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Table of Contents

Lavinia S. Costea

Editor's Note 5

An Oral History of the Roma Communities between Rural and Urban Areas in Post Second World War Transylvania. Historiographical Landmarks..... 13

Ionela Bogdan

Back then, everybody used to work: Empowering Roma women in Romania through work environment. An oral history research 43

Călin Andrei Olariu

Roma communities and gold requisitions in Socialist Romania. An Oral History Research..... 59

Varia – Oral History Methodology

Oana Ometa

Convergence between Journalism and Oral History 89

Fieldwork Photographs

List of contributors 121

Editor's Note

The current *Annual of the Oral History Institute* (further *AOHI*) issue emerges out of two salient issues of contemporary European societies, both equally relevant for its future: the memory of the past and the problem of minorities, in this case the Roma. Societies with troubled pasts, amnesic for long time, have realized that, in order to live a present and envisage a future, need to come to term with the past. Thus, the world we live became (over)saturated with a very fashionable and seldom misunderstood concept: memory. It all started with Maurice Halbwachs's *Collective Memory* published posthumously in 1950¹ and it refined into complex notions such as public memory, cultural memory, communicative memory, popular memory, historical memory etc. In the 1980s, Jan and Aleida Assmann have launched with much success the concept of "cultural memory."² Since then, an explosion of memory studies has aroused which culminated in the creation of a new discipline "cultural studies." For Jan Assmann, cultural memory is "a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the

¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950

² Almost simultaneously, Pierre Nora has published in 1984 the first volume of his *Lieux de Memoire*, with a focus on France.

sight of gesture, are stable and situation-transcendent.”³ On the other hand, “communicative memory is non-institutional; it is not supported by any institutions of learning, transmission and interpretation; it is not cultivated by specialists and is not summoned or celebrated on special occasion; it is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited time depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years, the time span of three interacting generations.”⁴ And there is direct connection Jan Assmann introduces between oral history and communicative memory which “includes those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications. These varieties, which M. Halbwachs gathered and analyzed under the concept of collective memory, constitute the field of oral history. Everyday communication is characterized by a high degree of non-specialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability and disorganization.”⁵ Therefore, the Assmanns have explicitly connected the written with cultural memory and the oral with communicative memory, the former being atemporal, the latter being limited in the span time of three to four interacting generations. This differentiation is supported by Jan Assmann’s reading of Jan Vasina, one of the founders

³ Jan Assmann, “Cultural and Communicative Memory,” in Astrid Erll, Asgar Nunning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Study. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin, New York, 2008, p. 110.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

⁵ Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity* *New German Critique*, No. 65, *Cultural History/Cultural Studies* (Spring - Summer, 1995), p. 126.

of oral history, who speaks about the fact that even in oral societies, the communicative memory is limited in time, while there are memory “specialists” who are in charge with creating, preserving and transmitting the memory, in what Jan Assmann considers to be cultural memory.⁶

However, Assmanns’ concepts have been severely criticized among others by Peter Carrier and Kobi Kabalek in the collective work coordinated by Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson, who considered their approach inconsistent and proposed another concept, that of “transcultural memory,” which is meant to replace the nation-centered concepts of cultural and communicative memory. Transcultural memory emphasizes “the subjectivity and transformation rather than memory as a tool of state politics.”⁷ Moreover, the work by Berthold Molden who has conducted oral history interviews in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in South America emphasized the hegemony of a dominant group in imposing its interpretation of reality. In the cases of Central and Eastern Europe there are “large communities of experience whose memory remain unarticulated and [...] ignored by the grand narrations of European history.”⁸

This is the place where oral history can genuinely make a difference. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, in a

⁶ Jan Vansina apud. Jan Assmann, *op. cit.*, p.112.

⁷ Peter Carrier and Kobi Kabalek, “Cultural Memory and Transcultural Memory,” in Lucy Bond, Jessica Rapson, *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory between and behind Borders*, De Gruyter, 2014, p. 39.

⁸ Molden, Berthold, "Resistant Pasts versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory," in *Memory Studies*, vol. 9 (2), 2016, p. 126.

collective volume edited in 2008, claim that “while there has been an extensive scholarship on oral history as a method and practice, too few people take it “out the house” and past the front door. [...] Recent scholarship on historical memory in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies has rarely engaged with oral history as a central practice in many societies where memory and history are inextricably entangled. [...] Very little published work examines how oral history, as an established form for actively making memories, both reflects and shapes collective or public memory.”⁹ However, since the beginnings of oral history, especially in European context, memory has been one of the most constant concerns for scholars. For example, Alessandro Portelli’s works on the Italian working class touches systematically elements of collective memory, remembrance, and orality and group identities. One famous example is the story of Luigi Trastulli, a young steel worker in Terni, a small town in Italy, whose death was erroneously placed by most of the interviewees in 1953 when a workers’ strike took place instead of 1949 when it happened in the context of an anti-Nato meeting. Portelli’s understanding of this misplacement is that for that specific community, 1953 was more meaningful than 1949, and it was needed to strengthen the identity of the working class fighting for their jobs.¹⁰

⁹ Paula Hamilton, Linda Shopes (eds.), *Oral History and Public Memory*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2008, p. viii.

¹⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, Sunny Press, 1991.

Moving to the second component of this AOHI issue, the minorities, the focus is on the Roma. Exoticized by the majority, Roma became, especially after the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, a major problem to be solved. Most works dealing with Roma issues, in spite of their diversity, identify a problem and try to provide a solution or, at least, an explanation. However, many works deal with Roma in other countries than Romania, in spite of the fact that this county has the largest Roma population in Europe. Moreover, what lacks from almost all accounts about the Roma is the “Romani voices and Romani perspectives” as one of the well-known scholars - Roma himself - Ian Hancock claims.

The (in)visibility of the Roma in contemporary research makes possibly not only to connect these issues, i.e. memory and minorities, but to create a coherent research framework seminal for nurturing democratic societies. Such effort has been made by UnToRo¹¹ project as the articles in this AOHI issue, building on two previous journal issues, are contributions to the improving knowledge on the Roma people’s ways of remembering the past which, in spite of the social marginalization, are not much different than their non-Roma majority in Romania. To give just one example, it is worth mentioning the nostalgia for the communist regime, wide spread in

¹¹ Between 2014 and 2017 the Oral History Institute in Cluj-Napoca implemented, in partnership with the University of Iceland, Reykjavik the project “Untold Story. An Oral History of the Roma people in Romania” (UnToRo). It has received funding from EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 under the project contract no. 14SEE/30.06.2014,

nowadays Romania is a common *lieu de mémoire* not only for the Roma and non-Roma living in the country, but for Bosnian Roma as shown by the research done by the UnToRo team.

Thus papers in current AOHI issue build on a double significance of memory as personal recollection of the past and its public extension as oral history narrative shared by informants which turn in or contribute to local, national, European policies of memory. The first article is by Diana-Alexandra Nistor, *An Oral History of the Roma Communities between Rural and Urban Areas in Post Second World War Transylvania. Historiographical Landmarks*. The author analyses the master narrative about the Roma in Romania in general and particularly in Transylvania, published during the communist period until nowadays. She uses concepts such marginality and mobility to analyses the historiographical landmarks on the Roma communities' everyday life during the communist regime in terms of the space/ place they inhabited, their mobility and migration, their relationship with the local authorities/ the communist state. Nevertheless, Diana-Alexandra Nistor give also, place for the voice of Roma to speak for them about how they lived and remembered they lived in communist Romania.

Ionela Bogdan's study "*Back then, everybody used to work! Empowering Roma women in Romania through work environment. An oral history research* offers a gendered perspective on work during communism in Romania. Her analysis is even more relevant given the marginal status Roma women have in society. Using an impressive amount of oral life-stories of women in different Roma communities, the author brings to the fore how they remember their lives

during the Communist era. In a political context in which work was one of the cornerstones for the building of the new communist society, and the criminalization of non-working in the state-owned companies, many Roma women had their first stable jobs.¹² In order to understand their perspective, the author underlines that one must take into consideration their experiences prior to the Communist period as well as the life quality they have in the present. Their interpretation also relies on comparisons with the male members of their community or with men and women outside of it. The fact that many Roma women used to be employed and nowadays benefit from a state pension has a vital importance to them, ensuring a decent livelihood and this is one of the main reasons why they still perceive the Communist period as “a golden era.”

The article by Călin-Andrei Olariu, *Roma communities and gold requisitions in Socialist Romania. An Oral History Research* focuses on Roma narratives on state repression during the communist regime. The author considers that their accounts, largely neglected by the mainstream, represent invaluable sources for better understanding the Romanian communist past. During the communist period, different forms of state repression were constant in the everyday experiences of almost all Romanians.

The last chapter of the journal departs from the topic of minorities, but is extends the methodological and theoretical discussion on the place of oral history within the general academic disciplines. Oana Ometa brings on the

¹² The article focuses on these women, specifying however that many other Roma women continued to live in the traditional communities, with daily cores of housewives.

convergence between journalism and oral history which outlines the similarities between the two. The reason for this subject choice comes from the need to analyze why and how recently the press seems to resuscitate issues that exploit the field of history (portraits of witnesses from certain periods of time, who are attracting attention due to their stories, interviews with personalities on certain historical subjects etc.). Oana Ometa claims that many successful online publications from Romania address this kind of topics that often go viral indicating that they are well received by the readership. Moreover, she argues that oral history and specialized journalism (particularly public journalism) use the same research methods and techniques and, generally, present the same characteristics with respect to topic approach.

Concluding, one can say that this AOHI issue is an example on how grass-root research on memory, in its public extension through oral history interviews, and minorities – the Roma in this case – can offer much insight on the Romania's past. In fact, Roma's recollections of the communist experience are a fundamental contribution to a more complex history of this period in Romania.

**An Oral History of the Roma Communities
between Rural and Urban Areas in Post
Second World War Transylvania.
Historiographical Landmarks¹**

Abstract: A particular concept regarding the image of the Roma communities in communist Romania is that of marginality. Post-Second World War years are characterized by many changes the nomadic, seminomadic and sedentary Roma communities have encountered regarding mobility, dwelling conditions and lifestyle. The present essay aims at emphasizing the historiographical landmarks on the Roma communities' everyday life during the communist regime in terms of the space/ place they inhabited, their mobility and migration, their relationship with the local authorities/ the communist state, highlighting the most representative works in the master narrative regarding Roma in Romania (and specifically in Transylvania) published

¹ 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"

during the communist period and after 1989 until nowadays.

Key words: historiography, Roma in Transylvania, oral history, center and periphery, acculturation, mobility and migration, Roma place or/ and space, marginality, otherness, segregation.

Let me tell you a well-known joke in my village back then [during the 1930s-1940s]: ‘A Gypsy: a musician’, for Gypsies were only into singing and entertaining. So: ‘A Gypsy: a musician, a Romanian: a thief, two Romanians: a gang of thieves. A Saxon: a workshop, two Saxons: a factory.’ But believe me, regarding the Gypsy population, it was exactly like it said! Believe me, exactly like that.²

Valeria Ciurar, a Roma interviewee from Brădeni (Sibiu County) recalled her childhood in a former Saxon village in Transylvania. She had been talking for about three hours about her family histories and also about the Roma who were brought back and forth between “the inside” and “the outside” areas of the village. She understood and linked the “historical” facts with some noteworthy changes regarding the Roma community settled in the village at the time, such as: their dwelling

² Valeria Ciurar, interview by the author, audio file no. 1185, Oral History Institute Archives, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, further OHIA, Brădeni, Sibiu County, July 25, 2015.

**Back then, everybody used to work:
Empowering Roma women in Romania
through work environment. An oral history
research¹**

Abstract: Throughout this study I will analyse the manner in which Roma women in different communities in Romania remember their lives during the Communist era, using the methodology of oral history and focusing on their memories in regards to work environment, when participation in the labour market was mandatory and according to the law everyone who was able to work, was required to do so. Most Roma women who used to have stable jobs define themselves as winners of the Communist regime when addressing the work environment topic. In order to understand their perspective, one must take into consideration their experiences prior to the Communist period as well as the life quality they have in the present. Their interpretation also relies on the comparison they make with male members of their

¹ 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”

community or with men and women outside of it. The fact that many Roma women used to be employed and nowadays benefit from a state pension has a vital importance to them, ensuring a decent livelihood and this is one of the main reasons why they still perceive the Communist period as “a golden era.”

Key words: Roma women in Romania, Communist regime, work environment, oral history

Following the Communists rise to power, the government began a complex process of industrializing and modernizing the country. Since at that time women represented more than half of the country’s population, they had a major role “in the drive to modernize and were well represented in the labour force.”² In Romania, women’s transition into the labour force progressed rapidly and it was followed by policies that legislated women’s equal rights in public and private spheres.³ The roles of women as “proud socialist mothers” and “productive workers” were central to the ideology of the Communist regime in Romania. The dual role or “double burden” as Barbara Einhorn described it, was heavily promoted by the

²Jill Massino, “Something Old, Something New: Marital Roles and Relations in State Socialist Romania,” in *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 22, no. 1, (2010), p. 37.

³ *Ibidem*.

Roma communities and gold requisitions in Socialist Romania. An Oral History Research¹

Abstract: During the communist period, different forms of state repression were constant in the everyday experiences of almost all Romanians. Immediately after the Revolution of 1989 an extensive literature (journals, autobiographies, historical works, oral history, etc.) which document the state's abuses against its own citizens was published. Eyewitnesses' accounts in particular represent the indelible proof of the human rights abuses committed during this time period. However, an official recognition of and condemnation of the communist regime was done only in 2006, based on a report produced by a Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania², which in itself produced no small amount of controversy. The present article addresses a historiographical void in

¹ 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".

² ***, *Raport final*, Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, București, 2006, passim.

relation to this larger topic by investigating Roma narratives on state repression during the communist regime. Their accounts, largely neglected by the mainstream, represent invaluable sources for better understanding the Romanian communist past.

Keywords: oral history, Roma, state violence, communism, gold requisitions, Romania

After the ascension of the Communist regime to power in the post-war period, the newly created repressive institutions of the state had gained an ever-growing influence within the society. The state's efforts to (physically) eliminate the old intellectual and political elite as well as all those who opposed the new regime led to the creation of a "concentratory universe" without precedent in Romanian history. After the creation, in 1948, of the Secret Police the "Securitate" a campaign was carried out in order to arrest members of the most influential political forces of the interwar period like the Legionary Movement, the National Peasant Party, the National Liberal Party, etc. At the same time, a sustained effort was made to eradicate the armed resistance movements against the regime which appeared throughout the country as well as all those who helped the members of the resistance in any way.³ The process of the

³ There is an extensive literature on this subject. For an oral history approach see the work done at the Oral History Institute in Cluj Napoca.

Convergence between Journalism and Oral History

Abstract: The present work aims to outline the similarities or better yet the convergence points of oral history and journalism. I attempted to highlight the fact that both oral history and specialized journalism (particularly public journalism) use the same research methods and techniques and, generally, present the same characteristics with respect to topic approach. This attempt does not claim to be an exhaustive research, but a review of several similarities, especially at this point in time, when the press seems to resuscitate issues that exploit the field of history (portraits of witnesses from certain periods of time, who are attracting attention due to their stories, interviews with personalities on certain historical subjects etc.). In fact, many of the successful online publications from Romania address this kind of topics that often go viral indicating that they are well received by the readership.

Keywords: journalism, oral history, interviewing, Romania

List of contributors

Oana Ometa graduated Journalism Department at Babeş-Bolyai University, in 2007 and she works a journalist in central media for Realitates.net, Bucharest. She holds a Ph.D. in History with a thesis on the condition of the journalists in the communist era, an oral history research. During her doctoral studies, she published the book *The Story of a Veteran Journalist* (Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2011). Her research interests include history, oral history and cultural journalism.

Ionela Bogdan is a Ph.D. candidate at University of Iceland, Reykjavik and Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. Her thesis is focused on the recent history of Roma women in Romania, emphasizing how gender and gender designated roles developed into Roma communities throughout the Communist regime. She participated to several research internships at the University of Iceland between 2015-2017 where she took part in a series of workshops and held a presentation within the Cultural Menace Course at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology. She was the recipient of an UBB Student Fellowship awarded by STAR-UBB Institute in 2017. Ionela's interests are

in the fields of oral history, gender studies, Romani studies and contemporary history.

Călin Andrei Olariu is enrolled as Ph.D. student at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, with the thesis “The State and the Roma in Socialist Romania. An Oral History Research,” an analysis of the interactions between the communist State and Roma marginal communities during the period between 1948 and 1989. His areas of interest are Contemporary History, Roma History and Oral History. Between 2015 and 2017 he was part of the research project: “The Untold Story. An Oral History of the Roma People in Romania.”

Diana-Alexandra Nistor is currently doctoral student working on a thesis called “Centre and periphery. The oral history of the Roma communities between rural and urban areas in post-war Transylvania” which approaches the everyday lives of Roma during the communist regime in Transylvania in terms of space/habitat, migration and identity. Her areas of interest are contemporary history and oral history. She works as research assistant the Oral History Institute, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.