memorial: the three iterations

First iteration

In December 2015, the Resistance and Repression Memorial was first inaugurated in the shape of two exhibitions. The first one, spanning across four rooms, offered a preview of the permanent exhibition, presenting categories of prisoners (political prisoners from Bihor, women, priests, members of anti-communist organizations) and the three detention places in the city via maps, graphs, information boards and objects. A map which pinpoints nationwide prisons and related typologies reiterates the detention picture in the early communist years. When doing so, the memorial distinguishes the particularities of local detention in the detention picture from the whole communist Eastern European space and of the former Soviet Union.

The most important difference between the penal spaces of the Soviet Union and communist Romania consisted in the separation of inmates. In Romania, political prisoners were kept separated from criminal offenders. Accordingly, Romanian prison memoirs do not speak of a Gulag aristocracy, and often mention segregation based on ethnic, political or religious affiliations. The process of becoming a political detainee unfolded in several stages: arrest and interrogation, trial, transfer to a transit prison (most often Jilava, which marked the last contact with the outside world), and finally confinement in a prison or labour camp, where the authors served their sentences. Periodically, prisoners were moved to other detention facilities in an attempt to prevent the creation of social networks which had the potential, at least in theory, to hurt the regime (Petrinca 2017, 12). The Penitentiary of Oradea was a transit prison itself, for both civil and political prisoners.²¹⁰

In addition to the graphic and visual information, one of the rooms was re-enacted as a cell of the Securitate, a punishment corner or the “black cell” (*neagra*) in the vocabulary of the memoirs, an empty space of 2 m², with no light, and water running through the walls, where inmates who were deemed to be especially difficult – those who talked among themselves, who sang, or were found to own a needle etc. – were detained.²¹¹ Male and female twilled cloth coats, loaned by Romania’s leading dissident Ana Blandiana, and a typewriter offered by a former political prisoner from Ploiești, recalling the inquiries at the Securitate in

²¹⁰ For a typology of Romanian prisons, see CPADCR (2006).

²¹¹ The respective cell, named as cell no 7, is prominent in prisoner accounts on the food and isolation regime. These accounts reveal that there was nothing in this space, as in the morning, at the 6 am wakeup call, the bed was pulled outside, and in the evening, at 8 pm, the mattress was brought back to the prisoner. Otherwise, for the whole day, the prisoner had to stand or sit on the humid cement. In the first three punishment days, the prisoner was deprived of food.

Oradea, are the exhibited objects.²¹² The travelling objects indicate collaborative memory forms among nationwide memories of detention as well as the authoritarian role of the Sighet memorial in terms of communist detention. Finally, the portraits of Bihor-based fighters who sacrificed their youth in the prisons of the Romanian Gulag, enduring the suffering and the torture enforced by the communist regime to transform them into obedient citizens for the Party are exposed in one room of this first exhibition. The six other rooms of the basement space hosted a sister-exhibition, “The Memory of Suffering”, made by the Centre of Studies in Contemporary History in collaboration with the Hans Seidel Foundation Romania, featuring portraits of former political prisoners from the whole country. In 2016, the Pleading for the Museums of Communism – an international exchange platform for best practices in representing Romanian communism – organized by ICCMER in Oradea moved the project to the next stage, to a collaborative curatorial work by three historians, an architect and a museum professional.

The first iteration of the memorial gives a fresh insight into the museum-scape of Romanian communism from a curatorial perspective. The landmarks for the creation of the Memorial were the Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance in Sighet, functional since 1997, and the Memorial House for the Victims of Communist Dictatorship in Sfântu Gheorghe, opened in 2014. Later on, the Memorial of the Pitești Prison opened its doors in 2018. Before that, the memory of the communist period was represented in museums set up through private channels such as the Romanian Plumber Museum in Petroșani (open in 2016), the Mother Museum in Petrila (open in 2012) and the I.D. Sîrbu Memorial House in Petrila (open in 2010). The Revolution Museum in Timișoara founded by Radu Gino is another example. Thus, from a curatorial perspective, the memory of communism is an individual and private endeavour, filling the gap left by a missing state museum of communism.

Second iteration

The Memorial was re-inaugurated in a re-arranged form in the same setting in April 2017, on Passion Thursday. Seven prisms with steel plates, with the engraved names of 127 prisoners detained in the Oradea Penitentiary, out of which 70 are from Bihor, informed the concept of the exhibition. Former political prisoners who found their names on the exposure prisms, and others who saw photographs of grandparents were part of the launch event. The name and photo of a Canada-based former political prisoner who found his picture at the memorial were added to those of the other 126 colleagues with a shared suffering. Due to this interactive feature between the curator and the public, the museum is a medium for prosthetic memory (Landsberg, 2004), which generates an identifica-

²¹² Those sentenced to severe arrest were only entitled to twilled cloth coats, a prison shirt and jacket, a cap, boots, and thin stockings.

tion with the victims (and humanizes them), placing them at the same level as the visitor. At the same time, as some witnesses of communism were still alive and attended the inauguration, the exhibition is part of what Jan Assmann described as “communicative memory” (*kommunikatives Gedächtnis*), bound to the bearers of experience.²¹³

The idea of communism was embodied textually and materially on the seven metal exposure prisms, suggesting the rigidity of the system and the restrictions to which humans were submitted. The flexible system of metal poles and pipes offered varied possibilities for exposure and boxes with supplementary information were placed near the prisms in this “tactile” museum, where people were invited to touch things. Political prisoners were presented on biographical sheets with birth dates, detention periods, detention centres and short texts about their stories with citations from memories, questionnaires etc. The ten rooms featured the history and memory of local detention centres, beginning with the national and international context after the second world war, the new geopolitics and the violent power grabbing by the communist regime in Romania, marked with significant dates between 23 August 1945 and 31 December 1948. The memorial narrative continued with the camp in the Oradea Fortress, the Oradea Securitate and Penitentiary, as well as with categories of prisoners and resistance movements: the anti-communist organizations from Bihor, personalities who passed through the Oradea prison, female prisoners, priests. Some forex plaques discovered during the revitalization of the fortress with information on the founding, functioning and housing conditions in the camp were added. Two other rooms presented local personalities – lawyers, educators or students – revealing a high number of prisoners who passed through the city’s detention centres and the peasant revolt of 1949. The “black cell” from the previous iteration, suggesting a narrow space, without window or ventilation, without a bed and with cement on the floor, and damp walls was preserved as such. After the first version of the memorial offered a condensed view of the exposed topics and was presented as an improvised version with powerful evocative objects, the second iteration presents a rich and detailed account on resistance and repression authors and victims. One thread of the exhibition is the contrast between the categories used by the Securitate to identify resistance members and those used by the latter. In the curatorial view, the files of the Securitate followed a specific pattern: all prisoners were “enemies of the people” and belonged to “terrorist organizations, trying to restore the popular democracy

²¹³ The communicative memory of detention is also addressed in a 2024 book launch on the Oradea Penitentiary (1945–1977), authored by the museum’s curator (Pușcaș 2024), at which a former political prisoner, Aurora Dumitrescu, and a memory of communism specialist, Lucia Hossu Longin, participated. Dumitrescu had been sentenced in the 1950s to six years’ imprisonment for involvement in an anticommunist organization, a sentence served in Oradea, Jilava, and Mislea.

regime”. Even if we are talking about 15–16-year-old students who could not have restored the newly installed order.

In terms of visual techniques, the highlight of the exhibition was the guiding of the visitors with the use of light. A random light trail and a specific algorithm of lights generated a different visitation order of the rooms. As the visitor was guided by the illumination, by turns, of a single cell, the memorial privileged a concept of the visit as an experience, with a focus on performative elements from visual to tactile, on emotional strategies and less on a plethora of information. Thus, the light itself became an “exhibit”, an experience, around which all the other material elements remained in semi-obscurity, de-personalized, the only visible information being the names of the victims, engraved in steel plaques. The time slots of the illumination – 4 min, 11 min, or longer, depending on the visit format – generated a random visitation order, with specific textual, visual and graphic information. The architect and author of the concept pointed out that the interrogation of the public alternated with the avoidance in giving some answers. At the same time, with the absence of mannequins or of other replicas, the descriptivism and trivialization of the message were avoided.

Finally, an itinerant exhibition hosted by the memorial in 2018 reveals the ways in which the memory of communist detention travels nationwide. Concepts such as “travelling memory” (Erl, 2011), “multidirectional memory” (Rothberg, 2009), or “cosmopolitan memory” (Levy & Sznajder, 2002) infer that memory – its forms, contents, and modes – circulates across and beyond national borders, reflecting and producing new forms of national and global interconnectedness. The “Depersonalization” installation consisting of ten 3,5 m high sculptures travelled to the Resistance and Repression Memorial from the Pitești Prison Memorial, and the collaboration with other nationwide memory actors such as the Gherla Memorial reveals the web of nationwide memories of detention.²¹⁴

Third iteration and the new museal space

As of 2024, the memorial belongs to the newly opened Oradea City Museum which hosts chronological exhibitions on the city’s history from pre-history to the modern period. Inaugurated in the year celebrating the country’s centennial, the museum currently includes four permanent exhibitions on the communist period,

²¹⁴ The project *Moving Monuments: Memorials of Anti-Communist Resistance* brings contemporary monumental sculptures to Romanian cities that either hosted detention facilities or witnessed resistance movements during the communist period (1946–1989), including Pitești, Râmnicu Sărat, and Brașov. Known as the “Pitești Experiment”, the program carried out at Pitești Prison between 1949 and 1951 involved a system of violent “reeducation” implemented by selected prisoners under the supervision of the prison administration, with the aim of transforming young political detainees into instruments of control. Thousands of highschool pupils, students, and intellectuals were subjected to systematic torture during the experiment. See Ierunca (2007) for detailed documentation and interpretation.

focusing on education, on everyday life, on the discotheque from the 1970s–1980s and on repression, to which at least one temporary exhibition is added. In 2021, the Oradea City Museum became a section of the Țării Crișurilor Museum, while both entities are engaged with promoting the memory of communism through exhibitions, debates or book launches.²¹⁵

Placed in a 70m² wide room with a vaulted ceiling, the new Resistance and Repression memorial preserves the narrative on detention settings and categories of prisoners from the previous iterations. The “light and shadow” game disappears, and the authenticity is re-created with the original objects of the prisoners that could not be exposed in the old space due to humidity. Letters from detention, release tickets, a handwritten poem written in Bărağan in 1957, one pair of glasses and a glasses case, a drawing made in the village of one prisoner’s mandatory residence, or a photo of people from Bihor deported in 1949 through the East train station in Oradea are showcased behind glass. The twilled cloth coats, one pair of boots and a cell door from the Oradea Securitate headquarters, no 52 Republicii Street, surround the eight metal constructions placed in a row, in the middle of the room. According to the curator, the objects and accompanying narrative recreate the semiobscure atmosphere of communist prison cells, in which light seeped through shuttered windows and oppression was maintained through Morsecode rhythms that “articulated” a poem, transmitted through walls and radiator pipes by prisoners forced into silence. In the Memorial, the audio morse codes reveal poetry from prison (Sighet, room 51) through the messages of two prisoners.²¹⁶

A touchscreen in Romanian, Hungarian and English placed at the entrance brings up a digital archive on the themes featured in the memorial itself: detention centres, personalities that passed through the Penitentiary, people from Bihor in the Romanian Gulag, priests from Bihor in the communist prisons, women who passed through the Oradea Penitentiary, lawyers from Bihor in communist prisons, the peasant revolts of 1949, and anti-communist organizations. The archive also completes the display on the prisms with portraits of women deported on the grounds of being daughters of *chiaburi*, lists of deported peasants after the revolt

²¹⁵ Țării Crișurilor Museum – museum complex, subordinated to Bihor County Council – is an important cultural objective in Romania, formed by Țării Crișurilor Museum departments: Archaeology, History, Natural Sciences, Ethnography, Art, Public Relations and Exhibitions), The “Iosif Vulcan” Memorial Museum, the “Aurel Lazăr” Memorial Museum, the “Ady Endre” Memorial Museum (museums that are part of the Memorial museums, social groups, history of the minorities) and the Vadu Crișului Cave. According to the statistic of the Ministry of Culture, the museum is ranked the fifth in Romania, due to the number of museum pieces (over 450000).

²¹⁶ The Sighet Memorial describes the morse poem as such: born without pencil or paper, transmitted from cell to cell through the Morse alphabet beaten in the walls, these verses were mental gymnastics exercises, spiritual release, human solidarity and ascesis through the acceptance of the anonymity. Retrieved from: <https://www.memorialsighet.ro/sala-51-poezia-in-inchisoare/> (May 2, 2025).

of 1949 in one village of Bihor, or the manifesto of an anti-communist organization.

The memorial itself brings together memory and historiography by means of information boards, maps, newspaper clips, objects, pictures and symbolic life trajectories in portraits. The three detention places in the county, together with four anti-communist organizations, female prisoners, detained priests, prisoners from Bihor, are featured across seven metal prisms placed in a row, in the middle of the room. The detention centres are described in terms of detention conditions, food regime, inquiries, hunger strikes. Fragments of memoirs occupy a special place in this iteration, acknowledging Gulag memoirs as a genre in their own right.

The number of published memoirs is very small when contrasted with the number of those who found themselves imprisoned at one point in their lives, yet their symbolic importance is tremendous. While according to James Wertsch the purpose of memory is to provide a “usable past”, Romanian Gulag memoirs also function as a counter-memory to the official state narrative of both Communist and democratic Romania (Petrinca 2017, 20). The memoir accounts on the Securitate reveal how hunger, cold and isolation were part of the everyday extermination strategy. Daily food consisted of cabbage soup, barley, beans, and seldom potatoes. Other accounts describe different forms of physical and psychological abuse, as for example: “The sergeant put black glasses on us when taking us out of the cell until upstairs, in the room where he questioned us, he hit us with our head on all walls or hit us with the boots”. (Aurora Dumitrescu) Cells looking like tombs, the air that passed through a 20 cm wide square, or wooden planks instead of beds are part of the other details exposed in the memoirs.

The Penitentiary, labelled as “the Red Hell in the city on the Criş River” is pictured in terms of famous anti-communist resistance fighters— Arsenie Boca, prior of the Brâncoveanu Monastery from Sâmbăta de Sus, where an important spiritual centre was born, Iuliu Hirşe (Greek Catholic Bishop), Arlette Coposu, wife of Corneliu Coposu, or the husband of Elisabeta Rizea, Gheorghe Rizea, as well as numerous members of resistance groups. One board features citations from memoirs which reinforce the atrocious nature the Oradea Penitentiary, famous for the high number of detainees in chains. The memoir of Ion Ioanid (1999), author of *Închisoarea noastră cea de toate zilele* (Our everyday prison), offering a panorama of Romanian prisons, says: “It could not have been worse than in Oradea. This is how we thought, even the most sceptical among us!” The memoir of Romanian-Canadian prisoner George Sarry²¹⁷ says that “in Aiud it was still a thousand times better than in Oradea” and “none of these prisons were so cursed and compara-

²¹⁷ George Sarry (1928–2022), born in Constanţa, Romania was the son of Louisa Baker (of British origin) and Dumitru Sarry (of Greek descent). In November 1949, at age 21, he was abducted by agents of the Romanian Communist regime while on his way to work as a messenger for the

ble in terms of the cruelty that we lived at the Oradea Penitentiary” and “they treated us like animals”. The labour camp is described as a sea of suffering, with a letter of an ethnic German from 1947 discovered during the rehabilitation of the fortress in 2011. Therefore, the memoirs on carceral experience are used as powerful evocation tools.

Women’s memoirs reveal restricted washing rights, lack of basic clothes, and prohibited basic objects meant to diminish the resistance of female prisoners. These examples confirm how famous memoirs describe the non-functionality of female body, which in the conditions of detention, inhibits and atrophies. At the same time, the featured portraits of women confirm that the percentage of those women who were incarcerated on account of their public attitude towards Communism is very low (Petrinca 2017, 16). The portraits of women in the memorial reveal the staged reasons for condemnation. Arlette Coposu, wife of Corneliu Coposu, was the victim of a staged spying action in 1950, being condemned for complicity for high treason crime, and accused of giving information to the French Legation. Niculina Moica, a 15-year-old student, received a 20-year long condemnation for belonging to the Romanian Liberal Youth organization aiming to act against the state. Galina Răduleanu, a doctor, was held and condemned for seven years for anti-communist discussions with her father, a Bessarabian priest, as reflected in her diary upon the search of the authorities. In terms of description modalities, women’s testimonies are said to describe detention in a rougher way than masculine ones, probably viewing their vocation in describing pain more vividly (CPADCR 2006, 303). Accounts of interrogations by the Securitate – “you had no right to talk, to sing Christmas carols; inquiries were conducted only at night, accompanied by severe beatings” (Aurora Dumitrescu) – as well as descriptions of prison labour conditions – “osier needs to be humid. We had wet knees all the time, because we kept the baskets on our knees while working on them” (Niculina Moica) – inform several of the displayed memoirs.

The prism on faith in the underground presents the destruction of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic cults as an assault on the symbols and identity of the nation. For example, Arsenie Boca was seen as a public danger by the Securitate and as a leader for the thousands of citizens confused by the new socialist order. The cited memoirs complete the picture of the detention centres: “Here, I endured the greatest cold in my life. On 4 December 1959, they took me out of the cell and riveted chains on my feet” (A Greek Catholic priest on the penitentiary). The Securitate inquiry – “seven months, day and night, they kept me with the lights on in the cell” – is part of the description. Greek-Catholic bishop of Oradea Valeriu Traian Frențiu – together with all Greek-catholic bishops was detained in two monasteries and the Sighet Prison where he lived an extermination regime: “We

British Consulate in Constanța and held as a political prisoner for the next 11 years. After his release, he arrived in Canada in 1961.

were as thin as the horses that fed the fish in Stâna de Vale”. After the Greek-Catholic cult was abolished, Greek catholic priest Teodor Dărăban was evacuated from the church by the commune’s mayor and notary. At the Securitate in Oradea, he was interrogated day and night: “I was kept in a cell that had a rotten mattress and damped walls. Seven months, day and night, they kept me with the light on in the cell. During winter, I was put under a cold-water shower, I got sick, but I was not looked after”.

In terms of the four local anti-communist organizations, the memorial reveals the lists of the members condemned by the Territorial Military tribunal, their purposes, and initiators from all walks of life: military staff retreated in the mountains (Vlad Țepeș II), college students (România independentă), or youth accused of setting up a subversive paramilitary organization with a legionary character (Lotul Beiușenilor). Overall, for each category of prisoners, the featured portraits of prisoners reveal the diversity of reasons for detention and the problems of social reintegration.²¹⁸ All portraits of prisoners are based on fragments from published memoirs, from the questionnaire that the curator used in her interviewing of former political prisoners, or from online archives.²¹⁹ With the displayed memoirs, the curatorial concept focuses on emotional rather than cognitive experiences. Overall, the memorial depicts the early communist years as a genocide comparable to the Gulag and presents prisoners as resistance fighters who sacrificed themselves for national liberation.

In addition to the specific categories of prisoners, prisoners from Bihor are shown on a specific prism, reinforcing the particularly high number of local repression actions there. In terms of political prisoners, the county stands on the 10th place on the national level, with a percentage of 1,4% prisoners based on a study of criminal records. According to the displayed information, within the tens of thousands of Romanians who knew the communist prisons (during 1948–1964 at least 91, 333 persons were arrested, among which 73,636 were condemned), the people from Bihor were in a leading position. Short prisoner stories from a wide spectrum – lawyer, a Greek-catholic priest, a teacher – are part of the narra-

²¹⁸ Cornel Sălișteanu participated as a student in Timișoara in movements expressing solidarity with the counterrevolution in Hungary in 1956. After being released from the Gherla prison, he changed his name: “The lack of freedom was hard to bear. It was even harder after I got out of there”.

²¹⁹ *procesulcomunismului.com*. The platform calls for a public process for all those who adopted communism, under the heading: “the process of communism, counterrevolution, and criminal transition”.

fericiticeiprigoniti.net. The platform aims to preserve knowledge on the new martyrs of the Romanian Orthodox Church and heroes of the nation who paid the price of their freedom and life under the four persecutions: the Carlist dictatorship, the Horthyst occupation, Antonescu’s dictatorship, and especially the communist dictatorship.

tive.²²⁰ The prism on the peasant revolts of 1949 reveals the state-enforced on-spot executions and deportations via historical narratives, photography, or the contrast between media propaganda on the successful work at the state farms and the revolt itself. In the description of the revolt, villagers gather at the Provisory Committee asking approval for the threshing to start, they cut off the phone lines, sing the royal hymn and patriotic songs while the bell is tolling. Photos of executed individuals, a blocked road, a pitchfork and a list of the twenty-four people from 11 villages executed during the revolt, with full names, including people from C.M. and U., are exhibited.

Finally, the memorial generated other temporary exhibitions, *in situ* or itinerant, revealing how curation becomes a creative process of collecting, documenting, exhibiting, researching, preserving, and communicating (Sabharwal, 2015; Newell, Libby & Wehner, 2017) in the context of digitalization. The exhibition “Memory places: the camp in the Oradea Fortress” (2020) re-told the narrative of the Internment Camp with the letter of an ethnic German prisoner restored as a cultural resource and a collaborative video documentary between the curator and an actress on the three detention places. Another temporary exhibition, “75 years since the peasant revolts in Bihor” (2024) re-featured the history and the memory of the revolt, adding other memorial tools, namely a video on the carceral experience (physical torture, typologies of detainees, or humiliation tactics) of one member from the anti-communist organization G4 and the manifesto of the respective organization. These multiple narratives reveal a fusion between historical and activist work, as well as an assemblage of memory spheres reinforcing the wide spectrum of resistance and repression.

The experiences of visitors and memory politics

The memorial offers a space of reflection on its meaning and purpose as a touristic resource. Previous work on tourism in museums of communism revealed that “communist heritage” tourism – the consumption of key sights and sites associated with the Ceaușescu regime and its overthrow – has emerged as a particular form of cultural or heritage tourism for special interest tourists (Light, 2010). Iordachi and Apor (2021, 24–26) show that museums of communism are promoted as “red tourism” destinations, with *damnatio memoriae* as well as economic motivations. One tourism promoter – the Oradea Heritage Foundation – presents the memorial as a unique area in Romania, as a memento of the fact that the Oradea Fortress served, at the end of World War II, as Internment Camp no. 1, where ethnic Germans, USSR deportees and the first enemies of the people were incar-

²²⁰ The curator documented the local detention in her work *101 chipuri ale suferinței în Bihorul carceral comunist* (101 faces of suffering in the carceral communist Bihor) (Pușcaș, 2021) based on the AFDPR archive.

cerated. From a curatorial perspective, the visit to the memorial has an educational and introspective role.

First, in terms of its educational purpose, the memorial fills a gap as communist repression is barely represented in schoolbooks and the transmission of oral history ceased. In this respect, the exhibition is part of the educational program "Școala Altfel", a nationwide program contributing to the development of socio-emotional capacities for school children, including guided tours with children, to whom the freedom to read and to dress as one pleases, were explained. At the same time, the Memory of resistance (www.memoriarezistentei.ro), a digital memorial also set up by the 40 Martyrs Association, containing essays on resistance movements, informed by historical works, published memoirs, questionnaires and interviews, serves as an educational resource. One highlight of the digital platform is the video documentary "Forgetting is a new condemnation" (10 episodes) featuring interviews with former political prisoners from Bihor, shown countrywide in film festivals and presented in itinerant exhibitions. The interviews feature a web of memory makers – the curator, family members or friends of former political prisoners, an artist, or the former political prisoners themselves – revealing a discourse of trauma and suffering, and occasionally on everyday choices. One of its episodes, "The lesson of dignity", was presented in the above-mentioned exhibition commemorating 75 years since the peasant revolts of 1949.

Moreover, the Memorial, via the 40 Martyrs Association, together with its partner AFDPR (the Association of former political detainees of Romania) aims to establish a Research Centre on Communist Repression in Bihor. In 2016, AFDPR launched a public call for donations of books, photographs, and other material things belonging to those who endured the Romanian Gulag or who wish to offer a testimony on this bloody period of Romanian history. Among other projects, the centre aims to put at the public's disposal the inquiry files of the Securitate for the former political prisoners in Bihor and a history centre for promoting oral history, for hosting meetings, debates etc.

Second, the memorial reveals an understanding from a curatorial perspective of the heterogenous qualities of communism for bearers of specific experiences. If, for some adults, the emotional load related to repression is too heavy, the permanent exhibition on everyday life during communism transposes visitors into a familiar past. The exhibition on the discothèque appeals mainly to the young public, but at the same time generates nostalgia for the adults. The majority of those who lived in their youth in communism are nostalgic, as the everyday shortages, the censorship, and the impossibility of travelling abroad were forgotten. At the same time, the memorial serves as a reminder for the visitors in their 40s-50s who were unaware of the discovered painful truth. For the younger ones, it counters the growing nostalgia for the communist regime. The memorial also serves as a repository of an untold truth for some generations. Those who lived in the 1950s–

1960s–1970s of the past century, out of fear, did not tell their children the truth. And now, those born in the 1970s–1980s don't know how to tell their children these things. Moreover, the curator offers a source of multi-generational knowledge of communist practices for the visitors. The generation born after the 1990s doesn't have any knowledge of the horrors of communism: prisons, cold, hunger, fear. Those born in the 2000s know just a part of the truth, and there is a danger of neo-Marxism. Some of the grandparents who did not know communist repression told their grandchildren that they “received apartments”, “they had a workplace”, “they went on holiday every year” etc. This mirage of socialism unfortunately deletes the abuses that Romanians lived during the communist regime.

At the same time, the memorial brings a fresh outlook on present-day museum engagements with the memory of communism countrywide. The discussions regarding the founding, in Bucharest, of a National Museum of Communism were for a long time deemed as history. Alternatively, the buildings of some decommissioned prisons – Râmnicu Sărat or Jilava – where the load would be more authentic, could have been valued. Unfortunately, these chances for having a museum *in situ*, with all the affective loading of reclusion spaces, were not valued either. The lack of interest for a local history culture, the incapacity to identify funds for valuing space in museums, as well as the thick bureaucracy coming together with many institutional shortages are the main faults for this state of affairs. Consequently, from a curatorial perspective, citizens declare themselves in great numbers as nostalgic for communism and a mental mapping of the city in terms of detention is missing, as some walk by the Securitate building in the city centre and are unaware of the horrors that happened there. Moreover, the memory of detention also reveals a weakness on the consciousness of the Romanian society regarding political prisoners, deemed to be forgotten by both the communist and democratic regimes.

Finally, the memorial offers the chance for a reflection on local memory politics in terms of communism-related temporary exhibitions or book launches, involving city museums and the IICCMER. The revolution was featured in a 2024 photographic exhibition on the day of December 22, 1989, when Oradea was declared a “communism-free city”, eight minutes before the Ceaușescu couple left Bucharest.²²¹ Artefacts such as a pierced flag, the desk of the last city mayor from the communist period, the camera used by one of the four photographers, and newspapers were also displayed and a video documentary capturing the event on the streets were shown. Another example from the same year is the exhibition “The Pitești Phenomenon. The True Face of Communism in Romania”, which for the first time presented eleven people from Bihor who had been subjected to the experiment against their will, as well as objects from the cells – chains, beds,

²²¹ The exhibition title is #35 “Ziua în care Oradea s-a declarat oraș liber” (#35 – The day when Oradea declared itself a free city).

and doors – brought to Oradea for the first time. Other events re-situate the local memory of detention in the nationwide one, such as a book launch on the political history of Aiud prison, viewing the impressive number of people from Bihor who lived this carceral experience.²²² Moreover, the nationwide collaboration between museums of communism is visible in an exhibition on repression and political detention during 1977–1989, bringing together the Oradea City Museum and the Museum of Communist Horrors in Romania.²²³ Finally, the cosmopolitan memory of communism, which puts together experiences of communism across national borders, is found in a photographic exhibition about GDR and Romania in memory cultures.²²⁴

²²² *Re-education and repression in communism. A political history of the Aiud prison*, Dragoș Ursu (2025) was launched at the Țării Crișurilor Museum in March 2025.

²²³ The title of the exhibition is “Seismograf ’77. Repression and political detention 1977–1989”.

²²⁴ The exhibition “Aufarbeitung. RDG and Romania in memory culture” (2024) was made by the Țării Crișurilor Museum in collaboration with IICCMER and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Romania.



18. *The Resistance and Repression Memorial, prism with engraved names of political prisoners*



19. Door of the Securitate office, temporarily displayed in the permanent exhibition on the “communist repression”. It belongs to Porszner Bela who owns a basement space in the building of the former Securitate, which was a former cell in communist times. Now, the building of the old Securitate belongs to owners of flats and basements. After being temporarily exposed, the door was returned to the owner.

The disco museum

Background

The exhibition on the discotheque of the 1970s–1980s originates from the one-week long crowdfunding campaign “Don’t throw away the past, bring it to the museum” launched by the Oradea City Museum and the 40 Martyrs Association in 2016, inviting the city people to donate objects from the communist period. Radio devices, flags, propaganda books, boards, wall gazettes, school uniforms, stamps, badges, toys or baby strollers were turned into heritage goods informing several temporary and permanent exhibitions, either thematic or event related. The engagement of the curator with this campaign, via the 40 Martyrs Association, as well with multiple memories of communism (resistance and repression, education, city life, discothèque) reflects a multi-dimensional memory work at grass-roots level, represented in the city’s main museums. Previous work on communist objects (e.g. Pohrib, 2015) focused on competing emotional regimes around communist materiality in the Sighet Memorial Museum, on two blogs and in a documentary, where things are framed as either junk or redeemed biographical objects. The original focus of this chapter on curation as a creative process of assembling and exhibiting brings to light ways of representing the communist past at the museum level, be it permanent/temporary exhibitions, itinerant or static exhibitions, reenactments of experiences (e.g. the disco of the ‘70s - ‘80s) or one-off events.

The gathered objects informed temporary exhibitions approaching the visits of presidents Dej and Ceaușescu in Bihor, mixing photos from a private collection and propaganda objects (2016), childhood in the 1970s–1980s, the “mixed shop”²²⁵ (2017) and the evolution of the city during the communist period (1945–1989) in terms of industrialization, the development of the city, culture, health, the visits of Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Revolution (2018). As for the permanent exhibitions, the one on the Discotheque from the 1970s–1980s set up in 2020 was followed by one on education in Oradea throughout the 20th century and on everyday life during communism. For the latter one, a block apartment from the communist period was reconstituted, with a living room and kitchen furniture and related equipment: TV, porcelain trinkets, radio and vinyl record players, cooker, gas lamp, soda, yogurt and milk bottles, lantern, the “Arădeanca” doll.

The temporary and permanent exhibitions reveal how the various mundane objects have the power to evoke different feelings ranging from fascination to nostalgia, reinforcing the link between memory and materiality. At the same time, among the vast spectrum of communism museums— state-owned, traditionally presented, or private enterprises – the object-based exhibitions belong to a “musealization” pattern from below, resulting from efforts of local communities and

²²⁵ The exhibition evoked the cooperative, an institution during communist years used as shop in the morning and bistro in the evening.

private individuals. Moreover, the exhibitions result from a crowdfunding initiative, involving collaborative curatorial work between museum staff, researchers, and local senior citizens who know about these old everyday objects. Finally, the exhibition makes collections of objects from the communist period recognizable as cultural resources.

The focus of this section is the discotheque exhibition, which reveals what the discotheques represented during the communist period, relying on collaborative work between the curator and former DJs as *de facto* owners of the exposed objects. The museal representation of the discotheque from the last two decades of communist Romania as an effort “from below” is an innovative research approach in terms of the nexus between music, memory and museums. Recent work on the role of music in communist Romania reveals how popular music (jazz, rock, and light music) was involved with performing communist and nationalist ideologies, as well as with addressing demands of cultural consumption for various audiences (Oancea, 2023). The description of the mechanisms by which the Party propaganda integrated western-style music into its wider social persuasion mechanisms in the last two decades of socialism informed the work of Pop (2016).

The exhibition

Vinyl designs on the ceiling and on the walls, vinyl and magnetophonon bands, a mirror globe projecting on the walls, magnetophonons and loudspeakers, a vinyl player, a wall painting, a handwritten psychedelic poem (Underground), a tissue with verses from Imagine (John Lennon) and pictures of DJs from the 1997s–2000s make up the intriguing décor of the discothèque exhibition. As the first permanent exhibition of this kind in Romania, it re-enacts a dance room, with background music, stroboscope lights and a photo corner, and a vernissage when the DJs of that epoch invited guests to dance.

The detailed information in Romanian, English and Hungarian on the digital display at the entrance is reflected on the five information boards presenting the discos of the 1970s–1980s, the commission of visioning and audition, how the DJ permission was released, the disco program and the everyday censorship, supported with historical reconstruction and interviews with local DJs. One such interview refers to the need to make a list for approval with 10–20% foreign music and 80% Romanian music, and to ways of coping with controlling agents, such as receiving signals from the entrance guard. Other featured recollections show ways to procure music, such as recording music from a Hungarian radio channel, pilots bringing piles of disks back from New York weekly, or music received from acquaintances in Hungary, where disks appeared in real time. The interviewed DJs highlight the different periods in terms of freedom and coercion: 1964–1971, with a lot of freedom and orientation towards the West, when Romanian radio stations broadcast all Western hits, and the consequent dramatic change, after 1971, when

Ceașescu went to China and Korea. In July 1971, after the release of some state documents, foreign hits disappeared. Furthermore, archival documents from the Culture and Socialist Education Committee of the county reveal the number and place of city discos, their program and photos of everyday disco scenes. When doing so, they show that discos were an oasis of freedom and evasion forms for the youth towards which the Securitate manifested a “moral panic”.

The displayed interview information further reveals the minimal equipment of the disco – lamp-based amplifier, pick-up for vinyl, recorder, coloured lamps, stroboscope, mirror globe – and the improvisation of the décor with beacons and church candles. Accounts on the timetable (days when attendance was allowed), the program (3–4 hours), and permission to open the disco on purpose on Resurrection Night, with a check in advance of the playlist, are part of the disco’s functioning. As of 1984, discos could only function based on an authorization released yearly by the Socialist Culture and Education Committee of the county. Legally, one could not listen to any type of music, especially when it came to “imperialistic” music, and the DJs found ways to “fool” the system or the system let itself be “fooled”. Despite these shortcomings, the exhibition shows how the disco was a social phenomenon lived to the fullest by the generation of the 1970s–1980s. The curatorial concept reveals that discos had an educational, recreational and social role. Educational, as it was the only place where the youth could listen to good music. Recreational as there were no other fun possibilities, and social, as a platform for meeting potential partners and communicating within a group. Thus, the exhibition shows that the youth from the 1970–1980 generation found their way to survive through the daily gloomy life of communism, censorship and ideological borders. Discos were oases of good music and socialization, equipped with music devices, lights, mirror globes, avant-garde pictures, while the dancing space was central (Pușcaș 2024, 416).

In addition to the intriguing décor, information boards and digital display, the exhibition brings up a large collection of objects and visual effects. The windows are obstructed with boards reflecting everyday moments from the Oradea discos. Selected images from one of the collected vinyl covers are painted and exposed. Heavy objects such as recorders, loudspeakers, or the pickup, are placed on wooden cubes, at an accessible level for children as well. Photos and collages are framed and placed on the walls and shelves for notebooks, vinyl disks and magnetic tapes were fixed. Several vinyl discs are hung on the pole supporting the light bulbs. The chiaroscuro is achieved with disco globes and coloured light bulbs. Each bulb was chosen so that the reading space has a clear light, and the dancing area is full of colours. In terms of the exhibition’s interactive feature, visitors can listen to vinyl discs on the set audio equipment, can photograph themselves on a podium with a DJ desk, or are invited to take photos of themselves in the re-created dance room (Pușcaș 2024, 414).

The core of the exhibition consists of objects from the valuable and highly original collection donated by Dumitru Chifiriuc, former DJ in the 1970s–1980s, such as black and white photos of life as a DJ, collages with verses from well-known pop songs, the pop repertoire (an A4 type notebook with hard covers), two notebooks with titles from various songs, or his playlist for disco nights. According to the DJ's featured story, in 1976, after inviting the disco public on Resurrection Night to go to church, he suffered the consequences of an atheist regime. The curatorial approach benefits from the rich output of the donation campaign, which gathered documents (photos, manuscripts, notebooks, collages, letters, envelopes, a pop music repertoire) and three-dimensional objects (vinyl, recorder rolls, pick-ups, recorders, radios, cassette tape cases, loudspeakers). Among the latter, around 70 vinyl discs edited by Electrecord Bucharest, with disks of Phoenix, Iris, Semnal M, Celelalte Cuvinte, and successful solo interpreters from the 1970s–1980s, around 20 recorder rolls, and valuable recorders and radios (with detailed descriptions for each), are found (Pușcaș 2024, 410).

In the curator's view, the exhibition captures a historical image as complete and as realistic as possible from the 1970s–1980s in terms of the challenges and trials experienced in those years. When doing so, it reflects the youth's atmosphere, without worries, with release and endeavours to escape patterns of life for the city people in those years. The décor and the boards represent the disco as a space of interaction between audiences and DJs, musicians and representatives of political authority, as well as between DJs and local society, depending on their social background, musical education and influences, and administrative authorities.

In terms of an outreach role, the exhibition was part of educational and art projects such as workshops, video production and evening dancing. Within the project "Dancing Queen", secondary school students created a video partly filmed in the exhibition space. Before the Covid pandemic, the former DJs featured in the exhibition were willing to organize dancing evenings in the exhibition space and were open to giving lectures to interested students. In 2022, the educational program "The disco of the 1970s–1980s in the museum" invited students and teachers to end of year parties in retro style, with playlists from the 1970s–1980s and a dress code from those years. In the following year, on the museum day, a disco evening with a former DJ attracted around 300 guests. In July 2024, a dancing evening was organized in the Museum Park, and the event was preceded by a conference held by the museum curator. At the event animated by a former DJ, participants were invited to wear a vibrant and daring outfit, specific to the respective period. At the end of the conference an Oradea – based DJ replayed the tunes that marked the respective times, as he used to do in the famous ARLUS disco in Oradea.

Moreover, together with the exhibition about education in Oradea in the 20th century, the disco exhibition was part of a project in which grandparents acted as museum guides. Set up during the one-week “ski holiday” in 2025, grandparents were invited to transpose their experience into stories, in the classroom or disco exhibition rooms. They could for instance, speak to the children about the significance of the fish placed on top of the TV set, about what those bottles of milk meant, how they were queuing up, the soda bottle, the petrol lamp reminding everyone of the fact that at that time, in the evening, they had power outages for a couple of hours, about the dial telephone. This interactive project shows how memory circulates intergenerationally. It reveals broader changes in mnemonic practices and provides valuable insights into the generationality of post-communist remembrances.

The disco museum is a meaningful example of the ways in which historical representations are conveyed through but also mediated by a variety of exhibition display techniques and methods, employing audiovisual media, historical objects and images, and textual documents. This section is a departure point for comparative studies on museums of everyday life in communism at the curatorial level in Romania and beyond.



20. *The Disco Museum – vinyl discs*



21. The Disco Museum – dancing ring

Conclusion

The conclusion is rather a reflection and an opening towards new perspectives, by offering state-of-the-art current research and proposing actual and future changes in research trends, in terms of theoretical or methodological aspects. It calls for consideration of new transnational and global spaces, without distinction between the urban and the rural. When doing so, the book situates itself in a scientific context that breaks from the traditional rural studies developed and followed in Romania from the 1930s until recently. Thus, my analytical perspective is no longer purely rural, but both agricultural and urban, as the socialist system in the countryside also transferred urban values and practices. At the same time, the study breaks from the tradition of ethnic studies, which consider a single population since the beginning, for example the Roma, to focus on “interethnic relations”, here between Romanian and Roma. Thus, it would be analytically incorrect today to research Romanians and Roma separately, as these two population groups see themselves as reference groups in the sense of Fredrik Barth.

For the hub of my book project – the Social Anthropology Domain at the University of Fribourg – the postsocialist changes in Eastern Europe brought up highly topical questions that were new or needed to be formulated in new ways: links within Europe, transnational traditions, the culture of memory, the Jewish legacy, nation building, relations between culture and power, and many more. The study of memory cultures of Romanian rural socialism enriches this legacy. After offering a comprehensive conclusion on ways in which the communist past is remembered, reshaped, and given meaning through the interplay of life stories, archival records, and museums, this final section will reflect on future research avenues for themes such as agriculture, Roma, deportations and trauma.

My common analytical focus on ways in which communism is remembered, reshaped and symbolized through the interplay of life stories, archival records, and museums reduces the apparent fragmentation of the case studies and highlights how work, gender, property, and institutions were all arenas where memory and agency were intertwined. The multiple sources reveal that the system of obligatory quotas was more than an economic measure: it was a mechanism of political control, a prelude to collectivization, and a daily source of hardship for peasant households. Archival records depict quotas as patriotic duties and instruments of modernization, while villagers’ narratives recall deprivation, concealment strate-

gies, and humiliation at the hands of collectors. The lived experience of quotas oscillated between scarcity and resistance, eroding trust in the authorities and fostering a repertoire of everyday tactics to evade state demands. Beyond their immediate economic burden, quotas shaped the memory of the early socialist years as a time of loss, ingenuity, and coercion – a memory that continues to structure how villagers situate themselves in the history of collectivization.

Then, the peasant revolt of 1949 emerges as both a local eruption of anger against quotas and confiscations and as part of a wider pattern of resistance to collectivization in Romania. In the narratives, the revolt is remembered less as a coordinated political act than as an embodied experience of fear, injustice, and loss. The intertwining of memory and history – archival reports, propaganda, and oral testimonies – reveals the multiple layers through which the event has been framed: as heroic resistance, as state violence, and as trauma carried across generations. What remains most powerful in villagers' accounts is not only the brutality of repression but also the persistence of memory, which continues to inform local identities and to connect everyday lives with the larger story of Romania's socialist transformation.

Moreover, the deportations of 1949 were not only acts of forced displacement but also instruments of fear and dispossession, designed to weaken resistance and accelerate collectivization. In archival accounts they appear as administrative measures, yet in villagers' memories they are recalled as ruptures that shattered families, destroyed livelihoods, and marked entire generations with stigma. Oral testimonies highlight both trauma and resilience: the cruelty of abductions, the humiliations of forced domicile, and the struggle to rebuild lives upon return. The persistence of memory – through family narratives, commemorative practices, and local monuments – has transformed deportations into a key site of moral reckoning, where loss is balanced by a search for dignity and justice. In this sense, deportations remain a central chapter in the lived history of socialism, shaping collective identity long after the events themselves.

The three event-based chapters – the imposition of quotas, the revolt of 1949, and the deportations that followed – were distinct episodes, yet they shared a common function: to discipline the peasantry, dismantle old forms of autonomy, and prepare the ground for collectivization. In archival accounts, these events appear as administrative measures or threats to order; in villagers' memories, they are remembered as turning points of fear, deprivation, and rupture. What emerges most vividly in oral testimonies is not only the suffering they entailed, but also the strategies of endurance, resistance, and survival that shaped everyday life.

In this sense, memory does more than recall trauma: it actively shapes local identities, marking who is remembered as victim, survivor, or collaborator, and how communities narrate their past. The memory of these events also resonates with broader patterns across Eastern Europe, where the legacies of communism

are still contested between nostalgia, silence, and condemnation. By situating local recollections within this wider landscape, the chapters show how memories of violence and deprivation remain central to understanding both the lived experience of socialism and the ways in which it continues to define moral and political identities in the present.

The everyday campaign of collectivization reveals the dense interplay of force, persuasion, and accommodation that reshaped rural life. Encounters between cadres and villagers oscillated between absurd promises, humiliation, and violence, while peasants responded with evasion, negotiation, or reluctant compliance. Land, livestock, and tools were not only material assets but also markers of identity and inheritance, making their loss deeply symbolic. Memories of the campaign portray it as both an assault on dignity and a catalyst for new social hierarchies, in which opportunism often triumphed over competence. By tracing these daily interactions, the chapter shows how collectivization was not a single event but an ongoing process that left lasting imprints on households, gender relations, and local solidarities. These recollections, preserved in testimony and family memory, anchor the experience of collectivization in lived reality and continue to reveal how communities remember socialism today.

The gender chapter reveals how women's stories move across registers of hardship and empowerment, resignation and rebellion, underscoring how gender was constructed through both institutional practices and intimate relations. Their narratives remind us that the socialist past cannot be reduced to uniform oppression or nostalgia, but must be understood as a field of ambivalence, where work and memory continue to define women's identities across generations. While this chapter emphasized women's voices in relation to courtship, marriage, work, and consumption, it is important to situate these practices within the broader transformations brought by communism. The socialist project did not merely overlay traditional gender roles; it actively reshaped them. Rituals such as weddings, once grounded in kinship strategies and material exchanges, were re-symbolized under socialism through the discourse of equality, productivity, and modernity. The "double burden" of productive and reproductive labour, long embedded in rural life, acquired new meaning when reframed as women's contribution to the socialist body politic.

Communism also altered the symbolic value of practices once tied to domestic continuity. Dowries, trousseaus, or household production, while persisting, lost some of their traditional prestige as state-distributed goods and cooperative labour became alternative sources of status. At the same time, consumption and scarcity in the 1970s and 1980s imbued everyday practices with new layers of meaning: queuing, barter, and improvisation became rituals of endurance, remembered today with ambivalent nostalgia. Thus, the everyday culture of women under socialism was not only a continuation of rural traditions but also a field

of re-signification, where old practices acquired new symbolic weight in response to state power, scarcity, and shifting moral economies. Attending to this re-symbolization allows us to see more clearly how communism unsettled traditional practices and created hybrid forms of gendered life that continue to inform memory and identity today.

The chapter on Roma social worlds reveals the complexity of identities, practices, and strategies of belonging in rural and transnational contexts. Rather than being passive subjects of assimilationist policies during socialism, Roma communities constantly negotiated their position through kinship, housing, ritual, work, and religious conversion. These practices shaped both continuity and change, making visible how ethnicity operates as a situational and relational category. The ethnography shows that Roma agency cannot be reduced to marginality: migration, informal economies, and neo-Protestant churches became resources for redefining status and creating new forms of community life. At the same time, the persistence of structural inequalities and the ambivalent role of majority society underscore how ethnic boundaries remain contested and continually reconfigured. In this sense, the study of Roma social worlds does not only enrich the account of collectivization and postsocialist transformations but also challenges essentialist views of ethnicity by grounding it in everyday social practices.

The chapters on women and on Roma communities demonstrate that the socialist transformation of rural life cannot be understood solely through the lens of repression and victimhood. Both women and Roma were subject to systemic constraints, but their everyday practices reveal a capacity to negotiate, adapt, and redefine the terms of participation within the socialist order. Women reconfigured traditional roles in marriage, family, and labour, while Roma communities mobilized kinship, ritual, migration, and religious affiliation to reshape their social status and collective strategies. In both cases, agency operated through small acts of adaptation and resistance that gave meaning to life under socialism. Far from being passive objects of policy, women and Roma emerge as active participants in the making of socialism's social fabric, leaving legacies that continue to shape memory, identity, and belonging in postsocialist Eastern Europe.

The world of work under socialism emerges as a paradoxical field, caught between inefficiency, surveillance, and ideological control on the one hand, and opportunities for mobility, solidarity, and creativity on the other. Collective farms and village councils were spaces where official directives collided with personal networks, improvisation, and moral economies, producing both frustration and pride. While many accounts emphasize failure, alienation, and corruption, others recall the collective as a place of wages, mechanization, and social life, where humour and ritual softened the pressures of everyday labour. These contrasting memories reveal how work was central to the socialist project, not just as production but as a site of identity, dignity, and negotiation with state power. The

afterlives of these institutions – through restitution, associations, and land tenancies – show that the meanings of work did not disappear with socialism but continue to structure contemporary struggles over property, trust, and authority in the countryside.

The Oradea memorial illustrates how memory, space, and curation intertwine to shape the remembrance of communism in contemporary Romania. Across its three iterations, the memorial combines archival traces, objects, testimonies, and performative curatorial strategies. It does more than preserve the memory of repression; it re-inscribes the communist past into public space, mobilizing emotions, education, and intergenerational dialogue. In this way, the memorial functions as both a *lieu de mémoire* and a site of ongoing negotiation about how communism is remembered, narrated, and instrumentalized in postsocialist societies. Alongside this project, the Disco Museum reveals a different but complementary approach to remembering socialism: one rooted in popular culture, youth practices, and the affective memory of leisure. Together, these two institutions demonstrate that the memory of communism is not monolithic but plural, spanning narratives of trauma and repression as well as nostalgia and everyday creativity. They highlight how museums today function as *lieux de mémoire* that are simultaneously pedagogical, affective and contested, constantly negotiating how the socialist past should be framed and transmitted in postsocialist societies. At the same time, the museum ethnography reveals the shortcomings in terms of setting up state museums of communism in Romania.

Across the chapters, this book has shown the richness of a multi-method approach that weaves together life histories, archival research, and museum ethnography. Each of these methods has generated a distinct yet complementary perspective: biographies have opened windows into lived experience and subjective interpretation; archives have revealed the state's official language of control and classification; and museum practices have illuminated the ways in which memory is curated, institutionalized, and contested in the present. Their combination allows for a plural vision of socialism, one attentive both to structures of power and to the creativity of everyday life.

The analytical framework has been guided throughout by the concepts of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1925) and communicative memory (Assmann, 1995). The life stories echo Halbwachs' notion of memory embedded in social frameworks, while intergenerational narratives, museum displays, and commemorations demonstrate how communicative memory is transmitted, reshaped, or silenced across time. These concepts are not only referenced but mirrored in the empirical material, showing how memory is both a lived practice and a cultural form that organizes our understanding of the past.

By situating rural Romania within the broader landscape of socialist transformation, the book contributes to ongoing debates about the memory of commu-

nism in Eastern Europe and to the global memory of atrocity. The events of revolt, quotas, deportations, and collectivization resonate with other histories of state violence and forced modernization, while the themes of work, gender, property, and institutions expand our understanding of how socialism was lived, negotiated, and remembered at the ground level. Beyond the wealth of empirical material, the book also points to the importance of narratological issues. The coherence of life stories, the silences, repetitions, and rhetorical strategies through which witnesses organize their memories are not simply narrative devices, but key elements in how meaning is produced. Testimonies about revolt, deportations, or everyday labour do not only recount events; they construct arguments, position the speaker within moral communities, and appeal to shared frameworks of interpretation. Attending to these argumentative and rhetorical structures highlights that memory is never a transparent reflection of the past, but a discourse shaped by context, intention, and audience. This dimension not only deepens the analysis of individual narratives but also reinforces the book's central concern with how the communist past is continually reshaped through storytelling, archives, and public commemoration.

On the blurred rural-urban cleavage

Urban-rural migration, organic food production, political ecology are some of the actual topics which inform anthropological studies within and about the rural space. Latest research topics within EASA reveal a great diversity in terms of phenomena lived and experienced within the rural space: how migration reconfigures hierarchies and dependencies for Romani groups in Slovakia, the wellness economy, recreational and healing practices in Southern Transylvania, private hosting of war refugees as an alternative form of refugee reception in a Polish village or shifting temporalities in a Serbian village caused by the exponential expansion of Chinese open-cast copper mines. How young men in the countryside of Belarus lived the events of the 2020 revolution and related feelings of hope is another topic. Then, "back to the land" projects in France and Italy in which people chose to practice agricultural and pastoral activity and to mutualize life spaces and production tools, calls for an ethnography of incoherence necessary to grasp contemporary dialectics and the possibilities for social change. Therefore, East-Central European rural spaces experience multiple binds and are embedded within specific configurations of power within the unequal spatiotemporal configuration of global contemporary capitalism (Harvey, 2007). In Romania, the Center for the Study of Modernity and the Rural World recently hosted the summer school "Postsocialist/Postcolonial Rural Lifeworlds vs. Degrowth, Defuturing, Decoloniality". In the light of these new research trends, the books calls for a study of trans-local spaces, beyond the rural space itself.

In my field, the urban-rural cleavage is blurred with past and present-day practices such as moonshine preparation, involving young urban generations returning

to the countryside, country-wide mobility of CAPs employees, or sale of harvest. Then, in a shift back from urban to the rural, agricultural entrepreneurs come to the village after the “industrial decline” and passing over of the agri-business to the younger generation. In C.M., independent agri-business comes with the delusion related to new dependencies. There is no direct market for the pigs and no slaughterhouse in the area, therefore villagers need to sell them to the middlemen, and are unhappy with the resulting gains. Or they choose to kill the calf instead of giving it away for little money. Villagers are discouraged about setting up EU-funded projects, not because of the complicated bureaucracy, but because of a market in which they are losers, as they would compete with low prices on the market and miss the chance to make the money to give it back. Economic anthropology or the anthropology of mobility could inform the study of these new topics. On the other hand, the local-global cleavage is blurred with return migration practices related to agriculture, wealthy housing, and a shift on the part of the majority population in their economic and social perceptions of rural Roma, who had for long been caught in a trend of downgrading and discrimination. The institutional rhetoric of village councils about investment in agriculture is meant to prevent or stop the youngsters from engaging in migration.

Finally, rural tourism brought new permanent and temporary inhabitants and economic resources. Amenity migrants and tourists represent both a threat and an opportunity for postsocialist countries facing socio-economic and demographic crisis. The renewed urban-rural connection and the revitalization of rural areas is a topic that needs further investigation.

The ethnography of postsocialism revealed shifting patterns of trust and cooperation in the three villages. No representations of village-wide solidarity inform political interactions. There are no common goods; no universal political community as a body of equals; no disinterested, rule-bound, altruistic administrators. Governance resources are represented as external resources rather than universal rights or common ownership. Villagers support skilled political operators capable of maximizing private returns irrespective of how they obtain them or how much they siphon along the way. Thus, each legitimates the leadership that provides the most individual benefits irrespective of collective outcomes (Umbres, 2022). One can also see shifting patterns of transparency where this does not occur.

In the three villages, the collective structures were dismantled and the land on which they stood was bought and re-sold, as a speculation form. In T., the former IAS was bought with the purpose of setting up a wedding hall, and the former CAP is a slaughterhouse set up with EU funding, raising Angus cows. The dismantling is deplored by agricultural entrepreneurs, who show that the buildings should have been kept under state control, and not destroyed, revealing the practice in neighbouring Hungary, where buildings were kept and re-used. In U., iron structures,

foundations and cement walls recount a vivid memory of the dismantling and in C.M., a two-generational agri-business flourished.

Building on these observations about the increasingly blurred rural–urban cleavage in East–Central Europe – and the multiple uncertainties, reconfigurations, and power asymmetries shaping contemporary rural lifeworlds – we can situate these dynamics within the broader anthropological debates on postsocialism. Both Kideckel (2014) and Kürti & Skalník (2009) argue that postsocialist anthropology must grapple with the profound uncertainty and heterogeneity that followed the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe. Kideckel (2014) emphasizes uncertainty as the defining condition of postsocialism – an uncertainty not only about economic futures and political directions but also about the very concept of postsocialism itself, which he portrays as an unstable analytical category shaped by ambiguity, contradiction, and uneven change. Kürti and Skalník (2009), writing from the perspective of “anthropology at home”, stress that postsocialist Europe does not represent a uniform transition toward Western liberal models but a diverse set of trajectories shaped by local histories, cultural logics, and power relations. They critique Western academic narratives that treat postsocialism as a linear progression or as a deficit compared to the West, insisting instead that anthropologists recognize the plurality, complexity, and agency within postsocialist societies. Together, the two works highlight the need for nuanced, locally grounded, and critically reflexive approaches to understanding the transformations of the region.

Roma

Furthermore, in a call for considering the Romanian majority and the Roma minority jointly, I understand ethnicity as a process in the making (Barth, 1969), different from the one of ethnic group.²²⁶ Synergies and entanglements between the two populations resulted from the study of past and present institutions (local administration, collective cooperative, NGO). Further ethnography included in a separate study (Mateoc 2016, 12) revealed how ethnicity was played out in the village school in T, in late communist years, when the nationwide policy of putting the Roma in separate classrooms was applied. For the respective classrooms, which gathered pupils from the ages of 10 to 17, teachers were assigned for voluntary work, in addition to the regularly paid amount. The teachers ex-

²²⁶ Giordano (1997) shows that the Anglo-Saxon literature on ethnicity draws on immigrant minorities in terms of urban subcultures. In Europe, the migratory phenomenon was for long perceived in social terms and not terms related to ethnicity. The latter was built in Europe starting from the territory and *jus sanguinis* questions, instrumentalized by states and managers of ethnic identities. From there, the separatist, regional, independent movements arise. Moreover, in Central and Eastern Europe, the territorial question and the “soul of the people” (herderian inspiration) and the pillars of the nationalist and ethnicist discourse, is a discursive political form pushed to the extreme after the fall of the communist regime.

plained that with the everyday life crisis related to the difficult access to resources in the late 1980s, in the context of the rationalization policy, they did not embrace their teaching mission fully but did it as something that had to be done. They point to the motivations invoked by Roma male students, when it comes to education: being able to write letters from the army and being able to do the driving school. Therefore, the Roma ethnicity is still assigned to misconception, and society does not take its education mission for them as a serious matter. By admitting the difficulties Roma students had, as they did not know the days of the week or they could not recognize objects such as planes from an image, the teachers perpetuated their stigmatization.

Another realm which reflected synergies and discrepancies between the Roma and the Romanian population is the collective cooperative. Here, ethnicity is played out in terms of work practice, as Roma worked almost exclusively at the livestock unit, but it was not necessarily stigmatizing: they stole (like everybody stole), as they needed milk for kids. The former CAP chairman in U. does not look at the Roma as at a de-favoured social category but rather says ironically that he brought the Roma into the village and that at present, when they are so numerous, villagers curse him for that reason. This stands in contrast with discriminating remarks on Roma who don't work on the land tenancy but at a garbage collecting company, or on Roma workers at the collective who roamed around the GO-STAT as they needed "bones", probably meaning low quality meat. Finally, for the Village Councils, the institutional culture shifts in relation to migration and conversion trends, by either acknowledging the non-authorized house building and further steps to be taken (U.) or pointing out the civilizing feature of conversion and thus creating a type of "good Roma" for the village (T.). Additionally, state institutions admit on the discourse level that, unlike before, the Roma are privileged: "There are job positions saved for them, in the police or administration field". The framework of "mixed economies" used for the Roma group as a non-collectivized population revealed interesting dependencies, trust and hierarchy forms between the two populations when it comes to work at the cooperative.

Furthermore, two institutional ethnographies unfolding when the thesis was handed in reveal interesting ways of ethnicity representations. A private foundation which intervenes in village T. targets the Roma community for education and employment related activities, and officially claims to target "segregated communities, with a low access to education, health services". Thus, ethnicity is absent from the public statements but present in the basis of the founders' intentions. In contrast with the above-mentioned attitude of schoolteachers in the 1980s, the program aims to help kindergarten children catch up with skills, by organizing a summer kindergarten to help children who never attended a kindergarten and start school soon to save three years of discrepancy in writing, holding a pen, socializing, and asking to go to the toilet. 7 to 45 pupils now attend kindergarten,

6 years after the intervention. Now they are the best in the classrooms, the teachers say. When it comes to employment-related interventions, the Foundation acknowledges the discrimination in society against the Roma: “In the early 2000s, after people knew about us that we are a Foundation changing things in the Roma communities, non-Roma people contacted us and were upset that we do so much for the Roma who do nothing, do not change, and we do nothing for the pensioners who raised Romania” (Foundation member). The Foundation started fighting society’s disapproval and rejection of the Roma, by placing Roma care takers with elders, while being aware of the long road ahead: “One Roma collaborator told that all his childhood, he was told that he has to be two times better than the Romanians, or the ethnic Hungarians, if he wanted to be better than them”.

The other institution reveals interesting ethnicity patterns. A Texas-based Association declaratively approached Roma through their ministry in T. which runs a feeding centre and educational workshops. Here, the Roma are essentialized, and internal differences within the group – such as migrant and nonmigrant populations, and informal economic practices versus traditional occupations – are omitted. Still, at community level, the intervention of the Association is perceived as meaningful.

Furthermore, the fluidity of ethnicity is perceived in everyday social relations, as boundaries are continuously built and dissolved. The Roma in U. describe a form of sociality distinct from that of Romanians, emphasizing that “we talk among us everywhere, unlike Romanians”, while also expressing a new ethos linked to conversion (“now, no one can persecute or discriminate against us anymore”). In terms of work values, the two populations share similar beliefs when it comes to work and investment. A Roma family in C.M. secured homes for children based on a decade long daily work in agriculture in the 1990s combined with trade-related activities. The duty to secure homes for children, and the maintaining of close family relations is valid for the Romanian majority as well. All in all, close family relations in the three Roma communities are reflected in the housing patterns: in addition to the example from C.M. described above, in U., the elder generation raises imposing villa-type houses possibly aimed at more generations living together. In T., the second generation builds a new house, in brick, in the garden behind the elders’ adobe house. Others have argued that staying within the community is a form of withdrawing into oneself when the surrounding society perpetuates discrimination and the state institutions dismiss their needs. My ethnography shows that everyday intercultural relations unfold in soft forms, such as migrant Roma giving their garden for use to their Romanian neighbours, or the house keys for looking over the stocked building materials in their absence. Moreover, in the view of a Roma villager, family relations were greatly altered due to land-related conflicts in the land restitution context of the 1990s: “Then, land was

given back and divided among siblings. One gets the field by the house, and the other the field outside the village. And discussions start here”.

On the ritual level, boundaries between the two groups are porous as well. The bridewealth ritual can function as an intentionally maintained ethnic trait, used to embellish a transaction between the parents of future spouses that secures their future well-being. In U., the so-called bridewealth is preserved by the parents of the bride and kept as a future investment resource in housing or other. At the same time, the Romanians are involved in the functionality of this ritual, such as the trusted Romanian neighbour who was requested to safekeep the sum for a while. At the same time, the two population groups share knowledge practices – for example when a Roma family contracted a wooden fence dismantling service, both the Roma family and the Romanian neighbour expected that the wooden planks would stay with the owner. The dismantling company also worked by default with a recycling logic that both the Roma and the Romanian villager were unaware of.

Overall, the book calls for further dual approaches in the study of rural Roma, which should consider the majority population, to understand transfers, similarities or clashes, as well as their intergenerational transformations. When doing so, ethnicity remains fluid and impermeable, both at the institutional and everyday level. At the same time, the ways in which institutional actors (both Roma and non-Roma), ethnicize the Roma group, dismissing internal differences, demands constant attention. Additionally, one should be cautious about the ethnicization of poverty and its attribution by default to Roma, as ethnicity is locally contingent on diachronic and synchronic transformative processes. Instead of the much encountered monolithic, victimhood perspective, in which the Roma are “ethnicized” by state and non-state actors, one should focus on empowerment forms for the Roma and its use on the ground, and on the constraints and autonomies which play out at the level of their culture, induced, for example, by the concepts of honour or shame. Moreover, the concept of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997, 3), understood as the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality could inform further work on intercultural relations between Romanians and Roma.

Deportations

Based on my analytical chapters, I wish to emphasize that repression in the countryside was not only evident in isolated dramatic events, such as the revolts and deportations, but was continuous in everyday life. It was a permanent phenomenon of *longue durée*, to use the famous formulation by Fernand Braudel. The remarks on repressive legality are also very interesting, as they were not only visible in exceptional situations but also in everyday life. In relation to dramatic events – revolt, deportations, everyday encounters with the executors – most villagers re-

member collectivization as a struggle of “us” against “them” (the regime) and present themselves as passive victims of circumstance.²²⁷ However, Kligman and Verdery (2011, 294) show that the new collective order eventually increased social mobility for Roma, young people, and women, both in and outside of the villages. In a similar vein, the chapters on gender, Roma and work reveal facets of everyday life and forms of empowerment, crosscutting through private life aspects (courtship and marriage rituals) and revealing new family and intergenerational relations.

The book explores the repressive mechanisms of deportations and the trajectories of victims. Their lived experience guides the research, and their words, ignored for a long time, are its heart. Several life stories narrate the violence of the abduction, the trials imposed by survival in the countryside of Dobruja, its stone quarries and windy fields, with a long, sometimes impossible return home. These voices maintain a memory which still impregnates postsocialist societies to this day and perhaps extends beyond our present. Liberation and return are especially understudied topics. Deportation had a collective impact, as families of two generations were abducted together. A part of the family returns, another one stays. In both cases, deportation dissolves in the rest of the deportees’ lives and narrators shift the story to marriage recollections and spend a moment to remember happy episodes. The long trajectory and history of deportations concerned not only those involved but also larger social environments, the society of origin and the society in the deportation place. The chapter opens the way for new memory work which shows the common nature of such experiences, such as those in a recent work of Stalinist deportations from Western Ukraine and Lithuania (Blum & Koustova, 2024). At the same time, the national memory of communist deportations – those of 1945, to USSR, of 1951, to Bărăgan, or of 1949, to Dobruja – is reconstructed around these life histories. Moreover, in addition to history from above (in documents) and from below (in biographies), a meso-level analysis of the transposition of the deportation decision on the ground reveals the language of the state used for the portraits of deportees. The deportation accounts allow us to seize the decalage between key recollection flashes, such as the one on the fear of being put face towards the sea and shot, and the cold, bureaucratic language of the report on the journey, pictured as a well-organized action.

A rich contribution of the deportation study is the revealing of its individual and collective nature. The deportation experience is narrated back and forth from the collective to the individual. The list of deportees, with family members, and several families ending up in the same village reveals a collective dimension of deportations, and a conservation of the memory from the home region. The whole

²²⁷ Parts of the book seem to be influenced by the populist narrative of “the peasants versus the incompetent state”, which has been popular in Western studies of socialist countries since James Scott’s (1985) path-breaking book *Weapons of the Weak*.

deportation process is governed by uncertainty, as people do not know why it happens. The mass journey to Dobruja, together with other deportees from North-Western Romania is a shared destiny collectively recollected by all villagers, with common precise details. At the same time, collective experience brings up a multitude of individual situations and factors which allow survival, for adults and children. Some are lost in small villages in the Dobruja countryside and work in the open field day in and day out, others are in the periphery of Constanța and work in the stone quarry. The human connections in the deportation place, the hidden correspondence with the family at home (e.g. a letter hidden inside a home baked bread), the constraint of police surveillance and related control forms (e.g. requests to show up at the police station every week, or to refrain from sharing with others life aspects from the deportation period) reveal precious insights into the representations of authority in the eyes of the deportees. Regional solidarity, the conservation of memory from home, and the cultural baggage from the home region are expressed through ways of doing (cooking, mending, household chores) estimated as superior to those in the deportation villages, seen as backward. At the same time, among the numerous solidarity and insertion spaces within the communities, some are chosen and revindicated (e.g. creating good connections with a host) while some are against the deportees (e.g. workplace, brigade, quasi-forced work in general). The gentility of individuals and of authorities is visible within these solidarity spaces (Mateoc, 2018).

Again, the links during exile, expressed through the choice of giving children the names of the host's children, through the activation of a local accent in the storytelling when recalling direct speech, or through pioneering practices in breeding, such as bringing sheep from Dobruja by train and starting sheep breeding in the village, are less explored. Moreover, the solidarity of the deportees continues up to this day, when their children are referred to as professionally successful people, either in Romania or USA, and when I am invited to participate at their informal meetings. The long and ambiguous return home, before decisions for collective returns, with either forms of ostracization from co-villagers, villagers who got installed in their homes, or solidarity with providing returnees with necessities is equally less explored. In a similar vein, Blum and Koustova (2024) point to former deportees from Lithuania who returned to Siberia as they felt stigmatized.

The deportation narrative reproduces themes from collective memory: the brutal and forced nature of the socialist regime, the injustice targeted at wealthy hard-working families portrayed as exploiters, and the absence of a transitional justice in the land restitution context, when the evidence for the fortune of a deported family had to disappear. The latter is pictured in emotional terms such as “the voice of blood” invoked when claiming the lost fortune to the local authorities. The fierceness of these recollections and sometimes the support I am requested

to provide in finding solutions for the matter of restitution is alternated with the serenity and forgiveness from other recollections. At the same time, narrators are silent in relation to the stigma which affected their life paths, as life is broken at some point because of deportations, which cannot be extracted from life stories. In the 2010s, when these recollections were recorded, the memorial canon on deportation was forged, even if villagers were recounting their life stories to a (native) researcher for the first time.

In addition to police reports on the journey and party documents with portraits of deportees, a future study of maps, postcards, photos during the obligatory stay or clandestine photos taken at departure, private correspondence, or letters written by villagers to the authorities will enrich the memory culture of deportations. Apart from the content itself, the graphics of letters can reveal the writing mechanism, probably via intermediaries, and the letters are like a palimpsest, with underlining and writing on a diagonal. On the other hand, the materiality of deportations deserves specific attention. The deportees to Dobrogea are abducted without any belongings, as one narrator showed, boarded in the lorry in their nightgowns. The account from Poarta Albă reveals how the food in parcels from home was given to them on purpose after it got rotten, or how deportees improvised means of insulation from cold. Macadam stone or sheep are exile objects brought back home. Blum and Koustova (2024) show how Lithuanian deportees to Siberia wrote their letters on birchbark, as a memory conservation form, even when the access to paper was no longer problematic.

In the national deportation narrative, the deportation experience is generalized, and the deportations of 1949 are an essential addition standing against the generalization of the experience. The synchronicity of voices from below allows a precious reconstruction of an event from recent history. An individual life story embodies history from above and from below and provides a passage from the collective to the individual. Deportations in general are part of the memorial scene. The “Resistance and Repression” Memorial features three portraits of deportees from Bihor assigned to obligatory domiciles in Dobruja, as part of the revolt repression, with accounts on the shootings of family members before deportation, on the journey, or on ways in which deportees found out about the death of family members: “We received a postcard with the news that my father got married and lives opposite the mill. Opposite the mill was the cemetery, and it was then that my grandparents found out that my father had been killed. A parcel with black clothes arrived and thus they understood that he does not live anymore” (Dull Terezia, daughter of a chiabur peasant, on display at the Memorial). A list of deportees from Girișu Negru – a village in Bihor taken as example – is displayed, including also the nickname of the family, thus paying respect to the local identities. Additionally, the memory of deportations to Bărăgan is featured, through a drawing (a horse drawn in black pencil) and a sketch (a horse-driven cart with two

adults and two children in it, with two more adults and a child marching behind it, made in colour pencils) made by a deportee and a poem (in verses, “Father Christmas from Bărrăgan”) written by a deportee during the obligatory domicile at Movila Găldăului in 1958 and in 1957, respectively. In this way, deportation re-gains its place in the recent local memorial scene.

Trauma

Certainly, the accounts on the revolt and on the deportation inform a discussion on the connection between repression and trauma. Trauma is understood as a psychoanalytic notion, as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind (Caruth, 1996). The re-enactment of trauma and its generational nuances is most clearly visible in the accounts of F. and her daughter, E. F. focuses on the triumph of their future life, marked by withdrawal from work at the CAP and by entrepreneurship to the greatest extent possible, including the introduction of paprika cultivation in the village and the operation of the former mill for private grinding. She is never critical of the past and of the limitations that the former legal status of deportee brought her, such as cutting education rights. E. re-takes the revengeful stance and reenacts the trauma by stressing the unjust victimhood status of the family (executed grandfather, deported mother), and then comes back to triumph, by showing that children of deported people developed bright careers. Later, E. is nostalgic for the late socialist years, when the salary of an engineer was more satisfactory, or when the streets were safer, when respect between generations was a norm. This dual stance – oscillating between trauma and triumph, and between suffering and nostalgia – suggests that the regime is not perceived monolithically: it is remembered as repressive in terms of the punishment endured by the family yet also recalled with regret for the loss of affordability and human relationships. The two narrators share mistrust in the local and national state institutions related to claims based on the legal status of deportees and their successors, and in the local land restitution actors.

Giesen (2004) shows that triumphant or traumatic experiences that devalue the experience of the parental generation and provide a frame for the collective identity of a generation are particularly important. The authenticity of these experiences is rooted in corporal presence and bodily rituals. The accounts of F. and E. show that the next generation either reinterprets or devalues a traumatic experience.

At the same time, the author shows that corporeality and experience are the antidotes against the risk of modernity. Modernity renders personal experience fluid, and therefore, individuals and societies re-emphasize corporeality. In referring to corporeal experience generations construct boundaries and barriers against the risk of being misunderstood by outsiders in a society in which neither class and descent nor locality can provide these boundaries anymore, at least not in a

legitimate way. Corporeal presence may be actual or imagined. A strong collective identity emerges within a generation – primarily among men – anchored in proximity to an extraordinary event: being on the barricades or under gunfire, in camps or refugee treks, at the opening of the Berlin Wall or the collapse of the Twin Towers, at Verdun or in Berlin, New York, Seattle, or Gorleben. Even when not physically present, individuals may claim symbolic proximity, had mere coincidence not prevented their participation (Giesen 2004). Here, children of deportees envision the experience of their parents and include corporeality in the recollection of post-memories such as those related to on-spot executions or to the deportations at the Canal, when corporeal presence was annihilated.

In addition to violent forms of repression – revolt and deportation – everyday trauma is present in interactions with state agents (the Kreisbüro, propagandists, activists, etc.) during the campaign. The *chiaburi* category made no sense to the villagers, and they keep on questioning its absurdity. On the other hand, narrators make recurring references to something worse than giving up one's land, such as the recollections of the battlefield told by their husbands, fathers or co-villagers, who had seen worse and lived worse. Giving up one's land is repressive on a symbolic level as well, as the land comes from a forest that the ancestors had slashed and burned to have their own land. Overall, the narratives on the revolt, deportation and the campaign are repositories of cultural trauma. Unlike psychological trauma, which is echoed in narratives, and re-enacted in the story telling, cultural trauma theory rejects naturalist theories of trauma that assume large-scale events such as war and atrocities have an automatic negative effect on the collective. Instead, cultural traumas are "made, not born". Social collectivities remember certain events as historically important when actors and institutions successfully mobilize cultural codes (such as the binaries of good and evil, victims and perpetrators), as the Resistance and Repression Memorial does. Meanwhile, memories of other large-scale events are forgotten or repressed when such discursive labour is absent.

Additionally, the memorial shows that trauma work is thus inherently competitive, as stakeholders struggle over what trauma narratives are legitimate and lasting, what the spatial and temporal frames of the event are, who are defined as victims, and who is held responsible for the wrongdoing. Events have a "trauma time": this time marks a break from the past and influences the future. Cultural trauma is created through the "symbolic extension" of victimhood from the individual and the collective, and primarily experienced vicariously through various mediated forms, such as narratives, testimonials and witness accounts, news reports, photographs, video, film theatre, commemorative ceremonies, monuments, museums and propaganda (Ushiyama & Baert 2016, 474).

Still in the revolt, deportation and campaign narratives, psychological trauma stands in place-based memory, bodily-imprinted sensations, and visual imagery of

past executions or fantasy. The revolt and the deportation are chronotropic experiences, connecting trauma and a shattered childhood. Moreover, the recollections on the revolt and on the deportations showed the ways in which resistance to authority has come to be experienced as illness, and how narratives of the body and its sufferings are used to articulate a political critique of history and society (Skultans, 1997). At the same time, the two accounts combine testimony and metaphor: harvests which remain on the field, or the journey into the unknown.

Appendix

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

The list follows the order of interviewing.

UCURIȘ

Popa Ioan, 1933
Cristea Floare, 1939
Ile Livia, 1936
Pintea Saveta, 1954
Pintea Teodor, 1942
Mateoc Teodor, 1925
Mateoc Ana, 1927
Gavra Zeina, 1940
Gavra Vasile, 1919
Sîrb Isaie, 1936
Știop Popa Elisabeta, 1932
Floroncuț Marioara, 1939
Bud Maria, 1958
Iura Ileana, 1949
Crăciun Isfira, 1938
Pater Ana, 1946
Anton Ana, 1925
Brândușe Maria, 1935
Heteș Petru, 1938
Heteș Saveta, 1940

COCIUBA MARE

Lobonț Petru, 1927
Jurcan Teodor, 1949
Hip Eva, 1938
Netea Silvia, 1931
Nan Mina, 1922
Scurtu Maria, 1935
Iancu Vasile, 1943

TINCA

Molnar Paraschiva, 1945
Deac Paraschiva, 1932
Csép Zoltan, 1937
Csép Margit, 1946
Suciu Ana, 1926
Magda Gheorghe, 1939
Ianos Suzana, 1943
Simon Erszebet, 1927
Csipkes Adalbert, 1937
Csipkes Maria, 1941
Drimbe Floare, 1932
Moț Floare, 1928
Moțiu Petru Ioan, 1943
Köteles Iuliana, 1942
Jenei Clara, 1934
Berke Juci, 1942

LIST OF ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

• Central

ACNSAS – Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității [The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives], fondul documentar dosar nr. 25 / 1949–1952

• Local

1. DJAN Bihor (Direcția Județeană Bihor a Arhivelor Naționale) [County-based Division of National Archives]

a) Fond Legiunea de Jandarmi [Gendarmes Legion Fund]

DJAN Bihor, Fond Legiunea de jandarmi Bihor, dosar 92/1949

DJAN Bihor, Dosar Legiunea de jandarmi Bihor, dosar 95 / 1949

b) Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR [County Committee of PCR]

Used files in chornological order:

DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 499 / 1949

DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 501 / 1949

DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 506 / 1949

DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, dosar 509 / 1949

DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Județean Bihor al PCR, Comitetul de Plasă PMR Cociuba Mare, PMR Tinca, dosar 1282 / 1950

DJAN Bihor, Comitetul regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul Colectărilor de Stat, dosar 64/1953

DJAN Bihor, Comitetul regional PMR Oradea, Sectorul GAC și Întovărășiri agricole, dosar 46 / 1956

DJAN Bihor, Comitetul Regional PMR Oradea, Secția Agrară, Dosar 45 / 1960

2. Sfaturi Populare [Village Councils]

Sfatul Popular al Comunei Cociuba Mare, Dosar 5 / 1956, cuprinzând Procese Verbale de Comitet Executiv cu deciziile aduse și deciziile organelor superioare pe anul 1956

Sfatul Popular al Comunei Cociuba Mare, Dosar 5 / 1975, cuprinzând documentele ședințelor de Comitet Executiv și deciziile aduse pe anul 1975

Dosar cu cereri pentru dovedirea bunurilor aduse în CAP Cociuba Mare la înființare, 1991

Dosar cu cereri pentru dovedirea bunurilor aduse în CAP Cociuba Mare la înființare, 1991

List of photographs

1. Tinca – on the left-hand corner, one building of the future school, at the time, a private bank belonging to an ethnic Hungarian family (photo made in September 16, 1941)
2. Tinca, participants at a theatre event (photo of 1947)
3. Cociuba Mare, main street, early 1990s
4. Ucuriș, place of one on-spot execution (August 3rd 1949)
5. The inscription says: “In the memory of MF killed by the Securitate troops on August 3rd, 1949, because he participated in the peasants’ revolt in L. against forced collectivization of agriculture and against obligatory quotas. This roadside crucifix was dedicated today, August 3rd, 2003”. The Association of Deportees in Bihor. President: Aurel Brazdă. Grandchildren: SFT, SGS
6. Pipe-makers, Ucuriș ©Alex Mara
7. Fieldwork time, Tinca, 2015
8. Tinca, handmade embroidery
9. Cociuba Mare, front yard
10. Ucuriș, house in the making, main road
11. Ucuriș, house in the making, side road
12. Ucuriș, photo taken in 1997. Visit of the delegation including president Nicolae Ceaușescu, Minister of Agriculture Petre Glavan, Ilie Verdet, Gheorghe Blaj. These met the local authorities: First Secretary of the County, Head of Village Council, and CAP Chairman.
13. Cociuba Mare, wedding, late 1970s
14. Ucuriș, former CAP building, now rented in the summer by a two generational family of shepherds
15. Ucuriș, former CAP building
16. Ucuriș, former SMT building
17. Cociuba Mare, merchandize supply, early 1990s

18. The Resistance and Repression Memorial, prism with engraved names of political prisoners
19. Door of the Securitate office, temporarily displayed in the permanent exhibition on the "communist repression". It belongs to Porsztner Bela who owns a basement space in the building of the former Securitate, which was a former cell in communist times. Now, the building of the old Securitate belongs to owners of flats and basements. After being temporarily exposed, the door was returned to the owner.
20. The Disco Museum – vinyl discs
21. The Disco Museum – dancing ring

List of abbreviations

- ACNSAS – *Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*, The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives
- AFDPR – *Asociația Foștilor Deținuți Politici din România*, Association of Romanian Former Political Prisoners
- APIA – *Agenția de Plăți și Intervenție pentru Agricultură*, The Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture
- ARLUS – *Asociația Română pentru strângerea Legăturilor cu Uniunea Sovietică*, The Romanian Association for Strengthening Relations with the Soviet Union
- CAP – *Cooperativa Agricolă de Producție*, Agricultural Production Cooperative
- CPADCR – *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România*, Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania
- DGSP – *Direcția Generală a Securității Poporului*, The General Directorate of People's Security, referred to as the *Securitate*
- GAC – *Gospodăria Agricolă Colectivă*. Initial name of the Romanian collective farms, until the 1960s, when they were renamed CAP (*Cooperativa Agricolă de Producție*). They are presented as the equivalent of the Soviet kolkhoz.
- GOSTAT – *Gospodărie (agricolă) de stat*. State farms usually established on state land that had been confiscated from large landowners after the 1945 land reform. They are presented as the equivalent of the Soviet State farms, the sovkhozes.
- IAS – *Întreprindere Agricolă de Stat*, State Agricultural Enterprise
- IICCMER – *Institutul de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului și Memoria Exilului Românesc*, The Institute for the Investigation of the Communism Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile
- PCR – *Partidul Comunist Român*, Romanian Communist Party
- PMR – *Partidul Muncitoresc Român*, Romanian Workers' Party
- RPR – *Republica Populară Română*, Romanian People's Republic
- SMT – *Stațiuni de Mașini și Tractoare*, Machine and Tractor Stations. State companies in charge of the mechanization of socialist agriculture. In the 1960s and 1970s they were renamed SMA (*Stațiuni de Mașini Agricole*, or Stations for Agricultural Machinery).
- TOZ – *Tovarishchestvo po sovmestnoi obrabotke zemli*, Association for Common Tilling of the Land. Loose Soviet agricultural association in which peasant members preserved their private ownership over land but worked it collectively and shared the harvest proportionally with their surface and work contribution. These associations were encountered in the earlier stages of the campaign. The peasants saw them as an alternative to full collectivization and the authorities as a step toward collective farms.

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