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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LAVINIA S. STAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 5

SÎNZIANA PREDA

AS YOUTH, WE HAVE TO LISTEN TO WHAT THE ELDERS TELL US!
EVEN IF WE DON'T LIKE IT. 9

IONELA BOGDAN

TALK IS NOT CHEAP: ADDRESSING PRONATALIST POLICIES
AMONG ROMANIAN ROMA WOMEN DURING THE COMMUNIST
REGIME 24

CĂLIN OLARIU

WE, TOO, WERE THERE! ROMA PEOPLE'S REMEMBRANCE OF THE
SOCIALIST CITYSPACE, MEMORY AND ORAL HISTORY 43

DIANA-ALEXANDRA NISTOR

BACK AND FORTH – CHANGE OF ADDRESS, CHANGE OF LIFE.
THE ROMA IN SAXON HOUSES: STATE POLICY OR
OPPORTUNITY? 71

LAVINIA S. STAN

GETTING BACK FROM HELL. STORIES OF ROMA REPATRIATION
FROM TRANSNISTRIA 116

ANDREEA IUSTINA TUZU

ORGANIZAȚII POLITICE ALE EXILULUI ROMÂNESC POSTBELIC.
STUDIU DE CAZ: CONSILIUL NAȚIONAL ROMÂN (1978-1989) 149

DRAGOȘ URSU

DEMONSTENE ANDRONESCU, MARTOR ȘI MEMORIALIST AL
REEDUCĂRII. STRATEGII DE SUPRAVIEȚUIRE SOCIO-
PROFESIONALĂ ȘI CULTURALĂ ÎN (POST) COMUNISM..... 187

DORIN-GABRIEL POP

SUSANNAH RADSTONE, KATHARINE HODGKIN (ED.), *REGIMES
OF MEMORY*, ROUTLEDGE, LONDRA,
NEW YORK, 2003, 224 P. 210

INTERVIEWEES' PHOTOGRAPHS 217

ROMA ORAL (HI)STORIES IN ROMANIA

LAVINIA S. STAN
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS¹

To paraphrase a famous oral historian, Alessandro Portelli, “a spectre is haunting the halls of the (Romanian) academy: the spectre of (Roma) oral history.”² For the academic community in Romania, this approach is a challenge, because the Roma issue was not a topic of interest for historians in Romania. The exception is a small group of researchers at the “Nicolae Iorga” Institute in Bucharest, led by Viorel Achim, whose publications are remarkable especially for the period up to the Second World War.³ The Roma, unlike other minorities in Romania, remained at the periphery of historians⁴ interest,

¹ The research leading to these results has received funding from the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009 - 2014 under the project contract no. 14SEE/30.06.2014, which is an initiative of the Oral History Institute, Faculty of History and Philosophy at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca and it is implemented in partnership with the University of Iceland in Reykjavik.

² Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991, p. 46.

³ For example, at the National Congress of Romanian Historians (25-28 August, 2016), this group of researchers led by Viorel Achim proposed a very interesting panel on the abolitionist movement in the Romanian Principalities. In spite of the excellent work done by the speakers, the interested public was rather limited which is symptomatic for the interest of the academic community for Roma topics.

⁴ Sociologists and anthropologists in the academic world have been more interested in the situation of Roma, see the projects developed at the Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca or Bucharest. Also, the Romanian Institute for

reflecting thus their positioning in the society. This marginalization explains partially the absence of the Roma from the Romanian master historical narrative about the past. Moreover, historians have not provided enough research and/or sources to disarm stereotypes and prejudices, and they did not approach the ethical dimension of responsibility in regards to the situation of the Roma in the past. I refer in particular to two different phenomena, i.e. the slavery and the Holocaust, occurring on Romanian territories where these forms of abusive behaviours were exerted by the majority on their Roma fellows. And from here, another limitation of the Romanian historiography emerges: the prevalence of positivism as theoretical framework for historical writing, especially regarding the use of written documents. Therefore, oral history has been a novelty in the Romanian historical writing, even since the creation of the Oral History Institute in Cluj Napoca in 1997. With a tradition in approaching the oral history of different ethnic and religious minorities, the Oral History Institute in Cluj-Napoca has been implementing since 2014 a project called The Untold Story. An Oral History of the Roma People in Romania, thus “forcing” the entrance into the academic world of both a pariah theme, the Roma, and a methodology, oral history.

This endeavour was possible due to the tireless work of a great team of young and very young researchers (Marco Solimene, Manuela Marin, Adrian Boda, Nicolae Cristea, Călin Olariu, Ioana Cozman, Petre Petcuț, Sînziana Preda, Diana Nistor, Ionela Bogdan, Ionuț Maranda, Diana Moisa, and Marina Trufan),

Research on National Minorities in Cluj-Napoca approached the Roma issue, as well.

encouraged, criticized and supported by some more experienced scholars (Ólafur Rastrick, Ionuț Costea, Valentin Orga), under the supervision of the two leaders of each national teams (Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, University of Iceland and Doru Radosav, Babes-Bolyai University). We benefitted of the contribution of our photographer and cameraman, Cristian Bota, who patiently photo and video documented all our activities. Nelica Morar whose support in administrative matters was irreplaceable, allowed the scholars to focus on research and not get lost in the bureaucratic web of project management. In order to print this issue in time, the texts have been translated and proof read by Thomas Tolnai, Veronica Zaharagiu and Sigrid Crăsnean to whom I express my deepest gratitude.

This special issue of the *Annual of Oral History (AOH)*, *Roma Oral (Hi)Stories in Romania* is the second one dedicated to Roma issues and it is based on an extensive research done by the project team, especially on more than 600 interviews with Roma people around the country. It gathers five articles, in English, focusing on: the experiences of Roma women in the context of pronatalist policies implemented by the communist regime in Romania (Ionela Bogdan), traditional Roma family dynamics in *Gabori* and *Cortorari* communities (Sînziana Preda), on the experience of the Roma living in Saxon houses (Diana Nistor), Roma people's ways of remembrance living in urban space during communism (Călin Olariu), and the analysis of return narratives of some Holocaust survivors (Lavinia S. Stan).

This issue has a miscellaneous section which gather two articles in Romanian on different types of dealing with a traumatic past: the Romanian exile in Western Europe during communism

(Andreea Tuzu), and the biography of a survivor of communist Gulag (Dragoș Ursu). The last part is dedicated to a book review by Dorin Pop, and it ends with some photographs of the persons whose interviews were used in the articles.

Last but not least, I thank all our interviewees, men and women, who generously accepted to share their life stories, invited us in their homes, offered us their best treats, did not discriminate us on racial basis, challenged all possible stereotypes and exhibit an exemplary hospitality. In fact, this volume is dedicated to all of them.

SÎNZIANA PEDA

**AS YOUTH, WE HAVE TO LISTEN TO WHAT THE
ELDERS TELL US! EVEN IF WE DON'T LIKE IT.⁵**

Abstract: This study focuses on several aspects related to traditional Roma family dynamics in the last two decades: the stability and continuity of cultural patterns in family structure (especially in *Gabori* and *Cortorari* groups), relations between generations, family as framework for cultivation of a particular ethos, elders' role in education and economic support of the young people, kinship as a way to maintain group cohesion. The narratives reveal the positioning regarding the transformation of the world Gypsies live in, but also the efforts of preserving their own existential model and differentiation as compared to others, which make the community function like a caste, protective and destructive at the same time.

Keywords: Roma family, tradition, community, kinship, rules

For the conservative Roma, family continues to be not only the method of reproducing their lineage, but also the way of articulating their own society. Based on a patriarchal organisation model, the control of the family micro-universe ensures the smooth functioning of the community to which it belongs. The segregation state – in relation to the Other, promoted by both

⁵ The research leading to these results has received funding from EEA Financial Mechanism 2009 - 2014 under the project contract no. 14SEE/30.06.2014.

IONELA BOGDAN

**TALK IS NOT CHEAP: ADDRESSING PRONATALIST
POLICIES AMONG ROMANIAN ROMA WOMEN DURING
THE COMMUNIST REGIME³³**

Abstract: The pronatalist policies implemented during the Communist Regime in Romania are regarded by the academic literature as being oppressive and trying to transform women's bodies into a public affair. The starting point was the Decree 770/1966, which prohibited abortions on demand with very few exceptions. What are the narratives of Romanian Roma women in regard to these events? Are their testimonies similar to the narratives Romanian women share in regard to the same subject? Did the economic aspect played a part in classifying a pregnancy as “unwanted”? The recollections of women who witnessed the intervention of the Communist state into their private lives lie at the heart of this article due to the richness of their lived experiences and were obtained using the methodology of oral history.

Key words: oral history, Communist regime, pronatalist policies, Romanian Roma women

In 1966, the Decree no. 770 was issued in Socialist Romania in order to prohibit abortions and access to contraception, acting as a tool to strictly control society and

³³ The research leading to these results has received funding from the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009 - 2014 under the project contract no. 14SEE/30.06.2014.

CĂLIN OLARIU
WE, TOO, WERE THERE!
ROMA PEOPLE’S REMEMBRANCE OF THE SOCIALIST CITY
SPACE, MEMORY AND ORAL HISTORY¹

Abstract: In this chapter I use oral history interviews to learn more about the ways in which Roma from a *țigănie* (Gypsy neighborhood) remember and give meaning to their experiences during the communist regime. Their accounts represent a powerful challenge to the official representations of the Roma marginal groups. Interviewees contest the communist authority’s dismissal of the *țigăni* (Gypsy neighborhoods) as places unfit to be part of the urban landscape, by talking about how the community was well integrated in the town’s life and about the important social and economic roles it played before 1989. The interviews also outline powerful influences on the social and individual memory of the inhabitants, which are marked by nostalgia and dissonance. These characteristics do not stem from an uncritical engagement with the communist past, but are a consequence of the social trauma the community went through during the transition period.

Key words: Roma, Gypsy neighborhoods, socialism, memory, nostalgia, social trauma, counter narrative

¹ The research leading to these results has received funding from the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009 - 2014 under the project contract no. 14SEE/30.06.2014.

DIANA-ALEXANDRA NISTOR
BACK AND FORTH – CHANGE OF ADDRESS, CHANGE
OF LIFE. THE ROMA IN SAXON HOUSES: STATE
POLICY OR OPPORTUNITY?¹

Abstract: Changes regarding Roma communities in post-war Transylvania bring into question urban and rural space, the center and the periphery. The fact that most sedentary Roma were settled on the outskirts of cities and villages is a well-known and accepted fact. However, according to the historiography published in Romania after 1989, the communist years bring along changes in Roma living conditions: some people living on the periphery moved to center, making room for a new population to settle there (the nomads). This paper deals with the Roma who moved in the center of some former Saxon towns and villages in Transylvania, for example Reghin, Sighișoara, Brădeni, Uila or Bradu, seeking answers to research questions such as: How did the Roma get to live in Saxon houses under the communist regime? Was it a State policy or did they take advantage of some opportunities? How did the sedentary Roma communities perceive the migration towards the center? Can we record any changes in terms of lifestyle, occupations, traditions, religion or language? In order to provide some relevant answers, the research started from the Archives and the post 1989 historiography. After that, an oral history approach was used to collect and recover life stories of the Roma from Transylvania during the communist period with the intention to complete the Romanian historical narrative.

¹ The research leading to these results has received funding from the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009 - 2014 under the project contract no. 14SEE/30.06.2014.

Key words: Saxon houses, communist regime, Roma communities in Transylvania

Changes regarding Roma communities in post-war Transylvania bring into question urban and rural space, the center and the periphery. The fact that most sedentary Roma were settled on the outskirts of cities and villages is a well-known and accepted fact. This chapter deals with the Roma population who moved in the center of some former Saxon towns and villages in Transylvania, such as Reghin, Sighișoara, Brădeni, Uila, Petelea, Șaeș, Saschiz, Mureșenii Bârgăului, Jelna, Lechința, Cincu, Criș, Merghindeal or Bradu – situated in Sibiu, Brașov and Mureș counties – seeking answers to the following research questions: how did the Roma get to live in Saxon houses immediately after the end of WWII and during the communist regime? Was it a state policy or did they take advantage of some opportunities? How did the sedentary Roma communities perceive the migration towards the center? Could any changes be recorded in terms of lifestyle, occupations, traditions, religion or language? How do the Roma remember German ethnics? In order to give some relevant answers, the research builds on archival documents, the recent historiography, as well as on an oral history approach that was used to collect and recover life stories of the Roma in Transylvania.

The present chapter offers an analysis of these relocations, looking into two large waves in which, during the communist regime, the Roma moved into Saxon houses in the above-mentioned areas: firstly, the relocations which occurred immediately after the Second World War and then another

LAVINIA S. STAN

**GETTING BACK FROM HELL. STORIES OF ROMA
REPATRIATION FROM TRANSNISTRIA¹**

Abstract: This article deals with a specific segment of the Romanian Roma Holocaust, that is, the narratives about the journey back from Transnistria. These particular fragments of biography are essential for a thorough understanding of the Roma deportation, which is fundamental for our democratic and multicultural society. It complicates, sophisticates and complements the perception, remembering and the ways of commemorating WW II. While in most works about the Romanian Roma Holocaust there is no much space given to the analysis of what happened after leaving deportation areas, in oral history narratives, people tend to give detailed descriptions on their way back home. This highlights the difference between history as written by historians and the past lived by people who give different importance and assign complex meanings to events and phenomena. The articles tries to answer questions such as: is there a place for the Roma refugee in the historical master narrative, especially given the nowadays refugee crisis Europe is facing? How are the time and the space represented in the return narratives? What is the meaning assigned by the interviewees to the traumatic experience of deportation? What is the role of (these) particular oral history narratives in the understanding of the past? Is there a gender relevant issue in narrating the past? In order to answer these questions, I approach several issues such as the time-space interplay in the narratives, how gendered stories about the return are, the performative aspects of the stories, and

¹ The research leading to these results has received funding from the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009 - 2014 under the project contract no. 14SEE/30.06.2014.

how this particular life-story fragment is transmitted within Roma families to next generations.

Keywords: Roma, Holocaust, oral history, Transnistria, narratives, performative

In nowadays Europe, speaking about refugees comes easy to anybody, sophisticated specialists or internet trolls, everywhere: in academic debates, media, kitchen discussions or administration offices. The refugee crisis occulted an older preoccupation of European public, the Eastern European Roma migration to Western Europe. It generated fierce debates and radical measures, such as the expulsion of the Romanian Roma from France during Nicolas Sarkozy's mandate. While the distinction between the refugees and the Roma migrants seems to be clear in 2016, going back in time, half century ago, because of the Holocaust, Roma survivors were among the countless refugees and displaced people² that World War II produced. During the war, Roma people from Romania were diachronically

² There is a complex conceptual framework with juridical applicability when dealing with different types of people movements. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is a person who “as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” See *The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, Geneva in 1951 (with a Protocol relating to the status of Refugees signed in 1967, which extended the time and geographical limits of the initial definition of the refugee), available online at <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>, accessed 15.07.2016.

MISCELLANEOUS

ANDREEA IUSTINA TUZU

ORGANIZAȚII POLITICE ALE EXILULUI ROMÂNESC POSTBELIC. STUDIU DE CAZ: CONSILIUL NAȚIONAL ROMÂN (1978-1989)¹

Abstract: This paper focuses on a political organization of the postwar Romanian exile, The Romanian National Council (1978-1989), presenting on the one hand, the context of its creation, the purpose and its actions and, on the other hand, the main criticisms against it. This approach is an attempt to recover some ways of organization and activities of exile, this political organization being little approached in Romanian historiography. Against this background, it is necessary to know this part of the history of exile, bringing to light the work of one of its organizations.

1. Introducere

Studiul de față își propune să abordeze o organizație politică a exilului românesc postbelic, Consiliul Național Român (1978-1989), prezentând, pe de o parte, contextul înființării sale, scopul și acțiunile întreprinse, iar, pe de altă parte, criticile la adresa sa. Prezentul demers reprezintă o încercare de recuperare a unei părți din modul de organizare și de activitate ale exilului, acest organism politic fiind foarte puțin abordat în istoriografia

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DRAGOȘ URSU
DEMONSTENE ANDRONESCU, MARTOR ȘI
MEMORIALIST AL REEDUCĂRII. STRATEGII DE
SUPRAVIEȚUIRE SOCIO-PROFESIONALĂ ȘI
CULTURALĂ ÎN (POST) COMUNISM¹

Abstract: The study approaches the conjunction between biography and History (“la grande histoire”) and between memoirs and historical writing within the larger context of (post)communist Romania. Starting from the destiny of Demostene Andronescu, survivor of the communist prisons, in his double status of witness and memoir writer of the late re-education from the Aiud prison, our analysis follows several major themes: the impact of communist repression on an individual level, through the biographical exploration of a former political prisoner who served 11 years of detention; the civic and ethical implications of the memory endeavour initiated by the survivors of the Gulag; the relation between the political identity of the author-witness and his written memoirs; finally, the context of elaborating the memoirs as a support for understanding the author’s memorial motivations and political intentions.

Keywords: Communism, memory, biography, history, Romania

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS-UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-0090.