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Editor's Note

The *Annual of Oral History* celebrates this year its 20th anniversary. Since 1997 when we got our first journal, it has been a long and exciting, albeit sometimes difficult endeavor to consistently offer to Romanian and international public original, root-based oral historical research. This was the red line that connected and gave coherence to issues across all years. Moreover, AOH tried to coherently approach in each publication relevant topics for Romanian society, by connecting them to international scholar debates. Thus, themes such as anti-communist resistance, the memory of the Holocaust in Romania, World War II, the oral history of different minorities, including the Roma, gold mining, and so on, have been tackled in special issues all these years. It has been a complex agenda which connects researchers' interests of at the Oral History Institute to main international debates such as the historiographical debate on the soviet history between the totalitarian and (post)revisionist schools, discussions on history, memory and remembrance, micro-history, history from below, history of marginal, orality, narrativity and representation, or gender. Consistent with this editing pattern, and complementing the previous AOH issue, the 20th number brings together five articles on the history of gold mining in the Apuseni Mountains resulting from research funded by the Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0874, within PNCDI III, contract no. 150/2017.

The research partially presented in this AOH issue aimed, firstly, to (re)construct miners' lived history and the history of gold exploitation in the Apuseni Mountains through life stories and interpretation of past artifacts. In this regard, it was based, on one hand, on a re-constitutive and analytical approach, that is mining history both as end and beginning of a cycle. On the other hand, the researchers looked at the imaginary and representations of the past as materialized in the memory of miners and communities they belong to. In the collective imaginary, gold acquired during the last century ethical and symbolic values which developed into a so-called "gold mythology" frozen in exemplary life stories and events, also mirrored by the negative mythology coming from long term (pre)Christian ethos; the representations by human beings: its magnetism, its curse, its social and economic role, as well as spiritual, ethical and professional values.

Secondly, the articles published here investigate traditional mining, revealing family and community strategies for economic survival, by pointing out continuities and discontinuities throughout history. The researchers scrutinized and tried to reconstruct miners' biographies and evaluate the economic and cultural status of this profession. Moreover, they analyze the perceived impact of "great history" events and phenomena upon the individual and familiar miner biographies such as modernization, industrialization, wars, reforms, political regimes, strikes, revolutions, etc. Last, but not least, the authors deal with the economic strategies and identity negotiation in the miners' world at the crossroads of tradition and modernization/industrialization: the miner profession in urban and rural areas, agricultural

occupations which double the peasant mining of gold washing technique.

The studies aim at connecting the history research the gold mining to recent analytical key instruments employed by recent international historiographical debates: (im)material cultural heritage, collaboration and resistance, gender roles in practicing the profession/craftsmanship as well as in miners' communities, modernization, minorities, environment and landscape, resistance, and migration. Some of the methodological questions addressed are: What are the continuities and discontinuities of gold mining in different epochs? How are the male and female experiences related to mining different? How the transformation of craftsmanship into a profession occurred? What was the impact of modernization on mining and miners' communities? What was the impact of mining on the environment and how the landscape changed within the *longue durée*? How is mining represented in individual recollections about the past? What was the impact of migration on gold mining?

To answer these questions, most articles use both archival and secondary sources as well as oral history interviews recorded between 2017 and 2019 in the gold mining areas of Alba and Hunedoara counties. Organized chronologically according to the time span covered, AOH opens with the work by Luminița Ignat-Coman, "Gold Mining in Transylvania in Modern Period," with a focus on the much-debated area of Roșia Montană. The author analyses how the technical innovations slowly and gradually changed not only the mining but local communities in general. The author provides a very useful overview of the central and local legislation on mines

during the period under scrutiny. A particularly interesting examination is made on work-related grievances, doubled by the nationalistic ones given the work ethnic segregation. The author concludes that "the modern era witnessed the steady and significant growth of gold mining in Transylvania."

Second, in the article "Work and Workmanship: Gold Mining at Gura Barza in the Latter Half of the 20th Century" Ioana Ursu shows how, when oral history reflects people's professions, unique information about the employee's daily routine, the tasks and working conditions, professional solidarity, job risks, leisure, and the troubles in combining work and family come to light. The article exploits 14 oral history interviews taken during a field campaign conducted in 2019 in Hunedoara County, with former miners or employees in technical or adjacent professions in the Gura Barza mining company. Moreover, the study explores how the attraction of the labor force from the town of Brad and surrounding villages, as well as the nature of the mining profession, have created professional solidarity and specific identities. Last, but not least, Ioana-Zoia Ursu offers a new perspective on work routines in the mine, the ethical values of the workers in the context of political changes, and technical developments in gold mining exploitation in Romania in the 20th century.

The third study is by Dr. Adrian Boda and is called "Gold Mining Accidents: Musariu Mine Fire in the Collective Memory." The author addressed one recurring topic in the recorded oral history interviews, i.e. work accidents. In the mines, accidents have been constant, depending on the type of activities and the environment in which they take place, as favoring or inhibiting factors for

their occurrence. Although their recurrence is higher in coal mines, work accidents have also occurred in the mining of precious metals. The author discusses how the Musariu mine fire is recalled by those who lived the event. There are two dimensions outlined in the remembering process, the first being the individual, of those who were directly involved in this tragic event. Secondly, there is a collective perspective on the tragedy, as the solidarity of mining communities in such situations is well-known. This case-study is privileged in terms of available sources, as the author confronts oral history testimonies, such for example the one by Nicolae Man – former deputy of the Electromechanical section of the Barza mining enterprise at the time of the fire – with archival documents, i.e. sketches and minutes related to the accident.

Ionela Bogdan brings the gender analysis to the fore in her study called "Feminine Narratives of Gold Mining in the Apuseni Mountains. An Oral History Research." In exploiting the life-stories of women living in gold mining communities, the author highlights elements such as dynamics and marital rules, gender relations, domestic financial management in miners' families, or the gendered labor division. The article also discusses the everyday life dynamic, namely the ways women reflect on, in the context of the control by the communist authorities. This appeal to memory is necessary to underline the strategies used by miners and their families to adapt to a world of a centralized economy, in which power relations change and rules of survival inevitably emerge.

The fifth contribution to the volume "Personal Mythmaking. Life Story Interviews of Former Employees at Barza Mining Company," by Călin-Andrei Olariu,

addresses the issue of life story interviews with former employees of Barza Mining Company. He analyzes the various, subjective ways in which witnesses build their life stories from different experiences and perspectives. The author tries to answer the question Why is it important for the interviewee to construct his life story in this way? to identify different ways in which the socialist past is interpreted and represented in post-socialism.

In the Varia section, Diana-Alexandra Nistor presents an extraordinary life-story in the article “A Story of a Century. War, Peace and the Everyday Life of a Roma War Veteran in Transylvania”. Augustin Poțo's biography is an example of how oral history can bring to the fore not only voices of ordinary people but of members of minority communities usually totally silent in the academic discourse.

Our younger colleague Andrei Dălălau wrote an excellent book review on Ioan Stanomir' book “La Centenar. Recitind secolul României Mari,” published in 2018. The last section of the volumes contains a series of photographs taken during the fieldwork campaigns in miners' communities as well as several images from the archives, documenting the Musariu mine fire. The current AOH issue closes with the list of contributors, which provide basic information about the authors, their institutional affiliation, and research interests.

Our final remarks are for the 250 people in gold mining communities in the Apuseni Mountains whom we interviewed, their families, and friends who understood the importance of recording their life-stories to preserve the memories and representations of the past for present and future. The research results presented here were possible

due to their availability, and to the assistance we receive from two extraordinary people who guided us throughout our fieldwork towards key people in the mining communities, i.e. Dr. Livia Coroi and Mr. Nicolae Pantea.

Gold Mining in Transylvania in Modern Period¹

Abstract: The article focuses on gold-mining in Transylvania, more precisely in the major gold-mining center of Roșia Montană, in the modern era. It discusses the intense dynamic of this industry, which involved the steady introduction of new technologies, the improvement of the technologies already in use, the opening of new mineshafts, and the upgrade of the old ones. Furthermore, the article shortly analyses the mining legislation in the province, emphasizing that it made this industrial sector more coherent and efficient. Throughout the modern era there were also many work-related grievances, all of them doubled by national grievances given the ethnic segregation of work in the mines. Based on the analysis, the article concludes that the modern era witnessed the steady and significant growth of gold-mining in Transylvania.

¹ This work was supported by a grant of Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0874, within PNCDI III, contract no. 150/2017.

Keywords: gold mining, Roșia Montană, Transylvania, modern era, legislation, technological progress.

Context

The Auriferous Quadrangle has been the main gold source of the Apuseni Mountains.² Due to its alpine geography and landscape and its well-known history, both as a Romanian land and as a major mining site, this is a sacred region, directly linked to the Romanian and European mining history. Geologist Fratišek Pošepný first described the region as a triangle, spanning from Hălmaგი in the NW to Baia de Arieș in the NE and to Săcărâmb in the South.³ Subsequently, the region was described by geologist Karl V. Papp and German engineer Fr. Schumacher as an irregular quadrangle extending on the NE-SW axis from Baia de Arieș to Căraci, from there on towards South-East, to Săcărâmb, and then back towards NE, encompassing Zlatna and all the other townships up to the departing point, Baia de Arieș. Besides, Fr. Schumacher has created quite a detailed map of the region mines, which includes the corresponding townships.⁴ The

² Horea Ciugudean, “Roșia Montană. Patrimoniu abandonat” *Roșia Montană. An Abandoned Patrimony*. in *Revista 22*, no. 875 (15 December 2006 - 21 December 2006) brochure available online http://www.cdep.ro/img/rosiam/pdfs/rev22_RM_sup.pdf, last visited on 15.05.2019.

³ Iosif Marin Balog, *Mirajul aurului. Economie și societate în patruleterul aurifer al Apusenilor. (The Mirage of Gold. Economy and Society in the Auriferous Quadrangle of the Apuseni Mountains). 1750-1914*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2016, p. 28.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 28-29.

moniker has stuck and is now used to designate the richest auriferous region in Transylvania.

The following ambivalent representation of the region has emerged: “*one of the most beautiful, but at the same time, miserable region.*”⁵ While some have highlighted its beauty, others, quite strangely, taking into account the riches of the land, have shown its poverty. Perceived as a Romanian cradle, the main difference between this and other Romanian regions consists of the numerous Romanian population, since they are “*the national bloc that has remained uninvincible by the mishappenings of history and the cruel surroundings.*”⁶

One of the most flourishing ages for the mining industry and for the people of the so-called *Auriferous Quadrangle* is considered the time period of the Transylvanian Princes. It was the aim of Princes to develop mining as much as possible, and therefore protected the interests of miners, by extending privileges of mountain towns, by offering new privileges to mining villages and by promoting miners to nobility status. This is how most of the inhabitants of villages such as Bucium-Cârpeniș and Abrud had become nobles. In 1836, the *Buciumani* had several officers among the ranks of nobles. The situation changed dramatically under Habsburgic rule. Despite technological progress, massive mining exploitations and

⁵ Dr. Ion L. Ciomac, “Îndeletniciri și aspecte din viața locuitorilor din Munții Apuseni” (*Occupations and Life aspects of the Apuseni Mountains inhabitants*). in *Observatorul social-economic*, no. 2, year VI, April-June 1936, p. 159.

⁶ Petru Râmneanțu, “Capitalul om din Munții Apuseni” (*The Human Capital in the Apuseni Mountains*) in *Buletin eugenic și biopolitic*, no. 9-10, vol. IX, 1938, p. 267.

investments, as well as the generally high interest in the region, there were also many shortcomings: state properties were managed by foreigners in this age, and the region was flooded with Armenian merchants involved in gold smuggling. During this time, more often than not, rulers were only preoccupied with their own wealth. Subsequently, over time, the state's wealth dwindled and the population became poorer whereas the families of state officials and Armenian smugglers established genuine dynasties.⁷

The best known auriferous site ever since antiquity was Roșia Montană (Alburnus Maior) whose history is linked to gold mining in general.⁸ Roșia Montană managed to maintain its status throughout history, reaching its peak during the Austro-Hungarian rule of Transylvania. Generally, inhabitants of Roșia Montană, who at the time were predominantly Romanian, are described as normal, common-sensical, religious people, working as miners in state-owned or private mines.

These lands are inhabited by calm, very well-behaved and God loving people, with a strong respect for their superiors. The majority of them, i.e. 70%, are Romanians, whereas the rest are Catholic, Unitarian and Reformed Hungarians who, however, in many cases only speak Romanian. Their main occupation

⁷ Victor Aradi, "Procesul moșilor" (*The Trial of the Dead*) in *Societatea de Mâine*, nos. 4 and 5, Year II, Cluj, 25 January and 1 February, 1925, p. 59.

⁸ Vasile Moga, *Aurul la români, (Romanians and Gold)* Editura Napoca Star, 2004, p. 45.

is mining, most of them earning their living as workers in state-owned and private-owned mines. Others crush the miraculous stone in a more rudimentary manner with so-called stamp mills, extracting as much gold as to allow them to survive from one day to the next.⁹

Taking into account the importance and evolution of this mining site, the main comparison relates to its development before and after the First World War, depicting a fall of the region. If, prior to the war, Roșia Montană was perceived as a flourishing, highly developed mining center (notwithstanding the deep poverty of miner families), following the war, the place witnessed a dramatic fall.¹⁰ Roșia Montană became a mining site defined by poverty, and its profoundly religious inhabitants perceived this fall as a divine punishment: “*The mine is not yielding any more, Father, it’s not yielding, God beat us, if people couldn’t beat us, because there is a lot of gold in there, Father, then God prevented us from finding it.*”¹¹ Poverty has led to other problems, such as migrations—many locals decided to leave the town behind for lack of perspectives: “*Yes, we are struggling in Roșia, struggling very badly, and if things don’t change in the next 20-30 years, all locals will have fled the region. Already there are beautiful*

⁹ Valeriu Stinghe, “Decăderea Roșiei Montane” (*The Fall of Roșia Montană*) in *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 120, Brașov, 17 November 1926, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

¹¹ “Misiuni în Munții Apuseni” (*Missions in the Apuseni Mountains*) in *Unirea*, no. 105, Year XXI, 7 November, 1911, p. 3.

houses abandoned by people who decided to flee due to poverty and sorrow.”¹² The fall of this mining site has been a gradual process: “Roșia Montană before the war was the most flourishing auriferous mine, the most God-blessed town where everyone was happy, from the simple miner to the highest of intellectuals... [...] today, the poor population is struggling in the darkest misery.”¹³

For a long time, Roșia Montană has been regarded as “the cradle of Romanian conscience and of the liberating movement of 1848,” beyond its label of a major mining site. In the context of its foreign rule, it was one of the most active and important contestation centers of Hungarian dominance, since the majority of the population was Romanian.¹⁴ For as long as Transylvania was part of the Empire, it was generally maintained that the region had been “coveted” by Hungarians thanks to the rich gold resource and, as such, it had been a preferred target for Hungarian influencing, as the plan was to create three Hungarian centers in the region: Abrud, Roșia Montană and Zlatna.¹⁵ The industrialization and Hungarian influencing of the region, especially in its strategic points, i.e. around the major exploitations, had been planned to be carried out following the First World War, but it failed to materialize as the Empire disintegrated.¹⁶ After the war, mining was performed either in the state-owned

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹³ Valeriu Stinghe, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Justin Sava, “Problema salvării Moșilor din mizeria trecutului” (*The Issue of Solving the “Moși” from the Misery of the Past*) in *Societatea de Mâine*, no. 2, Year 16, 1939, p. 50.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

exploitations in Roșia Montană, in various mining companies (Mica, Breaza) or in small “*share-based*” properties. Other workers were involved in washing the sand of auriferous rivers in search of gold.¹⁷ While prior to the war the main troubles were accompanied by *national* issues, after the war the inhabitants of the region were exclusively bothered by industry-related issues, chief among which was the price of gold – higher in the case of smuggling, but also the impossibility of contracting loans and others.¹⁸

Data pertaining to literacy efforts or the health status of the population are able to confirm some other difficulties shared by the inhabitants of the region. A very encouraging fact, especially if we use comparative data and we look at the counties within this region is the progression of literacy—one can see a major progress after 1918. Comparing the data of the 1920 census to the data of the 1930 census, one will note a significant increase in the percentage of literacy: 33.9-51.5% in 1910 vs. 51.8-64.5% in 1930.¹⁹ According to the data, there were also several conditions characteristic to the inhabitants of the region, so-called social diseases caused by living conditions, chief among which was tuberculosis; the high number of people suffering from this disease is owed to the biotype of the population, *bad lodging*, as well as miserable working

¹⁷ Victor Aradi, “Procesul moților” (*The Trial of the ‘Moți’*) in *Societatea de Mâine*, nr. 4 și 5, Year II, 25 January and 1 February, 1925, p. 59.

¹⁸ Justin Sava, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁹ Petre Râmneanțu, “Capitalul om din Munții Apuseni” (*The Human Capital in the Apuseni Mountains*) in *Buletin eugenic și biopolitic*, vol X, no. 1-2, January-February 1939, p. 32.

conditions and lack of food.²⁰ Other prevalent conditions included goiter and alcoholism. Goiter had both a physical and psychological impact, since many of the children affected by this condition could not finish school, while alcoholism was highlighted by the high percentages of incomes spent on alcohol, i.e. from 0% to 11%, slightly fluctuating between communities. Syphilis, which accounted for 6-8% of the population of the Apuseni Mountains, did not affect more people here than in other neighboring regions.²¹

All in all, it can be noted that the Transylvanian region with the richest gold resources was confronted with a wide range of issues and troubles in the modern age. During this entire period, the complaints of Romanians from the auriferous quadrangle overlapped with a series of national discontents. Nonetheless, it was considered a flourishing time period for mining, taking into account the extension of works, the opening of new galleries, the technological advances and, in general, an increase of the quantity of extracted gold, due to the introduction of new technologies.

The evolution of gold mining in Transylvania in the modern period

Two time periods are considered highly prosperous for Transylvanian gold mining: the years of Roman rule and the years of Austro-Hungarian rule (chiefly 1880-1910),²² even though in the latter period, there was the

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 34-36.

²² Virgil Sortan, "Țara moșilor. Țara aurului și a mizeriei. Ruina industriei miniere prin indolența oficialității noastre" (*The Land of the*

perception that the gold was ultimately banked by the Empire, as a strategic resource. For Transylvanian mines, the entire modern age was characterized by an intensification and expansion of works, by steady technological progress and, in general, by an increased interest in gold mining as well as by investments in production capacities and in lowering production costs in compliance with the technological advances from that period. This was also a time when people showed interest in ensuring coherence through legislation.

Exploited ever since Antiquity, mostly following the conquest of Dacia (AD 107), the gold of this region was mostly extracted under Roman rule. As mentioned before, this age was characterized by prosperity. To improve management, Romans set up an inspectorate, “procuratum aurarium,” in Zlatna (Ampelum), and a deputy inspectorate, “subprocurator” in Baia de Criș (AD 105-265).²³ The Roman traces can also be seen in other townships: especially in Roșia Montană, but also in Bucium (Corabia).²⁴ Nonetheless, it was the Transylvanian princes, most notably Gabriel Bethlen who showed a

Moți. The Land of Gold and Misery. The Ruining of the Mining Industry due to our Government's Indolence) in *Societatea de mâine*, year IX, Cluj, 1-15 February 1932, p. 23.

²³ Victor Lațiu, “Aurul munților noștri” (*The Gold in our Mountains*), in *Societatea de Mâine*, nos. 23 and 24, Year II, Cluj, 14 June 1925, p. 407.

²⁴ Lukács Béla, *Az erdélyi aranybányászat (Gold Mining in Transylvania)*, available online <https://www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/OMMonarchia-az-osztrak-magyar-monarchia-irasban-es-kepben-1/delkeleti-magyarorszag-erdely-es-a-szomszedos-hegyvidekek-4DF2/a-bodza-szorostol-a-delmagyarorszagi-hegyvidekig-5208/az-erdelyi-aranybanyaszat-lukacs-belatol-53C0/>, last visited on 17.04.2019

special interest in developing mining activities in the region, by relocating chief technicians from Silesia, but also by implementing legislation based on Bohemian mining laws, where in 1573 the so-called “Maximilianische Bergordnung” was brought into force.²⁵ The real boom of the mining industry in the region came along once with Maria Theresa’s decision to open new mines, offer special rewards to gold seekers, and imposing competitive prices for gold purchase and thereby discouraging smuggling activities. Maria Theresa also showed great interest in the organization of local authority, and an important measure was to set up a gold and silver foundry in Zlatna, where she organized the mining administration who took over control of all the gold and silver mines of Transylvania. All these measures had a positive effect on gold mining in Transylvania.²⁶

On the foundations laid by Maria Theresa, mining continued to develop. Technology broke into the Transylvanian gold mines gradually, modernizing the sites in accordance with the general technological advancements, but also with certain requirements imposed by the environmental background. Thus, if in Nojag (Certejul de Sus, Hunedoara county), the mining activity followed “*state of the art rules*,”²⁷ in Roșia, “*everything is*

²⁵ Ciugudean, *op.cit.*

²⁶ Lukács, *op.cit.*

²⁷ Călători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea, Serie Nouă, vol. I (1801-1821) (Foreign Travellers about the Romanian Principalities in the 19th Century. New Series, vol. 1 (1801-1821)) Paul Cernavodeanu(editor), coordinated by by Georgeta Filitti, Beatrice Marinescu, Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, Maria Stroia, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 2004, p. 213.

very rudimentary,” and “probably nothing has changed since the age of Romans, except for drilling and dynamiting.”²⁸ However, in this period, Roșia Montană had a spectacular evolution. Notwithstanding the obvious differences between mining centers as far as technological progresses are concerned, this is a time when changes occurred, allowing for higher yielding gold extraction techniques.

Gold was extracted with the use of *stamp mills* (*șteampuri*), which were a type of wooden grinders used for crushing gold-bearing rocks. The description of the functioning of these gold-extraction devices reveals that their modernization contributed to reducing losses. Stamp mills featured crushers mounted in series of three – with tips made of quartz or steel – which alternately smashed blocks of rock. This way, gold particles were released by separating the rock dust by alluviation with a flow of water directed on a wool surface where they were caught by means of amalgamation. The gold was extracted from the amalgam through heating, as mercury evaporated at the temperature of 360 centigrade. The main shortcoming of this method was the very low yield of gold – only 25% would be extracted, whereas the rest would end up in river sands. A modern electric stamp mill had a much higher yield.²⁹

The increase in processing capacity was reflected both in the number of stamp mills and in their modernization. In 1676, there were around 100 stamp mills in the realm of Roșia Montană (as compared to only 26 in

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 213.

²⁹ Latiu, *op. cit.*, 408

the Bucium valley, for instance)³⁰, while in 1844, according to the available data, there were no less than 1074 such installations!³¹

In order to enable mining activities during draughts, which was a real issue in the region, accumulation lakes were created or expanded between 1752 and 17790. Major hydrotechnical works were carried out in the lakes Orlea, Corna, Tarina and Gauri. Named by locals ‘tăuri’ (ponds), these water accumulations are still present to this day and contribute to the beautiful landscape of Roșia.³²

The trend of introducing new technologies continued beyond the mid-19th century, as the Austrian state encouraged the use of several new exploitation methods by building in 1851-1852 a stamp mill plant and an ore crushing plant in Gura Roșiei, powered by Pelton and Schwankrug branded hydraulic turbines. Additionally, a 3 km railroad and a 570 m inclined plane were built during this time. The old wooden stamp mills were slowly being replaced by new steel ones, named *Californian stamp mills* after their place of origin. The first electric machines were introduced with the aim of ensuring continuous production in summer, during draughts. An electric, gas powered plant was set up in Gura Roșiei at the start of the 20th century. The processing capacity of the Roșia Montană installations has thus increased gradually,

³⁰Ciugudean, *op.cit*

³¹Valeriu Butura, “Spălarea aurului din aluviuni și mineritul țărănesc din Munții Apuseni” (*Washing Gold from Alluviations and Artisanal Mining in the Apuseni Mountains*) in *Anuarul etnografic al Transilvaniei pe anii 1965-1967*, IV, Cluj, 1959, p. 55.

³² Ciugudean, *op.cit*.

but substantially. According to the data, the amount of extracted gold in Transylvania, in the 19th century and the start of the 20th century reached around 140 tons, supplemented by about 1300 tons of silver.³³

The technological advances have led to an increased production, as statistical data relative to gold production revealed, that in 1908, for instance, the Zlatna mining authority reported a production of 118 kg in state owned companies and of 2021 kg in private companies. Data regarding the year 1915 reveal that state-owned companies produced 118 kg, whereas private companies produced 1193 kg. Transylvania was the richest auriferous region in Europe and accounted for 43% of the overall European production and 0.4% of the world production.³⁴ At the same time, Transylvania would become the most important province of the Empire for metalliferous resources.³⁵ It should also be noted that the ratio between the production of gold and silver shifted in time. In the period covered by us, the production of silver surpassed the production of gold.³⁶

It is well known that, in general, gold occurred in three forms: nuggets, veins or in river sands. So-called nuggets were, in fact, massive gold blocks which were very well known and appreciated due to their weight. Such massive gold blocks have been discovered in the mines of

³³ *Ibidem*

³⁴ Latiu, *op.cit.*, p. 408.

³⁵ Ciugudean, *op.cit.*

³⁶ Victor Stanciu, “Bogățiile naturale ale Transilvaniei în economia românească,” (Transylvanian Natural Resources in the Romanian Economy) in *Revista Economică*, no. 12, year XLV, 13 March 1943, p. 79.

Brad-Valea Musari of Hunedoara in 1891 (a 58 kg nugget) and in Gura Barza, in 1905 (weighing 30 kg). To give you a comparison, the largest nugget in the world weighed 1350 kg, according to the media of those days, and was discovered in the auriferous plains of India.³⁷ Such blocks, as one will suspect, were seldomly available, a much more commonly occurring form were “veins,” gold deposits. The purest gold (lacking any other infiltrating substances) occurred in river sands (in the Arieș, Olt, Pianul român rivers), forming *alluviating gold* or *auriferous sands*. As a general rule, about 87% of the production was extracted from auriferous sands.³⁸ The expression “pure as gold” seems not to have a correspondent in reality, simply because there is no pure gold in nature, it is always combined with copper, silver or iron.³⁹

As far as the workforce used for gold extraction is concerned, during the Austro-Hungarian rule of Transylvania, there was a clear ethnic stratification of work and many foreign workers were relocated and hired here. The latter had higher incomes and better positions than Romanians from the area. This has generated dissatisfaction from Romanian workers: “*directors, deputy directors, chemical engineers, accountants, inspectors and other employees with better paying jobs, or even workers with decent pay, are brought in from all over the world, from all ethnicities, but not Romanians.*”⁴⁰ A daily wage for a worker in 1880 Transylvania, in the mining or the

³⁷ Lațiu, *op.cit.*, p. 408.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 408.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p.408.

⁴⁰ Gavril Todica, “Comori pentru străini” (*Treasures for Foreigners*), in *Libertatea*, no.35, 1909, p. 4.

iron and steel industry of the Zlatna region, could reach the level of fl. 1.50 for a man, and fl. 0.70 or fl. 0.50 for a woman or a child, respectively.⁴¹ Women and children were actively involved in this industry, and there are a number of regulations referring to these generally lower paid categories.

A particular category of workers, gold washers, needed special skills and had to master the technique considering that: *“they have a skill that few people have”* especially since this craft was inherited from father to son: *“gold washers are specific to this region, they will endure from generation to generation, so long as the flow of water carries gold lumps.”*⁴² It is self-evident that *„in older times, a lot of gold was washed from rivers (considering that losses were higher, and they only decreased with the advent of technology) and ever since 1850, Gypsies have predominantly been involved in this trade.”*⁴³

Families who owned small mines handled the entire array of activities related to mining themselves, involving the majority of their members. There are several descriptions of the manner in which each family member brought their contribution to gold extraction: it is them who extract, carry and process ore using their own stamp mills. The latter are described as: *„Pestle stamp mills similar to a*

⁴¹ Iosif Marin Balog – “Criza economică din 1873. Manifestarea și percepția ei în economia și societatea transilvană” (*The Economic Crisis of 1873. Reflections and Perceptions in the Transylvanian Society*) in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu”* din Cluj-Napoca, series, *Historica*, 50, 2011, pp. 74-75.

⁴² Dr. Ion L. Ciomac, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁴³ Virgil Șotropa, “Minele Rodnene” (The Mines of Rodna) in *Arhiva Someșană*, no. 8, p. 5.

windmill featuring several hammers which crush gold ore and separate gold and silver."⁴⁴ One of the most difficult tasks belonged to the father, even though the involvement of each family member was important. It was the father who „*would crush the rock and filled the baskets, while one of the sons would help out, guiding the horse from the mine to the stamp mill. This is where the second son and the mother, or only the mother was working. In some cases, the same person who extracts the ore, carries it to the stamp mill.*"⁴⁵

Safety in mines was a taboo topic, little is known about concrete aspects, however, it is a well-established fact that a mine was a dangerous place “*no-one dared to shelter gold ore in the mine, in a hole or a stamp mill.*”⁴⁶ Beyond any doubt, working in the mine was exposed to risks and there were many widows and orphans as a result of mine casualties: “*Experience shows that life in conjunction with the exhaustion associated with toiling in mines is not safe and that there are many orphans and widows left behind by those killed by mines.*”⁴⁷ For all of the reasons listed above, in order to make this trade appealing, miners enjoyed several exemptions and benefits: “*contributions, military service, but only to a certain*

⁴⁴ Sabin Opreanu, “Probleme de geografie economică în Munții Apuseni” (*Economical Geography Aspects in the Apuseni Mountains*) in *Observatorul social-economic*, Year II, July-December, 1932, p. 223.

⁴⁵ Butura, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

⁴⁶ *Călători străini...*, p. 211.

⁴⁷ E. Hodoș, *Simion Balint. Din istoria vieții sale. Fapte și lupte din Munții Apuseni Ardealului în 1848-1849 (The History of his Life. Deeds and Struggles in the Transylvanian Apuseni Mountains in 1848-1849)*, Sibiu, Tipografia Arhidiecezană, p. 14.

extent, when they ceased, have generated discontent.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, a powerful incentive for becoming a miner was hunger, which also acted as “*a strong constraint towards picking up mining*”⁴⁹. Another incentive was, of course, the lack of alternatives and perspectives in the region. The insecurity of this place may be illustrated by a worker who would commute to the mine and who would treat every commute as his last: “*The miner, after saying his prayers, puts on his backpack and leaves for the mine, with the lamp in his hand, the pack of dynamite in his pocket and his faith in God. Who knows if he ever returns.*”⁵⁰ Therefore, due to the hardships and insecurities, the life story of miners in the auriferous quadrangle is, perhaps, one of the saddest pages in Romanian history.

Mining regulations in Transylvania under the Austro-Hungarian regime are included in specialized laws in force, as well as, in rules, decisions or mining statuses valid in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș. As far as legislation is concerned, mining law was comprised in *The Austrian Mining Law* of 23 May 1854.⁵¹ It is the first mining law of Transylvania, following the Union with Romania, most specifically, until the adoption of the Mines Law of 1924. This stipulated that mine owners were supposed to measure their mining lots within 6 months, under the threat of cancelling licenses. Those without the

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ *Călători străini...*, p. 214.

⁵⁰ Ilie Haiduc, *Industria aurului din România, (The Romanian Gold Industry)* Imprimeriile Adeverul SA, Bucharest, 1940, p. 334.

⁵¹ Dir. Ios, “Districtul montan Abrud-Roșia” (*The Abrud-Roșia Mountain District*) in *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 18, year LXXIII, 1910, p. 2.

means of carrying out this task would lose their mining licenses and as a result, the new mining books published following the deadline included considerably fewer properties.⁵²

Regarding the most important aspect related to mining property, donation was at the heart of this law. Accordingly, the owner of the underground estate would hold control and dispose of the whole reserve (Article 3).⁵³ The law stipulated the 9 types of minerals (which included both gold and silver) which were exempted from the provisions of other civil laws (named exempted or reserved) and were the property of the state, which, in turn, donated them to private entities.⁵⁴ In order to become owners, candidates were supposed to apply for an *prospecting license* from the mining authority (the captain's or the mountain commissioner's office) first. The license would allow the applicant to prospect the territory for any of the reserved minerals.⁵⁵ In addition, the licensee would retain their priority over these minerals wherever they would find them. Exploitations were carried out according to a renewable annual exploration permit granted for general exploration purposes (Article 16) or according

⁵² Ioan Popa Zlatna, "Problema minieră din Munții Apuseni" in *Sociologie românească* IV, (1939), 4-6, București, p. 205.

⁵³ See "The General Austrian Mining Law" in George Stoian and Vasile Gheorghide, *Legiurile miniere vechi și noi ale României. Legiurile Vechiului Regat până la 4 iulie 1925 (Old and New Mining Laws in Romania. The Laws of the Old Kingdom, until 4 July 1925)*, Institutul de Arte Grafice "Eminescu" S.A., București, 1925, pp. 89-150.

⁵⁴ Dr. Candin David, "Din domeniul dreptului montan" (*Of Roman Law*) in *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 39, Year LXXIII, p.3.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

to an exploration permit for a limited area (Article 22).⁵⁶ Therefore, the license offered ownership and exploration rights over mineral deposits. licenses could be granted for: 45-116 square-meter rectangle shaped mining areas with unlimited height or depth (Article 42) but also for land strips in between licensed mining areas, which could not form a full mining area. These would be offered for common exploitation to neighboring mine owners unless they had priorly agreed otherwise and, lastly, mining areas with a surface of... They related to metals found in sands, river streams and gravel. The latter required an annual fee (Article 215). Authorizations were also required for digging tunnels and galleries, but also for building regional galleries.⁵⁷

In general, this new Mining Law of 1854 included important regulations regarding ownership and transfer of ownership in the mining field, it regulated mining licenses, explained new site set up procedure, but also the functioning conditions of these sites, provided fines, but also restrictions, etc. An aspect worth mentioning is that the Law stipulated the setup of an Insurance Company (The Mining House or the Mutual Aid House) which introduced mandatory subscriptions for miners used for helping employees, widows and orphans (Article 210).⁵⁸ The provisions of this law, grouped in 16 Chapters and 286 Articles stimulated mining and the development of mining in the area.

⁵⁶ “Legea minieră generală austriacă” in George Stoian și Vasile Gheorghiane *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

⁵⁷ Haiduc, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

⁵⁸ “Legea minieră generală austriacă” in George Stoian și Vasile Gheorghiane, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

Conclusions

In general, the modern period can be perceived as a booming time for mining in the Transylvanian auriferous quadrangle. There are several aspects which, during this time, made auriferous mining a profitable field, shaping in the meantime the image of a highly intensive stage for the mining sector: the gradual introduction of new technologies, the improvement of existing technologies, the opening of new galleries, the update of old galleries, etc. New legislation enhanced coherence as the most important law, *The Mining Law of 1854*, included the most important provisions for the field. The law regulated ownership, conditions for licensing mining fields, functioning conditions of galleries and opening new galleries. This was a document ensuring direction and predictability in the sector.

Throughout the investigated time period, especially during the Austro-Hungarian rule of Transylvania, one can note that along with the positive effects of the involvement in the region and of the investments made, there are a number of shortcomings. The issues of the mining industry which affected Romanian workers in the galleries overlapped with national issues. The ethnical layering of labor, a widely acknowledged issue of those times, disadvantaged Romanian workers whereas the majority of foreign workers were hired in senior positions – chief technicians and other high-ranking employees had been relocated from other regions. Additionally, the traditional occupation of gold seeker in auriferous river sands, generally performed by Gypsies, was passed down from generation to generation and it was mostly assimilated in a

family environment. Earnings in the mining industry were modest, with the exception of some categories who performed the brutal and hard work of extracting gold. In addition, even though well-off Romanian gold mine owners did exist, they were an exception.

The modern age brought about a gradual upgrade, an intensification of works, as well as development and evolution in the region. However, all of these did not significantly improve the life of miners in the auriferous quadrangle. This is one of the saddest pages in Romanian history and at the same time a great paradox, the fact that Romanian miners who extracted gold from the Apuseni Mountains were exposed to dirt, poverty and insecurities on a daily basis.

Work and Workmanship: Gold Mining at Gura Barza in the Latter Half of the 20th Century¹

Abstract: The large absorption of workforce at the “Gura Barza” Enterprise that attracted local residents of Brad town and the neighbouring villages, as well as the risk-taking nature of the mining profession generated professional solidarities and specific identities, which our paper proposes to explore. Through the help of oral history, our analysis will simultaneously follow the professional routine of those working in the mine, their work and their personal ethics, in an attempt to replenish the perspective on gold mining in the latter half of the 20th century, under the impact of technical and political change, starting from the case of the “Gura Barza” enterprise in Brad.

Keywords: professional monographs, gold miners’ biographies, safety measures, gold exploitation, mining techniques.

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Is the storytelling of gold mining as a profession different from the other professional monographs or does the risky nature of gold mining make it unique? When oral history captures people's professions and their daily work, different information comes to light; it speaks of the employee's daily routine, their tasks and work conditions, their professional solidarities, the risks of their job, but also about how they combine managing work with family duties and leisure. Fourteen interviews taken during a 2019 field campaign in Hunedoara county, with former miners, employees in technical professions or adjacent professions of the mining enterprise "Gura Barza" from Brad represent valuable sources to illustrate the idea above.

Social identities and professional solidarities: an intrigue

The 14 mining stories that represent the intrigue of our research can be divided into two large categories, incidentally related to the location of the interviews. Eight interviews were conducted in the Hunedoara villages of Vălișoara and Dudești, while the remaining six interviews were conducted in Brad. More specifically, however, the first interviews were conducted with villagers of similar ages, social backgrounds and professions, while the latter were conducted with residents of Brad that had various professional training which generated distinct approaches to mining and to the personal experience of the gold mining profession.

A look at these two batches of interviews makes us aware of the social mingling at the Gura Barza enterprise and reveals some professional solidarities and social identities in an unexpected manner. First of all, there are

the working miners. The ones who gather daily and commute by bus from the neighbouring villages of Barza, who work shifts and then return home to perform more housework, as they care for their crops and their livestock and raise their children in the never-ending workspace of the village. To them, leisure is inexistent as a concept. Their paid vacation goes unnoticed even in memories and recollections, as it was mostly sacrificed to the necessities of an agricultural household: digging, seeding, mowing, haymaking, reaping, harvesting and so on. Their daily routines aren't as primarily focused on the importance of mining, since their work does not end at the end of their mine shift. Consequently, most of the interviewees give the strong feeling of relating to gold mining as a job, a relatively well-paid one (and chosen mostly for such reasons), since their lives did not revolve exclusively around the mining profession. Naturally, the risk-taking work was their source of pride, of social status and of income, but their stories give off a certain sense of staying grounded, probably originated in the fact that mining was not their only work and therefore, it did not take over as an exclusive professional identity. The miners who lived in Gura Barza's neighbouring villages did not end work at the end of their workday, which made for a bitter reality, while also diminishing the burden of the risky gold mining in the underground. This did not mean in any way that these people were less professional or less prepared than their urban counterparts; only that, when discussing the professional identities of gold miners, it should be observed that local origins and solidarities embrace and personalise the miner's professional identity. When meeting and spending time with the interviewees, it was catching to the

eye how men were actually villagers who were former miners, and not former miners that happened to be villagers.

As for the interviews conducted in Brad, the different professional background of the interviewees (three miners, two engineers and a driver), connected to their current urban residence in Brad led to much more weight being placed on the professional identity of mining/mining engineering. The Brad interviewees were highly trained people; some of them held important positions in the enterprise; two of them had graduated from university; all of them were passionate, detailed and precise about their work and their daily tasks, as the interviews show abundantly.

To become a miner: reasons, training, and qualifications

Ionel Alba (b.1955) from Vălișoara entered the gold mine when he was 23. After graduating primary and secondary school, he continued with the Deva Professional School of Constructions, after which he did construction work for three years in Deva. As his daughter had just been born, money became insufficient, which is why he chose to enter the mine. He spent 22 years and 5 months in the underground, from 1977 until 1999. After getting hired at Barza, he started following the weekly training courses held Sundays at the enterprise in order to become a qualified miner. He promoted working categories and even studied to become a mine igniter. “I wanted to become a mine igniter, I was a mine igniter. I worked 14 years as a

mine ignite.”² Specifically, mine igniters (who fired shots) also needed to pass a psychological examination and to undergo biannual testing for “memory and anger,” Ionel Alba recalls.

IU: How would they check your anger? / IA: They asked you some questions, to see how you react. There were psychologists coming over from Petrosani, from the Petrosani mine. There were some of us (...) who could not endure some questions... And then they had to come again for the re-examination... / IU: And did they happen to fail the re-examination? / IA: Yes, it happened a lot, you know, and then they would revoke their fire igniter’s licence. They were no longer allowed to be... Not everyone could be a fire igniter. You worked with explosives.³

Vasile Alba (b. 1940) from Vălișoara-Dudești, had a difficult childhood, and his mother wanted to enrol him as a military troop child when he was 4 years old, but the local priest opposed and took him in as an in-house helper, and lived there until he left for the mandatory military service. Afterwards he got hired at Barza, where he worked for almost 32 full years.⁴

² Ionel Alba, interview by the author, audio file no. 2073, OHIA, Vălișoara, Hunedoara.

³ Ionel Alba, interview...

⁴ Vasile Alba, interview by the author and Ionela Bogdan, audio file no. 2074, OHIA, Vălișoara, Hunedoara, 27.04.2019.

Gheorghe Botoș (b.1954), originary from Ribița, came to Vălișoara in 1979. After 4 years of distance school learning, he went to Gura Barza's mining school, followed by the mandatory military service. He returned in 1979 and got employed as a miner in 1980. He worked as a miner (acquiring all work categories as soon as 1983) until 1992, when he transferred to the National Railways until 2000, when he retired.⁵ As for why he became a miner: "Where should I have gone, anywhere else? I had no education. I had no financial possibilities, as a child. I used to walk 7 kilometres to school on my own as a child. My parents didn't even have pension, just lived off the money they received from the collective farm, with the little they received..."⁶

Trofin Faur (b.1944) from Vălișoara got hired at Barza when he was 18. He worked for 30 years in the mine and retired in 1990.⁷

Toma Nicolae (b.1942) from Vălișoara went to the local village school and then worked as an in-house helper for a family in the village. Same as Faur Trofin, he entered the mine at 18 years old and retired after more than 30 years of activity, in 1990.

Petru Madoșa (b. 1942) from Vălișoara went to the local village school as well and then followed the Arts and Crafts Vocational School in Brad and then got hired at Barza. He worked as an electromechanic from 1965 until

⁵ Gheorghe Botoș, interview by the author, audio file no. 2075, OHIA, Vălișoara, Hunedoara, 27.04.2019.

⁵ Ionel Alba, interview...

⁶ Gheorghe Botoș, interview...

⁷ Faur Trofin, interview by the author, audio file no. 2076, OHIA, Vălișoara, Hunedoara, 27.04.2019.

2000, and spent only one year underground as a front mechanic.⁸

Gheorghe Dorin Lazăr (b. 1960) from Vălișoara only worked in the mine from 1982 until 1987. Although he started working at Barza because of the more consistent wages, he left the mine in 1987, transferred to the National Railways and worked until 2019, when he finally retired. Lazăr jokingly added that he transferred because “They had windows... You could gaze, gaze after a woman, gaze after others...,” admitting he didn’t like it underground, but didn’t regret his option, as he learned a lot from both jobs.⁹

Mihai Dărăștean (b.1943) from Hălmăgel, Arad, currently residing in Brad, started the Mining professional school at Barza when he was 14 years old. He started working at Barza in ore pre-crushing, and afterwards in the underground in sector 1 Musariu of the enterprise. He worked as a miner until 1967, when he enrolled in the Technical School for Foremans/Overmans. After shortly working at Altân Tepe in Dobrogea, he returned to Barza as an overman. After an unjustified internal restructuration annulled his overman position, he decided to go to university to prove himself to the enterprise leadership. He studied at the Mining University of Petroșani between 1973 and 1978 and returned as an engineer and section chief at Barza. During his first year engineering internship, he led work formations, attributions similar to an overman: to guide, to oversee and to supervise the workers’ abidance

⁸ Petru Madoșa, interview by the author, audio file no. 2077, OHIA, Vălișoara, Hunedoara, 27.04.2019.

⁹ Gheorghe Dorin Lazăr, interview by the author, audio file no. 2078, OHIA, Vălișoara, Hunedoara, 27.04.2019.

by the technical procedures.¹⁰ He worked until the 1990s, when he retired.

Dorel Jurca (b.1959) originary from Blăjeni, residing in Brad, followed mining in his father's footsteps, despite him initially graduating as a turner from the Gura Barza professional school in 1977. After working as turner for a little time, he decided to switch his career to mining, despite having to liquidate his debt towards the enterprise that had initially hired him. "I no longer wanted to be a turner, I wanted to be a miner. I went and got hired at Barza." He worked as a miner from 1980 until 1998, studying for qualification courses and even completing long distance learning at the Gura Barza professional school.¹¹

Ioan Anghel (b. 1946) and **Cornel Moț** (b.1951), both current residents of Brad started as driver, respectively locksmith, and chose to activate underground: Anghel initially drove the underground "locomotive" while Moț repaired underground machines as a mechanic; in time, they changed positions, promoting to overmen. They both worked at Barza for two decades, from 1971 to 1991, respectively 1973-1993.¹²

Last but not least, **Aurel Circo** (b. 1948), originary from București, Hunedoara and a resident of Brad for most of his life, worked in mining for three decades, and for a

¹⁰ Mihai Dărăștean, interview by the author, audio file no. 1937, OHIA, Brad, Hunedoara, 28.04.2019.

¹¹ Dorel Jurca, interview by the author, audio file no. 1942, OHIA, Brad, Hunedoara, 28.04.2019.

¹² Ioan Anghel, interview by the author, audio file no. 1939, OHIA and Cornel Moț, interview by the author, audio file no. 1940, OHIA; Brad, Hunedoara, 28.04.2019.

considerable amount of time he was technical supervisor of the entire electromechanic activity of the Gura Barza enterprise (chief mechanic of the entire institution). In the last two years before his retirement, he was electromechanic chief engineer at the Deva Mining Company; he retired after 2000 and entered politics, functioning as vice-mayor of Brad during four consecutive tenures (2000-2016). He graduated as top of his class in the first promotion of the Gura Barza Mining High School and completed his university studies at the Mining Institute in Petroșani, Faculty of Electromechanics. Mining ran in the family: his father had previously been main overman at Brădișor, one of the mines from the Gura Barza complex. Despite having other good professional prospects after graduation, he chose to come back to Brad and Barza, “to work in production,” expressing his personal desire to return to his natal area. In 1971 he is hired at Barza and makes a good impression with both his outstanding academic results and his Party membership, acquired since the final years of university.¹³ Aurel Circo takes pride in his academic and professional achievements, and in fact most of the interviewees take pride either in their professional itinerary (promoting through all mining categories¹⁴), their work ethics (working fair and respecting procedures,¹⁵ working hard, fulfilling and even breaking

¹³ Aurel Circo, interview by the author, audio file no. 1941, OHIA, Brad, Hunedoara, 28.04.2019.

¹⁴ Ionel Alba..., Petru Madoșa..., Dorel Jurca... etc.

¹⁵ Mihai Dărăștean, interview...

quotas,¹⁶ responsibility for their subordinates), or their constant, uninterrupted presence at work.¹⁷

Often, working continuity is a source of pride for the miners, as it is the case for **Gheorghe Gontaru**¹⁸ (b.1959) residing in București, Hunedoara, miner and former employee of Barza (institutionally, the Brad Section of the Enterprise for Geological Prospections and Explorations – I.P.E.G. Deva) since 1975 until retiring, as shown by his work license that registers all his qualifications and promotions (see photos).

To be a miner: risky routines, gold and some socialism

The universe of the mining profession, as reflected in oral history interviews, is a rich one. It encompasses professional paths and biographic motivations, working conditions in the mine, risks, accidents and professional diseases, ethics and professional satisfaction, the imaginary of gold mining, but not least, traces of political involvement and propaganda.

Daily routines

After commuting to the mine by bus, the miners' daily routine would start with changing clothes in the locker rooms (a dedicated space with improvised furniture and benches). In the late 1980s, Barza also had a canteen; before entering the underground, the men would eat, then go through the roll call, clock in, enter the mine, go to the

¹⁶ Vasile Alba, interview...

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Gheorghe Gontaru, interview by the author, audio file no. 2012, OHIA, București, Hunedoara, 28.05.2019.

wagons, travel by the mine train and then descend the shafts, each one to their assigned horizons and galleries.¹⁹ There, they each settled into their respective jobs: reinforcement, perforation, loading ore, supervising safety measures, extracting native gold etc.

Ionel Alba's work as a fire igniter implied handling explosives: dynamite and astralite, and with electric detonators. His work was, during the 1980s, a much safer one compared to the previous fuse match detonators. However, Ionel Alba recalls a one-time shortage in electric detonator supplies which made them use fuse matches to fire the shots, which was a slightly more difficult procedure, as they had a limited number of holes to fire, and were supposed to perfectly measure the fuse dimensions for proper and safe detonation.²⁰

Only fire igniters were authorized to carry around explosives; some fire igniters (such as Ionel Alba) sometimes needed to fire shots for more than one team. They had to carefully calculate the necessary quantity of explosives, as they submitted papers and receives the explosives in a locked crate.

I was supposed to calculate the number of holes and ask for explosives based on the number of holes. I couldn't ask just like that. I didn't feel like asking for 10 kg and consuming only 5. And take those 5 back to the warehouse. It was far away. I had to go - it was a mile or so from the front where we worked to the explosives depot. I had to walk,

¹⁹ Ionel Alba, interview...

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

with the crate in the back, the primer in my neck ... and that was the situation. The padlock locked on the explosives box - I was not allowed to walk without a padlock, with the key behind me, everything ... I was not allowed to mix the staples with the explosives to the front.²¹

Finding, exploiting and (not) stealing native gold

The geological structure of the mine also involved the exploitation of native gold, found in gold veins. The rules and the technical procedure were highly strict. Only the engineer and the overman could give permission for entering the gold vein point. And only the team leader and the miner aid were allowed to enter for work (without the hauler, the third member of a basic mining team). The procedure involved shooting three holes with a pick hammer, pulling out the native gold, and a short wash was followed by the gold being sealed in tin cases by the production controller²².

Ionel Alba discovered once a gold vein while working along his colleagues, an event that still brings him pride to this day. "It was as thick as a brick. And it was so long... A year and a half we worked only at that front"²³.

Vasile Alba and his team also found native gold.

I found gold – the vein was a meter and something thick. For three months we advanced on it: it was 10 metres long and 30

²¹ *Ibidem.*

²² *Ibidem.*

²³ *Ibidem....*

metres high. Normally, the gold was put in cans and sealed, sent to the factory. But as it was such a large gold vein, a commission came from Bucharest. The superiors from Barza had to announce Bucharest - it got crowded, because it was something very rare. And that gold spot occurred at a rolling spot. (The rolling spot was armed with wood). And it was just like a fountain, and we would let it go down the rolling spot. Down in the gallery was a 700 kg wagon with lids, and through the roll the gold was sent directly into the wagon, it was sealed with lids - and straight to Barza!²⁴

He also gives a detailed description of gold preparation.

The vein, which was gold, was put in the wagon. You had a plan, and out of 3-4 wagons of ore per day, that one went to the crusher. The crusher is, how can I tell you... How sieves make oil... it crushed it, it made it small ... And from there on were corves that went, from the top of the mine to the factory down, to preparation. They put it in there... they put it in once more (when crushed). Some sieves that beat the table repeatedly did so. One was going, one was coming (...) And, as they crushed it, the small water-based

²⁴ Vasile Alba, interview...

ore, there were some tables... There were about 50 on one side, 50 on the other. And on those tables was tin. And as the gold came, it remained on that board. Mercury was added to it and remained on the board. And 2 times during the shift they stopped and cleaned the gold on the board, and put it in... they had some pans, that's how they called them, and then they put it in the oven to burn. But normally it didn't stay clean, clean here at Barza. From here, once they collected 100-200 kg, they would take it to Baia Mare. At Baia Mare it was burned again, but there it was pure, pure. Clean. Because they had other means of working.²⁵

When clocking out and exiting the mine, the underground workers were all subjected to perquisitions to trace stolen gold. From a given point, even fire igniters were given the right to search, after a short training. Perquisition was random, workers entering series of 10-12 people were being either asked to undress, asked to take off their shoes, body searched etc.²⁶ Vasile Alba also mentions x-rays performed at the end of shifts, and also catching a fellow miner while trying to steal gold in his bag while claiming it to be carbide dust. Once the laboratory results of the stolen sample came, the miner, an acquaintance of Alba from a neighbouring village was sentenced to 2 years

²⁵ *Ibidem.*

²⁶ Ionel Alba, interview...

and 8 months in prison. “I thought he would be coming to get me afterwards, but... no, I had no trouble with him.”²⁷

Rules, risks and accidents

Electromechanic Petru Madoșa, who worked for a year as front mechanic, stresses the importance of ventilation. He was in charge of supervising and fixing machineries used for perforation, but also the machineries used for ventilation

When they shot fires, that is when they dislocated ore with dynamite and stuff like that, we pulled [toxic] air outside. It was that ventilation that ensured people down there had air. If the ventilation machines didn't work, the colleagues couldn't start their shift. If the gases weren't ventilated, headaches would soon appear; if the machines didn't work, the air direction would be reversed and gases would go directly onto them.²⁸

Engineer and former overman Mihai Dărăștean offers several examples of how general procedures could be disregarded, as well as the potential risks for disregarding norms, resulting in a threat to the safety of those working inside the mine:

At a stope, the useful, veined part, which contained gold, had to be removed and replaced with sterile. That was called

²⁷ Vasile Alba, interview...

²⁸ Petru Madoșa, interview...

backfilling. Or, the tendency of the people was not to sort all the ore and to complete it with stone - which increases the dilution of the ore. Because the miner had to count his tonnage as well, the ton norm. And in addition to that vein ore, he also had to produce tailings. And then the ore content decreases, and the sector does not carry out its tasks. That would be it, basically speaking. Many deviations from technology were made. I'm not saying they all did the same thing. It depended a lot on the people who worked. / IU: But what did those deviations from the rules mean to them? Did they earn more, did their tonnage increase? (...) / MD: Yes, yes, that's why... and inevitably, if they were in a hurry, they wouldn't have enough time to solve their other technological problems.²⁹

IU: What does a safe, ensured work place look like? / MD: In our case, the basic operation was jowling. With the help of the tools at hand, one would pull off all the stones that sounded empty - when it sounded loud, then it was fine. So, everything that came off as a result of the cracks made in the shooting - and not only that, came off and then there was an increased security, increased security in the working front. Or, not many people did this job properly. And then you would find areas

²⁹ Mihai Dărăștean, interview...

that were not checked properly... you would make them fire shots again when you went through control there, until the workplace was secured.³⁰

More examples of potentially dangerous situations included transportation on galleries:

If there were not enough spaces, if the reinforcement technology was not respected, you didn't have enough space to drive, a wagon would come and you would hit the wall, for example... From the beginning, the workers know what profile their work had to have. The profile was higher in situations which required special reinforcement with wood, acacia. The opening had to be bigger in order to maintain enough room for travel and transportation after the wooden reinforcing. I can tell you that mining really is a science. In order not to have human accidents, you must be as rigorous as possible and respect the technology imposed by the documentation.”³¹

Occasionally, such accidents did occur.

I had an accident in 1985,” Gheorghe Botoș recalls. “I wanted to quit the mine then... / IU: tell me what happened. / GB: A young boy, 25-year-old, died next to me. / IU: Was

³⁰ *Ibidem.*

³¹ *Ibidem.*

he from your team, or...? Tell me.../ GB: It wasn't at my place of work. (...) Another stope, 40 meters away from us, collapsed. We went to help that team. And it collapsed on us. It threw me, caught him underneath, killed him on the spot, and caught another, breaking both of his legs. That's when I wanted to liquidate, but... For a whole week, miss, I was on the streets. I gave statements to... alas! (...) I loved mining extraordinarily. But after I had the accident... I'm telling you, I saw how a man can die in a split second! That's why I'm telling you! To have a responsibility, it's very hard... As for people - you die, you're dead...³²

Mihai Dărăștean also recalls a similar accident, a fall of rock at an intersection, that killed a person: “A block fell; a large stone fell from the ceiling and killed him. You were supposed to advance carefully at intersections, and even install temporary reinforcements.”³³ The most tragic accident, however - experienced by some, impacting others and which remained a referential event for the history of the Gura Barza Mining Enterprise, remains the January 1973 fire in which several people lost their lives³⁴.

The Party and the Socialist Competitions

As the interviewees recall, the 1980s were a time for “socialist competitions,” namely competitions among

³² Gheorghe Botoș, interview...

³³ Mihai Dărăștean, interview...

³⁴ Aurel Circo..., Mihai Dărăștean..., Vasile Alba..., Faur Trofin...

work brigades in order to extract a larger quantity of ore or of gold. At the end of the month, after comparing numbers and results, winners were awarded bonuses or applauded during party meetings.

Apart from these occasional “socialist competitions,” the Party’s presence was felt in the mine, as, at one given point, it was natural for all miners’ team leaders to become party members. Aurel Circo eloquently puts it:

This was probably a form of constraint as well. Irrespective of how skilled he was, he had to be a good activist as well. This was the doctrine. And the line of propaganda was also observed. Monthly guidance meetings took place, with the participation of the superior organ. And a superior organ would never show up unprepared/ IU: Who was the superior organ? / AC: The Political Bureau of the Committee. A subdivision of the enterprise’s Party Committee.³⁵

Political change and technical difficulties

Generally, when comparing mining at Barza before and after the fall of the communist regime, the interviewees unanimously comment on the lack of discipline, lack of materials, lack of adherence to the technical procedures, which in turn led to more often and more absurd accidents.

³⁵ Aurel Circo, interview...

IU: What was different after 1990? / IA: We worked chaotically. On my word, we worked chaotically, no one cared anymore! During Ceaușescu's time things were much stricter, you knew you were afraid of something. Afterwards, there was chaos. I think that's why Barza shut down, too. Yes... you had to retrieve materials from old galleries ... And myself, I admit! That I was working chaotically in the last years! That's how it was! Not just me!³⁶

Mihai Dărășteanu confirms the situation, when recalling how the miners no longer conformed to the working technologies: “In the last years before shutting down, none of the technological indications were observed at Barza.”³⁷

Conclusions

One of the questions all the interviewees were asked was whether they had any particular thoughts when going underground. Only two miners answered that question. One of them was Vasile Alba: “You went; you didn't know whether you'll come out or not. You went underground, like the mole.”³⁸, he said. The other one was Toma Nicolae.

I was thinking! I was thinking of God. Will I be going out again? I'll never be coming out!

³⁶ Ionel Alba, interview...

³⁷ Mihai Dărășteanu, interview...

³⁸ Vasile Alba, interview...

Not that you go in and don't get out... But accidents happen! You see, even with cars on the road, in broad daylight, not even at a carbide lamp (...) Thank God! I didn't have any [troubles], and the years went by...³⁹

In general, the interviewees' sense of appreciation for their work overshadowed the professional risks and diseases of mining. As seen from most biographical references, for most of them, working in the gold mine was a means of social elevation, which offered the opportunity for self-making. Young people with poor social backgrounds attained constant pay, supported their families and performed a relatively-well paid job that, despite the risks, they enjoyed. They dedicated themselves to mining and worked hard to support themselves and their families, at the end of the day feeling a sense of professional accomplishment and professional solidarity stemming from a common biographical point: being a former employee of Gura Barza. At the same time, their sense of accomplishment and their individual experiences are stories to be told and retold, instilling the author with her own sense of appreciation and gratitude towards oral history, that helped relay the stories of these people.

³⁹ Toma Nicolae, interview by the author, audio file no. 2079, OHIA, Vălișoara, Hunedoara, 27.04.2019.

Gold Mining Accidents: Musariu Mine Fire in the Collective Memory¹

Abstract: In the mining industry, accidents are a constant and miners are well aware of the dangers that threaten their safety. Although serious accidents occur more often in coal mines, they have also occurred in gold mines. The most notorious gold mining-related disaster happened in Certej, on October 30, 1971, when the collapse of a tailings dam resulted in 89 casualties and at least 76 people injured. Another tragic event, which took place underground, happened on January 3, 1973, at the Musariu mine - Hârnic central shaft. As a result of a fire that broke out during the second shift, 10 miners lost their lives and another 28 suffered severe intoxication due to carbon monoxide poisoning. This article discusses how the accident at the Musariu mine is recalled by those who experienced the event from different angles. Oral history interviews outlined two major dimensions of the testimony, the first being the individual, personal one, of those who were directly

¹ This work was supported by a grant of Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0874, within PNCDI III, contract no. 150/2017.

involved in this tragic event. The second dimension is represented by the collective perspective on the tragedy, as it is known that mining communities show extraordinary solidarity in such circumstances. Another interesting aspect of our research is the confrontation of the oral testimonies with the archive document to obtain a complete perspective over the causes, the evolution and the aftermath of this disaster.

Keywords: gold mining, disaster, Musariu gold mine, communism, Romania, oral history, collective memory.

The mining industry is one of the most important, but at the same time one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. The hazards of mining activities are a constant both for the men directly involved in underground works and for the communities located close to mining facilities. Disasters like Aberfan² or Buffalo Creek³

² The Aberfan Disaster was one of the worst coal mining-related disasters in the history of Great Britain. On 21 October 1966, after a period of heavy rain, a colliery spoil tip suffered a catastrophic collapse and slid downhill killing 116 children and 28 adults in Pantglas Junior School and nearby buildings in Aberfan, South Wales. For more information see: Gaynor Madgwich, *Aberfan – A Story of Survival, Love and Community in one of Britain’s Worst Disaster*, Y Loyfa Cyf Publishing, 2018; Sue Elliot, Steve Humpries, Bevan Jones, *Surviving Aberfan. The People’s Story*, Grosnevor House Publishing Limited, 2016.

illustrate the perils of mining activities for the local communities. Although the majority of mining disasters are related to the coal mining industry, there were also some major accidents involving gold mining activities. Two of the worst gold mining-related disasters of the last century happened in Romania. On October 30th, 1971, the collapse of the cyanide tailing dam in Certej resulted in the loss of 89 lives and the injury of at least 76 people. Due to the secrecy of the communist regime in Romania, news about this important disaster never got out of Romania until after the fall of the regime in 1989. Another important environmental incident happened in Baia Mare in the 30th of January 2000, when 100.000 tons of cyanide-contaminated water was spilt into the rivers Someș, Tisza and Danube as a result of another collapse of a cyanide tailing dam. Although no human fatalities were reported, the leak killed up to 80% of aquatic life of the affected rivers and was called Europe's worst environmental disaster since Chernobyl.⁴

³ The Buffalo Creek Disaster was one of the deadliest coal mining-related floods in modern U.S. history. On 26 February 1972, after heavy rains, a coal slurry impoundment dam burst and flooded 16 coal towns along Buffalo Creek Hollow. As a result of the flooding, 125 people were killed, 1121 were injured and over 4000 were left homeless. For more information, see Gerald M. Stern, *The Buffalo Creek Disaster: How the Survivors of One of the Worst Disasters in Coal-Mining History Brought Suit Against the Coal Company – and Won*, Vintage Books, 2008.

⁴ For more information, visit: <https://www.mediafax.ro/main-story/focus-zece-ani-de-la-poluarea-cu-cianuri-de-la-mina-aurul-din-bai-a-mare-5464530> accessed 05.10.2019; <http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2000/07/11/150431.htm> accessed 05.10.2019.

Our article will not focus on those two important disasters, but will examine another major collective accident which happened in a gold mine and resulted in the loss of human life. Since the majority of gold mining incidents worldwide were the result of cyanide spilling or tailing collapse, the Musariu mineshaft incident represents one of the few cases in which the causes of the disaster were not cyanide spill-related. The collective accident that we will examine was the result of a fire that broke out in the afternoon of January 3rd 1973 in the Hârnici mineshaft resulting in the death of 10 and the injury of other 28 miners. The main reason I chose to examine this event is related to its severity, the event being recalled as the worst underground work accident in the perimeter of gold mining facilities in the Brad-Roșia-Montană area.

The main sources of our article were the oral interviews with those who witnessed the event and the accident investigation file preserved in the National Archives, Hunedoara County subsidiary. Both oral history and archival research took place in the period 2017-2019, focusing on interviewing those miners that were working underground or participated in the rescue activities in the hours that followed the outbreak of the fire. While those testimonies represent a first-hand experience of this tragic event, the archival documents provide an in-depth analysis of the causes, development and aftermath of the accident. Thus, our main objective was to combine the subjectivity of the personal perspective with the objectivity of the document to obtain the most accurate representation possible of this event.

While the fire that took the life of 10 miners was the biggest incident in the so-called Romania's Golden

Quadrilateral, the life of the people that worked underground was marked by daily dangers. It is a fact well known that mining is one of the most dangerous environments where psychological trauma often occurs.⁵ As in the case of Tenise van Niekerk's dissertation regarding the psychological trauma and its management in the South African Gold mining industry, our search for written materials regarding the mining incidents and their consequences in gold mining areas in Romania made us realize that there has been no research done on this topic so far. That was one of the reasons we included a separate topic regarding accidents in underground gold mining work in our interviews with former miners.

During our research, we discovered the fact that all the miners we interviewed have witnessed or were involved in a mining accident. This fact reflects the numerous dangers that those men had to deal with in their daily activity, exposing themselves to a variety of life-threatening circumstances that constituted a permanent danger to their physical and mental condition. The constant danger that miners had to face during their activities was summarized in the term "ordinary danger," mentioned in Karen Buckley's book *Danger, Death and Disaster*.⁶ Although in her case the term referred to the inherent work

⁵ Tenise van Niekerk, *The experience of psychological trauma and the management thereof in the mining industry*, Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Commercii in Industrial Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University, 2016, p. 16, retrieved from https://dspace.nwu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10394/24996/Van_Niekerk_T_2016.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, accessed 05.10.2019.

⁶ Karen Buckley, *Danger, Death and Disaster in the Crowsnest Pass Mines 1902-1928*, Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2004, p. 3.

hazards in the coal mines, it also applies in the case of gold mines, although in other degrees. While both mining branches posed numerous threats for miners, there are some differences in the typology of accidents for each one. The common accidents in the underground work are injuries resulted from coal/stone falls, hauling incidents, descending cage related incidents, broken bones, amputations and burns. Methane and coal gas accumulation that result in massive explosions are specific to coal mining and are very rare in gold mining.

Since we lacked any reference regarding the type of accidents in gold mining, we asked our interviewees to describe the most common accidents they witnessed during their underground activities. Their answers provided lots of insights regarding the typology of incidents that occurred in the gold mining activities. Because such dramatic events involve an emotional reaction or, in the worst case, a threat to life or bodily integrity, our interviewees were able to give accurate testimonies about some of the worst accidents they witnessed. To provide a comprehensible typology regarding the nature of gold mining accidents we will use a classification based on the most representative examples narrated during our interviews. According to them, the most common type of incidents resulting in injuries and death were caused by rock falls as a result of an improper preparation of the work area. Mr. Marian Petruț recalls such an incident that resulted in his injury, but could have ended tragically:

In my case, there was a collapse of stone material and it caught me, it didn't catch me underneath because I managed to get out, but

it caught me from behind and broke my tibia and fibula. There were other mortal incidents, they were buried by the material, there were!⁷

A more elaborated opinion about this type of accidents was provided by Mr. Candin Răpcău whose experience in both coal and gold mining resulted in a better understanding of rockfalls causes depending on the deposits specifics:

Most accidents could have happened, therefore, caused by man or deposit structure... For example, in the Jiu Valley, there are more dependent causes of deposit, because there they work from top to bottom and all the pressure from above presses on some hydraulic poles that can give way, so the man can work perfectly and still the poles can give in and people remain there, caught beneath thousands of tons. Here at Barza [gold mining well in Apuseni Mountains], some cracks may appear in the deposits, in the walls and the ceiling of the galleries or the work front and due to ignorance, or improper security operations of the work front, in the case of cracks,

⁷ Petruț Marian, interview by Diana Nistor, audio file no. 1822, Oral History Institute Archive (further OHIA), Luncoiu de Jos, Hunedoara, 25.04.2018.

pieces of rock could fall off at any time, this led to an imminent or particular danger.⁸

Another category of incidents mentioned by the former miners were those related to the use of explosives in underground activities. The manipulation of explosives in ore extraction activities was the attribution of a special category of miners, the shot firers. Although they had to obtain a special license to fulfil this task, the shot firers were often the source of deadly work accidents involving not only themselves, but the entire team of workers in the work front. Two main types of accidents resulted in death or injuries as a result of accidental explosions: those resulted from drilling in an unexploded charge left from a previous blast or those in which the shot firer accidentally initiated the blast in a sector that was not evacuated by miners. Mr. Nicolae Pantea nominated the so-called „left hole” [a hole made for a blast and filled with an explosive that failed to ignite during the initial blast] as the second source of deadly accidents in underground works:

Well, the main cause was the falling of rocks, unforeseen during work front securing process, but there were other dangers, in controlled blasts, if the procedure was not followed exactly, after loading, firing, there was a left hole, as the miners call it, which did not ignite and when they came to prepare the

⁸ Candin Răpcău, interview by Ionela Bogdan, audio file no. 1835, O.H.I.A, Brad, Hunedoara, 7.04.2018.

workplace, there was still a load of dynamite left unexploded.⁹

Another example of an unexploded charge that was hit during the process of preparing for another blast was narrated by Lucian Petruț: “a colleague of mine, a young boy from Potângani, who was living in Mesteacăn, while drilling, a left charge exploded and the perforator was jabbed into his head, crushed his head, his nose and forehead, his eyes. A pound of dynamite exploded in front of his forehead. Imagine what it was! A dead man”¹⁰.

The carelessness of the shot firers in the process of dislocating the ore by controlled explosions could result in tragic accidents. Such an accident was recalled by Mr. Ion Borș:

There was also a case at Musariu mineshaft where a shot firer fired the work front and people were not gone. Normally he had to shot fire his place of work, where he had taken the respective shot firing wires. He made a mistake, instead of going to his work front he went and initiated the shot fire in the work front of another, because the wires were close and he put the wrong wires in the

⁹ Nicolae Pantea, interview by the author, audio file no. 1813, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 11.11.2017.

¹⁰ Lucian Petruț, interview by Ionela Bogdan, audio file no. 1840, O.H.I.A., Luncoiu de Sus, Hunedoara, 25.04.2018.

detonator and loaded the detonator and fired. He blasted them all, it obliterated them”¹¹.

A third type of accidents that were mentioned as a source of individual or collective deadly mishaps was related to the improper manipulation of descending cages. The main cause of those events was the violation of safety regulations by those who were inside the cage, but there were some instances when the cage operator carelessness resulted in deaths. Regarding this kind of incidents, Francisc Dineş remembered a deadly event caused by the improper use of the cage:

It was a similar case when an extraction machine mechanic had to be taken from one level to another. The cage was signaled to leave, but he opened the door, the mechanic opened the door, and when he wanted to enter the cage left and he stepped into the void. And he died! This happened in Musariu mineshaft, at the Elena shaft¹²”

A similar situation was also narrated by Mr. Vlad Barbu Petru, who witnessed a descending cage deadly accident of a miner crushed due to his carelessness:

¹¹ Ion Borş, interview by the author, audio file no. 1943, O.H.I.A, Brad, Hunedoara, 28.03.2019.

¹² Francisc Dineş, interview by Călin Olariu, audio file no. 1806, O.H.I.A, Brad, Hunedoara, 27.04.2018.

The cage stopped and he opened the door and jumped out of the cage. At the same time, the cage left, because he didn't pull any signal, he didn't pull the stop signal, nor the departure one and when the cage left, he stepped out and was caught between the cage and the ceiling... he tried to get down or to step out of it, I don't know ...but it caught him and made it into a mush, cut him into pieces, made him into a small package, there in the cage.”¹³ There were also some situations in which the cage operator made a mistake and those who were in the cage died or were injured as a result of faulty handling. Such an example was mentioned by Ioan Cioară: “And with the cage, which is like the elevator in the buildings, with that cage... an operator made a mistake and instead of stopping at the level where he had to stop, he put it in the water and drowned them all because below that level were 7 meters of water ... How many accidents have there been in the mine!”¹⁴

Besides those categories described above, some other unfortunate events resulted in serious injuries or deaths. In underground work, the miners had to be on constant alert, since their life was menaced at every step. A constant source of accidents was the use of machinery such

¹³ Vlad Barbu Petru, interview by the author, audio file no. 2023, O.H.I.A., București, Hunedoara, 28.05.2019.

¹⁴ Ioan Cioară, interview by Ionela Bogdan, audio file no. 1890, O.H.I.A., Ciuruleasa, Alba, 21.11.2018.

as transport trains and ore loading machines. Many interviewees talked about the accidents that often happened during transport in trains towards or from the work area, due to mine carts derailment or caused by miners being caught by locomotives or minecarts against gallery walls. Even accidental extinguishing of the carbide lamp could result in a fatal accident, since the miner could step in an uncovered communication well and fall to his death. For former miner foreman Mircea Miheț, the lack of protective grilles on those wells was a source of constant danger for miners: “the lack of grilles on the rolls [an inclined well used to store ore for an easier loading of minecarts. Those wells could have a height of 30-60 m.], some grilles protected you from falling there, some miners were still inattentive, if there was no grill there, they would fall and roll down to 30 meters.”¹⁵

The higher occurrence of individual deadly accidents or minor incidents resulting in non-lethal wounds is a testimony to the fact that more miners were hurt in those types of accidents than the percentage of men that lost their lives in major collective accidents. Nevertheless, collective tragedies had a much greater impact on local communities due to multiple deaths and injuries. During our interviews, the subject of mining accidents served as an introduction to the main subject of interest: the Hânic central shaft fire. This particular accident was, according to all interviewees, the most important underground collective accident in the gold mining area of Apuseni Mountains.

¹⁵ Mircea Miheț, interview by the author, audio file no. 1850, O.H.I.A., Crișcior, Hunedoara, 26.04.2018.

Taking this into account, a case study approach was used as a research strategy in our study.

The detailed analysis of this event pointed out a series of contradictions at several levels. Although the official cause of the fire that broke out on the afternoon of January 3, 1973, is considered to be oxyacetylene flame welding during the cable replacement operations at the Hârnic central shaft, the final reports of the commission appointed by the Hunedoara court of law contradict the first conclusion of the technical expertise conducted by a commission appointed from the Ministry of Labor and labor protection inspectors. An interesting aspect, which is also related to the memory mechanisms, is the fact that the vast majority of witnesses took over the results of the first investigation, mentioning as the most probable cause of the fire the welding performed in the central shaft. Few have raised the issue of another possible cause of the fire, although some members of the inquiry commission pointed out that an unattended carbide lamp or a cigarette thrown into the bottom of the well could be a more likely cause of the fire. Therefore, the reconstruction of the January 1973 event reveals a series of contradictions both in terms of the official discourse of the time, noticeable in the argument between official reports on the cause and unfolding of the tragic event, but also the memory-event ratio.

The testimonies of those who witnessed the accident were sometimes affected by ambiguities due to forgetting processes, a fact that is normal if we consider the period of 45 years between the event and the moment we recorded the interview. Some of them did not remember the exact date of the accident, while others provided an incorrect figure of victims. This was the case of three

interviewees, Crișan Mircea, Miheț Avram, and Petruț Marian who misplaced the date of the accident in 1975, 1971 and 1974, although they provided important details regarding the causes and unfolding of the event. Whilst the official documents mention the number of 10 dead and 28 injured in the fire, some interviewees offered different numbers. For example, Băiceanu Mihai recalled that some 16 people perished, while Boldea Iosif mentioned the number of 13-14 dead miners. A smaller number, 5-6 dead, was mentioned by Mr. Ion Borș during the interview, while Tudor Kiszely provided the much higher figure of 46 dead. Despite these discrepancies that are inherent during the recall process, the testimonies proved to be a rich source of information to reconstruct the accident from a personal perspective.

To obtain the individual dimension of this tragic event during our research we focused on those who were in the two shifts that worked underground in that day. Among the persons that took part in our interviews were two key characters: Vlad Barbu Petru and Nicolae Man. The testimony of the first was one of the most important, as he was one of the miners trapped underground as the fire amplified in the shaft. During the interview he provided important details about the miners' reactions during disasters, how the alarm is triggered in case of danger, survival strategies, panic management among those trapped underground, and mine emergency preparedness and response. The second character, Nicolae Man, is equally important for our investigation, as he was one of the engineers in charge with the planning and execution of the maintenance work that supposedly caused the fire in the shaft.

Before we focus on the testimonies about the fire itself, we would like to examine the cause that triggered the fire. Although both sources indicate as the most probable source of fire the welding activities performed during the first shift of the 3rd of January 1973, there is a difference regarding the reasons behind that process. The official documents indicated that the activities programmed for that day were part of a major maintenance work which should have resulted in the change of the main cable of the cage used to introduce and extract miners and ore in the mineshaft. According to those: “The scheduled replacement of the compensation cable was decided as early as November 1972, because it was in an advanced state of wear and no longer provided sufficient operational safety.”¹⁶ This hypothesis is also sustained by Nicolae Man’s testimony:

I received an order from ... we have to change some compensation cables to the multi-cable cage from Hârnicu shaft and ... who should do it? My boss, my former boss Moga says: “Man, you take it - Good.” So I took another friend by my side and started to research to see what type of technique to apply. I went to Jiu Valley, I was interested in how they did it, how to do it. It was a new

¹⁶ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Note of the Ministry of Interior regarding the first findings resulting from the investigation of the event produced at the “Barza” Mining Enterprise from 05.01.1973, p. 25.

type of cage that so far has not been used in our country in the mining industry, in the gold mining industry and I managed to do the design, I went, I presented the project at the local company, all were satisfied, I went to the Central Mining Office in Bucharest, they were also satisfied and there I got the final approval, it's okay.¹⁷

At least four of our interviewees support the hypothesis that the event that started the fire was just a routine check to establish the wear of the compensation cable. This argument is present in the testimonies of Francisc Dineş, Niculae Stoica, Viorel Popa and Miheţ Avram which claim that the cutting of the cable was a regular maintenance operation: „in the central shaft and the other shafts, from time to time, they would cut the cable which was thick like a hand, take it to a laboratory in Petroşani to see how much it had deteriorated and if it no longer corresponded, they would change it, bring another one...”¹⁸

The central shaft lit up, the central shaft in which a cage that could accommodate 64 people operated, so big it was! All was button-based, very modern and a cut was made on the cable to make a test, every month the cable was tested to see if it holds

¹⁷ Nicolae Man, interview by the author, audio file no. 1946, O.H.I.A, Brad, Hunedoara, 28.03.2019.

¹⁸ Avram Miheţ, interview by Ionela Bogdan, audio file no. 1837, O.H.I.A, Brad, Hunedoara, 27.04.2018.

up, not to break while people were transported.¹⁹

The main reason we wanted to point this out had to do with how people remember this important activity that was the source of the accident. We think that this operation was more than a regular check of the cable's ware state, since those charged with the operation had to do an elaborate work technology that was approved by the highest mining authority in Romania, the Institute of Mining Designs in Bucharest. Both Nicolae Man's testimony and official documents support the fact that the maintenance work done on the 3rd of January 1973 was approved and done to change the cable and not just to take a sample of it:

To replace the compensation cable - a very important and difficult work - engineers Man Nicolae and Şenilă Viorel elaborated a technical documentation which provided the work technology and the order of operations, documentation approved on 24.12.1972 by the Technical Council of the "Barza" Enterprise and approved at 28.12.1972 by the Bucharest Mining Design Institute.²⁰

¹⁹ Viorel Popa, interview by the author, audio file no. 1951 in O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 26.03.2019.

²⁰ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Note of the Ministry of Interior regarding the first

Taking into account all the prepared and approved documentation, what went wrong in the 3rd of January 1973? To elucidate the chain of events that resulted in the most important underground gold mining accident we have to consider both human error that led to the violation of labor protection rules and non-compliance with the approved technological process, and the pressure coming from the political factor, visible in some formulations in the content of the official documents. Both documents and oral testimonies indicate as the source of the fire the little incandescent fragments that resulted from the oxyacetylene welding cut done on the compensation cable of the cage in Hârnic main shaft. Although the description of this disaster vary depending on the amount of information the interviewee gathered during the last 4 decades, almost all of them point this operation as the cause of the tragedy. “During a cable replacement work, they cut the cable with the autogenic, so to speak, device, and those sparks went down there and set it on fire. And it ignited, all shaft was on fire and was burning to the outside, that was in 1973.”²¹ “Leaves and pieces of wood gathered down there, and as they welded to cut the cage wires, it sparked and ignited.”²² „Those sparks fell there and probably not the sparks because they extinguish quickly, but probably a piece of overheated iron went right to the bottom of the shaft. Down

findings resulting from the investigation of the event produced at the “Barza” Mining Enterprise from 05.01.1973, p. 26.

²¹ Iosif Boldea, interview by Diana Nistor, audio file no. 1804, O.H.I.A., Valea Bradului, Hunedoara, 25.04.2018.

²² Mircea Crișan, interview by Diana Nistor, audio file no. 1826, O.H.I.A., Ocișor, Hunedoara, 24.04.2018.

there were various materials like greasy rags, Vaseline and other combustible materials that ignited.”²³

The main reason why the initial work technology was abandoned was the incapacity of the workers to mechanically remove the clamp screws of the compensation cable beneath the cage. This fact is also mentioned in the note drafted by the representatives of the Ministry of the Interior two days after the tragedy:

During the first shift of January 3, 1973, around 10 o'clock, after some attempts were made to mechanically disassemble the cable under the cage, the application of the technology established by the documentation was abandoned and without all the safety measures being taken the engineers Marțiș Vasile, head of the electromechanical department, Șenilă Viorel, electromechanical engineer within the same section and foreman Leuceanu Serafim decided to cut the cable with oxyacetylene flame, ordering the welder Pandele Ion to perform this operation in the shaft.²⁴

²³ Kiszely Tudor, interview by Lavinia Costea and Ionuț Costea, audio file no. 1815, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 11.11.2017.

²⁴ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Note of the Ministry of Interior regarding the first findings resulting from the investigation of the event produced at the “Barza” Mining Enterprise from 05.01.1973, p. 26.

The fragment above contains the justification and the name of the persons that were responsible for the decision making process. But nothing is said about the reason why they made this hasty decision. At this point, we have to take into account the political factor which, in our opinion, contributed to the violation of the technology initially approved, a fact that led to the outbreak of the fire. A key element of this argument is a statement present in the Opinions on the Technical Expertise Report (from this point on T.E.R.), a document that contradicts some of the most important conclusions of the T.E.R.:

Because the fixing screws were rusty and had a non-standard dimension, they could not be loosened mechanically. The screws were then plugged with oil ... After the fixing screws were plugged, they tried again to loosen them mechanically. The operation proved to be very difficult and to fit in the time provided by the approved technology, it was decided to cut the cable with the oxyacetylene flame.”²⁵

The hasty decision to ignore both approved technology and safety rules had to do with the time granted by the management of the “Barza” mining factory to finish the operation. Although this fact does not mean that those

²⁵ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Opinion on Technical Expertise Report made by engineer C. Nichituş, Dr. engineer V. Berinde, dr. engineer M. Breazu and Senior Lecturer engineer N. Leonăchescu from 10.05.1975, p. 1.

involved in the operation are not guilty of the violation of labor protection norms, it explains the haste and lack of foresight that decisively contributed to the tragic outcome. We can only assume that the short timeframe of the operation had to do with the overall productivity percentage and the fact that the management of the “Barza” Mining Company wanted to reduce the period in which the cage of the main shaft was not functional. Our supposition is based on the fact that the gold mining industry was one of the most important sources of income for the communist authorities and a longer period of inactivity meant a decrease in the planned productivity. In his testimony about the incident, Nicolae Man shares some impressions that support our hypothesis about the time factor that resulted in the haste and carelessness of those working in the shaft:

I went up and the colleague that I had worked with [Vasile-Valeriu Marțiș] went down to oversee the execution. All the things were prepared down there, it was a very big operation, everyone was careful about this, the management also came, the former head of department with his deputy came there and to finish faster he changed the technology... I didn't suspect that they will cut with an open flame and probably it happened from that, to make the work easier, to finish faster, the unscrewing of those big screws was abandoned because they needed special keys to loosen those screws, so that the loop could

be removed and they cut with an open flame.²⁶

The most important aspect of our research was how those who were trapped underground during the incident recalled the terrible event. As in the case of other significant tragedies, the circumstances of the fire were recalled with exact details about the location of the person when he found out about the fire. Unfortunately, only three of our interviewees were able to give such informations: Mihai Băiceanu – was in the first shift near Hârnic shaft that day, Viorel Popa – entered the mine in the second shaft in Brădișor secondary shaft and was evacuated in time, Vlad Barbu Petru – worked in the second shift near the Hârnic central shaft and was trapped underground as the fire was spreading.

The official investigation established that the welding operation that caused the fire took place at the – 290 meters horizon and between 10 o'clock and 12.30.²⁷ According to the same document source, the first warning about the existence of a fire was given “around 13.45, when the welder Pandeale Ion was announced by a phone call from Popa Petre, a technician, that smoke and gas

²⁶ Nicolae Man, interview by the author, audio file no. 1946, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 28.03.2019.

²⁷ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Note of the Ministry of Interior regarding the first findings resulting from the investigation of the event produced at the “Barza” Mining Enterprise from 05.01.1973, p. 26.

appeared at the lower horizons.”²⁸ This information is also confirmed by Mihai Băiceanu in his testimony:

We were in the first shift, those at our horizon. It was said that something was welded in the central shaft, I don't know what the welders did there, but when I was about to shot fire I saw black smoke coming from the ventilation wells. I hurried away and said: *That's it, dress up cause black smoke is coming our way and nobody is in the gallery.* And that was it, we all left to the shaft, got in the carts and went up. But the second shift came, and the trouble happened in the second shift, they went into the smoke.²⁹

Although Mr. Băiceanu did not mention an exact hour in the above passage, his mention regarding the fact that he was ready to shot fire the charge places the action at the end of the first shift. The shot fire was the last action performed in the hewing before the mining team finished the work in a shift. Since the first shift usually ended around 2 P.M. for the miners to head for the exit and pass all the specific shift end checks, the moment in which Nicolae Băiceanu felt the smoke was sometime before 2 P.M., while he was ready to blast the charge and exit the shaft.

An additional fact to be taken into account is the lack of any measures to prevent and extinguish the fire

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

²⁹ Mihai Băiceanu, interview by Ionela Bogdan, audio file no. 1836, O.H.I.A., Țebea, Hunedoara, 27.04.2018.

while it was in an early stage. As the investigation documents revealed, there were at least two telephone calls (foreman Aurel Ganea at 1 P.M. and technician Petre Popa at 1.45 P.M.) from those working in the lower horizons (-330, -370 and -490) announcing the presence of smoke in the shaft.³⁰ Despite the early warnings, those in charge of supervising the welding operation considered the smoke and the gases a result of the vaseline burned during the welding cut procedure. Only around 6.30 P.M. foreman Bolcu Adam and foreman Benea Ioan

Noticed that white smoke started coming out in Hârnic central shaft from the horizon located at -330 m. When they looked in the shaft they noticed sparks of fire in the light of the bulbs at the horizon -330 m. Foreman Benea Ioan tried to intervene by overthrowing two carts full of water in the shaft and by opening the tap of the water pipe that was mounted in the shaft. The attempts to extinguish the fire were unsuccessful, the fire was spreading at a fairly high speed, as fresh air entered the shaft from the surface at a speed of over 4 m/sec.³¹

³⁰ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Note of the Ministry of Interior regarding the first findings resulting from the investigation of the event produced at the "Barza" Mining Enterprise from 05.01.1973, p. 28.

³¹ Idem, Report concluded on the 10th of January at "Barza" Mining Company, p. 34.

Both foremen took the initiative and evacuated the workers in the area, announcing the production dispatcher about the event around 7.15 P.M. The dispatcher, in turn, announced all mining sectors and the service officer from the “Barza” Company. The general manager, the technical director and other members of the management were informed and intervened around 7.40 P.M.³² The evacuation of the workers from the underground started at 7.15 P.M., some 680 workers out of the 691 who were underground at the time of the fire being evacuated from the Musariu and Brădișor mines affected by the gas. The evacuation operation lasted until around 2 P.M. in 04.01.1973.³³

One of the miners evacuated from the Brădișor shaft was Viorel Popa. In his recollection about his experience during the fire he mentioned some of the measures that miners took to save themselves from certain death:

I went in an upgoing gallery to give water and air to a colleague to start the drilling. When I went up in the hewing, I could not see anything. Suddenly, I realized that there is no more water and air and I heard pipe beatings coming from down, the hewing was about 20 or so meters long, going up. I hear the pipe beating: *come down quickly! The mine is on fire!* Then I told to one of my colleagues: *run and tell them ...* there were two of them, they were drilling, one of them was called Benea

³² *Ibidem*, p. 35.

³³ *Ibidem*.

and they both died... *run and tell them to stop immediately and come down.* When I got down there was no one left, they had all fled ... it was so much smoke that you couldn't see. I barely found... I was working there for a year and a half and I barely found my clothes, that's how thick the smoke was. I found my clothes and said to my colleague: *Vasile, put your overall on your head, over your mouth and bend over on the floor as much as you can and let's run to the shaft.* We were the last to get out. The head of our sector was waiting for us there, at the shaft, with a mask. When he saw us, he said: *you were the last, it's ok ...* he sent us up. One could not see the light bulbs in the gallery, couldn't see them, that's how much smoke there was. The smoke was coming from the central shaft, the central shaft was on fire, and the smoke was coming towards Elena shaft and our shaft, Brădișor, because the air from outside pushed it and it went into the Elena shaft, and then 10 miners died, some of whom had worked with me.³⁴

Fortunately, Mr. Popa managed to evacuate from underground without serious consequences for his health. This was not the case of Vlad Barbu Petru. During the fateful day of 3 January 1973, he was very close to die in the fire, but somehow managed to escape the most affected

³⁴ Viorel Popa, interview by the author, audio file no. 1951, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 26.03.2019.

area and sheltered with other miners in another shaft until the rescuers were able to find and save them. Nevertheless, the time spent in a polluted environment had a major impact on his respiratory system, and two years after the Hârnic shaft fire he underwent a difficult surgery on his lungs. His testimony was very important for our research because he was the only one who could tell us about what happened underground from the moment the alarm was sounded until the rescuers managed to get to the isolated groups of miners.

In the day the fire broke out, Mr Barbu was working in the second shift in Hârnic shaft at the -120 horizon. His previous jobs of production controller and his neat writing placed him in a comfortable position of workbook writer in a storeroom at 50 meters from the main shaft. While he was taking a break from his work, he noticed that the light bulbs from the gallery were not visible anymore:

I looked in the gallery as I walked toward the shaft. There were light bulbs in the gallery and you couldn't see, you could always see the shaft, but then you couldn't see the light, only one or two light bulbs near. I told myself: what is going on here? ... I got scared, took the lamp with me even though there were light bulbs and left, I took the lamp just in case power went out and I left. When I advanced, I found myself in dense smoke, it was a smokescreen. The smoke was so thick that you could not see, the light from the shaft was blocked and I saw that the smoke came

up from the bottom and when I saw it, I got scared and I realized that somewhere down the mine is burning.³⁵

Mr Barbu's first reaction was to get back to the storeroom and telephone the cart operators to find out what was happening. As mentioned before, the first response was that the smoke was a result of the burnt vaseline during the welding that took place earlier in the main shaft. Dissatisfied by the answer received from the cart operators, Mr Barbu called the main company dispatch and notified that thick smoke was accumulating in the shaft and probably a fire is burning in the lower horizons. Since the operator already knew something was on fire, he advised Mr Barbu to announce everybody he could reach to evacuate the galleries and run towards a secondary shaft, called No.3 shaft.

I ran to tell them to get out of there quickly, so they would not die in there. There were four people in that team and I went there. It was quite far. I went, I told myself: *I'm leaving now and I'm going to No. 3 shaft*. But No. 3 shaft was far away, because it was more than a kilometre to No. 3 shaft, and where they were ... there were other miner teams in my way and I went quickly there, I shouted to them to come out, they also ran away, *come with me to No.3 shaft!* I left and on my way to

³⁵ Vlad Barbu Petru, interview by the author, audio file no. 2023, O.H.I.A., București, Hunedoara, 28.05.2019.

No. 3 shaft I was beating on pipes, in hewing,
I told them to run away.³⁶

Although we cannot verify this information, Mr Barbu's early warnings likely helped save lives. An interesting fact described by him was how the miners warned each other in case of emergency by beating in the pipes in three-time stroke sequences. Using this warning, he managed to gather his colleagues and together with them ran towards the indicated place. Once there, another unexpected situation happened: "the misfortune was that when we arrived at the No. 3 shaft, the smoke was also there. As the smoke reached No.3 shaft, the mechanics operating the extraction machine were gassed..."³⁷

For those gathered near the No. 3 shaft the hours that followed were terrifying. One can only imagine the fear and helplessness felt by those miners trapped there and waiting to be rescued. Mr. Barbu testimony offered a precious insight into the behavior and self-preservation strategies used by himself and others during those agonizing hours:

About an hour, until we got there [the time it took them to reach to No. 3 shaft] and we felt bad, our head hurt, we vomited, some of us fell, they were sick...each had his idea, some of them were moaning, some said that we were going to die, we didn't know what was happening. Others were trying to get out by

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

³⁷ *Ibidem.*

climbing the stairs, but they couldn't, they would fall back and wait to see what happens, if we were to die here, we will die, what was happening? Where else to go? In another area ... it was the only valid exit, that was the only one.”³⁸

During this time, the operators from the main dispatch were in contact with those trapped underground and offered them precious advice and encouragement:

The phones worked, they always told us on the phone to wait for them [the rescuers] to come, they were on their way, to have patience, to resist, to drink water, to wash, to drink water if we have water, we had drinking water, to wash our faces and stay calm, don't walk and get tired and inhale too much smoke.³⁹

According to official documents the first rescue teams equipped with self-contained breathing apparatus were alarmed around 8.00 p.m. and descended underground at about 9 p.m. Rescue and evacuation operations were conducted by the technical director of “Barza” Mining Company, Lungu Nicolae. Self-contained breathing apparatus was needed to rescue and evacuate people out of the affected area, and those were taken from the company’s rescue station and E.M. Țebea and E.M.

³⁸ *Ibidem.*

³⁹ *Ibidem.*

Deva, because the underground staff of “Barza” Mining Company was not equipped with such devices.⁴⁰

Regarding the arrival of the rescuers, Mr. Barbu recalled that he was in a bad state and almost unconscious at the moment of his rescue:

I don't know, because I didn't see the rescuers, they came down there in the extraction machine and they had masks... they dragged us in the cage, pulled us up and took us all out, 16 of us could enter the lifting cage once, we were 8 on one floor, it had two floors [...] I resisted and we were lifted out with the cage at the 1st May horizon. When we arrived here, there was smoke too, but there was a ventilation gallery that came from Dealu' Fetii, it was called Dealu' Fetii gallery, and we all went there to breath fresh air, the air came from outside, and when we got there, in the fresh air, I fell, I don't remember anything. All I know is that I reached to fresh air and lots of people were there, but many were on the ground, unconscious.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the “Barza” Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Report concluded in the 10th of January at “Barza” Mining Company, p. 35.

⁴¹ Vlad Barbu Petru, interview by the author, audio file no. 2023, O.H.I.A., București, Hunedoara, 28.05.2019.

Despite all rescue efforts, 10 miners died and 28 were intoxicated with carbon monoxide. The last three fatalities and one survivor in serious condition, Dobîrcău Ioan, were found by the rescue teams and evacuated on 06.01.1973. The forensic reports showed that the 10 workers lost their lives as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning.⁴² The indictment dossier mentions the name of the casualties and since we consider that those who passed away in this terrible accident just became part of a statistic, we considered important to mention them. The 10 dead miners were: Igreț Ioan, Petruț Lazăr, Benea Gheorghe, Dud Miron, Furdui Alexandru, Cataramă Gheorghe, Ștefan Ioan, Margea Simion, Mateș Nicolae, while the 28 miners that suffered from carbon monoxide intoxication were: Dobârcău Ioan, Achim Ioan, Biro Ștefan, Duna Gheorghe, Nistor Ioan, Groza Viorel, Popa Mihalache, Neag Ioan, Bizu Constantin, Drăgan Ioan, Stârcă Iorgu, Becheanu Ilie, Burian Paul, Toda Gheorghe, Leucean Ioan, Circo Serafim, Neamțu Ilie, Vochim Gheorghe, Ancheș Ioan, Dan Iuliu, Ivan A. Nicolae, Alba Aurel, Frandేశ Gheorghe, Sîna Petru, Ivan P. Nicolae, Suci Constantin, Moneanu Ioan, Topor Teodor.⁴³

As the official inquiry suggested, all the victims suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning. In his

⁴² Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the “Barza” Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Report concluded in the 10th of January at “Barza” Mining Company, p. 37.

⁴³ Idem, Indictment from 1973, march the 5th, Prosecutor’s Office of the Romanian Socialist Republic, Prosecutor’s Office of the Hunedoara County, Deva, File No. 2/B/1073, p. 56.

testimony, Vlad Barbu Petru mentioned some of the effects of poisoning with this colorless, odorless, tasteless gas produced by burning materials: headache, weakness, dizziness, confusion, loss of consciousness. These symptoms were present in the case of those who experienced a moderate exposure to the deadly gas. Another interviewee provided an example of how one of those who died by carbon monoxide poisoning was found by the rescuers:

He died while eating a can. He was in the shaft, he sat down on a bench at his work front and he was eating a canned liver pate with the knife and with bread, and carbon monoxide gas caught him with the knife taken to his mouth and he froze in that position. Can you realize? ... Petruț Lazăr was his name, may God rest his soul!⁴⁴

An interesting surviving story was narrated by two of our interviewees: Kiszely Tudor and Niculae Stoica. Unfortunately, none of them could name the miner that survived for almost three days in a part of the shaft as the fire was still burning:

In any mine, there is a team of well-trained miners with rescue devices - oxygen tubes - that can enter these places. Well, they worked hard in the winter of '71. They were going in

⁴⁴ Francisc Dineș, interview by Călin Olariu, audio file no. 1806, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 27.04.2018.

the shaft, found them... you know, they found one still alive, he was eaten by rats, but he lived because he was in a water channel and there was no gas circulating there.⁴⁵

Some of them escaped because there was a canal on the edge of the gallery through which the water from the mine was evacuated. And he kept his mouth close to that canal and fresh air passed through there ... and he stayed there until the rescuers reached him. One of them was bitten by rats, he was dizzy, then fainted and he was bitten by rats. And he lived ... I don't know if he is still alive, but he was still alive a few years ago.⁴⁶

Although no name was mentioned in connection with this incredible episode, a key information from the documents point to Ioan Dobîrcău, a miner that was found in serious condition, but alive, and was evacuated after three days spent in the shaft that was still on fire.⁴⁷

The fire that broke out in the afternoon of 3 January 1973 produced not only human casualties, but also huge material damage that resulted in the permanent incapacitation of the most modern extraction cage used in the mining industry in Romania. The authorities that investigated the fire concluded that the fire broke out at the

⁴⁵ Kiszely Tudor, interview by Lavinia Costea and Ionuț Costea, audio file no. 1815, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 11.11.2017.

⁴⁶ Niculae Stoica, interview by Diana Nistor, audio file no. 1814, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 11.11.2017.

⁴⁷ For more information, see note 41.

mining facilities from -120 m., -60 m. and -30 m. horizons in Hârnic central shaft. Rescue teams and firefighters managed to put out the fire burning at -120 m horizon in 5 January, at -90 m. horizon in 11 January and at -60 m horizon in 14 January. Unfortunately, a new fire broke out on the 15th January at -90 m horizon and the emergency teams were unable to put it out by the end of January 1973. As a result of this difficult situation, the communist authorities in Hunedoara county estimated that the daily production of gold ore was reduced from a planned daily production of 1610 tons to an average production of 950 tons daily, reaching 1118 tons on January 17. The losses of the “Barza” Mining Company for the period between 1-19 January were 9548 tons of ore and 40 kg. of metal.⁴⁸

As we mentioned at the beginning of our study, the in-depth analysis of archival documents revealed some major discrepancies between the initial conclusions of the investigation and the opinions elaborated by some of the appointed experts in the investigation committee, more than two years after the event. According to the document entitled *Opinion on Technical Expertise Report made by engineer C. Nichituș, Dr. engineer V. Berinde, dr. engineer M. Breazu and Senior Lecturer engineer N. Leonăchescu from 10.05.1975*, the cause of the fire was incorrectly pointed out in the T.E.R. and both management of the

⁴⁸ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Note on how the works for the liquidation of the damage at the Musariu mine within the “Barza” Mining Company are carried out. - elaborated by the Hunedoara county committee of the Romanian Communist Party in 19.I.1973, p. 45.

“Barza” Mining Company and local authorities were pressing Hunedoara Court to solve the case. The experts that contested the conclusions of the previous expertise participated in all reconstitution experiments imposed by the court. In this document, Dr T Sălăgean, an associate member of the Academy of the Romanian Socialist Republic, Senior Lecturer Dr. engineer I. Bejan and Dr. engineer D. Popovits denounced both how other members of the appointed commission presented the T.E.R. without consulting them on the final results of the expertise, and the key conclusions of the T.E.R.

The 20 pages document is based primarily on eyewitnesses’ statements, the expertise made in the burned shaft in 09.12.1973 and the experiment meant to test the possibilities of fire outbreak which took place in 6.04.1975. In their argument, the three experts mentioned the following facts:

We do not agree with the conclusion formulated at point 5 in the Technical Expertise Report which shows: *the most probable cause of the fire that broke out at the Hârnici central shaft on 3.01.73 where the drops of incandescent metal resulting from the cut of the wide compensation cable with oxyacetylene flame* for the following reasons:
-the cutting products did not ignite flammable materials such as: wood, sawdust, wood chips, paper, dried leaves even in the ideal conditions of the experiment conducted on 6.04.75.

-there is no evidence that on 3.01.73 there were oil-impregnated rags in the shaft. On the contrary, the evidence in the case file shows that the small piece of rag (the size of a handkerchief) was evacuated from the shaft section.

-the experiment of 6.04.75 showed that the oil-impregnated cotton fibres ignite instantly in contact with the incandescent drops resulting from oxyacetylene flame cutting. Consequently, if we were to admit that on 3.01.73 there were oil-impregnated cotton fibres in the shaft on which incandescent drops would have fallen, the ignition should have started immediately. ... and so, the fire would have been present immediately after the completion of one of the two cuts made in the section of the shaft. However, the case file shows that the fire appeared 6 to 8 hours after the end of the two cuts, which refutes the possibility of triggering the fire according to the above-mentioned model and therefore shows that the two cuts made in the shaft section could not be the cause of the fire.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Opinion on Technical Expertise Report made by engineer C. Nichituș, Dr. engineer V. Berinde, dr. engineer M. Breazu and Senior Lecturer engineer N. Leonăchescu from 10.05.1975, pp. 11-12.

According to the same document, the experts agreed that the most probable source of the fire was one of the following: “1. the lighting and power cables with the route close to the wood could ignite it as a result of a local short circuit due to damage to the insulation; 2. the cuts made with the oxyacetylene flame by the welder Pandeale Ion on the ramp situated at the -290 level, as a result of which a highly heated incandescent “conglomerate” would have resulted and settled on the floor. This could have ignited highly flammable materials and melted PVC or rubber insulation; 3. apart from these potential sources of fire, we see cigarette butts and open flame lamps as possible sources of fire; 4. it is also impossible to rule out as a cause of the fire its provocation by a criminal hand.”⁵⁰

Contrary to the opinion of other interviewees, Avram Miheț supports the conclusion of the three experts presented above. During the interview, he mentioned his point of view and pointed out that the authorities wanted to find a scapegoat and quickly settle the matter:

They said the fire broke out when the sparks or melted pieces fell from the cable that was cut, but I thought something else had happened in the shaft. It had 3 compartments, on a compartment that was with stairs there

⁵⁰ Romanian National Archives, Hunedoara County, Romanian Communist Party Fund, Informations, minutes and sketches regarding the collective work accident at the Barza Mining Enterprise, Musariu mine from 3.I.1973, Opinion on Technical Expertise Report made by engineer C. Nichituș, Dr. engineer V. Berinde, dr. engineer M. Breazu and Senior Lecturer engineer N. Leonăchescu from 10.05.1975, pp. 16-18.

were 36 cables, thick like a hand, all power cables, because there were several horizons and probably that's why. Even a minister came [at the experiment meant to test the possibilities of fire outbreak], the one who was responsible for the mining industry and the fire did not ignite at the first cut, did not ignite at the second one and yet they did something to set it on fire to prove that it was ignited by oxyacetylene welding. And those 3 engineers, all 3 were incarcerated. They were there for 3 years, one of them for 4 years, one who was also a teacher at Gurabarza, at the high school, he had only worked underground for 3 months, but he was sentenced with the others. My opinion, from what I knew then and what I know now, the fire was not caused by the welding, but someone had to be to blame for, that's how it was in '71, they had to find a culprit.⁵¹

The collective accident that took place at Musariu shaft had an important impact not only upon the victims of the fire, but also on the local community. Since the miners lived in the villages located around the gold mines, all these small communities were more or less affected by the loss of lives and the sadness that follows after such a tragic event. According to Karren Buckely, in the case of a mining disaster, the death of multiple members of a

⁵¹Avram Miheț, interview by Ionela Bogdan, audio file no. 1837, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 27.04.2018.

community produces understandable grief reactions in individuals in those communities.⁵² However, during such difficult times, the mining communities show extraordinary solidarity helping the families of those who died or were injured in the accidents. Such gestures of solidarity were also made for the families of those who were affected by the fire from the Hârnic shaft. Our interviewees mentioned how the community supported the bereaved families, by providing material goods, money and moral support for each family of those who perished in the accident.

We collected money because we realized that the families didn't have any, we all donated money, which one of us gave as much as he could and as much as he wanted. I remember I gave 100 lei, in the money of that time. Especially for one that I told you about, he always cursed: *may the fire burn the mine!*... he had five children, but he was from somewhere near Cluj, on the road to Baia Mare, somewhere over there. He was Hungarian, but I got along well with him, I worked with him on the team.⁵³

Besides financial aid and moral support, Candin Răpcău mentioned another way through which the mining companies would help the families of the dead miner:

⁵² Karen Buckley, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

⁵³ Popa Viorel, interview by the author, audio file no. 1951, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 26.03.2019.

We took care of those who survived and send them to the best hospitals in the country for the first aid and for the deceased we provided part of the money for the funeral or financed all that was needed, we took care of what was necessary and they hired at least one person from the family, if he didn't work elsewhere, he was hired by our unit.⁵⁴

The miners helped not only the families of their dead colleagues, but also their colleagues that were imprisoned after the trial that investigated the fire of the Hârnic Shaft. According to the indictment file of the case, Moga Nicolae, Marțiș Vasile-Valeriu, Șenilă Viorel and Ursoi Teodor were arrested and faced multiple criminal charges that resulted in their imprisonment for periods of 3 to 4 years. Ion Borș remembered that the miners were working in Saturdays and Sundays to hasten their release and to recover part of the damage:

The engineer Moga was imprisoned, I don't remember for how many years, but I know that we worked for him, they took us ... we went to work on Saturday and Sunday, to work for compensations. We worked for him, on Saturday and Sunday, we went and we work, but in another sector. We were

⁵⁴ Candin Răpcău, interview by Ionela Bogdan, audio file no. 1835, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 27.04.2018.

supposed to extract more ore to get him out of jail.⁵⁵

We can conclude that the Musariu mine fire remains to this day the most important underground collective accident in the gold mining industry in Romania. Researching this tragic event was not an easy task, because remembering the friends and colleagues they lost during this accident made our interviewees sad. Although we started from the premise that in underground work accidents were a constant, the recollections of those who worked in the gold mines exceeded our initial expectations about the numbers of deadly accidents and injuries that occurred almost daily in the mine. Equally, we were surprised by how sudden men died in mining accidents and the many ways in which miners could die or be crippled as a result of a minor negligence.

The in-depth analysis of the Hârnici shaft fire revealed not only an accurate unfolding of this tragic event, based primarily on the archival documents, but also the human dimension of such a tragedy. Through the medium of oral history interviews with those who were the victims of this incident, we better understand how people react and adopt different self-preservation measures in those critical moments. While official documents focused on establishing the causes, the evolution of events and the culprits, the personal experience of this disaster captured both the experience of the survivors and how the communities of miners react in such difficult situations.

⁵⁵ Ion Borș, interview by the author, audio file no. 1943, O.H.I.A., Brad, Hunedoara, 28.03.2019.

Besides, the specifics of the oral testimony provided some unknown details, such as an unexpected surviving story or the fact that the miners contributed substantially with their work to the early release of those found guilty in the Musariu fire legal cause.

Feminine Narratives of Gold Mining in the Apuseni Mountains: An Oral History Research¹

Abstract: The feminine memory of gold mining in the Apuseni Mountains area is a subject under researched until now, but on which it is worth focusing on, with emphasis on elements such as: matrimonial dynamics, gender relations, economic management in families of miners, division of labour among others. The dynamics of daily life will also be discussed, respectively the way in which women relate to it in the context of the control exercised by the communist authorities. This “memory exercise” is considered necessary to highlight the strategies used by miners and their families to adapt to a world of centralized economy, where power relations changed continuously and survival rules inevitably emerged. Using the methodology specific to oral history, this paper aims to bring to the fore the impact that gold mining has had on the wives and

¹ This work was supported by a grant of Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0874, within PNCDI III, contract no. 150/2017.

families of miners, in order to preserve the “stories” behind a disappearing profession.

Key words: oral history, women, gold mining, communist period, daily life

A history of gold mining in the Apuseni Mountains is proving to be a necessary research topic in the recent climate, of the wide debates and the massive wave of protests in recent years regarding the situation in Roșia Montană and other gold mining areas in the country. Such context opened the curiosity box in regard to the “stories” behind a craft that is slowly but surely becoming obsolete and, at some point represented the main occupation for entire communities. Even if general information about the craft of gold mining in the Apuseni area may be abundant, little it is known about the lives of those who actually practiced the craft itself, about their families, their day to day activities and the manner in which they coped with life itself. In this sense, the purpose of this paper is to accentuate the “humane perspective” of gold mining through the voices of those who more often than not are neglected: the women- wives, mothers, daughters of the men who worked underground in the mines, extracting the most precious metal of all: gold. Thus, the roles women played in “family management and labour” in mining communities needs to be taken into account since they were the ones who sustained the social life around the mines.²

² Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, “The Feminisation of Mining,” in *Geography Compass*, no. 9, 2015, p. 526.

The history of gold mining in the Apuseni Mountains is rich, complex and centuries old as proven by the archaeological artefacts discovered in the area and the specialized literature on the subject. Prior to nationalization, almost the entire population of the area was involved in mining activities, including women and older children. This is especially emphasized in the Roșia Montană and Bucium area, where two of the interviewees recall how, together with their mothers, brothers and sisters, used to transport pieces of ore to the so-called *șteampuri* -water powered artisanal installations- owned by their families. As a general rule, artisanal installations were used in order to extract gold until 1949 when the communist regime nationalized the mines and traditional mining was forcibly stopped.³ At the same time all country's mineral resources became property of the state, the miners were prohibited to continue to exploit gold, the so-called *șteampuri* were taken out of service and those who owned gold had to hand it over to the bank.⁴ These events had a massive impact on the livelihoods of the gold mining communities in the Apuseni region and it transformed the craft of gold mining into a profession with an industrial character, with the opening of the state owned mining companies such as “Întreprinderea Minieră Barza.” The region under scrutiny offered few occupational options, thus it left no other choice for the miners than to accept employment at “Întreprinderea

³ Cosmina-Maria Berindei, “Aspecte ale sacralului în toponimia minieră din Roșia Montană și Bucium,” in Ovidiu Felecan (ed.) *Proceedings of ICONN*, no. 4, 2017, p. 527.

⁴ Cosmina-Maria Berindei, “Discursive strategies of Traditional Mining Memory in Two Villages of the Apuseni Mountains,” in *Philobiblon*, vol. XVIII, no. 2, 2013, p. 314.

Minieră Barza” or to search for work in other mining regions such as Valea Jiului.⁵ After the fall of the communist regime gold mining became almost an obsolete profession due to the fact that slowly but surely all gold mines closed. These considerations are pivotal in understanding the manner in which gold mining communities relate to their past and present and how they are choosing to construct their narratives in regard to it.

Literature on the matter describes mining regions as being a “male contoured social landscape” and women married in such communities are perceived as belonging to it due to their husband’s employment.⁶ This proves to be accurate when it comes to the Apuseni Mountains region as well, where the main occupation for the men of these communities was working in the mines, whereas women would be housewives or, in some cases working in related fields. In the work “Aurarii din Munții Apuseni” is brought to the fore that in Baia de Arieș, among other amenities, a textile factory was built in order to offer employment opportunities to the wives and daughters of the miners.⁷ Even so, the main providers of households were considered to be men. At the same time, throughout the communist period in regions such as the mining town of Brad and its surroundings, the architectural landscape changed in order to accommodate the needs of the growing mining

⁵ Marius Cristea, “Procesul de naționalizare din România. Studiu de caz: Exploatarea aurifere din Roșia Montană,” in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală*, no. VII, 2006, p. 297.

⁶ Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, “The Feminisation of Mining,” in *Geography Compass*, no. 9, 2015, p. 526.

⁷ B. Roman, A. Sîntimbrean, V. Wollmann, *Aurarii din Munții Apuseni, Sport- Tourism*, Bucharest, 1982, p. 66.

community, including those of miners' families, by incorporating commercial and cultural spaces.⁸ In her doctoral thesis, "Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland," the historian Malgorzata Fidelis acknowledges that "because female and male roles are so deeply embedded in all social life they can provide a window into the interaction between a new political order and existing national and local conditions."⁹ In this sense, she offers a broad analysis in reference to the manner in which gender roles are constructed, with emphasis on how women experienced work environment in postwar Poland, analyzing, among others, coal miners communities where traditionally women were portrayed as main responsible of the domestic realm. As resulted from the oral history interviews conducted in the Apuseni region, the situation was similar here also.

Oral historian, Paul Thompson emphasized that: "oral history certainly can be a means for change for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. [...] It can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their words, a central place."¹⁰ This was obviously the case when conducting oral history interviews among the gold mining communities in the Apuseni region. The miners with few exceptions were willing to share their life stories but their wives and women

⁸ Gabriela Pașcu, "Patrimoniul vizibil este invizibil. Zona minieră Brad, Țara Zarandului," in *Revista Monumentelor Istorice*, no. 1-2, 2015-2016, p. 86.

⁹ Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010, p. 5.

¹⁰ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 26.

from these communities in general were surprised that we wanted to record them. One of the reasons for this is that they felt they had little to nothing to say in regard to the gold mining activities, since they were not directly involved in it. At the same time, women considered their daily activities and mundane chores do not constitute stories worth sharing. Thus, they needed to be convinced that what they had to say and their perspective(s) is important to us.

The methodology of oral history “stems from practice, from the direct performance of oral history, from the fieldwork experience,”¹¹ thus engaging with the interviewees proved to be natural, by going into villages where we knew people used to work in the gold mining industry. Nonetheless, we were fortunate enough to benefit from advice from different contacts who took their time to introduce us with people in the communities, thus, giving us a vote of confidence. At the same time, giving the welcoming nature of people living in these parts, we had the possibility of just knocking on people’s doors and asking them to tell us their life stories. In the quest of reconstructing parts of the history of gold mining in the Apuseni Mountains, the principles of good practice regarding ethical guidelines were put into place those interviewed being informed they had the option of remaining anonymous among other things.

Domestic activities, daily chores and the education of children appeared to be the first topics when starting interviewing women living in the region under scrutiny, which at first were presented in a fast forward manner.

¹¹ Ionuț Costea, “The Roma Community: Between proscription and assertion of Historic Consciousness,” in *Oral History Institute Yearbook*, no. XVI (2015), p. 16.

After the interviewees gained confidence, they started to open up a bit more and expressed their constant concern for family members who worked as miners. When it came to punctual aspects regarding what entails to be a gold miner, the interviewees offered general remarks such as: “it was a difficult but lucrative job” or “all these villages lived from the mine because there was no other possibility.” The answers to specific questions were at times evasive: “What was your husband doing at the mine?” “How should I know what he was doing? He did his job; he did what he was told to do and for that her received money.” In this sense, one may suggest there was a lack of communication between spouses regarding aspects of mining, the daily discussions being focused on pressing issues that impacted their daily lives such as bills that needed to be paid, household chores, agricultural work and so on.

Very often, working in the gold mines came across as a long standing tradition, on the one hand perpetuated because, in that region the mines represented the main employer and on the other because the income provided by the mining company was relatively high. An interviewee described her family’s situation:

He [her father] worked with gold, in the gold mines until they were nationalized and then was employed in this area, Doxului Valley, Rușchița, Poiana Ruscă Mountains at Roșia Montană Mining Company. My mother did not work, she stayed at home, caring for us children, taking care of the house and doing the usual house chores. I worked at Roșia Montană Mining Company as a phone

operator and my husband worked as a miner. We were content with our salaries then because we managed to raise our children with what we gained and we are content with our pensions today.¹²

The above testimony does not constitute a singular example and the majority of the interviewees described gold mining as being a tradition in the Apuseni Mountains. Regardless of the risks employed, this craft was tempting even for those who were less familiar with it. At the same time, as some interviewees explained, it represented a way of securing a decent livelihood for oneself and one's family and leaving poverty behind.

When we analyse the life stories of women from mining communities, it may be important to emphasize the similarities in the fate of these women in mineworkers' culture [and] argue that in this particular culture women and men might share certain narratives and genres to express themselves.¹³

In this sense an interviewee summarised "how things used to be" in his family, while, at the same time emphasizing the situation of his mother:

¹² A.E., interview by author, audio file, no. 1882 (OHIA), Bucium, Alba County, 18.10.2018.

¹³ Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini, Paul Thompson (eds.), *Gender & memory*, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2009, p. IX.

In my family working in the mine was not a tradition; I was the first one to become a miner. My father was a clerk and my mom was a *stay at home wife*. More precisely she was a *suffer at home wife*, since she had to do a lot of work by herself. Back then, you had to work the land manually, to wake up early in the morning and go to work. We had five hectares of land which we worked manually and we also had animals.¹⁴

Even though his mother was not a miner's wife, she appears to have faced similar challenges as the women who were married with miners did, such as: having no one to rely on in regard to different chores and having to take upon herself the responsibility of caring for children and the household. At the same time, I find it remarkable that this male interviewee actively acknowledged the difficulty of the tasks her mother undertook in order to raise a family. This, however, does not constitute a singular example, since I encountered other male interviewees who acknowledged the efforts their wives/mothers put in order to successfully manage a household. The testimony of a female interviewee comes to support the one above:

It was hard to do the job of a man and a woman at the same time: to raise two children, to take care of the household, to wash, to cook, to clean, to work in the field,

¹⁴ Lucian Petruț, interview by author, audio file, no. 1840 (OHIA), Luncoiu de Sus, Hunedoara County, 25.04.2018.

especially in the summer when there were so many things to do. It was a harsh life because I had to do everything by myself. I suppose it was easier for those who had extra help, but it wasn't my case.¹⁵

The interviewee who offered this testimony used to be a housewife and as seen from her recollection, even without taking part in the formal economy, her workload was always significant. In other cases, women living in gold mining communities used to have steady employment but they also had help with the children and within the household. Most of the oral history interviews exemplified throughout this research were conducted in rural areas where women lacked formal education but there are also cases of women who had the opportunity to higher education and later on were employed in the mining industry or in other areas. Such an example is given by a woman who used to work as an engineer at the gold mine in Roșia Montană and among other things explained that her parents in law helped her greatly.¹⁶ Another similar example is given by an interviewee who after finishing school obtained a job in the mining industry and worked at first in a research department and later on was promoted and worked at the Ministry of Mines in Bucharest.¹⁷ She talked proudly about how she was able to make a career

¹⁵ Maria Ghileanu, interview by author, no. 1999 (OHIA), Curechiu, Hunedoara County, 28.05.2019.

¹⁶ A.V., interview by author, audio file, no. 2065 (OHIA), Roșia Montană, Alba County, 21.11.2018.

¹⁷ G.P., interview by author, audio file, no. 1993 (OHIA), Crișcior, Hunedoara County, 27.05.2019.

while also raising a family and briefly mentioned how she decided it was best not to work in the same department as her husband, in order to draw a clear line between work and domestic realm. A different interviewee explained how she had the opportunity of working at the post office and after that as a phone operator at the mine but she had to quit soon after having children, because her mother died and there was no one else to take care of the children. In one way or another, many women living in the area under scrutiny brought their contribution in the working sector, being able to shape an identity outside the home and family.¹⁸

A recurrent theme that appears within the narratives of the women I recorded is the uncertainty surrounding their husbands' jobs, a fear of not knowing if they will return home safe. When asked whether she was afraid for her husband's safety when working in the mine an interviewee explained that fear is always present but one cannot live in fear of what might happen, adding she is more fearful now for his safety since he is persistent in driving his car even if he's advanced in age:

You know how it is? You're always fearful but you can't live being afraid. Look, for example now I'm afraid because he keeps on driving even though he's old. So I fear something might happen to him. I'm aware

¹⁸ Jill Massino, Shana Penn, *Gender Politics and everyday life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009, p. 13.

he's a good driver but I still worry whenever I'm not with him.¹⁹

A different interviewee explained that in the end she learned to cope with the constant fear of what might happen and it became part of life. At the same time, she acknowledged that she had to do so much work around the house that worrying about her husband became a passive activity.

The parallel between how things used to be and the current situation is very often brought to the fore and the majority of the interviewees managed to vividly depict the difference between then and now. An interviewee who was brought up into a family where gold mining represented a long standing tradition, since her father also used to work as a miner and her husband as well, remembered the conditions in which she lived while growing up, and, accentuated that because of her father's place of employment life was not as bad as it could have been:

I don't know, I guess it was good enough. My father didn't have any problems, he used to work in the mine also, you know? Moreover, he wasn't recruited in the army because of his job. My mother didn't work and we raised animals so we had enough to eat. We had our cows, we would have enough milk, and we had our chickens. Of course you can't compare the past with what we have now. It

¹⁹ Maria Gavrileş, interview by author, audio file, no. 1833 (OHIA), Zdrapți, Hunedoara County, 26.04.2018.

wasn't like that. Now you can go anywhere and buy everything.²⁰

Another interviewee brought to the fore the surviving skills one needed in the late period of the communist regime when food was rationalized:

In the 80's things started to change for the worst because they rationalized the food: bread, cooking oil, sugar. But no one died because of it. It's true, you were not allowed to slaughter calves but we did it anyway. We had our ways of hiding what we did. And most of all we had good neighbours who were discreet and minded their own business.²¹

The individual representations of daily life before and throughout the communist regime portray at times the harsh realities during those periods but at the same time they bring to surface aspects such as the feeling of camaraderie existing between neighbours as well as the clever ways of improving one's life. Reminiscing about the past does not always refer to pragmatic aspects. On one occasion, an interviewee who lived her entire life in a small village where gold mining represented the main occupation confessed that the thing she misses most is the sound made by the artisanal installations used by miners for crushing

²⁰ Maria Gavrileş, interview by author, audio file, no. 1833 (OHIA), Zdrapti, Hunedoara County, 26.04.2018.

²¹ Lucian Petruş, interview by author, audio file, no. 1840 (OHIA), Luncoiu de Sus, Hunedoara County, 25.04.2018.

gold ore- the peaceful sound of home, as she defined it.²² Even though she could have moved elsewhere she decided to remain in her village as a primary school teacher, because she felt safe and protected in that environment. The installations to which she refers to, the so-called *șteampuri* were fairly popular before the communist period and even if all interviewees know about them, only a handful was actually born when these were still in use. When remembering the past, the interviewees inevitably reminisce about their youth, how they met their husbands and decided to start a family, managing to offer an overall picture of how life has been for them. In most cases, the future partners were childhood friends or used to be neighbours, thus, they knew each other well and marriage represented the obvious choice. Even though throughout their lives they encountered numerous limitations, they still manage to preserve a positive attitude towards their past experiences, which are seen through the lenses of the present.

When it comes to gold mining in the Apuseni region, the voices of women are not the loudest ones in a room but they do have a significant impact in shaping the narratives about this topic since they sustained and enriched the social life around the mines. The feminine narratives of gold mining are ordinary and extraordinary at the same time because they bring to the fore the richness of all phases of life within communities that slowly but surely becomes obsolete.

²² Victoria Crișan, interview by author, audio file, no. 1866 (OHIA), Bucium Țasa, Alba County, 16.10.2018.

Personal Mythmaking. Life Story Interviews of Former Employees at Barza Mining Company¹

Abstract: The aim of this article is to present the interlinking between the biography of a former employee of Barza Mining Company, ing. Nicolae Vela,² and larger historical events during the Romanian communist period. Similar to other life stories with former employees at Barza Mining Company the narrative construction of the interviewee's life story revolves around his professional career, his journey of becoming one of the most respected chemists of the time in Romania. However, he provides rich descriptions of other topics such as: the socialist planned economy, food shortages, blat/ the importance of personal relationships, student life during communism, free time.

Keywords: oral history, life stories, gold mining, communism, Romania

¹ This work was supported by a grant of Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0874, within PNCDI III, contract no. 150/2017.

² Vela Nicolae, interview by Lavinia Costea and Olariu Călin, audio file no. 1819, Oral History Institute Archive, Cluj-Napoca (hereinafter referred to as OHIA), Criscior, Hunedoara County, 24.04.2018.

Introduction

The interview this study is based on was conducted in 2018 in Criscior, Hunedoara County, a village located 6 km from the town of Brad. The research was part of the project “The History of Gold Mining in the Apuseni Mountains” whose main objectives were to “(re)construct miners’ lived history and the history of gold exploitation in the Apuseni Mountains through life stories and interpretation of past artefacts; to investigate traditional crafts, to scrutinize the economic survival strategies of miners families/communities, by highlighting continuity/discontinuities throughout history; to explore the link between the traditional occupation of mining and resistance in the sense of biography, memory and identity, the development of narratives and different representations within the community memory.” We focused on asking questions about the witnesses’ experiences from their childhood up to the present and were particularly interested in the way people interpret/ give meaning to their experiences and the historical periods they have been through.

The two and a half hour long life story interview with Mr. Vela was conducted by Lavinia Costea and me. Mr. Vela’s account is both personal and communal. Through the creative and interactive process of telling his life-story – in the context of his interaction with the oral historian – he offered a unique perspective on the activity at the Barza Mining company – given his position as the head of the chemical laboratory of the Company, as well as stories about his personal unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. Doing so, however, he also touched upon several common themes found in almost all of the more

than 100 interviews conducted with the former employees of the Barza Mining Company.

Life stories

A well-known quote of the oral historian Alessandro Portelli is that an oral history interview is “a story untold, even if largely made up of twice told stories.”³ The interview is fundamentally a work of collaboration between the oral historian and the interviewee and the content and shape of the interview is largely shaped by this interaction. Thus, an oral history interview is always a text in the making since the witness goes through a creative effort to shape a story which has never been told before in that particular way - even though fragments of a life story could have been told in many instances before:

What is spoken in a typical oral history interview has usually never been told *in that form* before. Most personal or family tales are told in pieces and episodes, when the occasion arises; we learn even the lives of our closest relatives by fragments, repetitions, hearsay. Many stories or anecdotes may have been told many times within a narrator’s immediate circle, but the whole story has hardly ever been told in sequence as a coherent and organized whole. The grandparent who takes a grandchild on his or

³ Alessandro Portelli, “Oral History as Genre,” in Mary Chamberlain, Paul Thompson (eds), *Narrative and Genre*, Rutledge, London & New York, 2003, p. 24.

her knee and tells the story of his or her life is a literary fiction.⁴

We went to Mr., Vela home at the recommendation and together with another former engineer at the Barza Mining Company, Mr. Miheț. After we introduced ourselves, we told Mr. Vela that we were interested in his life story with a particular emphasis on his work at Barza. In designing the interview guide used in the project we followed several main topics such as: working conditions at the mine during communism and post-communism, relationships between work colleagues, mining accidents, gold stealing, free time, the influence of the Communist Party at the mine, etc. Many of these topics were touched upon during the conversation were presented in similar fashion to other accounts collected in the Brad area. Some of the stories were told in the form of anecdotes and were well know at least in the personal circle of the narrator, given the insistence of Mr. Miheț that Mr. Vela would be a valuable witness for our project.⁵

The most consistent part of the account was allocated to the description of his professional life focusing

⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵ Alessandro Portelli emphasized: “An oral speech act, to a higher degree than a written one, is implicitly social, because it requires an audience: the fact that these stories had been told often means that Peppoloni's circle found them, at least congenial and, perhaps, that they were more or less consciously shaped or selected to meet the expectations of that particular circle.” “The Best Garbage Men in Town: Life and Times of Valtèro Peppoloni, Worker,” in *Alessandro Portelli, The Death of Luigi Transtulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1991, p. 129.

on his journey of becoming one of the most respected chemists of the time in Romania, who were tasked by authorities at the highest level of the party-state with conducting analyses of the gold content of different ores and goods. He provided detailed descriptions of the technological process of exploiting gold, of the working conditions at the mine's processing plant, the interaction with Communist Party personnel, the way miners would spend their free time and so on. At the same time, given his position at the mine, he made rich descriptions of the difficulties in conducting one's work in the context of the socialist planned economy.

However, the interaction with the witness was also a process of negotiation where, in the process of constructing a coherent account of his life, Mr. Vela chose to also talk about subjects which were of particular relevance to him and which ultimately proved to be useful in better understanding certain aspects of the communist past. Thus, for example, he talked about his period as a student in Timișoara, his unruly behavior of that time, before his career had begun, his life-long love for classical music, the cultural activities organized by the Communist Youth Organization in which he took part, the difficulties he had with the system of repartitions from the communist period and the importance of personal relationships in solving one's problems. Furthermore, he also made uchronic⁶ descriptions of some of his dreams and aspirations which ultimately never materialized.

⁶ Alessandro Portelli, "Uchronic dreams: Working-Class Memory and Possible Worlds," in *Alessandro Portelli, The Death of Luigi Transtulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1991, pp. 99-116.

Family history and childhood

The interview starts with the interviewee's childhood recollections, he was born in 1939, and a short family history. His parents were both born in the Banat region of Romania but in 1938 the family moved to Brad due to the fact that his father, who was also a football player, was recruited in the Mica Mining Company's football team of the time. Mica was the most important privately owned gold exploitation company in interwar Romania⁷ and the largest gold producer of the time. Besides many important innovations in the technological process of gold exploitation, it also heavily invested in improving miners living conditions by creating health facilities as well as avenues for spending their free time, the football team being one such example.

In 1938 the president of the administrative board of the Mica Company, which exploited the gold ore [in the region], someone called, I believe he was called Gigurtu⁸, he was also a minister [in the government] decided to foster the social life in the region and came to the conclusion that it would be best to make a

⁷ After the nationalization of the industry in 1948 the company came under state control. It latter known as Trustul Aurului and then Barza Gold Mining Company.

⁸ Ion Gigurtu (1886-1959) was a prominent Romanian engineer and industrialist specialized in mining operations. He was also involved in the far-right politics of Interwar Romania serving between July and September 1940 as Prime Minister, under the personal regime of King Carol II.

football team. There already was a team which played in Division C, if I remember correctly, and decided to bring some players of better quality. And so he sent scouts to Arad, Timișoara, because these [towns] were closer [to Brad] and among the [players] was my father. They were nine players. And in the first year they promoted to Division B and in the second year to Division A. And how did he convince them to come here? At that time there already was some gunpowder smell in the air, in 1938, and Gigurtu indeed kept his word, they were not mobilized to the [Eastern] front. Because in 1940-1941 the war already started. And yes... the thing with playing football did not last for long because of the war. [But] they played once in some wartime championship, I still remember.⁹

Mr. Vela's has a nostalgic view of his childhood, emphasizing that he's family could provide him with everything he needed. Although much of his early childhood was marked by the Second World War he did not make any references to the troubles brought about by the war and the following change of the regime. He went to the primary school in Criscior and finished the Avram Iancu high school in Brad. From his adolescence, he emphasized one event in particular, a summer camp organized by the state-owned mining company, in a nearby village, for the employee's children.

⁹ Vela Nicolae, interview...

After he finished high school he tried to go to the medical school in Timișoara but failed the university's entrance exam, stating, however, that he „does not regret it.” He also tried to get admitted to the Mining Institute in Petroșani but was assigned at a department which trained personnel for underground work. Because of this he decided to try and was successfully admitted at the Polytechnic University in Timișoara where he studied industrial chemistry.

Professional career

The most consistent part of the interview revolved around Mr. Vela professional life. This was both because of the fact that from the very beginning we emphasized that we were interested to find more about his activity at Barza Mining company but also because work is one of the central aspects of the interviewees identity, the narrative construction of his life story revolving around his journey of becoming the chief of the Barza chemistry laboratory and one of the most respected and accomplished industrial chemist in his field of work. This aspect of his life story is similar with most of the other biographical interviews conducted with former employees as Barza Mining Company, who take great pride in their work at the mine.

Mr. Vela first brief contact with the work at the mining company took place after he failed his exams for medical school and with the help of his father managed to get a position at the Processing Plant. He later also worked there for a short while after he finished his studies at the Polytechnic in Timișoara, until he managed to finally be employed as a chemist at the laboratory. Mr. Vela provided us with a detailed description of the technological process

which was employed at the processing plant, from the early stages of crushing the ore to the way cyanide was used in the later stages of gold extraction. The most significant part of his description, however, is not the one focusing on the more technical aspects of gold ore processing but his subjective account of the work environment. He vividly describes the harsh working conditions at the plant: the very cold and wet environment or the deafening noise of the machines.

It was cold, because it was a large factory hall with several openings. There was this cableway which continuously brought ore [to the plant] so you could not fit windows or doors [...] and it was cold. [...] There ... were stamp mills which resembled an upright piano about... There were five hammers, five long stamps with a weight at the end which crushed the ore on anvils. And those stamps, each stamp went up and down 92 times per minute. And in the Processing plant there were 80 stamp mills. 80! [...] Yes, 80 by five stamps that crushed [the ore] 92 times per minute. Now, do your math and figure out how many tup, tup, tup! [...] You could not, even if someone told you something in your ear ... it was hard to understand. There was an alphabet ... a sings [alphabet] which I once knew, because I worked there. When? Around 1966. Yes, you had to learn it

otherwise you could not communicate with others.¹⁰

Mr. Vela also made detailed descriptions of his work in the laboratory at I.M. Barza, both of the challenges he went through as well as the many rewards his work provided him with. At the laboratory he was mainly tasked with measuring the gold content of processed ore at different levels of production as well as the gold content of different ore samples collected by the mine's geologists who were working to identify new gold deposits underground.

And it [the ore] was taken into the processing plant. One would take a sample when it was introduced in the production process. Then, samples were again taken at certain stages in the production process in order to ensure that the mining installations worked properly. At the end, one would again take a sample. [...] So this entire process needed to be examined, including the tailing that was thrown away. Because that is the origin of the name Crișu Alb, from this tailing that was thrown in Criș. Now it is not thrown in Criș anymore, but... And this tailing needed to be analyzed to make sure no gold was left which would thus be thrown away [...]. And [sometimes] that happened, obviously.¹¹

¹⁰ Vela Nicolae, interview...

¹¹ Vela Nicolae, interview...

Mr. Vela also described the many challenges he faced when he just started his work in the laboratory, especially in regards to making analyses of the gold content of ores or other materials. The main method of analysis used at the time was called “docimazică” which, according to the interviewee, although rudimentary, as it barely involved any chemical processes, was quite precise. The main challenge he encountered after he was first employed at the laboratory was that there was only a limited scientific material on this method of analysis. As he emphasized, although it did not require complex chemistry knowledge it was nevertheless “very long, complicated and capricious.” In the end he made use of the few scientific materials available since the war [and interwar] period and relied on the experience of two older workers at the plant.

No! And I did not have whom to [learn] from because there is no documentation, no bibliography, there is nothing ... for this method which is called “docimazică.” There is no documentation, it was inherited from one person to another. There was only a diploma thesis of a young engineer woman from 1946 or 1948 which I later multiplied and gave to several other people who came to learn this trade from us. This was all the documentation. I learned more from... We had two older workers and I would talk with them. And things went wrong, look, it does not work. And then they [the two workers] would say: “But wait, because doctor Marinescu... [did such and such].” He was a

university professor who created the laboratory around 1936, he was a professor at the Polytechnic in Timișoara. [I learned] by seeing and doing.¹²

With experience, however, he managed to improve and extend the activity of the laboratory which became well known in the country and made analysis of samples from different factories in Romania as well as from the many of the communist Romania's enterprises from abroad, located, for example, as far as Africa or South America. In the end, the laboratory became so established that they were even tasked with resolving conflicts which arose between different Romanian and/or foreign companies in regards with the precious metal contents of the materials which were transacted between them.

Dysfunctional planned economy

Taking about his work at the Barza Mining Company, Mr. Vela also touched upon the many difficulties he, as well as some of his colleagues, had in conducting their everyday work in the context of the planned socialist economy¹³, especially in the final decade of the regime. His accounts are similar to other professionals working in Romania at the time which point

¹² Vela Nicolae, interview...

¹³ Janos Kornai, *Economics of Shortage*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, New York, Oxford, 1980; *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992.

to the inefficacy of the Romanian centralized economy.¹⁴ He recounts how one needed to create a network of friends and collaborators in order to be able to get all the materials needed for his or her activity as well as solve the many problems with the electricity supply at the mine.¹⁵ Furthermore, they were also forced to produce exaggerated production reports in order to “achieve” unrealizable production plans set by the higher echelons of the party-state, saying that often “his pen was shaking when he wrote them.” He illustrates all of these aspects through several anecdotes.

There was... Yes! It was called CSP, it was the State Committee for Planning,¹⁶ yes. And

¹⁴ In a widely influential book “Economics of Shortage,” first published in 1980, the Hungarian economist Janos Kornai produced a first comprehensive critique of the centrally planned soviet-style economies. His main argument was that the failures of these types of economies were the result of complex systemic flaws and not only flawed decision making. One of the most important negative consequence of the systemic flaws was the development of “shortages” at all levels of the economic system amongst which the most visible were the severe shortages of consumer goods prevalent in Central and East European countries¹⁴ at the time. In a following work “The Socialist System,” first published in 1992,¹⁴ he nuances his views by also outlining the fact that the failings of soviet-type economies were not exclusively economic in nature but also the result of the interlinking of the economy with the political system – as the communist party had control over most aspects of socialist societies.

¹⁵ For an analysis of the Romania case see: Katerine Verdery, *What was Socialism and what comes next*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, pp.17-57.

¹⁶ Following the adoption of a new Constitution in April 13th 1948 the communist leadership adopted Law 119 “Regarding the nationalization of the main industrial, banking, mining, insurance and transport

it... One could not even do, not even one move [without their consent]. I, for example, I needed hydrochloric acid, because it was heavily used in the laboratory. Which was produced... I had to investigate myself and see, it was produced at Turda Chemical Plant. [...] In the end I found out it was produced there, but I had to send a car to Reactivu București to get hydrochloric acid. [One time] although we had an annual quota and the like [we could not receive enough for the laboratory] [...] And I had a [former] colleague who was an engineer there [at Turda]. And ... I told him. He said “Send a car to me and...” But it was not that simple, in order to get it I had to send a car to Bucharest and he had to send the hydrochloric acid to Bucharest as well. You know? And those from Bucharest would pour it in a container and sent it to Gura Barza.¹⁷ [...] I was lucky because I always nurtured good relationships with collaborators and friends, more or less friends, throughout the

enterprises,” which thus came under the administration of the Romanian state. The State Committee for Planning was created as a central institution whose main attribute was to manage the economy according to the objectives set by the party-state leadership. See: Mihaela Cristina Verzea, *Partidul Stat-structuri politice (1948-1965)*, Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2012, p. 369.

¹⁷ Because the town of Turda is relatively close to Brad, both located in the western part of Romania it did not make practical sense so send materials to Bucharest, in the eastern part of Romania, only to return them to Brad.

country and we used to barter! Like in the Stone Age! And I would make a phone call to Baia Mare. “Băi, Guș, can you provide me with X thing? “I have it.” And then I would go to him or he would send me, he would give me a, [for example] I would give him a bottle of X thing, trichloride of some kind, and he would give me a canister with ammonia.

[...]

Everything! ... in the last period ... before this [unclear] or whatever it was, revolution, ... the party ruled everything. Nothing could be moved [changed] not... you could not even move a guard from here to somewhere else without the Party's consent. [...] No [there were no conflicts with those from the party] because the directors did not have any say, so they could not start any conflicts [he laughs]. You could not open your mouth and say that you oppose the party, the party was in all things. [...] And of course you had to balance everything carefully ... to sometimes lie, to... We used to lie a lot regarding the plan, with... [...] One time I went out with Kiszely and with the head of planning, after a meeting with the Securitate officer in charge of the plant... There was a Securitate officer who came and... he did not really control us, but was [sometimes] asking different questions... [...] So what was the subject [of the meeting]? He gathered several of us who

had access to the [company's] data, the so called secret data. Meaning, quantities of ... Production data... With gold, silver, lead, copper, how much we achieved things like that. And he made a presentation on how to be careful to ... keep this data secret so that the Americans, or the hell knows who else had an interest in finding them, would not be able to access it. And after we left, this guy, Kiszely, said... Because I was with him and one other friend. He accepted, the poor guy was the head of production, he used to keep modifying plans [numbers], depending on how much of the plan we achieved. He would... Anyways, he [Kiszely] said: "Why did he do ... this for?" I said: "Well, so that the Americans don't find out." "Really?! Well if only they knew the real data, they would be so disappointed and confused!" [he laughs] Because the Americans [could] find the data that we used to report and was thus considered top secret. You know? Well, if they knew... the real data¹⁸

Blat, the importance of personal relations

One common element of the life stories collected with former miners at the Barza Mining company is their mentioning of the high importance personal relationships had in being able to have access to a better workplace and

¹⁸ Vela Nicolae, interview...

different goods and services. Blat¹⁹, as this practice was called in the Soviet Union, was a common characteristic to all Central and Eastern European Socialist regimes. Personal relationships were essential throughout the entire communist period, although this practice became more and more important in the last decade of the communist regime, in the context of the major economic crisis faced by the country at the time. Mr. Vela elaborates on this subject in regards to at least two distinct moments of his biography. The first one is his effort to get a job at the mining company even though he could not officially do so, given the repartition process set in place at the time for university graduates.

I did not come [here] with an official delegation. I was delegated... How did it work? I don't think you know how delegations were made. Representatives from different factories throughout the country were waiting for [the candidates] in a room and the candidates would go there [to receive official appointments]. And I was determined to come home, although you could not go [where you wanted] you had to go where you were assigned to.²⁰

¹⁹ Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, passim; For an analysis of the Romanian case see: Vlad Onaciu, *Societatea Penuriei; Comunismul românesc și lipsurile sale. Muncitorii din Cluj în anii '60 și '70*, PhD diss. Babeș Bolyai University, Cluj Napoca, 2017, p. 238.

²⁰ Vela Nicolae, interview...

At the repartition process Mr. Vela did not manage to get appointed near Brad but at another enterprise in the same County, at Baru Mare. However, he never went to work there and returned home determined to be employed at Barza. Given that he did not return with an official appointment he went to ask for help from the Company's director who initially refused to help him. However, he was helped by an influential syndicate leader, well connected to people from the highest echelons of the party.

I don't know, he [the director] wasn't in good spirits at that time and was not very happy to see me and said: "Well boy, if you don't have an official delegation ... [I can't hire you]. And I left very disheartened but I met with [...] Dărăbanț. [...] He was an important person. He was in... The syndicate at the time was called "The General Confederation of Labor" and he was good friends with the person who would eventually take Gheorghiu Dej's place. [...] Gheorghe Apostol. [...] And he asked me: "Why are you so upset?" And I said: "Look, these people do not want to hire me here [at the company]. "Come with me." I went with him to his office, he picked up the phone, he didn't even greet [the director]: "Aurele!" He was talking to the general director. He asked: "How many "boctări" [informal for guards] do you have at the processing plant?" I don't know what he responded. "You know what? Fire two or

three boctări from there since they don't do anything [important] at all and hire this kid.” And poc! [he hanged up] He said: “Tomorrow you go see him.” I went and that was all. [he laughs]²¹

The second time Mr. Vela mentions the importance of informal relations is when he, similar to other interviewees, describes the various survival strategies Romanian citizens had to employ in the context of the shortage of food and consumer goods during the 1980. For example, he remembers how one could deal with the food shortage at the time by making connections throughout the villages surrounding Brad in order to illegally buy veal.²² He explains that it was possible to do so because of the complicity of local authorities who were more interested in negotiating their place in the local community than blindly enforcing central party directives.

Unrealized life paths

An oral history interview presupposes collaboration and a constant negotiation between the interviewee and the researcher. In the creative effort of constructing his life-story narration Mr. Vela found it essential to talk not only about his activity at the factory but also about the period he spent as a student in Timișoara, and later in Turda, emphasizing in particular his lifelong love for classical music and his membership in a student ensemble /band

²¹ Vela Nicolae, interview...

²² Sacrificing calves for personal consumption was forbidden under Decree No. 94/ March 28, 1983 “On reporting livestock, butchering and commercialization of cows and horses.”

even though he was well aware of our project's research goals - "But I waste your time with these stories of mine..." Assuring the interviewee of our interest to find out about all the aspects of his experience during communism, we discovered that his account, which in a way resembles an uchronic²³ description of "how his life could have been" provided us with a rich account of students/ youth life during communism.

The student bands were one of the way in which the youth could spend their fee "dopolavoro"²⁴ time during communism. Of course, they were closely supervised by state authorities, the communist youth organization in particular, to ensure the ideological correctness of their activities. However, the interviewee did not insist on this aspect and saw his involvement in a student band as a means to further his passion for music and interact with several of his colleagues, some of whom eventually became important figures in the classical music scene in Romania. On the contrary, he presents the time as a student as an unruly period of his youth when, because of a disagreement with a member of the Union of the Communist Youth, among other problems he head, he lost his scholarship and eventually had to repeat one year. He

²³ I borrowed the concept, although it does not entirely fit my analysis, from Alessandro Portelli who researched what he described as "uchronic dreams" of the Italian working class. Uchronia is a concept used in science-fiction literary criticism defined as "the amazing theme in which the author imagines what would have happened if a certain historical event had not taken place."; Alessandro Portelli, "Uchronic dreams...

²⁴ Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory. The cultural experience of the Turin working class*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, passim.

remembers how they, as a student band, participated at different contests at that time and even had a cassette with recordings. The leader of the group was Peter Oschanitzky who later worked at the State Philharmonic in Timișoara and was the brother of the well-known Romanian jazz player Richard [Ricky] Oschanitzky. Another member of the group was Dorin Teodorescu who eventually became the lead singer at the Operetta Theatre in Bucharest. Although, as I mentioned, the narrator takes great pride in his career as a chemist at Barza Mining Company he finished his description of his times as a musician by narrating an episode which might have led him into a musical career if he took slightly different decisions at that time.

In the second year [at the Polytechnic] we had to go to a student contest in Bucharest with the student cultural house. And I ... I did not go because I started a relationship with a colleague and went home to present her to my parents. [...] And Dorin [Teodorescu] went. He told me afterwards: “You were such a fool for not coming because they did not have candidates at the music school for singers this year!” And they took him. The president of the committee for the student contest was a composer, Gheorghe Danga, who was also the dean of the music school. And he said [to Dorin Teodorescu] “Boy, don’t you want to join the music school?” And Dorin said, he was very direct. “The hell I’ll come, I barely managed

to finish two years at the Polytechnic in there year's time..." And he said: "Well, no, you'll enroll in the second year." [...] "Then I agree." He eventually became the lead singer at the Operetta Theatre in Bucharest..."²⁵

Conclusions

Mr. Vela testimony provides a personal description of his life during the communist period which encompasses both several shared themes among former workers at the Barza Mining Company as well as more personal depictions of the time. The testimony of a former engineer working at the mines processing plant, just like those of miners, which provide more detailed descriptions of the work underground, are invaluable primarily for their subjective character. As shown above, besides providing an account of the technological process of gold exploitation [which, for example, is generally presented in more detail in specialized academic works] he provides rich descriptions of his subjective experience of the plant/mine during communism: the fear, the excitement, the noise, the smell, the negotiations with party-state representatives and so on. Mr. Vela's testimony confirms yet again the ability of the oral history research methodology to "tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."²⁶

²⁵ Vela Nicolae, interview...

²⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *What Makes Oral History Different*, in *Alessandro Portelli, The Death of Luigi Transtulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1991, p. 50.

Varia – Oral History Interview

Diana-Alexandra Nistor

A Story of a Century. War, Peace and the Everyday Life of a Roma War Veteran in Transylvania

Abstract: A particular concept of the image of Roma communities is that of marginality. While strengthened by many exceptions, the rule of being located on the outskirts of settlements remains a reality. This is how the perception of a small Roma community settled nearby villages and towns appear as a given or as an “inheritance” from the past. The great events of the twentieth century passed over and marked both center and periphery. The research tackled the stories of periphery, the manner in which they recall the facts that happened in the center and the events everybody underwent. In this respect, the paper aims at encountering history within the stories of a Roma war veteran, outlining his ordinary peripheral life in Petelea, a former Saxon village in Transylvania. His stories recall the Roma community living there during the interwar period, the Second World War and the communist years, not necessarily chronologically, but revealing a story of sameness, and emphasizing collective experiences. Being enrolled in the Hungarian and then in the German army, the interviewee described the course of the

Second World War, as he saw and understood it, his duties and experiences as an ordinary soldier. The questions to be answered in the paper are the following: Are histories of periphery revealing a different history? How can Roma life stories be linked to the Romanian history of the WW2? How are war experiences narrated and perceived by Roma in Transylvania? – Are they different from the other villagers?

Key words: oral history, Roma, World War Two, Transylvania, autobiography, mental map

By analyzing the daily life of Roma communities in Transylvania during the communist regime one could observe that despite the peripheralization of the Roma population present in the historiography, there were several situations in which Roma lived in the center – there is registered a fluctuating relationship between the Roma communities and center/ periphery they lived. The communist state's policy pursued a cultural and ethnic assimilation of the Roma, considering that they could have been “civilized” by giving up to their cultural heritage.¹ The rejection of Roma was manifested through the systematic absence of the term “Roma” in the public discourse of the regime. However, the state authorities and the Communist Party representatives drew up numerous

¹ Viorel Achim, *Țigani în istoria României*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1998, p. 162.

reports, notes and studies on the situation of the Roma minority, revealing an overall picture of the Roma communities' experiences within several main coordinates, such as: social marginality, the integration into the Romanian society, as well as their collaboration or opposition towards the communist regime. Actions undertaken by the communist regime aiming to solve the "Gypsy problem" addressed only the social agenda and completely erased its cultural dimension. Thus, the lack of specific programs designed for the immediate needs of Roma communities and their cultural characteristics, favored the perpetuation of inequalities and generated physical and geographic marginalization which at its turn resulted in negative prejudices and stereotypes among the non-Roma. In addition, the Roma were often considered "social parasites" who frequently came in conflict with the Militia and/ or the local authorities not only on the bases of crimes but also because they were not employed or because they practiced crafts without authorizations.

Roma living in Romania during the communist regime were to be "Romanianized" since the Roma identity was assimilated to a culture of poverty and underdevelopment.² However, multiple examples demonstrate that Roma situation in Transylvania was different. In this region, during the communist period, the Roma population was living on the edge and/ or in the center of settlements inhabited by different "cohabiting nationalities."³ Hungarian, Romanian or/ and Saxon

² Emmanuelle Pons, *Țigani din România. O minoritate în tranziție*, Editura Compania, București, 1999, p. 11.

³ "Romania has recognized the Roma as a national minority in 1990. During the communist period the Roma did not have this status,

population. Under these circumstances, although the communist regime's policy aimed at homogenizing⁴ and implicitly "Romanianizing" the Roma minority, most Roma in Transylvania have assimilated social, ethno-cultural and religious values of the majority near/ with whom they lived. The validation of this statement is supported by several oral history interviews with the Roma in rural and urban areas in Transylvania with phrases such as: "we've been Romanianized" (Romanian: "ne-am romanizat"), "we have learned a lot from the Saxons" (Romanian: "ne-am dat după sași," "am învățat multe de la sași"), "their [the Saxon] church remained ours," "we dressed and behaved like Romanians in the village," "we speak Hungarian as well as Hungarians" etc. Thereby, "memory becomes more important in its social aspect than as an individual phenomenon. By placing an individual as a member of a community, he assimilates memory schemes. Each community holds a different collective memory that is transmitted and reproduced among its

although they numbered a large population, and in the National Censuses they were registered as an independent ethnic group. After August 23, 1944, the Roma were considered as a marginal social category, not an ethnic minority. Legislation on Minorities (Statute of Nationalities adopted on February 6, 1945) referred only at 'traditional' minorities such as: Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, etc., excluding the Roma," Viorel Achim, "Romii din Romania (1948-1949)" in *Revista istorică*, XXI, 2010, no. 5–6, p. 451.

⁴ Although this "homogenization" targeted the entire Romanian society, seeking its transformation into a "multilaterally developed socialist society," implicitly the concept embraced a larger project of the gradual assimilation of all cohabiting nationalities.

members, from one generation to another one.”⁵ In this sense, recorded oral history interviews play a powerful role “for discovering, exploring, and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory – how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them.”⁶ The oral history interviews recorded during the fieldwork campaigns within the Roma communities in Transylvania emphasize several very interesting accounts on Roma everyday life in Transylvania in *longue durée*: throughout the interwar period, the years of the Second World War, the communist decades and the post-1989 years.

The present essay aims at emphasizing the relationship between the periphery and the center by bringing into question a “lived history” of a Roma interviewee in Transylvania. Histories recalled within this interview are stories from the periphery, histories of discrimination and marginalization and, at the same time, histories of integration and acculturation. In this sense, the following paragraphs address the relation between Roma communities (acknowledged as periphery) and the major historical events of the 20th century (understood as center) by analyzing how “a single life story relates to a broader and shared pattern of culture which makes this story

⁵ Ionuț Costea, *Lazăr de la Rusca. Mitbiografia în comunism și postsocialism*, Editura Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, pp. 40-41.

⁶ Alistair Thomson, *Fifty years on: An international perspective on oral history*, *The Journal of American History*, September 1998.

representative”⁷ as well as the verbal construction of the histories, the unique way in which the interviewee “gave a narrative form to his life.”⁸ The life story to be discussed is that of Augustin Poțo, a 93 years old Roma war veteran interviewed during the fieldwork campaign in the village of Petelea, Mureș County. The interview was recorded during three meetings and represents one of the most complex interviews the team⁹ has recorded in Transylvania.¹⁰ The interviewee lived together with his daughter, in a room in the back of a brick house that once belonged to a Saxon family. Augustin Poțo had certainly thought about his

⁷ Alessandro Portelli, *The death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories. Form and meaning in Oral history*, State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 117.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ The research leading to these results has received funding from EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 under the project contract no. 14SEE/30.06.2014, “Untold Story. An Oral History of the Roma people in Romania”; Beneficiary Institution: Babeș-Bolyai University, Oral History Institute, Cluj-Napoca. Within this project, a team of doctoral and postdoctoral students, young scholars and senior researchers with historical, sociological and anthropological backgrounds worked together in order to provide a complex image of the Roma communities’ past and present in Romania. There have been recorded a number of 623 interviews within different Roma communities in Romania.

¹⁰ The recording is about 5 hours long of audio recording and 3 hours of audio and video recording, summing up 116 typewritten pages. The first time I interviewed Poțo Augustin I decided to interrupt the interview after about two hours although he did not show any signs of fatigue, and decided to go the next day and continue. The next month, together with the project team we decided to go again to Mr. Poțo in order to videotape the interview. He agreed to receive us and he told us that he would think about what he was going to tell us given that he did not want to “steal our time with no reason” (Augustin Poțo).

stories for a long time, and had told them over and over but never as a coherent whole. Thus, the interviews gave him the chance to connect his stories into a life story of a century. The interviewee showed himself thrilled by the fact that someone was interested in his “old stories”: “I’m so happy you came. I kept trying to tell them [the family] how much I suffered during the war, but they laugh at me. I frequently wondered who would be interested in these stories nowadays.”¹¹

The interview captures some of the most important episodes of the interviewee’s life. A remarkable fact is that Augustin Poțo recalled, with little interventions (guiding questions), the historical events he lived, outlining his autobiography, most of the times in a chronological manner, and highlighting the participants and their and/ or his implications within different situations. The interviewee has shown an incredible power of remembrance and offered plenty of details in regard to situations that marked his everyday life – he could have spoken for hours about his experience and his family experiences during the Second World War – the manner in which he built his speech was absolutely fascinating, therefore, as interviewers, we have seldom interfered with questions or comments. Moreover, Augustin Poțo presented a lived history of a period of one and a half century in the village of Petelea in Transylvania, encompassing the experiences his family and the Roma community underwent during the First and the Second World War. He managed to create the image of the second part of the nineteenth century by

¹¹ Augustin Poțo, interview by the author, audio file, no. 1407, Oral History Institute Archives, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, (further OHIA), Petelea, Mureș County, August 18, 2015.

revitalizing the stories of his father and his grandparents – thus, he recalled diseases from the nineteenth century, the post-World War I land reform, the most common occupations the Roma had in the village of Petelea at the beginning of the 20th century, the languages spoken by the Roma community in the Saxon village at the periphery of which they lived or about the relationships with the Saxon population during the interwar period, the Jewish community in the village and the atrocities they have encountered during the Second World War, the communist period and the post 1989 years. One of the most conspicuous memories the interviewee recalled was that of the *lived war* (The Second World War). He described in great details events he had seen and lived “not so long ago”: causes of the war on the territory of Transylvania, the Vienna Award and the impact it had on the territory of North-Western Transylvania, the premilitary period and the recruitments managed by the Hungarian army, his brother’s death on the front, his work on the trenches, the August 1944 events, the experience in Poland, the traumatic memory of the front and, finally, the end of the war with the withdrawal from Czechoslovakia and the road back home to the village of Petelea. Augustin Poțo referred to the manner in which German soldiers talked about the Russian army, and his memories about both Russian and German armies. He remembered the conditions on the front: food, accommodation and the relationships with his comrades and officers. One of the episodes he highlighted the most was the one about the road back home after losing the war and the manner in which he found himself in the situation of juggling with his identity to win his freedom from the advancing Russian army. Another relevant

sequence the interviewee recalled was the post-war years: the post-war famine, the first years of the communist regime, the establishment of the Collective Farms, Militia's controls in the village, the allocation of the Saxon houses in the village etc.

The oral history interview becomes very useful in reconstructing and, in patches, completing the history of a village, a community, a family, an event or a political regime. Considering Augustin Poțo's life stories, a twofold analysis could be employed: firstly, regarding the idea of space as housing/ dwelling of the Roma community living in the village of Petelea where the interviewee lives, and secondly regarding the idea of time and how the interviewee spoke about different events he witnessed during the interwar period, the Second World War and the communist years, encompassing both the individual and the collective experiences he remembered. In this connection, the present analysis aims at answering to the following research questions: are histories of periphery revealing a different history? How can Augustin Poțo's life stories be linked to the Romanian history of the interwar period, the World War II and the communist times? Are war experiences narrated by Augustin Poțo different from the ones recalled by the non-Roma?

Among the stories Augustin Poțo recalled during the interviews, one could easily notice the importance the interviewee gave to different *places* he transposed himself during the process of remembrance. He used a *mental map* of his experiences in order to narrate details considered to be essential to the listener for understanding the narrative form of those lived realities. For instance, when he described "the train ride to the war" he remembered the

villages on the road, the stops they have made, the moment the train wagons split and the directions towards the battlefield, the places where they dug the trenches, the road to Czechoslovakia, the arms factory in Brno, the withdrawal of the German army (the names of different places in Czechoslovakia) and the way back from the war etc.

They brought us to Sighet. In Sighet the train split: they went right towards the battlefield and we turned left. We went to Vişeu, Borşa, Prislop - these are some of the places we've passed through. [...] There were mountains, rocks! We couldn't dig [the trenches] at all! Stone! No trees, no grass was growing there! In Prislop, there were shelters since the First World War in 1914. They were already carved in stone. I remember we just cleaned them and dig others because they were not enough.¹²

There was heavy snow on the road in Czechoslovakia, the roads were covered in asphalt concrete! There's where I saw asphalt for the first time! And the horses slipped, imagine, they slipped like they were skiing! I remember we put screws on the horseshoes so they would not slip. [...] When the war ended, I came home. I saw in Czechoslovakia such beautiful houses! I remember I used to

¹² Augustin Poţo, *interview...*

tell myself: ‘If I ever come back home to Petelea, I’ll work until I manage to build a beautiful house such as the ones in Czechoslovakia!’¹³

For the years preceding the Second World War, the interviewee described a *place* he considered relevant to understand the stories about the interwar period and the craft his family was performing in the village. As he recalled, his family performed blacksmithing, which was at the time one of the most profitable profession. Thanks to it, they could at some point move closer to the center of the village, after the end of the Second World War when many Saxons left the village.

At that time, Roma in Petelea lived at the periphery of the village... it was a Saxon village. The Roma were good people, but they did not have the opportunity to work anywhere. Most of them were day labors here in the village. [...] I remember I’ve learnt the craft from my old man. He was a blacksmith. We were three brothers and we’ve all learnt this profession. It was such a good profession back then! A profitable one! People would have paid you immediately after you’ve finished the work, and back then people had many animals... during the winter people would bring cows and horses to our

¹³ *Ibidem.*

farriery, otherwise it would have slipped on the ice and snow!¹⁴

After the end of the Second World War in Transylvania many Roma families moved permanently or for a period of time in Saxon houses. Augustin Poțo remembered that during the interwar period his brother moved into a Saxon house and worked for a Saxon family who hired him as a blacksmith – this was, as the interviewee stated, a fact worthy of praise among the Roma community. According to Augustin Poțo, the appreciation given by a Saxon family to a Roma family was very uncommon back in the interwar years.¹⁵ Immediately after the end of the Second World War, Roma families or poor Romanian families moved into some abandoned Saxon houses. Augustin Poțo remembered the times when the mayor and the orthodox priest in the village of Petelea have allocated the empty Saxon houses to Romanians, and he added that the Roma were too afraid to take them, thinking that Saxons were to come back at some point.

Immediately after the war, my brother moved in the center of the village – a Saxon man

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ Augustin Poțo's narratives frequently encompassed paragraphs regarding the good relationships he and his family had with *the Others* (the Saxon majority during the interwar period, the Romanian majority during the post-war period and also with the Hungarians in the village). The interview recorded plenty details regarding his very close relationship with a Romanian doctor in the city of Tg. Mureș, who helped him with various problems during the post-war years and who frequently visited his family in Petelea, pointing out that during his visits he would very much appreciate the food his wife cooked.

offered him a house next to his in exchange of the work my brother did as a blacksmith. This Saxon man had many buffaloes and plenty of land. He needed his own blacksmith. So, my brother lived there with his wife, his mother in law and the children. I remember he stayed quite a long period of time there. He was lucky indeed.¹⁶

Thus, the interviewee's life stories display his and the Roma community good relationships with the majority in the village (be it Saxon, Romanian or Hungarian). For instance, when asked about the language the Roma speak/spoke in the village, he indicated instances in which Roma used different languages:

We speak Romani. But, of course, I know Romanian language, we are able to use our language just among us: anywhere we go we need to speak Romanian – if we didn't speak Romanian the Romanians wouldn't be nice to us. I didn't have the chance to learn German, the Saxons left the village during the Second World War. But my brothers, they knew it. They worked for the Saxons. [...] I also speak Hungarian; I know it well. I remember the moment the Hungarians came in the village [at the beginning of the WWII]: they took us in order to complete the paramilitary training: all the boys over the

¹⁶ Augustin Poțo, interview...

age of sixteen were camped and trained in the city [Tg. Mureș] – so I learnt Hungarian.”¹⁷

In order to emphasize the narrative construction of Augustin Poțo's memories, it is interesting to investigate his testimonies in terms of *time* and the manner in which he placed the events on a timescale in his life. In this sense, oral historian Alessandro Portelli raised the issue of the manner in which “historians frequently strive for a linear and chronological testimony while the speakers are often interested in pursuing and gathering together bundles of meaning, relationships and themes, across the linear span of their lifetimes”¹⁸. Therefore, historians are interested in reconstructing the past and the narrators are interested in projecting an image of the same past – Augustin Poțo's testimony is not always chronological, but it brought forward facts layered with feelings and perceptions, facts which become part of an understanding process of “the past as it happened.” Even though the interview did not have a chronological line, the interviewee pointed out the period he was speaking about each time.¹⁹ His most coherent story in terms of chronology was the one about the Second World War, because it was the most significant experience which marked his existence. The narratives

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Alessandro Portelli, *The death of Luigi Trastulli...*, p. 63.

¹⁹ Augustin Poțo apologized (several times during the interview) for mixing episodes of his life – he told the facts as he remembered them, and the story followed its course, linking episodes emphasizing different instances in his life: the interview begun with his childhood, then suddenly highlighted facts that his father and grandfather told him about their youth and the events which took place in Petelea during the 1800.

about the war contain substantial shifts in the “velocity” of narration (the ratio between the duration of the events described and the duration of the narration). The interviewee recounted in a few words experiences which lasted a long time, and dwelled at length on brief episodes, stressing their importance. Augustin Poțo pointed out the most important events he noticed during the war and explained them in details. For instance, he did not know the historical causes of the Second World War but he tried to express the reasons for which he understood it started. Another example is the “the train ride to the war” which is portrayed as a long, almost endless episode: the interviewee remembered spending about six months on the road, crowded into train wagons, time during which he recalled a number of events such as a raid of Russian planes bombing the train or the moment in which the train got out of order.

By 1938 or 1939 Hungarians and Romanians fought a lot over territories. The Hungarians wanted to take Transylvania, and the Romanians didn't approve. Yes, there were great disagreements between them. The border guards, Romanians and Hungarians, clashed many times at the borders. They didn't get along, Hungarians wanted to take Ardealul [Transylvania]. Somehow, once, they had Transylvania, but that was a very long time ago! So, the Hungarians thought it was theirs. In 1940 the Germans called the Romanians and the Hungarians in a meeting and told them: ‘Transylvania is neither yours,

nor yours, it's mine! And when we all together finish the war, I'll divide it to you both. By that time its territory will increase: I'll take land from your neighbors and give you more!' Therefore, they agreed on the terms, so the Hungarians came to Transylvania. Romanians had to leave to Moldova where their country was. Hungarians have ruled here for four years.²⁰ We left in March, and sometimes in August we arrived at the front. [...] They put us in the wagons of a freight train. We were stuck there in small wagons, not like the ones you can see nowadays! Forty soldiers in a wagon! You could not sit down. No, we stood up! There was lack of water... we travelled so much without a drop of water.²¹

On the other hand, the interviewee remembered with precision the years and months different events took place: when he did not remember exactly the day, he linked the events with the seasons in which they took place. Thus, he outlined lived histories by employing a “*short time*” – a personal time represented by temporal connectors such as: “during autumn,” “when the grapes were good,” “in the morning,” “it was heavily snowing”; as well as a “*large time*” – a historical irreversible time, marked by dates, years, periods of time: “in 1945 on May 9,” “in 1940.”

²⁰ Augustin Poțo, interview...

²¹ *Ibidem*

We walked throughout Czechoslovakia until the war ended. In 1945, on May 9 the war ended. I was there! I didn't know where to go and what to do. [...] The Russians caught us in Czechoslovakia, in Brno. [...] It was Sunday, May 1945. Sunday... it was Sunday morning. The foreman came to me and said: 'Gusti [Augustin], this is it. The Russians arrived, they are two kilometers away, the Americans three kilometers away and we [the German army] are here!'²²

We arrived there [Czechoslovakia] when the grapes were good, when the wine began to boil. In October, it must have been October. We stayed in a Czechoslovakian village until the end of the war. In 1945, on May 9 the war ended. I was there and I did not know where to go.²³

The Hungarians came to Ardeal [Transylvania], they came around the Christian feast day of Pentecost [Romanian: Rusalii]. Well, I know it was around the feast of Pentecost when they came because, here in the village, we had a tradition: when the feast of Pentecost was approaching, we were allowed to go to the woods and cut woods with the permission of the forester. We cut

²² *Ibidem*

²³ *Ibidem*

them this thick! We used to carry home linden branches and put them at the gates. Three or four branches. This was the tradition. On the occasion of the feast of Pentecost, we carried wood from the forest. This was the moment when the Hungarians came in!²⁴

Augustin Poțo's life story reveals histories of periphery which several times intersect the center: the histories of an unknown soldier during the Second World War, the everyday life of a peripheral Roma community in the village of Petelea over a century of changes in terms of administration, political regimes, and population. Through the oral history interviews with Augustin Poțo, it can be reconstructed, beyond the individual biography, the history of his family and that of the Roma community in the village of Petelea as well as the history of its inhabitants, the localities where the interviewee was camped during the World War II and the lives of the communities in those localities, all these at the intersection with the great events of the twentieth century and with the dominant narratives about the past. The interviewee's life story is similar in many respects to those of the Romanians or Hungarians who participated at the Second World War, however it is important to mention that although these experiences of the war are similar, the interviewee's feelings and impressions are unique and are worthy of being recorded – it should be taken into account that Augustin Poțo is a man born in 1923 in the village of Petelea in Transylvania, with

²⁴ *Ibidem.*

elementary education (four grades). Although the “micro memory” of data and places is sometimes inaccurate, the “macro memory” of impressions and consequences is instead as truthful as it can be, considering of course the fact that it is articulated on its own subjectivity. In this connection, the relationship between the interviewee’s biography and the great events of the last century show how the interviewee relates to history and interprets it. Eventually, his life and his family’s life can be used to describe the everyday life within a village in Transylvania during the twentieth century. “Apparently, oral history might be a challenge or a way out of the cage of the master historical narrative, because it provides a voice to those not belonging to the dominant group, but it is still highly conditioned by the limits imposed by the Roma-non-Roma dialogue that is *the Other* speaking to *Us*.”²⁵ The interview with Augustin Poțo is standing as a solid example of this “way out of the cage of the master historical narrative,” emphasizing his rather modest life within the periphery of a village which represented in the interviewee’s interpretation “the center” of the Roma community – the social space which offered himself, his family and the Roma community stability and comfort despite all historical events which interposed in different moments of their lives.

²⁵ Lavinia S. Stan, “Sharing a broken umbrella. Roma life-stories in communist Romania,” in *Anuarul de Istorie Orala*, No. XVI, Editura Argonaut, Presa Universitara Clujeana, Cluj-Napoca, 2015, p. 32.

Book Reviews

**Book Review: Ioan Stanomir, *La Centenar. Recitind secolul României Mari*,
Ed. Humanitas, București, 2018, 208 p.**

Introduction

Ioan Stanomir is a Romanian literary critic, essayist and political scientist. He is a professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Bucharest, known for his research on constitutionalism, conservatism and cultural studies. He is known for works such as *Libertate, lege si drept. O istorie a constituționalismului românesc*, published at Polirom Publishing House in 2005 or *Spiritul conservator - De la Barbu Catargiu la Nicolae Iorga*, Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2008, as well as for other collective works and anthologies. In 2018, Ioan Stanomir published the book *La Centenar. Recitind secolul României Mari* at Humanitas Publishing House, a work intended for the general public.

The structure of the book

Stanomir's book has 206 pages and six chapters which are divided in subchapters. However, neither the chapters nor the subchapters are numbered. This detail may be insignificant to many, but it points out that this work was not meant to be a systematic academic book, but rather an easy-to-read essay. There are no footnotes included in the narrative. Given the author's interest in novels and literature, we can easily regard his work as an historical essay.

The chapters are dealing with the period between 1918-2018, from Ion I.C. Brătianu to Liviu Dragnea and Viorica Dăncilă. Even the titles of each chapter enhance the informal style of writing. They suggest a literary and a philosophical approach on each historical event. Here are some examples: *The return from heaven*, *The Purgatory*, *The Snake Egg*, *The Great River gathers its waters* etc. Stanomir begins his argumentation with an overview of World War I which marked the beginning of a new epoch. The symptoms of this new world were: the disappearance of the belief in progress, the loss of innocence, the abandonment of individualism in favour of collectivism, the challenge of constitutionalism and the crisis of democracy. The interwar years are considered as a 'preparation for the apocalypse.'¹ The Great War enshrines the emergence of a new enemy: the political religion - a fusion of faith, mythology, political romanticism and collectivism. Totalitarian regimes become a guide to an alternative humanity and to a new anthropological settlement. Greater Romania is developing in this socio-political context, which is gradually adopting certain practices that will prove to be fatal to it.

Methodology and writing perspective

In his work Ioan Stanomir develops a conservative writing perspective. To better understand this book, I propose a brief contextualization of this assessment. From the *Preface* of the book, the author inserts a liberal-conservative perspective in the reading of the twentieth

¹ Ioan Stanomir, *La Centenar. Recitind secolul României Mari*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2018, pp. 12-13.

century. The author's motivation lies in his desire to go against the general current of nationalist enthusiasm that prevails in the public discourse to this day. Stanomir proposes the concept of 'patriotic lucidity', which implies that Romanian past had both good and bad parts so our mission is to critically consider every aspect of it.

Although paradoxically, the liberal-conservative concept has been used since his work *Junismul și pasiunea moderației*, where he places Junimea Literary Society under the sign of legalism, constitutionalism, moderation, prudence and individual freedom². This doctrinaire concept became recurrent in his writings and it expresses an archetypal understanding of his ideal version of democracy.

To better understand the general perspective of this book, it is necessary to capture the broad significance of liberal-conservatism: Stanomir is pursuing the ideas of American (Russell Kirk, Robert Nisbet) and English (Edmund Burke) Conservatives. In his view, conservatism is opposed to any social experiment in the name of race or class, history or progress. He refuses the 'cosmogonic ambitions' of the totalitarian regimes, which have distorted reality in the name of ideology. In the words of Stuart Hughes, we can say that this vision is 'an ideology without ideology'; it is in fact the denial of ideology. Given the fact that this essay was predominantly written in a literary and philosophical manner, Stanomir may fall into his own trap by rejecting any doctrine while building another one at the same time.

² See Ioan Stanomir, *Junismul și pasiunea moderației*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2013.

In line with a contemporary vision of American conservatism, Stanomir attributes some deficiencies of the Romanian state due to its 'paternalistic' character throughout the century, denying citizens the construction of intermediary institutions to be placed in the civil society. Another permanence on display is the need for 'authentic decentralization', which would have stimulated the local economic, cultural, political potential and would have resulted in greater autonomy in relation with the centre. Excessive centralization is not considered a more efficient coordination of the society, but an addiction.

Main arguments

There are daring premises on which the argumentation begins: the creation of the world, the anthropological creation of the new man and the re-establishment are actions put into practice by totalitarian ideologies. Stanomir suggests that judging a man based on ideology, and not on reality is a very dangerous process. The author denies the preponderance of social ideas and advocates for constitutional legalism. He considers the laws of a country to be the only 'abstract ideas' beyond which no political force is allowed to pass. The overcoming of this constitutional framework is never justified, especially if it is performed by a militant ideological state such as the communist regime. Stanomir's effort is part of a larger process of recovering the Romanian past, in the context of celebrating the Centenary of the Great Union of 1918. The value of the book and the subject itself are undeniably of great importance for the Romanian society. Personally, I consider this book to be an addition to historiography, given that the nationalist key for

interpreting the past is exceeded. New historical methodologies are assimilated from sociology, anthropology, the history of mentalities and of the imaginary. The author succeeded to form an intellectual history synthesis of modern Romania.

The essay starts with the text of the Resolution of Alba Iulia, a document made on the compromise of all political parties and of religious concordance between confessions, which was based on ‘human dignity, freedom, pluralism, minority rights and constitutionalism’³. However, following the Resolution programme the Romanian authorities have not implemented those commitments. Throughout the book Stanomir analyses how the state failed to implement the long-awaited democratic reforms. This is the first direction of argument.

The second line of argument is the centralization of the state. Ioan Stanomir notes that the Great Union has preserved the administrative centralization of the French inspiration from 1859. He states that the capital manifested hostility towards an authentic decentralization, which can be reflected in the marginalization of Moldova. From an administrative point of view, Greater Romania was nothing more but the Old Kingdom extended in the new territories⁴. The regionalization idea was suspected for being of foreign influence. The universal vote implemented after World War I brought a wider electoral participation in the political sphere, but the crisis of democracy gave birth to extreme political movements: communism, on the one hand, and nationalism, on the other.

³ Ioan Stanomir, *La Centenar*, p. 34.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

I will briefly present how Stanomir perceives radicalization, according to his point of view: Nazism and fascism ideologically divided individuals on the basis of race or class. The author argues that within any collectivist ideology the individual exists only as part of a larger mechanism that can annihilate the individual without any hesitation. In fact, the 'official' justification of the crime was only for political legitimation. Behind the curtain, totalitarian regimes devised social plans that were to restructure and attract the forces of society. Ioan Stanomir tried to demonstrate historical facts based on their doctrinal-philosophical justification, although between ideology and the historical reality there is a wider and a more polychromatic range of human motivations.

He then makes the transitions to political religion and Romania's totalitarian regimes. The Legionary Movement is considered to be the 'syndrome of collective delirium and madness', an eschatological and millennialist political religion that 'parasitizes Christianity through the political manifestation of resentment'⁵. Antonescu's regime supported the biopolitical state and took actions against racial communities, being guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity. The author's criticism reaches its climax in the two chapters dedicated to the communist regime, the political religion that has implemented its program by seizing power, destroying the old local solidarities, removing the monarchy, imprisoning the contesting elements, as well as applying the Marxist principles of progress, equality, social justice, industrialization, nationalization, centralization and other social

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 72-73.

engineerings. In short, the communist utopia marks the preponderance of the abstract idea in justifying reality. The intellectuals reduced to silence remained ‘inner emigration’, as the author called it.

Stanomir shows how the political system of the interwar Romania was working. In my opinion, some of his analyses are anachronic. For example, he argues that "Bratienismul" (in regards to The National Liberal Party most influential family) cannot be claimed from the classical liberalism of the nineteenth century because the Romanian liberal state was ‘alien from authentic competition, economic pluralism and consent’⁶. State intervention further encouraged the ‘nationalist monopoly’ and damaged the civil society. Firstly, it is necessary to point out that the 19th century classical liberalism from The Great Britain was not represented in similar terms in the Romanian space neither from a doctrinal nor social point of view. The liberal doctrine was adapted by the Romanian intelligentsia to the local needs and developed differently in many aspects. Also, the social, cultural and economic basis of the Romanian liberals was distinct from that of the English liberals. Secondly, the idea of ‘civil society’ was gradually theorized only in the post-war period. Even the conservative discourse that calls for the strengthening of civilian institutions also stems from the post-war debate from the Anglo-American space. The use of the ‘civil society’ concept for the interwar period may appear to historians as an anachronism.

The paper ends with a brief image of the present political challenges: the danger of ‘neo-legionaries or

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

Ceaușist nationalists’, on the one hand, and the ‘politically-correct, anti-capitalist and anti-American radical left’, on the other hand. The rise of Putin, Erdogan or Viktor Orban suggests the authoritarian inclinations of the modern collective mind and, at the same time, a danger to the democratic order of Romania. In this context, Stanomir recommends the Romanian society to stand firm against ‘party nomenclature’, against ‘elites who maintain the order of privileges’, against corruption, autarchy, anti-westernism and, last but not least, against the state: ‘The enemy with whom he has this desperate struggle was the same, the state dominated by the single party, the state ready to abolish freedom, the state that suffocates, controls and represses those who choose to say ‘no’, the state that despises, humiliates, kneels, the state that discourages civility, preferring obedience’⁷.

We cannot go further without noticing that some arguments seeking to remove the state from any ideology are made from the perspective of another doctrine, the conservative one in this case. Stanomir’s analysis ends with post-communism. The present times must be read under the vision of what he called ‘patriotic lucidity’ which is meant to be a middle ground between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. The end of the paper contains a number of tips for the reader: the individual must support limited governance; he must show his attachment for the rule of law and he must defend his right to memory. The formation of a civil society is necessary to ‘rehabilitate the autonomy of the individual’.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

The distrust of the state is constant in Stanomir's work. The state is seen rather as a unitary doctrinal construction in all the past and present regimes of Romania (the state is corrupt, regardless of the regime) and less as a structure analysed in different historical periods and in continuous structural transformation. On the other hand, the author's attitude is somehow justified if we consider the effects that the anti-corruption protests of the years 2017-2018 and the abuses of the Gendarmerie from August 10, 2018 had in the public sphere. We know the attitude Mr. Stanomir took on social media and on TV against state corruption and political abuses. We must keep in mind that this essay was meant to be read by the general public. Every anti-state argument seems to be dominated by a protest speech and the quotation from the previous paragraph confirms the social mobilization purpose of the argument, that of strengthening the civic consciousness of the Romanian society.

Judgment of value

Making a brief judgment of value, Stanomir's line of narrative follows two main ideas - the state and the ideology. There are two entities that intertwine and mutually determine each other according to different time periods, so that their mixture manifested itself to the detriment of the rule of law. The tradition of state intervention which 'deprive the individual of his right' has made the author to plea for intermediary associations, where the central place is occupied by the civil society. By this approach, Stanomir introduces in Romanian historiography a perspective that goes beyond the nationalist debate of the past centuries. The paper certainly

presents itself as an addition to the debate on the Great Union from 1918. The new perspectives brought into discussion tend to broaden the analytical field of research so that Romanian historiography can integrate in major international debates and synchronize with them in terms of method.

La Centenar is rich in metaphors and has semantic consistency, being an in-depth cultural and intellectual analysis of a century of Romanian history. A less favourable aspect of the essay could be anachronism, the application of a contemporary analysis scheme to an old historical period, more precisely the transposition of the present mentality in a past foreign to such visions. The concepts developed during the post-war period cannot explain the historical realities from the interwar period. For example, 'human rights' is a concept which was differently understood in the inter-war period compared to the post-war period: it is important to establish what has changed throughout the evolution of the concept by analysing the ever-changing historical context. The same thing applies for state theories. The risk of anachronism is high in the case of radical polarization between the minimal state and the welfare state (the redistributive state), the two visions entering the field of the doctrinal debate much later in Europe and USA and much less in the Romania, considering the nature of the communist regime.

In the interwar period, while Nazism, Fascism and Communism seized the political power in the neighbour states of Romania, the financial crisis required the intervention of the state in the economy; nevertheless, the Romanian democracy has been gradually weakened due to the general crisis and due to ascension of totalitarian

regimes. In this context, it is almost impossible to impute the lack of decentralization. This political vision is rather a very modern and almost non-existent ‘crisis measure’ among the 1930s political elites, and is now considered beneficial only after the historical tragedy has been consumed. At that time, people were not thinking as we do now and they did not have the ‘big picture’ we acquired during a lot of study. The National Peasant Party’s project of decentralization was abandoned immediately after they came to power in 1928 due to the Great Depression. The same event could be perceived by the inter-war or post-war societies radically different from how we perceive it and explain it today. The authentic recovery of the past implies the reconstruction of the ‘cultural code’ of that epoch in order to transplant yourself not only in the broader context of the events, but in the very core of the mentality of the past. The social perception of a historical moment and the attitude it generated is often more important than the event itself. The risk of beginning the analysis from the effects of an event and not from its causes exposes the research to risk of teleology. Although the author tries to offer examples of decentralization plans belonging to intellectuals such as Aurel Popovici, George Grigorovici or Romul Boilă, their voices remained unanswered at the time and were rather insignificant for the administrative organization of Greater Romania. Beneficial or not, decentralization remains a chapter of counterfactual history in the Romanian past.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Ioan Stanomir's book is a necessary read for every historian and for any person in general,

being a good opportunity to overcome the fears, the resignation and the inertia of the present. The reader can meditate on a century of history, which, with ups and downs, is part of our condition. Recovering the memory and embracing the critical spirit are the imperatives of an era that believes to have reached the maturity of historical responsibility. Professor Ioan Stanomir's essay remains a reference book in the context of the debate held around the Centenary of the Great Union of 2018. Personally, I recommend it for the internal consistency of the concepts, for the unique character of approaching the 'current problems' of Romania, but also for the courage to verbalize all the emotional impulses of a society carried by the wave of freedom and democracy after four decades of historical darkness. Stanomir has the merit of transforming this historical essay into a true treatise of ontology, of a human necessity philosophy - the basic need of freedom without ideological restraint. It is a genuine cultural product carrying the role of a social catharsis

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