



Mass Culture Forged on the Party's Assembly Line

Political Festivals in Socialist Romania, 1948-1989

Oancea Constantin Claudiu

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

Florence, September 2015

European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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Introduction

In 1981, after the Socialist victory in France, François Mitterrand consulted specialists in the history of festivals during the French Revolution, requesting their help for the choreography of his inauguration ceremony.¹ This event might (ironically, of course) be considered as a case study of truly applied historical research, but at the same time it is highly indicative of the power that festivals, as performative, or celebrative assemblies, have. Festivals are the product of tradition and at the same time they create and consolidate tradition. Although this particular function of festivals is common knowledge, the term “festival” can prove itself difficult to grasp.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the noun *festival* means “a time of festive celebration, a festal day” or “a musical performance or series of performances at recurring periods”.² The two senses encapsulate the dual essence of a festival, shaped by public and cultural aspects. One could therefore deduce that a festival refers to public cultural performances, organized over certain periods of time. What the definitions in the dictionary do not take into account however is the ideological dimension that festivals can have. This becomes even more obvious, if one takes a look at the history of 20th century political regimes, and at the development of mass politics within fascism, National Socialism, or communism. Regarding the latter, the Soviet Union is the most well-known case, the Bolshevik regime using traditional celebrations and public festivities and inventing new ones, in order to legitimize its authority. Similar processes took place in the countries of Eastern Europe, after World War II, as the newly-installed communist regimes needed to build themselves an identity which could appeal to the masses.

In the case of communist Romania, political festivals were set since the early 1950s, starting with the celebration of the World Youth Festival in 1953 and continuing

¹ Sean Wilentz, “Introduction. Teufelsdröckh’s Dilemma: On Symbolism, Politics, and History” in Idem (ed.), *Rites of Power. Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999, 5.

² Oxford English Dictionary. <http://dictionary.oed.com>. Last entry: May 15, 2011.

with a series of festivals dedicated to films in the rural areas and theatre competitions, such as the “Ion Luca Caragiale” biannual festival.³ The most illustrious example of officially created mass festivals is that of “Festivalul Național al Educației și Culturii Socialiste *Cântarea României*”, translated as “The National Festival of Socialist Education and Culture *Song of Romania*”.⁴ This festival appeared in the immediate aftermath of the Romanian communist regime’s inclusion of nationalistic elements into its official socialist ideology, more exactly after the 11th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, (1974) and the first Congress of Political Education and Socialist Culture (1976). It was established in 1976 and lasted until 1989, comprising seven editions held every two years. Each edition lasted from autumn until the summer of the following year.

Structurally, the festival primarily consisted of a politically set system of national artistic competitions, between all types of social, professional and age categories. It included several phases, starting at a lower mass level, going through county and regional phases, and ending with the republican level of competition, in which – as it was officially claimed – only the selected best of the other levels could participate. Although, the means of competing in the artistic field were various, the art topics for the festival resumed only to praises of the official regime, of the new socialist Romania and last but

³ See *Îndrumătorul cultural*, year 1955, February, p. 26.

⁴ The original Romanian title is “Cântarea României”. The name of the festival was inspired by a famous poem, with the same title, written by Alecu Russo, in the 19th century. The original poem emphasized the love of the author toward his country, as well as the beauty of Romanian lands. In choosing this name for the festival, the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu intended to resort to national ideology as means of gaining legitimacy.

English translations of the name have varied, but without essential differences. The translation encountered mostly is that of “Song to Romania”. Other alternatives are “Singing of Romania” (as the name of the festival is translated in the Subject Files of the Romanian Unit, at the Open Society Archives: <http://www.archivum.ws/db/fa/300-60-1-1.htm>). This is due to the fact that “Cântarea României” is an ambiguous term, allowing both translations. The festival was also known as “Cântare României”, which can only be translated as “Song to Romania”, acknowledging the existence of the dative case, and not the genitive case, as it happens with “Singing of Romania”. Katherine Verdery took into account only the genitive case, using the translation “Song of Romania” (see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 114, 212. This latter translation is also the one I have opted for, taking into account Nicolae Ceaușescu’s intentions for the festival. On November 1st 1976, during the meeting of the Executive Bureau of the National Council of Socialist Unity Front, Ceaușescu considered that the name “Cântarea României” [Song of Romania] is better, arguing that “Trebuie să cînte România, nu să cîntăm pentru România.” [It is Romania that must sing, not us for Romania]. See ANIC, Secția organizatorică, file 20/1976, folio 2 v.

not least, of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965-1989).⁵ The focus of the festival was especially on amateurs, on workers, peasants, pupils, who were supposed to create new works of art in their free time, to “sing” the achievements of the communist regime.

The festival had multiple functions. Officially, its primary aim was to “contribute to the education of the entire society, of the youth, in the spirit of endless labor for the growth of socialism in Romania”.⁶ Nevertheless, this self-entitled festival of culture and education was intended to achieve more than the mere cultural education of workers, peasants or pupils. Its aims, as its origins, were primarily political.

“Song of Romania” served as a propaganda instrument for Nicolae Ceaușescu’s personality cult and for the official socialist ideology, which incorporated nationalistic elements. It relied on various means, such as mass-media, popular and folk music, as well as a newly created type of folklore, for which scholars have coined the term “folklorism”.⁷

Although the festival focused on amateur artists, the latter also included professional artists, but their function was reduced to that of supervising the activity of amateurs. Thus, “Song of Romania” served as a means for depriving professional artists and intellectuals of their traditional status of creators of culture. At an institutional level, this translated in state control over professional artists’ unions.

Propaganda actually meant providing legitimacy for the communist regime, and illustrating the social unity of the Romanian people, regardless of ethnicity or social origin. The ultimate function of the festival was that of creating a mass identity for the people, in order to integrate it as a structure subjected to the Party and its Leader.

The overall structure of the festival and the wide range of its function make “Song of Romania” a subject worth investigating, for adding to or reinterpreting the existing corpus of knowledge on festivals, on the one hand, and communist regimes in Eastern Europe, on the other. However, few researches have been conducted on this topic, despite

⁵ For a program article, dealing with the main features of the “Song of Romania” festival, see the article “The National Festival of Education and Socialist Culture “Song of Romania”, a brilliant display of the love of work, of the creative virtues of our people, an expression of the democratic cultural politics of the Romanian Communist Party” [“Festivalul Național al educației și culturii socialiste “Cântarea României”, strălucită manifestare a dragostei de muncă, a virtuților creatoare ale poporului nostru, expresie a democratismului politicii culturale a Partidului Comunist Român”] in *Scînteia*, November 28, 1976, 1 and 4.

⁶ *Ibidem.*, 1.

⁷ Anca Giurchescu, “The Power of Dance and Its Social and Political Uses”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 33. (2001), 117.

its importance and spectacular character. This means that the history of the festival “Song of Romania” is still under-researched. As for the early forms of festivals, their topic has been completely neglected until present.

Anca Giurchescu was among the first to focus on this festival, and the first to construct a theoretical analysis of the latter.⁸ Her 1987 article on “Song of Romania” puts forth a typology of functions of the festival and its main features, focusing especially on the political uses of folklore by the communist regime.⁹ However, the article lacks primary sources and represents mainly a 1980s perspective on “Song of Romania”, while the festival was still underway. In another article by the same author, focusing on the political and social uses of dance, “Song of Romania” appears as a first hand example and is defined as a network of institutions, designed to disseminate symbols of national unity, or historical continuity.¹⁰ Dragoș Petrescu takes a more descriptive approach to the matter, succeeding, nonetheless, to make interesting points with regard to how propaganda approached different social, professional and age categories, such as peasants or youth.¹¹ Still, his sources extend as far as the first edition of the festival, but his article can be seen as the starting point for a more thorough analysis. Apart from the works mentioned above, there is little to be found concerning the festival “Song of Romania”, except for brief accounts of it, in works dealing generally with Romanian communism, or with the Ceaușescu cult.

⁸ Anca Giurchescu, “The National Festival “Song of România”, Symbols in Political Discourse”, in Claes Arvidson, Lars Erik, Blomqvist, . *Symbols of Power: The Esthetics of Political Legislation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskill International, 1987, 163–171. Apart from Giurchescu, there were other articles on the festival, by dissidents who had left Romania. But these were written in a journalistic style, as their purpose was not to construct a scholarly research, but to inform the general public through mass media means such as Radio Free Europe. Such articles can be found at the Open Society Archives, Hungary, Budapest. One example is Gelu Ionescu, *Puțină artă, multă propagandă în festivalul artistic „Cântarea României”* [A Low level of Art, A High Level of Propaganda in the Artistic Festival “Song of Romania”]. HU OSA. 300-60-1. Romanian Unit. Subject Files. Box 109. Folder 804. “Cântarea României” [“Singing of Romania”], 1981-1989.

⁹ Anca Giurchescu, “The National Festival “Song of Romania”. Symbols in Political Discourse”, in Claes Arvidsson, Erik Blomqvist, *op. cit.*, 169.

¹⁰ Idem, “The Power of Dance and Its Social and Political Uses” in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 33, 2001, 109-121.

¹¹ Dragoș Petrescu, 400000 de spirite creatoare: “Cântarea României” sau stalinismul național în festival” [400,000 Creative Spirits: Song of Romania” or National Stalinism in Celebration] in Lucian Boia (ed.), *Miturile comunismului românesc* [The Myths of Romanian Communism], Bucharest: Nemira, 1998, 239-251.

So far the most comprehensive and thorough analysis of the "Song of Romania" festival remains Vintilă Mihăilescu's study, which focuses on the festival's officially established goal to build the *new man*.¹²

It can be argued that secondary literature on "Song of Romania" has either taken a descriptive approach on the topic, neglecting any construction of a theoretical framework of analysis, or has dealt extensively with theoretical interpretation, without relying on primary sources. For the latter case, which is singularly represented by Giurchescu, one also has to take into account the fact that the research did not include the entire history of the festival, nor its aftermath, thus becoming chronologically restrained.

I approach the history of these festivals from a different perspective, defining them not as a pseudo-cultural phenomenon, or as simple propaganda, but as political festivals. I argue that their role was not just to exert institutional and mass control, or to provide legitimacy for the communist regime, but to actually create mass identity through the network of political rituals and political symbols which were supposed to be disseminated at a mass level. In doing this, these festivals also created ideology, but from below, by integrating official political ideas into the identity of the participants.

This perspective rises numerous theoretical and research questions. The first relate to concepts like political festivals and political rituals, to their interrelationship, as well as to issues of collective and historical memory, which influence the effects of the festival on ordinary people. The second refer to the approach which needs to be taken on political festivals in general and "Song of Romania" in particular. I intend to provide a double-sided analysis of the festival. Firstly, I will rely on a structural analysis at a general level, identifying the main features, concepts and mechanisms of such festivals, and integrating them in a conceptual framework, relying on general secondary literature and primary, propaganda sources. Secondly, I will also construct three case study analyses of the festivals, based on oral history interviews, in order to identify the internal and informal mechanisms which lay behind the official propaganda as well as the subjective perception of ordinary people on these festivals. For these case studies I will

¹² Vintilă Mihăilescu, "A New Festival for the New Man: The Socialist Market of Folk Experts during the 'Singing Romania' National Festival", in Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev and Slobodan Naumović (eds.) *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies II. Socialist Era Anthropology in South-East Europe*, Berlin: Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2008, pp. 55-80.

also construe the mechanisms of memory and how the radical political changes of 1989 affected the latter. Thus, a comparison between these two different perspectives will put forth a more complete and less subjective image of the festival, also providing a solid background for further research concerning the memory of the festival for present-day generations, as well as its effects regarding artistic education of ordinary people, the creation of a new type of artificial, urban folklore, or nationalistic residues in present Romanian collective and historical memory.

Thus, my research objectives for this research are firstly, to construct working definitions of concepts such as political ritual and political festival, and to apply them to the case study of political festivals in socialist Romania; secondly, to identify the main propagandistic components of these festivals and to observe their interrelationship as well as the ultimate purpose of this interrelationship; Thirdly, to construe how ordinary people responded to these festivals, and in what ways they relate to them in the present.

I have employed various types of sources for this research. For the general structural approach I have relied on official press, on newspapers such as *Scînteia*, *Scînteia tineretului*, *România Liberă*, *Cîntarea Romîniei*, on annual magazines, such as *Almanahul Scînteia*, or monthly magazines, such as *Îndrumătorul cultural*. Radio Free Europe transcripts of radio and TV broadcasts, at the Open Society Archives, in Budapest, Hungary, have also proved useful in gathering information about how the festival was brought into the public opinion's attention. I have also used propaganda books about the „Song of Romania” festival and collections of poems, presented during the competitions of the festival. For the oral history case studies, I have relied mostly on oral history interviews with persons who participated in the festival, or who were organisers of different stages of the competition. I have also made use of already published accounts, by former members of juries operating within the “Song of Romania”.¹³

¹³ The starting point for an investigation at a case-study level was an article by ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu, in which she describes how juries were assigned the task of selecting at least half of the candidates for the superior level, in order to show the mass-appeal of the festival. See Speranța Rădulescu, “Traditional Musics and Ethnomusicology: Under Political Pressure: The Romanian Case” in *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 13, No. 6. (Dec., 1997), 8-12.

The nature of the subject requires an interdisciplinary approach, combining methods and approaches from various disciplines. Written sources, like newspapers or magazines can provide information about both the history of the festivals and their propaganda image and how the latter was constructed. Oral history interviews can provide in this case a most useful insight not just to the meaning of the festivals for ordinary people, but first of all, to the procedures adopted by authorities at the deeper levels. Each of the approaches, taken individually, has its own biases: a general description can constitute a history of these festivals, but it leaves many questions unsolved, whereas a case-study approach is too limited to allow itself general conclusions, despite the fact it can provide an insight that would have remained undiscovered in the case of the general chronology. The most interesting findings can be obtained by comparing the conclusions drawn from the general chronology and from the case studies. However, this final approach has its limitations as well. Leaving aside the matter of integrating the case studies into the general framework, its first and foremost limitation is that it offers little information on the cultural aspect of the festivals and of their legacy, not just at a cultural level, but first of all, at a social one. But this research does not aim at offering a totally-comprehensive image of what political festivals in socialist Romania were and what remained of them, but at setting out specific purposes, depending first of all on a time limitation.

It is hoped that the thesis will offer a more accurate image not just on the anatomy of these festivals, but also on their physiology. Understanding their nature can offer a very advantageous point of view on its effects on contemporary Romanian society. It can also constitute a case-study, adding to the already existing others, broadening the general images of festivals and their use for propaganda purposes.

The main purpose of this research is neither to add another case study to the already immense literature on political festivals, nor to pass moral judgment on the festivals, or on their effects. At least, not until the mechanism of political festivals and their legacy in the minds of those who witnessed it are thoroughly revealed.

Chapter 1: Political Festivals and Political Rituals. A Conceptual Approach

1.1 Preliminaries

Shedding light on the issue of political festivals and rituals proves to be a complex and difficult task. The historicity of the concepts, the different anthropological, historical, political and sociological approaches on these subjects have led to the existence of an impressive bibliography, extended in its focus of research both geographically and diachronically. At the same time, political festivals are directly linked to political ideologies. Certain researchers have seen this link in the fact that political festivals provide “the tools of cultural management” for disseminating symbols and inculcating ideology, through a system of officially created, laic rituals.¹⁴ While this function of political festivals is certainly worth taking into consideration, it leaves out the more complex interrelation that exists between the political official purposes of festivals and the open ended meanings that participants can draw from them.

Nevertheless, there are many questions which need an answer, regarding both the theoretical approaches to political festivals and the latter’s anatomy and physiology: what are the origins of political festivals in modern society? What is the interrelationship between festivals and ideologies? How are festivals created and developed by ideologies and how do they help project the image of these ideologies to the masses? What are the functions of festivals in mass politics? Why are political festivals among the main means

¹⁴ See Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society – The Soviet Case*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Christel Lane is a Professor in Economic Sociology at the Faculty of Political Sciences, and fellow at St. John’s College, University of Cambridge. (See profile at: <http://www.sociology.cam.ac.uk/contacts/staff/profiles/clane.html>. Last retrieved on May 1st, 2011). Her book on rites in the Soviet Union proved to be extremely influential, as it covered a gap in the historiography of political rituals, by adding a case-study on Soviet Russia. It also put forth the thesis according to which public ideology in Soviet Union was a “political religion”, seeking to transform the Soviet system in the absolute measure of all things within the Soviet society. See especially Part I, subchapter 3, “The beliefs and ritual of Soviet Marxism-Leninism as political religion”, pp. 35-45, in *Ibidem*. See also S. Frederick Starr’s review of the book in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 41, No. 3. (Autumn, 1982), 558-559.

of propaganda within National-Socialist, Fascist and Communist regimes of the twentieth century? What is the relation between National-Socialist rallies during the 1930s and other forms of political festivals?

Furthermore, when asking about the functions of political festivals and political rituals, one has to take into account not only the intentions behind rituals and their political organizers but also the nature of rituals, enabling them to produce and communicate meanings that elude the intentions of their organizers. Thus, a new issue arises from this last point, that of performativity, referring to the capacity of ritual to bring into being that which is presupposed by its own premises.

This chapter aims at constructing a working definition of political festivals, at providing a taxonomy of their main functions, as well as identifying a set of methods, useful for analyzing communist festivals in Eastern Europe in general, and in Romania, in particular. In doing so, it will also construe the nature and functions of rituals in general and of political rituals in particular.

I will first discuss the main methodological challenges that one can encounter when dealing with the topic of political festivals in modern society. Starting from a rather broader, but summative, analysis on “festival” and “ritual”, as concepts used in various research fields, such as sociology, anthropology and history of religions, I will then focus on the issue of political festivals, discussing the already existing definitions, pointing out their strong as well as their weak points.

Finally, I will shed light on the main functions of political festivals and political rituals, while addressing the issue of performativity. My theoretical discussion will focus especially on several historical case-studies, such as the French Revolution, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.¹⁵ The choice of these particular cases has been determined by several reasons: the origin of modern political festivals during the French Revolution of the late 18th century, the importance of political festivals in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, as well as the nature of political festivals in Romania,

¹⁵ This selection includes the major influence on political festivals in the modern society that is the French Revolution, as well as the three most “famous” case-studies of “totalitarian” regimes of the twentieth century. I have used the term *totalitarian* in inverted commas to point out the debate on the respective term, as well as on its historicity. For an excellent comparison of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, in an attempt to address the issue of “totalitarianism” and its validity in present day research, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, Michael Geyer (eds.), *Beyond Totalitarianism. Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

throughout the 20th century, influenced more or less directly by festivals in the above mentioned cases.

1.2 Methodological Challenges

Before discussing the problems concerning the definition of festivals, rituals and political festivals, one should point out a series of methodological problems which can occur and which make this attempt at defining and categorization a very subjectively-selective and relatively-incomplete one.

A first problem is that the topic of festivals has been dealt with from different perspectives, using different methodologies.

Disciplines such as history of religions and anthropology have focused on festivals and rituals in traditional or so-called “primitive” societies, in order to analyze social relations within those societies, or aspects related to their culture.¹⁶ The findings of such researches have been more than purely informative. Not only have they added to the existing corpus of knowledge on traditional cultures and societies, but they have also raised conceptual and methodological questions on the idea of “culture” itself. Clifford Geertz dealt with the issue of ritual and its uses within a system of social relationships, later on focusing on the epistemological relation of the anthropologist with the network of cultural meanings that surround him.¹⁷ Geertz’s research led him to argue that “culture” is “historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols – a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms”.¹⁸

Historians have also been influenced by such new concepts and theories and have started using anthropological research methods and concepts, especially in fields related

¹⁶ For an analysis of the two disciplines and their mutual focus on ritual, see Hans H. Penner, “Myth and Ritual: A Wasteland or a Forest of Symbols”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 8, Beiheft 8: On Method in the History of Religions. (1968), 46-57.

¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in M. Banton (ed.) *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London: Tavistock, 1966, pp. 1-46. See also, “Symbol” in William H. Swatos, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Source: <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/Symbols.htm>. Retrieved on May 2nd, 2009.

¹⁸ Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, 3.

to political culture and political regimes.¹⁹ One such example is William F. Miles, who focused on the relation between the performative function of spectacles and festivals in the historical context of Nigeria during the 1976 election campaign.²⁰ Miles uses Abner Cohen's thesis on the "two dimensional man", which is both a symbolist animal and a political one.²¹ He also makes use of Geertz' method of "thick description", providing the reader with highly-detailed accounts of mass-rallies, which occurred during the elections campaign.²² Miles' conclusion is that cultural variables, such as dress, music, song, myth, speech behavior were used by political elites in order to project itself at "the pinnacle of society in an attempt to maintain social and political hegemony."²³ It can be deduced from his' article that the purpose of political rallies was to develop a set of stereotypes, in order to dominate the entire chain of events in a certain historical context, as well as to develop a unitary code of interpretation, by setting certain symbols, which could be used in the advantage of the regime.

This would be only one case of a historical research on political regimes, which is influenced by anthropology. In a more general and summative manner, Sean Wilentz argues that "anthropology, unlike *Annales* materialism, functionalist sociology, and orthodox Marxism, has given historians ways of seeing politics as a form of cultural interaction, a relationship (or a set of relationships) tied to broader moral and social systems. Political symbols and acts of persuasion in this view carry with them complex networks of social customs, aspirations and fears. Whereas previous historians interpreted politics either as a narrative with a logic of its own, or as the conjunctural outcome of economic and demographic indicators, those influenced by the anthropologists interpret political ceremonies and insignias as minidramas or as metaphors, upon which are

¹⁹ See, for instance, political anthropological studies, such as those of John Middleton, "Power, Authority and Personal Success in Islam and Bornu" in Marc Swartz, Victor Turner and Arthur Tuden (eds.), *Political Anthropology*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1966; Ted Lewelen, *Political Anthropology: An Introduction*. South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1983.

²⁰ William F. S. Miles, "The Rally as Ritual: Dramaturgical Politics in Nigerian Hausaland", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 3. (Aprl., 1989), 323-338.

²¹ See Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

²² For instance: "Ideological differences aside, the form and trappings of the political rallies were remarkably similar for all the parties. Noisy vehicles, blaring bullhorns, party, tee-shirts, and bumper stickers could always be expected. Music and dance predictably announced political events. The campaign rally represented excitement and entertainment." William F. Morris, *op. cit.*, 328.

²³ *Ibidem*, 334.

inscribed the tacit assumptions that either legitimize a political order or hasten its disintegration.”²⁴ As Wilentz argued, the interdisciplinary research based on anthropology and political history led to a unification in the field of research topics, revealing similar patterns in political regimes spanning both geographically and historically: “certain fictions – the divine right of kings, the ceremonial charisma of Geertz’ Indic Negara, the Nazi Aryan cult – may seem like sheer fantasy to later generations and alien cultures. [...] In all cases, they operate as the unchallenged first principles of a political order, making any given hierarchy appear natural and just to rulers and ruled.”²⁵

The second problem related with the analysis of festivals, and especially with that of political festivals has to do with the regimes which made use of celebrations as means of disseminating ideology. Political festivals may not have first occurred during the French Revolution, but it was the French Revolution which marked their development and acknowledgement as important means of political legitimation for a regime. Or, as George L. Mosse points out, the most important influence of political festivals, as they emerged during the French Revolution, is that they created the idea of mass politics and legitimized the use of symbols, rituals, processions, songs, in order to create a civic religion, that of the nation.²⁶ Later on, festivals were an important tool during the French Third Republic, for creating a national identity in the historical context of a defeated and humiliated France, after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871.²⁷ During the twentieth century, political festivals were one of the most important propaganda and control instruments used by fascist, Nazi, or communist regimes. The problem faced by a historian in such a case has to do with the ways in which he can interpret and analyze a variety of celebrations, mass assemblies, officially and artificially created, formally

²⁴ Sean Wilentz, “Introduction. Teufelsdröckh’s Dilemma: On Symbolism, Politics, and History” in Sean Wilentz (ed.), *Rites of Power. Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, 3.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 4.

²⁶ See George L. Mosse, “Fascism and the French Revolution”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 24, No. 1. (Jan., 1989), 5-26. George Mosse (1918 – 1999) was a historian of Fascism and Nazi Germany. Among his works are: *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964; *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism*, New York: H. Fertig, 1999.

²⁷ Charles Rearick, “Festivals in Modern France: The Experience of the Third Republic”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Jul., 1977), 435.

artistic competitions, which bear the same generic name of *political festivals*, but which have the purpose of disseminating symbols of different ideologies, which in their turn originate from different cultural and historical backgrounds. Literature on political festivals is vast, focusing on different case studies. Among these, Italian fascism, German National Socialism and Soviet Communism have been the most privileged ones, Eastern Europe still remaining an under researched field.²⁸

²⁸ Each of the historical cases mentioned so far, starting from the French Revolution and ending with festivals in Eastern Europe during the second half of the twentieth century has constituted the focus of extensive bibliography, more or less. Here is only a selective bibliography, centered around major historical cases, based on political regimes.

For the French case, Mona Ozouf is arguably the most famous and insightful researcher, her focus being primarily that of festivals during the French Revolution. Mona Ozouf has been a member of *Centre de Reserches Politiques Raymond Aron* at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, as well as Director of Research at the *Centre National de la Reserche Scientifique*. See Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988; Idem, "Space and Time in the Festivals of the French Revolution", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 17, No.3, (Jul., 1975), 372-384; Joseph F. Byrnes, "Celebration of the Revolutionary Festivals under the Directory: A Failure of Sacrality" in *Church History*, Vol. 63, No.2. (Jun., 1994), 201-220. One should include in this section also the already mentioned Charles Rearick, *op. cit.*

Fascist Italy has also been the focus of studies centered on celebrations and mass politics, although in this case the main topic was Mussolini's concept of blending aesthetics and politics, with respect to mass politics. See, for instance, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle. The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; Also, Cinzia Sartini Blum, "Fascist Temples and Theaters of the Masses", *South Central Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3-4, Fascism & Culture: Continuing the Debate. (Autumn-Winter, 1997), 45-58.

The case of Nazi Germany benefited from a wide range of studies, either books or articles, which focused on general, theoretical problems related with the nature of the National-Socialist ideology, and its means of propaganda, or on more particular issues, such as traditional, or newly-conceived forms of artistic performance, which were used by the Nazi regime, in order to construct its legitimacy at a mass level. See: Michael Meyer, "The Nazi Musicologist as Myth Maker in the Third Reich", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 10, No. 4. (Oct., 1975), 649-665; Anson G. Rabinbach, "The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich", *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: Theories of Fascism. (Oct., 1976), 43-74; Henning Eichner, Robert A. Jones, "The Nazi Thingspiel: Theater for the Masses in Fascism and Proletarian Culture", *New German Critique*, No. 11. (Spring, 1977), 133-150; Rainer Stollmann, Ronald L. Smith, "Fascist Politics as a Total Work of Art: Tendencies of the Aesthetization of Political Life in National Socialism", *New German Critique*, No. 14. (Spring., 1978), 41-60; Simon Taylor, "Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 4. (Dec., 1981), 504-520; Susan Manning, "Ideology and Performance between Weimar and the Third Reich: The Case of "Totenmal", *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Power Plays. (May, 1989), 211-223; Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*, London: Penguin Books, 1991; Carole Kew, "From Weimar Movement Choir to Nazi Community Dance: The Rise and Fall of Rudolf Laban's "Festkultur", *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, Vol. 17, No. 2. (Winter, 1999), 73-96.

Numerous studies have been published on the case of Soviet Union, covering issues such as festivals during the first years of the Bolshevik regime, celebrations during the regime of Stalin, every-day rites, etc.: Dinko Tomasik, *The Impact of Russian Culture on Soviet Communism*, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1953; John J. Von Szeliski, "Lunacharsky and the Rescue of Soviet Theatre", *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Special International Theatre Issue. (Dec., 1966), 412-420; Mark Zaitsev, "Soviet Theater Censorship", *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 19, No.2, Political Theatre Issue. (Jun., 1975), 119-128; Christel Lane, *op. cit.*; Christopher A.P Binns, "The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and Accomodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System: Part I", *Man*, New Series, Vol. 14,

George L. Mosse attempts an insightful comparison between the French Revolution (namely, the Jacobin dictatorship) and Fascism.²⁹ Still, he fails to take into account the fact that he is dealing with elements which are not contiguous in space and time. He also takes only the Italian fascist case into consideration when discussing about fascism in general. Still, he develops a set of criteria to point out the differences or similarities between the two ideologies, also making extensive reference to National Socialism, and occasionally to Bolshevism. He refers to elements such as “unity of

No. 4 (Dec., 1979), 585-606; Idem. “The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System: Part II”, *Man*, New Series, Vol. 15, No. 1. (Mar., 1980), 170-187; Gabriel A. Almond, “Communism and Political Culture Theory”, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2. (Jan., 1983), 127-138; Christopher Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia. The Intelligentsia and the Transition from Tsarism to Communism*, Houndmills, London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1990; James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; James von Geldern, Richard Stites, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917-1953*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995; Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades. Celebrations in the Time of Stalin*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000. Some bibliographical references mentioned above hold only historiographical value, as they provide the reader with out-of-date information, or conceptualization. Nevertheless, most references provide useful information on celebrations and mass culture, or officially-constructed mass culture, despite the fact that the sheer majority of them are focused on what might be called the “early period” of Soviet communism, mainly the 1920s and 1930s.

Eastern Europe has been rather an under researched area, despite the fact that both fascist and communist regimes have been in power in most countries of the region, during the twentieth century. Leaving aside the literature on folklore, or singing societies, one of the indispensable works on politically-influenced celebrations in communist regimes is Claes Arvidson, Lars Erik Blomqvist, *Symbols of Power. The Esthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell International, 1987.

Paradoxically, another region which has been relatively poorly researched, despite its great potential of revealing insightful information on communist regimes, is that of Asia. Communist China under Mao Tze Dong, North Korea, communist Vietnam, all these countries have used festivals and celebrations, more or less, to create and disseminate their ideology. Most of the bibliography written on these countries either is out of date, or is focused on key-figures, such as Kim Ir Sen, or Mao. Nevertheless, relatively recent articles have started to shed light on the issue of political culture, regimes and ideology also. See, for instance, Zhou Qun et al., “Mao Worship, Past and Present” in *Twenty First Century*, No. 20, (1993), 37-43; Thomas Scharping. “The Man, The Myth, The Message: New Trends in Mao-Literature from China”, *China Quarterly*, No. 137, (1994), 168-179.

And *last but not least*, one should take into consideration articles on celebrations and artistic competitions developed as means of creating an ideology, by communist Parties in non-communist states. For instance, John E. Bonn, Nataniel Buchwald, Brooks McNamara, Mady Schuman, “Spartakiade”, *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 17, No. 4, International Festival Issue. (Dec., 1973), 99-112.

²⁹ George L. Mosse, “Fascism and the French Revolution”. For instance, he discusses the influence of Christian religion on both fascism and the French Revolution, without clarifying whether fascism borrowed Christian elements directly, or through the influence of the French Revolution. Mosse states that this influence manifested itself both at the level of symbols (a symbol like “the holy flame”, for instance) and at the level of terminology. *Ibidem*, 9. The same question of Christian religion influence is put forth by Simon Taylor, *op. cit.*, 514-515 and Klaus Vondung, “National Socialism as a Political Religion: Potentials and Limits of an Analytical Concept”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (June 2005), 88. Taylor refers to a “Holy History of Nazi movement” as an equivalent of the Christian apocalypse (Taylor, *op. cit.*, 514) and at Hitler as “Christ of the Second Coming” (*Ibidem*, 515).

people”³⁰, “worship of a Supreme Being”³¹, “sense of participation” and “worship of a nation”³², the utopia of “a new man for a new nation”³³, as well as “fascination with death”, “cult of the dead”³⁴, and “preoccupation with youth, beauty, war”.³⁵ Mosse finds similarities between the French Revolution and fascism, concerning most of these aspects.³⁶ He also develops a set of criteria by which he distinguishes between the National Socialist and Fascist ideologies: leadership and the construction of utopias. According to the first criterion, Nazi leadership appears – at the official level – to be more collective than individual, despite Hitler’s prominence as unchallenged leader, whereas the fascist regime in Italy is centered on the figure of Mussolini.³⁷ According to Mosse, the Nazi case is similar to that of the French Revolution, in that both of them put forth a symbolic leadership.³⁸ According to the second criterion, the difference between Nazi Germany and fascist Italy lies in the fact that, whereas the former was able to create a concept of utopia, the latter – at least officially – seemed reluctant to such a concept, preferring a more realistic approach at the ideological level.³⁹

This would be only one case-study of comparison between different political regimes, which make use of mass festivals and political rituals, in order to create an idealistic ideology and to disseminate it at a mass level. But it is an incomplete case-study, as it focuses mainly on only two regimes, dealing scarcely with other comparisons between temporally synchronic ideologies, such as National Socialism and fascism.

One aspect of a multiple comparison is the way in which the Jacobin dictatorship, Italian Fascism, German National Socialism and Bolshevism dealt with their past: either their own, or their predecessors’ past. For the first historical case-study, Mosse is very

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 6.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*, 7.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 17.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 7, 16.

³⁶ For the last case, of “preoccupation with youth, beauty, war”, he argues that similarities can be found only at a theoretical level, whereas in practice, the two historical contexts would differ from each other. See *Ibidem*, 19.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 14-15. Hans Meier also argues that Hitler was not suited to political symbolization. Hans Meier, *op. cit.*, 270.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 15.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 21. According to Hans Meier, “Italian Fascism, in contrast to Bolshevism and national Socialism, signified more a programme for a voluntaristic renewal of the state than a vision of an unprecedented ‘new time’ and ‘new human being’ “. Hans Meier, *op. cit.*, 269.

strict in arguing that it meant a total break with the past, and that it sought to create and disseminate new symbols and to create a new culture.⁴⁰ Fascism presented a continuation of Italy's past, recycling old cultural elements of the latter's.⁴¹ Meier argues that Italian Fascism used European classicism, along with "ancient Roman, Augustian features", resonating in the images and statues of Mussolini.⁴² The case of Nazi Germany seems more ambiguous at first sight. Mosse argues that it did not mark a break with the past⁴³, whereas Meier claims that National Socialism "shoved aside historical precedents in order to bring forth entirely new emblems".⁴⁴ As for the Bolshevik regime, Mosse argues in favor of a break with the past, finding a similarity between the latter and the Jacobin dictatorship⁴⁵, which is the contrary of what Meier and James von Geldern state. Meier mentions that in the early phases of Russian communism there were remnants of the immediate past, "Old Russian and Slavic reminiscences" and "religio-eschatological moods"⁴⁶, but he seems to contradict himself, when arguing that communism meant a total break with the past.⁴⁷ Von Geldern offers an explanation to this confused situation, by showing the discrepancy which lay between the official level and that of everyday practices. If at an official level the Bolshevik regime sought to create a totally new culture and symbolic network, in practice, it also used festivals and mass celebrations in order to integrate past culture into its ideology.⁴⁸ Or, as Gabriel A. Almond states, Lenin believed only in the possibility to change political elites, but not masses, affirming that

⁴⁰ George L. Mosse, *op. cit.*, 11.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*. Hans Meier, *op. cit.*, 269.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 269. Also, *Ibidem*, 274, with a similar statement.

⁴³ George L. Mosse, *op. cit.*, 10.

⁴⁴ Hans Meier, *op. cit.*, 274.

⁴⁵ George L. Mosse, *op. cit.*, 11.

⁴⁶ Hans Meier, *op. cit.*, 272.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 274.

⁴⁸ James von Geldern, *op. cit.*, 72-75 and 86-88. See also Karen Petrone, who focuses on the celebration of New Year's Day, in order to prove that the latter "offered Soviet citizens the possibility of celebrating in private, and those who had enough material resources to afford trees, decorations and special food created New Year's festivities at home. These private practices meant that some families could defiantly celebrate Christmas, while others marked out their status as part of the Soviet elite by displaying their prosperity. The holiday sanctioned the participating of citizens in traditional New Year's practices such as drinking, fortune-telling, and masquerading. While cultural cadres sought to regulate these practices, they could not always do so. The reintroduction of the holiday thus enabled a multiplicity of private practices with private meanings." Karen Petrone, *op. cit.*, 108.

“the revolutionary elite would have to adapt their revolutionary tactics to the cultures of the masses.”⁴⁹

This is only a scarce attempt at pointing out similarities and differences between different historical regimes, characterized by use of mass politics, and mass festivals, in order to disseminate their ideology. This attempt, however, has pointed out not only the difficulty of finding criteria for comparison, but also that there are multiple levels at which this comparison can be made. Such comparisons may not be absolutely crucial when dealing with the issue of festivals, because, as George Mosse pointed out, several regimes may differ in content, but are similar in the ideological instruments they use.⁵⁰ But they are essential in order to understand that festivals, or political festivals, are historical concepts, which differ in space and time, because they are differently perceived and used by various political regimes, in order to serve different purposes, and to disseminate different symbols.⁵¹

Thus, in order to analyze a certain political festival within a certain political regime, one must take into consideration the different theoretical approaches on festivals in general, as well as the consequences of such different approaches, which can reveal the political origins of the festival, but also its functions at the level of society, and the interrelationship between mass popular culture and the network of symbols, which are put forth by the festival. At the same time, one should also take into consideration the similarities which exist between festivals, regarding their structure and their forms of organization and functioning, bearing in mind the interplay between the festival itself and the political regime which created it, as well as the interplay between political regimes in general.

⁴⁹ Gabriel A. Almond, *op. cit.*, 130.

⁵⁰ George L. Mosse, *op. cit.*, 10.

⁵¹ For the idea of concepts in history, see W. H. Walsh, “Colligatory Concepts in History” in Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *The Philosophy of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, 127-144; Reinhart Koselleck, “Begriffsgeschichte and Social History” in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 73-91; M. Fairburn, “The Problem of Absent Categories” in Miles Fairburn (ed.), *Social History. Problems, Strategies and Methods*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1999, 13-38.

1.3 Rituals and Political Rituals

Leaving aside the methodological questions which need to be taken into consideration when dealing with mass celebrations, one should still ask about the nature of these celebrations. So far, several terms have come into discussion: festivals, political festivals, rituals, symbols. My aim is to provide a definition of rituals and festivals as concepts, but also to shed light on the relation between these concepts. At the same time I intend to observe how these concepts can be applied to a political framework of interpretation, and why would a political regime make appeal to such instruments and for what purposes.

Ritual has been the focus of many and various researches, and thus has been often defined in different ways. For instance, according to one definition, ritual means “any formal action that is set apart from profane action and expresses sacred and religious meaning” or “any everyday practice that is characterized by its routine nature and by its significance to mundane social interaction”.⁵² Other definitions identify ritual with “an often-repeated pattern of behavior which is performed at appropriate times, and which may involve the use of symbols”.⁵³ It can be easily noticed that both dictionaries emphasize the routine aspect of ritual, its pattern, as well as the fact that rituals can occur not only in the field of religion, but also in that of everyday practices. For the latter approach, most important are Durkheim’s studies, which operate with a strong distinction between the sacred and the profane, placing rituals mainly in the former field.⁵⁴ At the same time, of great interest for the functions of ritual in everyday life are Erving Goffman’s studies. Goffman refers to “interaction rituals”, arguing that the latter comprise a code of everyday behavior, which is shared by humans in acknowledging a shared reality.⁵⁵ He also refers to rituals as mainly “interpersonal rituals” which attest for

⁵² “Ritual” in David Jary, Julia Jary, *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1991, 420.

⁵³ “Ritual” in Gordon Marshall (ed.), *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 569.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ Irving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*, New York: Doubleday, 1967, 11-15.

a “relationship”.⁵⁶ Goffman considers the usual everyday acts as interpersonal, social relations. Christel Lane analyzed official rituals, whose frequency was established not by interpersonal relations, but by a political regime. Influenced by Durkheim⁵⁷, she defines ritual as “a stylized, repetitive social activity which, through the use of symbolism, expresses and defines social relations. Ritual activity occurs in a social context where there is ambiguity or conflict about social relations, and it is performed to resolve or disguise them. Ritual can be religious or secular.”⁵⁸ But she does not refer to ritual in general, applying this preliminary definition to the context of Soviet Union. This leads her to state that “Ritual in Soviet society [...] is regarded by political elites as one means to gain acceptance for their definitions of crucial social relations and must therefore be viewed as an instrument of cultural, or, to indicate less spectacular cultural changes, of cultural management”.⁵⁹ She thus opens the way for a new concept, that of “political ritual”, by referring to state-planned rites regarding family, or events such as birth⁶⁰, wedding⁶¹, or funeral⁶², as well as rituals of social initiation, such as acceptance into youth organizations.⁶³ Political rituals might be defined, as Steven Lukes argues, as “rule-governed activity of symbolic character which draws attention of its participants to the objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance.”⁶⁴

Political rituals occur in the events described by Lane, as well as in mass political assemblies, such as the Nazi rallies.⁶⁵ Applying Lukes’ definition of political rituals, one can refer to Nazi rallies as mass assemblies, subjected to a political ritual, by which symbols of the past are reunited into an eschatological narrative supposed to offer

⁵⁶ Idem, *Relations in Public. Microstudies of the Public Order*, New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper Colophon Books, 1972, 199. Goffman discusses the existence and functions of so-called “tie-signs”, which he defines as “all such evidence about relationships, that is, about ties between persons, whether involving objects, acts, expressions, and only excluding the literal aspects of explicit documentary statements”. *Ibidem*, 194. He then goes on to identify three sub-classes of “tie-signs”: rituals, markers and change signals. Among these, rituals refer to everyday acts, events, which, by their undergoing, express the state of relationship between two or more persons. *Ibidem*, 199-202.

⁵⁷ Gordon Marshall, (ed.), *op. cit.*, 569-570.

⁵⁸ Christel Lane, *op. cit.*, 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 27.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 68.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 74.

⁶² *Ibidem*, 82.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 89.

⁶⁴ Steven Lukes, “Political Ritual and Social Integration” in *Sociology*, Vol. 9, 1975, 301.

⁶⁵ See Simon Taylor, *op. cit.*, 504-511.

legitimation for the Nazi regime and to provide a sense of total cohesion for the participants.⁶⁶

1.4 Festivals and Political Festivals

Researches on festivals have focused more on case-studies, neglecting a theoretical approach, which would lead to a summative, general definition.⁶⁷ Still, despite the fact that festivals vary from culture to culture, they present several basic patterns: they presume the existence of assemblies of people, they have performative and celebrative functions, either in religious or profane, everyday practices.

If festivals, as a general concept, might group several traits, the same thing cannot be stated about political festivals, at least with respect to secondary literature. As it has already been mentioned, researches undergone on political festivals have emphasized the specificity of their own historical contexts, leaving aside the construction of a theoretical framework, in which to include the findings of their own case-studies.

M. Karabaev is one of the few who attempted at defining political festivals.⁶⁸ Constructing a general taxonomy of festivals, Karabaev distinguishes between six groups of festivals: “festivals of nature”, “labor festivals”, “festivals of culture”, “political festivals”, “personal family festivals”, and “religious festivals”.⁶⁹ He then moves on to identify each group, stating the following with regard to political festivals: “Political festivals which developed under the influence of historical processes. Each political festival has important significance for one historical period.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 515.

⁶⁷ See, for instance, A. W. Sadler, “The Form and Meaning of the Festival”, *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, (1969), 1-16. The title of the article might be misleading, as it apparently sets as aim to discuss the issue of form and meaning in festivals, at a general level. Nonetheless, the author refers to a more specific case study of Japanese traditional shrine festivals (*Ibidem*, 8). Nevertheless, he draws certain conclusions which can apply not just to his case-study, but to general features of festivals.

⁶⁸ M. Karabaev, “Festival-Ritual Culture as a Factor of Social Progress” in Said Shermukhamedov, Victoriya Levinskaya, *Spiritual Values and Social Progress*. Retrieved from: <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series03/IHC-1/contents.htm> Last entry: May 10, 2011.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

There are several problems related to Karabaev's definition.⁷¹ First of all, the author does not mention the criteria according to which he operates with the above-mentioned classification, leaving the floor opened for guesses. Apparently, it seems that the object of celebration is the main criterion which led to the six group taxonomy. Furthermore, he fails to take into consideration that so-called "festivals of labor", or "festivals of culture" might be easily developed or incorporated into the means of propaganda by a political regime.⁷² Thus, several festivals, although officially dedicated to non-political objects of celebrations, can serve political purposes, and depend almost entirely on support from the state, in order to exist at all, entering Karabaev's category of political festivals. Karabaev fails to acknowledge the network of cultural and political relations which appear between different types of festivals.

Secondly, Karabaev's definition of political festivals fails to conceptualize its object of definition, remaining vague and imprecise. Although he is right to point out the interdependence which is created between a political festival and its historical context, he fails to explain the manner in which a political festival develops "under the influence of historical process", as well as to provide the two main parts of any definition: a common corpus of elements in which political festivals can be included and the specific features which make political festivals distinct from other festivals.

1.5 Political Rituals and Political Festivals

In order to construct a more reliable definition of political festivals, one needs to look firstly at the relation between rituals and festivals. It is easy to notice that rituals and festivals can be dedicated to the same events, acts, or objects. But at the same time one

⁷¹ It should be mentioned that the author is not necessarily – at least to my knowledge – acknowledged as a reference with respect to political festivals, or festivals in general. The main reason, for which I have chosen this particular article by this particular author, is that it discusses political festivals at a more general level. My aim was to use Karabaev's definition as a point of departure for constructing a more elaborate definition for political festivals.

⁷² See for instance, examples provided by Christel Lane, *op. cit.*, 68, 74 and 82. James von Geldern, *op. cit.*, 72-75. Karen Petrone, *op. cit.*, 53-55 and 108. These authors put forth examples of festivals which were either entirely created by the Soviet regime, during the 1920s and 1930s, or were recycled, reshaped in order to fit in with the new ideology. For the latter case, see Karen Petrone, *op. cit.*, 108, presenting the case of New Year's day' celebration.

should also observe that rituals, as cultural practices which mark a certain event or act, occur most often during festive celebrations, in order to transform the respective cultural practice into a socially-accepted one.⁷³

Secondly, one also needs to investigate the manner in which such a relation between rituals and festivals becomes active in a political context. This becomes more obvious if we consider that each political regime must provide legitimacy for itself, by constructing a network of commonly accepted ideas and meanings. By “legitimacy/legitimation” one does not understand only an institutionalized form of power, but also a moral acknowledgement on behalf of the members of that political regime, which is achieved through a set of mutually accepted symbols⁷⁴. These provide – at least at an official level⁷⁵ – a commonly shared meaning for a certain set of acts, events, behaviors, etc.⁷⁶ Remembering Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture as “historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols”⁷⁷, it results that a

⁷³ J. Ndukaku Amankulor, “The Condition of Ritual in Theatre: An Intercultural Perspective”, *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 3, The Interculturalism Issue. (1989), 45.

⁷⁴ By “symbol” I define “any act or thing which represents something else. More particularly, the smallest meaning-unit in the semantic fields of ritual, dream or myth”. (See “Symbol” in Gordon Marshall (ed.), *op. cit.*, 657.) Also, “a sign in which the connection between the meaning and the sign is conventional rather than natural”(See “Symbol” in David Jary, Julia Jary, *op. cit.*, 508.)

⁷⁵ When discussing the nature of symbols, one has to take into account the fact that symbols present a multiple set of meanings. Mircea Eliade constructed a set of six features which characterized symbols, as conceptual instruments for the history of religion. Although this classification might not find direct application to the present case-study (because of both the nature of the research topic and the fact that Eliade’s interpretation might be considered as out-of-date, for present-day interdisciplinary research), it is worth mentioning as it points out the dual nature of symbols, which can be diversely interpreted not just in the field of history of religions, but also in that of history of fascist and communist political regimes during the twentieth century. Eliade considers that the functions and features of symbols are: 1. the capacity of opening modalities of the real or structures of the world that are not manifest in immediate experience. 2. a symbol points to something real. 3. the multivalence of a religious system. 4. capacity of religious symbolism to manifest a coherent unity of the world. 5. the capacity of a symbol to express paradoxical situations. 6. a religious symbol always aims at a reality or structure in which human existence is engaged. See Mircea Eliade, “Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religion” in Mircea Eliade, Joseph Kitagawa (ed.), *The History of Religions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959, 86-107.

⁷⁶ See also the definition for the concepts of “legitimacy” in Gordon Marshall (ed.), *op. cit.*, 363.

⁷⁷ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”, 3.

political regime must construct a political culture⁷⁸, disseminated at a mass level, through mass rituals and festivals, which lead to a set of common social and cultural practices.⁷⁹

Political festivals would therefore be defined as politically-organized performative and celebrative events, comprising mass assemblies, artistic competitions, having the purpose of disseminating a variety of political and cultural symbols, in order to provide political legitimacy, by shaping a newly-created set of social relations, as well as a new cultural background.

1.6 Functions of Political Festivals

Political festivals are used in order to create an institutional framework, comprised of mass assemblies which are subjected to a network of symbols that form political culture. Political festivals have two main functions. Firstly, they are ideological instruments of propaganda, used to diffuse and shape ideology. Secondly, they operate in the sense of creating social and civic unity, and of providing legitimacy and authority to the regime.

The first function appears especially when a regime is at the beginning of its existence and intends to consolidate its authority. This can be well observed in the case of the French Third Republic, as Rearick points out.⁸⁰ The regime of the Third Republic resorted to a wide range of artistic and celebrative means, such as historical and patriotic celebrations, popular plays, concerts, art exhibitions, exhibitions of industry, or displays of archaeological monuments.⁸¹ Their purpose was to include all symbols and elements of artistic, historic or traditional culture, which could have had a symbolic potential for conferring legitimacy to the regime.

⁷⁸ For the concept of political culture, I have relied on Robert C. Tucker, "Culture, Political Culture, and Communist Society" in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 88, No. 2. (Jun., 1973), 173-190 and Gabriel A. Almond, "Communism and Political Culture Theory", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2. (Jan., 1983), 127-138. Tucker discussed the concept of political culture, and how it emerged under the influence of anthropological studies at the end of the 1960s. Robert C. Tucker, *op. cit.*, 175.

⁷⁹ In this respect, one can also argue with Irving Goffman's emphasis on ritual as performing a mainly social function (See Goffman, *Relations in Public*, 199) by adding the cultural aspect to the research on rituals.

⁸⁰ Charles Rearick, *op. cit.*, 439-440.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 440.

In the case of the French Third Republic, one deals with a formal framework for political festivals. The latter however could appear as means of providing an alternative ideology to the official one, as in the case of *Spartakiads* in the United States of America, during the 1930s.⁸² In this case, however, political festivals proved to be useless, as long as the symbols of communist political culture could not appeal to American spectators.⁸³

The second main function of political festival is well explored by Serhy Yekelchik in his study of Soviet politics in the Ukraine, during 1943-1953.⁸⁴ In this case, the Soviet state intended to shape the personal identity of ordinary citizens, by setting a set of politically-originated, socially-accepted values and norms, whose observing meant the immediate integration of the individuals into the general collective.⁸⁵ Stephen Kotkin made the same observation, previously to Yekelchik, and he extended it to the entire Soviet regime, not just to official politics in a certain geographical area.⁸⁶

1.7. Conclusions

Political festivals incorporate a vast and complex network of historical case-studies and have been the focus of several theoretical approaches. Anthropology and history of culture have proved extremely useful in constructing a working definition for political festivals. At the same time, they have enabled the construction of a theoretical network of interrelations between concepts such political festivals and political rituals.

In order to gain mass legitimacy, political regimes have resorted to festivals and rituals as traditional means of forming mass culture and ascribing identity within the collective, giving them a secular and pragmatic purpose. Political regimes have formed

⁸² John E. Bonn, Nataniel Buchwald, Brooks McNamara, Mady Schuman, *op. cit.*, 99-100.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, 111-112.

⁸⁴ Serhy Yekelchik, "The Civic Duty to Hate. Stalinist Citizenship as Political Practice and Civic Emotion (Kiev, 1943-53)", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7 (2006) 3, 529-556.

⁸⁵ Jochen Hellbeck is one the authors who have conducted research on personal journals and autobiographies, in an attempt to grasp the ordinary man's attitude toward the practices of the regime. See Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931-1939)", in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism. New Directions*, London: Routledge, 2000, 77-116; Idem, "Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts", *Russian Review*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (2001), 340-359.

⁸⁶ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 220.

their own structure of political symbols, which in their turn have influenced the means used to disseminate them.

Although, studies on political festivals have abounded with respect to fascism, National Socialism, or Soviet communism, the region of Eastern Europe, as shown before, is yet to be explored. Romania presents an important case study, especially for the 20th century, if one takes into consideration the fact that it has witnessed the use of political festivals from the 1930s up until 1980s, by various regimes and ideologies. Nevertheless, before construing political festivals in 20th century Romania, one needs to be aware not just of the difficulties imposed by actual research itself, but by the complexity of the phenomenon which is studied.

Chapter 2: Political Festivals in the 1950s and 1960s

2.1. Preliminaries

The historiography of Romanian communism carries with it one important paradox: it is vast, it has grown almost exponentially especially over the last decade. Yet, most of the areas of social and cultural history in what has been the Romanian communist experience are yet to be uncovered in articles, monographs, or even plain essays.⁸⁷

I will start this chapter with a brief presentation of the historiography of Romanian communism, focusing on its main features, representative monographs, published both before and after 1989, domestically and abroad, with a particular focus – for the latter – on the academic literature stemming from American and British academia. After a brief outline of the historic landmarks in Romanian communism, I will focus on the legal and financial aspects of state policies regarding political festivals during the 1950s and 1960s. I will also construe the ideological aspect that lay behind the cultural policies, especially in the domains of music and theater. Last but not least I will focus on alternative cultural ways for Romanian youth in the 1960s, based on research in the CNSAS Archives, with a special attention given to one of the symbols of Romanian musical underground during the late 1960s and 1970s: Cornel Chiriac.

2.2. Historiography

There is a habit among researchers of communist regimes to be influenced primarily by the literature published on the most significant state communisms over the 20th century: Soviet Russia and Communist China. This is explainable twofold. Not only did the two regimes play a crucial role in world history during the short century, but their importance attracted the highest number of scholars and largest research funding available in Western Europe and the United States. For these particular reasons, the

⁸⁷ This is also acknowledged in the Report by the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania. See Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, *Raport final*, Bucharest, 2006, p. 21-30. Source: http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf . Last retrieved on July 12, 2013. This is the original report published by the Presidential Administration online. The Report was also published as a book a year later. See Dorin Dobrințu, Cristian Vasile (co-editors), *Raport final*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008, pp. 25-32.

historiography on these two states is particularly rich and serves as a model of secondary literature for similar academic endeavors focusing however of communist experiences in other parts of the world; in the latter sense, Eastern Europe is arguably the first area to spring to one's mind.

Without going into any detailed chronicles, one can argue that the Western historiography of Soviet Russia has passed so far through at least three main phases, influenced in their turn, by historical events, political contexts and ideologies and the specific academic training of those who have pursued them. A first phase is the so called totalitarian school, emergent in the postwar context and reaching its climax in the 1950s and 1960s. The totalitarian school's advocates were mainly political scientists. Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, on the one hand⁸⁸, and Hannah Arendt, on the other⁸⁹, came to symbolize the pillars of the totalitarian school type of analysis. Among the principles of this type of analysis there were several: the contrast between totalitarian and democratic regimes – the former being the extinct Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the then present communist regimes, the latter being the regimes in Western Europe and the United States; communist regimes' total control over their subjects; an elaborate ideology; a state run by a single mass party, led in its turn by a dictator; assertion of power through a system of mass violence; a state monopoly on armament, means of communication and economy, the latter controlled through state planning.⁹⁰

This was followed by a wave of historians challenging the totalitarian model throughout the 1970s. Among them were Moshe Lewin⁹¹ (in Great Britain, and, since the

⁸⁸ The reference book in this case is Carl J. Friedrich, Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956.

⁸⁹ See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Berlin: Schocken, 1951. While Arendt's importance for the analysis of communism is of lesser importance than ascribed here, the reason I have chosen this as a pillar for the totalitarian school is connected to its importance for Romanian scholarship (including American scholarship dealing with communist Romania).

⁹⁰ These are the six main features, as described by Friedrich and Brzezinski (See Carl J. Friedrich, Zbigniew Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 19). Over the course of years these six principles would be endlessly debated and modified by adepts and contesters of the totalitarian model alike.

⁹¹ Moshe Lewin's first books were published in French first and only later on translated into English. This is also an expression of the centers of power at play in different academia during the 1960s Cold War. While the American academia was still dominated by right wing academics, the French one comprised a sizeable intellectual field held by leftist researchers. The explanation for this is complex and not the focus of this research, but in passing, one should point out to the legacy of World War Two. For Lewin's first books, see Idem, *La Paysannerie et le Pouvoir Soviétique*. Paris: Mouton, 1966 (later on translated as *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968; and

late 1970s in the US), and Sheila Fitzpatrick⁹², who not only came with a different historical perspective, but also focused differently on the experience of communist regimes, in particular on social history aspects. Two areas of research were crucial, for their stake: the Russian Revolution and the Stalinist experience of the 1930s. Both had been seen as irrefutable proof by the totalitarian school adepts of the “evil” of communism, and furthermore, as an actual lack of any authentic mass support.⁹³ The Russian Revolution in particular had been seen by adepts of the totalitarian school as a top-down movement, without any real support from any social category, apart from the Bolsheviks themselves, which in turned provided the cause for the Soviet Union’s totalitarian features in maintaining power.⁹⁴ Lewin, Fitzpatrick, and a string of social historians set out to debunk these claims, and by the early 1980s a subfield of social labor historians had emerged, with monographs focusing on the implication of workers in the 1917 Russian Revolution.⁹⁵ Since the main purpose of this generation of historians was to debunk the received knowledge present in the academia, their trend became known as revisionism.

The 1989 events, marking the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the downfall of the USSR itself in 1991 influenced Soviet historiography in a twofold manner. First of all, the events marked an end of a dream for those who had seen the USSR and communist regimes in Europe as an alternative to Western style capitalist democracies. Secondly, the downfall of the Soviet Union led to the unprecedented opening of Soviet archives, enabling historians for the first time to shed light on so many

Idem, *Le Dernier Combat de Lénine*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967 (translated as *Lenin's Last Struggle*, New York: Random House, 1968).

⁹² Among Sheila Fitzpatrick’s numerous works see: *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1932*. Cambridge University Press, 1979; *The Russian Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 1st ed., 1982; or *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*. Oxford University Press, 19

⁹³ In this last regard, see in particular Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. This is the revised edition of the original published in 1954, and revised several times. Pipes’ and others’ claim was that the Bolshevik revolution was a movement from top down, without any real support from any masses.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ Just two examples: Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968; and Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

aspects in 20th century history that until that time had remained an object of fierce debate among totalitarianists and revisionists.

Thus the 1990s paved the way for a new trend in the historiography of the Soviet Union, which would become known as the post-revisionists. If the totalitarianists had been mainly political scientists with little access to archives and primary sources, taking on a top-down approach, and the revisionists had been mainly social historians, with leftist leanings, but also with access to certain Soviet archives, taking on a bottom-up approach and focusing more on aspects of everyday life and less on issue of high politics, the post-revisionists were historians, as well as anthropologists, with unprecedented access to various types of official, informal, oral, written sources, focusing on cultural aspects of Soviet history, but also comprising political and social history as well.⁹⁶

After this outline, one might ask the question: *What does this have to do with scholarship on Romanian communism in general and with research on a festival like Song of Romania in particular?* If one uses it as an analogy, but also as a standard for presenting Western and Romanian scholarship on Romanian communism, the answer would be manifold. Before going into a presentation on Romanian communist historiography, one must make one more observation: the outline on Western scholarship dealing with Soviet history did not include any references to Soviet historiography itself. However, in presenting Romanian historiography, I will take into account the 1989 divide, the Romanian versus Western approach, as well as the methodological aspects and those related to access to sources.

From the point of view of a 21st century historian, pre 1989 historiography on Romanian communism consists mainly of monographs published outside communist Romania. While there were numerous publications on the history of the Romanian

⁹⁶ The star of the third wave of historians of Soviet Russia would be, at the risk of oversimplifying an otherwise complex historiographical landscape, Stephen Kotkin. His representative monograph in this case is the gargantuan *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, University of California Press, 1995. As the title shows, Kotkin's approach was to see Stalinism as more than just an ideology, or a set of socially oriented policies, but as a civilization, comprising the former, but also adding the cultural aspect. For a concise, if subjective overview of the historiography on Soviet Russia in general and 1917 in particular, see Idem, "1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks", in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 70. No. 2 (June 1998), pp. 384-425, in particular the first part of the article. Other works belonging to this approach: Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Communist Party and the state even supported such endeavors institutionally⁹⁷, the actual historiographic output remains today more as a work of propaganda and less as a professional analysis.⁹⁸

Western scholarship on contemporary Romania came from Romanian born scholars who had fled Romania and found political and academic refuge in countries like Great Britain, or the US. The most prominent and one of the earliest examples is that of political scientist and former leftist Ghiță Ionescu, who published one of the first monographs about politics in socialist Romania.⁹⁹ The book covered a period of thirteen years, from 1948 until 1961 and remains until this day as one of the reference syntheses on Romanian communism, despite a rather outdated approach. The 1970s marked the interest of American scholarship in socialist Romania, mainly from the field of anthropology. The explanation lies in Romania's opening toward the West in the late 1960s which allowed Western scholars to visit the country. Among these, one must mention Katherine Verdery, Gail Kligman, or David Kideckel who conducted research in villages in Romania, particularly Transylvania, during the 1970.¹⁰⁰

Several political scientists also construed more or less in depth aspects of the political life in socialist Romania, usually attempting to apply their Romanian findings to a larger category of Eastern European socialist regimes. The first names – and most

⁹⁷ During the communist period there was even an Institute for the History of the Party [*Institutul de Istorie a Partidului*]. However, most professional historians refrained from submitting work under the Institute's umbrella and some even backed down from investigating contemporary history at all, preferring instead ancient or middle ages history. See Bogdan Murgescu, *A fi istoric in anul 2000* [Being a Historian in the Year 2000], Bucharest, Editura ALL, 2001, pp.34-64.

⁹⁸ In this sense, see the string of monographs published by official historians Mircea Mușat and Ion Ardeleanu, or the massive and collective series of monographs in six volumes, each numbering around 1,000 pages, titled *Istoria militară a poporului român*, under the coordination of Ilie Ceaușescu, one of Nicolae Ceaușescu's brothers: Ilie Ceaușescu, *Istoria militară a poporului român* [The Military History of the Romanian People], Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1983 to 1989.

⁹⁹ Ghiță Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

¹⁰⁰ In the early 1980s the fruit of these research trips were starting to appear. See Katherine Verdery, *Transylvanian Villagers: Three Centuries of Political, Economic and Ethnic Change*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981; Gail Kligman, *Căluș: Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981; David Kideckel (ed.) Special Issue of *Anthropological Quarterly*: Political Rituals and Symbolism in Socialist Eastern Europe, Vol. 56, No. 2, 1983. Kideckel wrote his PhD Dissertation on *Agricultural Cooperativism and Social Process in a Romanian Commune* at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1979. His dissertation would be published as a book in 1993: *The Solitude of Collectivism: Romanian Villagers to the Revolution and Beyond*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

famous – to spring into one’s mind are Kenneth Jowitt and Andrew Janos.¹⁰¹ However, one author who had been neglected by post 1989 scholarship on communist Romania and whose work on the political elites during communism still provides numerous means of analysis and topics to construe is Daniel Nelson.¹⁰²

There were also Romanian born historians who fled to Western Europe and published monographs or syntheses on Romanian communist history, like Vlad Georgescu or Victor Frunză.¹⁰³ However from today’s standards the books of the latter authors are mainly of historiographic interest, lacking access to archival sources, and relying on an outdated perspective. Notwithstanding this, they played an important role during the 1980s in providing information about the nature of the communist regime which had remained little known until that moment.

The immediate aftermath of 1989 saw a wave of books, monographs, and edited documents about the repression of the communist regime in Romania, mostly from the 1950s and early 1960s, but also detailing episodes of torture and violation of human rights in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰⁴ The Civic Academy [Academia Civică] amassed an impressive archive of oral history testimonies of people who had been persecuted under the communist regime and it established the Sighet Memorial in the former Sighet Prison from the 1950s. What the Memorial left aside though was that during World War Two it was also used by Romanian authorities as a transit station for Jews deported to Nazi extermination camps.

1997 marked a turn of events in Romanian historiography in general when Lucian Boia published his book on what he deemed as „myths” in Romanian national

¹⁰¹ Kenneth Jowitt, *Social Change in Romania: A Debate on Development in a European Nation*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: Institute of International Studies University of California, 1978. Andrew Janos, *Authoritarian Politics in Communist Europe*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: Institute of International Studies University of California, 1976.

¹⁰² Daniel N. Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era*, London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1988.

¹⁰³ Vlad Georgescu published a synthesis of Romanian history in 1983, including the then recent history, up to the 1970s. See Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians: A History*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991. The original was published in 1984, in Romanian by the Romanian American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Victor Frunză fled to Denmark in 1980 where he published a monograph on the history of the Romanian Communist Party. See Victor Frunză, *Istoria P.C.R.* [The History of the R.C.P.], Aarhus: Northern Publishing House, 1984. The monograph was republished in Romania in 1990.

¹⁰⁴ In this sense, see the series of monographs published by the Sighet Memorial Museum, housed in the former prison at Sighet. Among these of limited interest – as it provides no more than a brief overview of the communist regime – is Dennis Deletant, *Romania under Communist Rule*, Bucharest: Academia Civică, 1997, republished twice until 2013.

ideology.¹⁰⁵ Boia had previously coordinated a collection of articles debunking myth under Romanian communism. His books in the late 1990s started a veritable school of young historians preoccupied with demythologizing the Romanian past. This came in sharp contrast with the several previous works of historians who until that moment had preserved the nationalistic approach in their analysis, claiming it to be rooted in interwar historiography, despite its obvious influence by national communist ideology as well.

The following turning point in Romanian historiography on communism was in 2006 with the formation of the Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, led by Romanian born, American political scientist Vladimir Tismăneanu. The commission comprised an eclectic – also heterogeneous – mixture of writers, literary historians, anthropologists, historians, who, in less than a year submitted an almost 700 pages report to the then Romanian president, Traian Băsescu. Băsescu read a resume of the report in front of the Parliament, formally condemning communism and its legacy in Romania. While the report caused a huge controversy in the political arena, being either unanimously praised or condemned, according to the political affinities of each reviewer, it left inconsiderable signs within Romanian society.¹⁰⁶ By 2010 a survey showed that 61 percent of Romanians considered communism to have been a good idea and approximately 50 percent considered life before 1989 to have been better than life in post-communism.¹⁰⁷ This is explainable by the numerous social and economic measures adopted by the various governments in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 crisis, which belatedly affected a large percentage of the Romanian population.

¹⁰⁵ Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* [History and Myth in Romanian consciousness], Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997. The book was republished several times in the meantime and helped established Boia as one of the most famous, influent, but also controversial historians in post-communist Romanian historiography. By “myths” Boia referred to events, persons which were neither false nor true. For instance, referring to the myth of Michael the Brave [Mihai Viteazul], and his unification of the three Romanian provinces in 1600, Boia argues that while Michael the Brave did not have any national consciousness and that, historically, one cannot present the event as a national unification, it was embedded with such a national ideology by the 1948 revolutionaries in Wallachia and Transylvania and thus while false in its original sense, it became true in the influence it manifested in Romanian modern consciousness. See Boia, *op. cit.*, second edition, 2001, pp. 14-16.

¹⁰⁶ For a more moderate – if itself uneven – critique of the report, see Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu et al. (coord), *Iluzia anticomunismului. Lecturi critice ale Raportului Tismăneanu* [The Illusion of Anticommunism. A critical Reading of the Tismăneanu Report], Chișinău: Editura Cartier, 2008.

¹⁰⁷ See <http://www.rfi.ro/articol/stiri/economie/romanii-nostalgici-comunism> . Last retrieved on July 16, 2013.

Despite the fact that the Presidential Commission was made of both Romanian and foreign scholars, some professionals of international fame, like Katherine Verdery or Gail Kligman, the Report itself came across more as a compilation of sources and secondary literature already in existence, than as a fresh approach to Romanian communist history. While neglecting social and cultural history almost in entirety, the Report focused on the political biographies of communist high nomenclature members and maintained a highly subjective tone throughout its pages. In terms of influence over Romanian legislation in actually condemning the physical communist perpetrators, the Report was basically ignored. There were, however, two major positive aspects the Report and Commission can be held responsible for. One was the formation of a transnational network of scholars from Romania and other countries, in particular the United States. The second, even more important, aspect is that the Commission exerted influence over the political decision to start the opening of archives from the communist period. This has been a slow and tumultuous process. However, by 2013, the opening of archival files had reached the year 1989, although administrative problems and lack of qualified personnel have slowed down the process significantly.¹⁰⁸

However, in concluding the historiographic survey, one must point out several facts. When compared to Western historiography on communism (American, German, British, etc.), and even to other national historiographies in Eastern Europe, Romanian historiography has never gone beyond the boundaries of the totalitarian school. One should not undermine the contributions of this school¹⁰⁹, however, when dealing with Romanian historiography, the lack of any preoccupation with social and cultural aspects limits the relevance of such approaches. Furthermore, most monographs in Romanian historiography remain preoccupied with the political elites, and completely ignore any aspects related to everyday life.¹¹⁰ This is inconsistent with the general approach in the

¹⁰⁸ See for instance the list of available archival funds at the National Archives of Romania: <http://www.arhive.nationale.ro/index.php?lan=0&page=313> . Last retrieved on July 17, 2013.

¹⁰⁹ See Stephen Kotkin, "1991 and the Russian Revolution", p. 390.

¹¹⁰ In terms of topic, one exception from this state of affairs is a relatively recent monograph by Cristian Vasile dealing with cultural policies in 1950s Romania. However, the title of the book is ultimately misleading as the only cultural policies taken into consideration are those hinting at intellectual elites. The book does not break the paradigm of resistance versus compromise. See Cristian Vasile, *Politicile culturale comuniste în timpul regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* [Communist Cultural Policies during the Gheorghiu-Dej Regime], Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011.

majority of the Romanian mass-media, portraying the communist period as an aberration and gap in Romanian history.

From this point of view, post-communist Romanian historiography has yet to go beyond the established paradigm of compromise versus resistance. While such a paradigm is understandable and explainable since many of the former communist activists, politicians, and intellectuals are not only alive but also active in the political and cultural fields, one still deplores the absence and, even more, the application of concepts such as *eigensinn* in Romanian historiography on communism.¹¹¹

2.3. Mass Culture in socialist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. Institutional Aspects

When analyzing the cultural institutions in socialist Romania one is confronted with a lot of information about the institutional changes, particularly in terms of names, and with little pieces of evidence about the actual legislation referring to mass cultural policies. National Archives reports and various laws adopted and published in the official bulletin offer a web of transformations for the cultural institutions under the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej regime.

By 1948 the institution in charge of cultural politics and policies in the newly installed communist administration was the Committee for Culture and Arts adjunct to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. It was also subordinated to the Central Section for Political Education.¹¹² During 1948 and 1950 the Central Section for Political Education became the Directorate for Propaganda and Agitation of the Romanian Worker's Party.¹¹³ From 1950 until 1953 the latter was renamed the Section

¹¹¹ A representative fact of the extent of the compromise vs. resistance paradigm in Romanian culture: Katherine Verdery's book *National Ideology under Socialism, Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991 was translated into Romanian as *Compromis și rezistență* [Compromise and Resistance] although its author had explicitly disavowed such an approach in the English version. When discussing *eigensinn*, I am obviously referring to Alf Ludtke's concept. See Alf Ludtke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, N.Y. Ithaca: Princeton University Press, 1995.

¹¹² See the Central Historic National Archives (from now on ANIC – after the Romanian acronym for *Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale*), Propaganda and Agitation Section, File 3/1948, p.23.

¹¹³ ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, File 6/1950, p. 1. This is also published in *Buletinul Oficial al Marii Adunări Naționale a Republicii Populare Romîne* [The Official Bulletin of the Grand National

for Propaganda and Agitation, comprising seven sectors: Literature and Arts; Science; Publishing Houses; Public Education; Central Press; Local Press; Cultural Activists; and Mass Culture Activity.¹¹⁴ In 1953 the Section was divided into three Sections, one for Literature and Arts, another for Propaganda and Agitation, and a third for education and sciences. The former included two sections, one for literature, another one for arts while the second was made up of seven sections: Central Press; Local Press; Agitation; Party Propaganda; Cultural Activists; and Mass Culture Activity. The third was divided into two sections, according to university and pre-university education.¹¹⁵

From 1953 until 1955 the main Section for Propaganda and Agitation re-included the section for literature and arts, but added new sections on cinema, sports, radio, and re-included the publishing houses section. The Education and Sciences Section was re-divided into sectors for biological and agricultural sciences, social and university sciences, technical sciences, and the schools sector.¹¹⁶

For two years, in 1955 and 1956, the institutions in charge of mass culture and propaganda comprised two main sections, one for science and culture, the other one for propaganda and agitation. The former one included the humanistic and technical sciences: technology, biology and agriculture, social sciences, schools, literature, arts and cinema, and university education. The latter one came to include four sub-sections, on propaganda, agitation, publishing houses, and mass cultural activity.¹¹⁷

From 1956 until 1962 the state operated through the Directorate for propaganda and culture, closely connected to the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party. It was divided into three sections: one for science and culture, one for propaganda and agitation, and one for schools. The first section consisted of the biology and agriculture section, the social science section, the literature section, the arts and cinema section, and technical science section. The second one preserved the propaganda and mass culture activity sections, but added/renamed two sections: press and radio, and the

Assembly of the People's Republic of Romania – from now on referred to as *Buletinul Oficial al M.A.N. al R.P.R.*], No. 4, 1950.

¹¹⁴ ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, File 3/1953, p.5.

¹¹⁵ ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, File 5/1953, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, File 10/1955, p. 34. Also published in *Buletinul Oficial al M.A.N. al R.P.R.*, No. 23, 1955.

¹¹⁷ ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, File 5/1956, p. 20.

section for political activity.¹¹⁸ 1963 brought another change in name for the three main sections which became known as: The Science and Arts Section, The Propaganda and Agitation Section and the Education and Health Section.¹¹⁹

The numerous changes are often superficial and refer to the name of the institution. However, one notices from the early 1950s until the mid-1960s a division between what the regime itself views as high arts and research sciences, propaganda and mass culture, and pre-university education. This is partly explainable in the move the Gheorghiu-Dej regime made away from the early 1950s Soviet model, slowly returning to a pre-war division of ministries.¹²⁰

2.4. Financial Aspects

It is a well-known fact that statistics and data from official sources and reports dating from the pre 1989 period are generally unreliable, mainly because of them having been falsified on propaganda purposes.¹²¹ Budgets published in official bulletins have higher degree of credibility, as confirmed by reports in archival files.¹²²

The following table was organized by historian Cristian Vasile and is mainly based on data found in the Official Bulletin of the Grand National Assembly of the People's Republic of Romania. Budget reports found in archival files were used for corroboration with the officially published information from the Bulletins.¹²³

¹¹⁸ ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, File 8/1962, p. 9. Also published in *Buletinul Oficial al M.A.N. al R.P.R.*, No. 40, 1962.

¹¹⁹ ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, File 13/1963, p. 15. Also published in *Buletinul Oficial al M.A.N. al R.P.R.*, No 20, 1963.

¹²⁰ For the division of ministries in interwar Romanian governments, see Bogdan Murgescu, *Romania și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice* [Romania and Europe. The accumulation of Economic Setbacks], Iași: Polirom, 2010.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 345.

¹²² See, for instance, comparison between data published in *Buletinul Oficial al M.A.N. al R.P.R.* no. 5, 1953 and no. 7, 1957 with data in Reports on the Real Budget Situation for the years 1953 and 1957, found in ANIC, Economic Section, file 6/1953, p. 34, and file 9/1957, pp. 23-25 respectively.

¹²³ Cristian Vasile, *Politicile culturale comuniste în timpul regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* [The Communist Cultural Policies during the Gheorghiu-Dej Regime], București: Humanitas, 2011, p. 65. Vasile used data from the following sources: *Buletinul Oficial al M.A.N. al R.P.R.* [The Official Bulletin of Grand Assembly of the People's Republic of Romania], year II, no. 4, January 29th, 1953, pp. 13-14; *Ibidem*, year III, no. 19, April 21st, 1954, p. 147; *Ibidem*, year IV, no. 13, June 2nd, 1955, p. 129; *Ibidem*, year V, no. 11, April 4th, 1956, p. 45; *Ibidem*, year VI, no. 11, March 28th, 1957, p. 61; *Ibidem*, no. 36, December 29th, 1957, pp. 297-298; *Ibidem*, year VII, no. 41, December 30th, 1958, pp. 313-314; *Ibidem*, no. 31, December 31st, 1959, p. 247; *Ibidem*, no. 27, December 27th, 1960, p. 181; *Ibidem*, no. 29, December 30th, 1961, pp. 377-379; *Ibidem*, year XI, no. 28, December 30th, 1962, pp. 231-232; *Ibidem*, year XII, no. 24, December 30th, 1963, pp. 297-299; *Ibidem*, year XIII, no. 24, December 30th, 1964, p. 250; Also, Ion Moraru, "Cultura și masele"

Year	Total Budget, in millions of lei¹²⁴	Budget for Social and Cultural Activities	Budget for Education, Science, and Culture
1953	37,500		
1954	39,338		
1955	43,005	6,800	
1956	44,430	7,693	3,078
1957	45,247	10,496	3,807
1958	47,167	11,291	3,767
1959	51,033	11,928	3,999
1960	55,930	13,436	4,313
1961	64,801	15,198	5,328
1962	77,790	16,964	6,051
1963	81,462	19,122	7,136
1964	91,232	20,635	7,875
1965	98,401	22,075	8,417

One should mention that the budget for culture, as presented in the above table, also included the budget for social security, sports and health. However, for the period 1953 to 1965 one observe a continuous increase in the budget allocated for culture, including mass cultural activities. The increase was possible through budget cuts from other sectors, but it is also explainable by Romania's recovery from the war damages. For

[Culture and the Masses], in Ștefan Bălan, Ilie Murgulescu, George Ivașcu *et al.*, *Momente ale revoluției culturale în România* [Moments of the Cultural Revolution in Romania], București: Editura Științifică, 1964, p. 323.

¹²⁴ Romanian national currency.

the former explanation, evidence is found in Plenary Meetings of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party, such as the one from 1953 on the 1954-1955 budget, stating:

“Of the investments for 1954 and 1955 for heavy industry as well as for large constructions, an amount of 15 to 17 billion lei would be deduced, out of which five billion will be used for agricultural production, consumption, and for other social and cultural activities.”¹²⁵

2.5. Ideology and Policies

The ideology of the Romanian Workers' Party made a clear difference between professional artists and amateur ones, as evident from all reports made at official plenaries, congresses and directorate meetings. In terms of policies this translates in the financial retribution of the former and the status attributed to the latter. For instance, after 1948, actors, musicians, singers, script writers were forced to become “state artists”, which meant a fixed salary¹²⁶. They also had to perform for working people and worker peasant audiences, but they were paid for activities with amateur artists.¹²⁷ Some artists though continued to make money informally out of concerts. While for classical music or early jazz musicians this was harder, as the number of halls and restaurants with an audience for such genres was limited, for folklore performers this became relatively easy, when they performed in the province.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ *Hotărârea Plenarei lărgite a CC al PMR din 19-20 august 1953 cu privire la sarcinile partidului în domeniul dezvoltării economiei naționale și ridicării continue a nivelului de trai material și cultural al oamenilor muncii* [The Decision of the Plenary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party from August 19-20, 1953, regarding the Party's tasks in the development of national economy and continuous enhancement of the cultural and material lifestyle of the working people] in *Rezoluții și hotărâri ale Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român* [Resolutions and Decisions of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party], Volumul II, 1951-1953, Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură politică, 1954.

¹²⁶ This was regulated through numerous normative acts published in the *Buletinul Oficial al M.A.N. al R.P.R.* See, for instance, *Ibidem*, no. 6, 1948, pp. 67-69; *Ibidem*, no. 2, 1950, pp. 34-37; *Ibidem*, no. 9, 1953, pp. 145-146.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*, no. 26, 1954, pp. 34-36.

¹²⁸ Compare, for instance, the case of pianist and conductor Teodor Cosma, who was under surveillance for concerts held in Bucharest and the case of Maria Tănase, who allegedly won important sums of money during the 1950s for concerts in various towns of the country. See for the former case, ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, file 5/1956, pp. 34-37, about complaints on Theodor Cosma's activity and, for the latter, Viorel Cosma, *București. Citadela seculară a lăutarilor români* [Bucharest. The Long Lasting

The explanation for this situation is twofold: on the one hand, control in Bucharest restaurants was stricter, as their audience was more heterogeneous and included foreigners as well, embassy employees in the early 1950s, but also tourists later on. The second explanation is ideological, and had to do with the Party's view of so-called cosmopolitan genres, like jazz, seen as foreign and representative for foreign, Western ideology. While this will oscillate over time, the 1950s are marked by a rigid opposition to any foreign styles, other than the ones from the Soviet Union or friendly socialist countries.¹²⁹

The same attitude was valid in the case of theater, especially for mass audiences. In fact, the Party's ideology explicitly mentioned the purpose of theater as being that of developing the cultural and artistic level of a mass public and of guiding an ever increasing audience toward the principles of a socialist democracy. Thus the objectives of the new theater were twofold: on the one hand, socialist theater had to mark a definitive break up with the bourgeois theater, seen as decadent, mystical and disorienting.¹³⁰ On the other hand, socialist theater had to become a cultural soft weapon in the Cold War environment. Stalin's death in 1953 only briefly attenuated the Cold War atmosphere. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty offered numerous broadcasts comprising theater plays and propaganda that insisted on the differences in civilization between the free Western World and the socialist camp, where artists were allegedly humiliated and stripped of their rights.

Thus the traditional theater genres of drama and comedy are reinterpreted in order to fit in with the ideological requirements. While dramas remain the privileged domain of professional play writers and actors, focusing on reflecting the "new social conscience"¹³¹, comedies were supposed to be written for, and played by a larger

Citadel of Romanian Fiddle Players], Ed. Fundației Culturale Gheorghe Marin Speteanu, București, 2009, pp. 510-515.

¹²⁹ This is particularly evident in the content of articles published in the Cultural Guide [*Îndrumătorul cultural*] over the 1950s.

¹³⁰ George Oprescu et al., *Teatrul în România după 1944* [Theater in Romania after 1944], Bucharest: Editura Academiei RPR, 1959, pp. 14-15.

¹³¹ Florin Tornea, "Reflectarea noii conștiințe sociale în dramaturgia noastră" [Reflecting the New Social Conscience in Our Drama Plays], in *Teatrul*, no. 3, 1959, pp. 14-21.

audience, comprising artistic brigades in factories or pupils' theater groups in secondary schools.¹³²

This became apparent in the ways theater directors were appointed in the province, more than anywhere else. Starting with 1948 and in the early 1950s theaters emerge in almost any major town of the country. They are named either People's Theaters, or State Theaters. The creation of so many theaters posed numerous problems: one had to find the actors, play writers, scene directors and – last but not least – repertoires to fill in the cultural quota. This was made even worse by censorship which limited the number of plays allowed for public performance.

The solution laid in Soviet plays repertoires, coupled with short plays written for amateur artists.¹³³ This solution might have seemed simple in theory but became much more difficult when applied. For instance, a report from 1960 indicated that the director in the county capital of Ploiești was complaining about the lack of amateur play scripts and that in most cases people forgot their lines during performances, because on little amounts of time for rehearsal.¹³⁴

The same thing happened in the case of houses of culture. Initially a major problem for the authorities was to delineate between culture and politics. At a more concrete level this translated into what institutions would be created at a local level, and for what purposes. As mentioned previously, houses of culture had been created since the early 1920s, with a similar combination of cultural, educational and political activities.¹³⁵ The eclectic character continued well into the 1950s. By 1957, a certain D. Fălticeanu, head of the cultural regional section of Constanța, was still acknowledging the need to create separate institutions for cultural activities, political propaganda and – specific for agricultural areas – production propaganda (*propagandă de producție*).

“Our goal is that, as soon as leading committee for cultural institutions are elected, we start establishing a precise role for houses of culture in villages and in

¹³² George Ionescu, “Comedia – izvor de învățăminte pentru artiștii noștri amatori” [Comedy – a Spring of Teachings for Our Amateur Artists], in *Îndrumătorul cultural*, no. 6, 1958, pp. 6-7.

¹³³ Constantin Paraschivescu, “Ce repertoriu fixăm și ce jucăm” [The Repertoire We Fix and Play], in *Teatrul*, no. 4, 1959, p. 38.

¹³⁴ *Raport asupra situației teatrelor din Republica Populară Română* [Report on the Situation of Theaters in the Romanian People's Republic], ANIC, Propaganda and Agitation Section, file 8/1960, pp. 45-46.

¹³⁵ See Gheorghe D. Mugur, *Căminul cultural. Îndreptar*, Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Principele Carol I, 1924, pp. 3-4.

agricultural cooperatives. Thus we intend to create a single cultural institution with a predominantly cultural role, while the others, in agricultural cooperatives, would focus more on political education and on problems related to agricultural production. Thus, comrades, we will achieve better results in the struggle of communist activists in towns and villages.”¹³⁶

Of course, one should bear in mind that Fălticeanu was only an activist and that his article was simply following the official dogma as already stated by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej at the 2nd Congress of the Romanian Workers Party, on December 23rd, 1955.¹³⁷ Gheorghiu-Dej would reiterate the importance of setting houses of culture for the sole purpose of cultural activities – as opposed to political, social or economic issues – in 1965 just a couple of months before his death. At a plenary meeting of the RCP Central Committee, Gheorghiu-Dej would put forth the role of amateur artistic activities, for their ”important contribution to the development of socialist conscience and to the esthetic education of the masses, to using leisure time in a pleasant and instructive way.”¹³⁸

Furthermore, the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej period would see a rapid development in terms of figures, of amateur participation for cultural events, coupled with a continuous growth of funds invested in mass culture and education. Thus, a report from 1965 of the RCP Propaganda and Agitation Section revealed that ”the 7th Edition of the Amateur Theatre Festival (1963-1964) drew in a number of 80.000.000 viewers who appreciated the 300.000 performances presented by amateur artists.”¹³⁹ The figures seem unusually high, regarding both the numbers of spectators and of performances. However, two observations need to be pointed out. First, the report shows no detailed evidence for the numbers presented. Second, one can only imply that the report gathered all performances and all spectators for each individual show, in order to get to a figure that was almost five times the population of Romania in 1964. Such an interpretation suggests

¹³⁶ D. Fălticeanu, „Munca culturală la sate”, in *Îndrumătorul cultural*, No. 1, 1957, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Fond CC al PCR – Propaganda and Agitation Section, Dosar No. 6/1955, file 20.

¹³⁸ Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Fond CC al PCR – Propaganda and Agitation Section, Dosar No. 3/1965, file 18.

¹³⁹ Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Fond CC al PCR – Propaganda and Agitation Section, Dosar No. 3/1965, file 28.

that people had to sit several times through different performances of the same show, a fact that is also confirmed by oral history testimonies from later periods (1970s and 1980s), indicating that the practice of turning artistic events into mandatory one for workers, farmers, pupils was well rooted in the Gheorghiu-Dej period.

The early 1960s also mark the beginning of thaw period that would reach its climax in the late 1960s. Although Christmas will only be celebrated in 1968, there were already signs from the bottom that showed a revival of former traditions. Pilgrimages become popular again and threaten to escape the Party's control in the region of Vlașca which had just been collectivized in 1961.¹⁴⁰ In urban areas street gatherings are noticed around Christmas starting with the early 1960s.¹⁴¹

Traditional folklore begins to be not only reincorporated into amateur bands repertoires, but it replaces Soviet folklore altogether by the mid-1960s. The Agitation and Propaganda Section report mentions that "the Festival of Song, Dance and Traditional Costume, which was first held in the summer of 1964 at the seaside and the Prahova Valley (Mamaia, Eforie, Constanța, Sinaia, Predeal) has gathered some very positive appreciation from the working class people as well as from foreign tourists. Folklore ensembles from eight regions of the country took part in the festival."¹⁴² The incorporation of traditional folklore went hand in hand with the development of international and domestic tourism, marking a break with the 1950s closed society that was oriented solely towards the Soviet Union. Despite continuous and heavy control of folklore by the Party, one notices, in the same 1965 report, "an enrichment of traditional repertoire by creating people (*oamenii de creație*). In the last four years, composers, writers, all have written songs, theatre plays, as well as other literary and artistic materials dedicated to the artistic amateur movement. The Central House of Folk Creation (*Casa Centrală a Creației Populare*) has edited, through its regional branches, more than 1.000 mass songs, folklore adaptations and classical music scores, around 100

¹⁴⁰ Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, *Peasants Under Siege. The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949-1962*, Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011, pp. 243-244. Kligman and Verdery base this interpretation of several oral history interviews conducted in the area.

¹⁴¹ ACNSAS, File I 206465, Volume 2, pp. 10-16.

¹⁴² Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Fond CC al PCR – Propaganda and Agitation Section, Dosar No. 3/1965, file 35.

one act theatre plays, numerous texts for agitation artistic brigades, as well as choreography books and pamphlets and more than 70 edited books comprising literary works from around the country.”¹⁴³

The first years of the Ceaușescu regime did not bring any major innovations regarding the organizing and functioning of amateur formations. Between 1965 – 1966, Ceaușescu mentions this topic only seldom.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the decorations awarded in this period to amateur bands and artistic brigades are few. Among these one can find the Song and Dance Ensemble of the Armed Forces, decorated with the Cultural Merit Order (*Ordinul Meritul Cultural*), 1st Class, in April 1967.¹⁴⁵

One mentioning that Ceaușescu does is at the 8th Congress of the Communist Youth Union, on March 23rd, 1966:

”The Union of Communist Youth must offer a wide organized framework for pleasant and instructive activities, it must initiate cultural and artistic manifestations that are varied, it must develop and taste for literature and art in young people, it must organize tourism, mass sports, thus contributing to the formation of health, optimistic young people, with a high level of culture.”¹⁴⁶

Despite Ceaușescu’s optimism when addressing the communist youth and positive reports accounting for more than one million amateur artists in 1965, grouped into 43,000 brigades, formations and bands¹⁴⁷, the real situation poses several problems. Most amateur bands go through long periods of inactivity, sometimes months in a row without rehearsals, or performances. Others have a short existence, breaking up months after their formation. This was caused primarily by lack of adequate funding, as shown in Law No. 35 from 1966, regarding the expenses allowed for the organization of school competitions. Pupils’ participation in various cultural, artistic, and sports activities was affected by the lack of funding for transportation, accommodation and daily expenses, in

¹⁴³ Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Fond CC al PCR – Propaganda and Agitation Section, Dosar No. 3/1965, file 39.

¹⁴⁴ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *România pe drumul desăvârșirii construcției socialiste. Rapoarte, cuvântări, articole. Iulie 1965 – septembrie 1966*, București: Editura politică, 1968, *passim*.

¹⁴⁵ *Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Socialiste România*, 3rd Year, Part I, No. 39, Friday, April 28, 1967, p. 384.

¹⁴⁶ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

¹⁴⁷ Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Fond CC al PCR – Propaganda and Agitation Section, Dosar No. 8/1966, file 39.

case of taking part in a cultural competition.¹⁴⁸ This only shows that despite increases made in funding over the previous years, there were still problems that affected the functioning of amateur bands, and that these problems were not taken into consideration when setting up goals for the latter.

However, when setting up the new General Directorate of educational activities and social problems, in 1967, two aspects were brought into discussion. One referred to the means by which the Directorate had to support transportation for amateur bands. In more pragmatic terms, these bands could now rely on cars, or buses that belonged to houses of culture. The other aspect referred to the control the Directorate was supposed to take hold of, with respect to "new young amateur bands that offer performances in houses of culture and student clubs, playing Western influenced music".¹⁴⁹ Despite this, there was no mentioning of how the Directorate was supposed to act, nor was there any judgement passed on "Western influenced music", other than its origin.

Despite this, in the same year, Ilie Verdeț, prime vice president (*prim-vice-președinte*) of the Minister Council recommended the Directorate to encourage amateur bands in "paying themselves when organizing cultural and artistic competitions."¹⁵⁰

The 1968-1969 period temporarily affected amateur bands and mass artistic festivals, the cause being the preparations for and, ultimately, the 1968 administrative restructuring of Romania into counties. This led to an increase in the number of important houses of culture – the ones in county capitals, that could also ask for increased subsidies from the state, based on their status.

Toward the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s there were other problems, as noticed in a Agitation and Propaganda Section report from 1970. Despite having been decorated with the Cultural Merit Order in 1967, the General Union of Syndicates in Romania offered artistic brigades of "low quality", "with very little impact on audiences", and "with no diversity concerning their repertoire".¹⁵¹ Furthermore, there

¹⁴⁸ *Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Socialiste România*, 2nd Year, Part I, No. 2, Friday, January 20, 1966, p. 7.

¹⁴⁹ *Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Socialiste România*, 3rd Year, Part I, No. 42, Thursday, May 25, 1967, p. 410.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 411.

¹⁵¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Fond CC al PCR – Propaganda and Agitation Section, Dosar No. 14/1970, file 12.

were also tendencies of "autonomy" and "professionalisation" among many such brigades:

"[...] the last amateur bands competition has shown that the permanent repertoire of vocal, choral and instrumental bands has no room for revolutionary working songs. Even worse, syndicate amateur bands show the same problem. However, despite this, some amateur formations show a highly specialized repertoire whose usefulness for working people we doubt. For instance, the Education Syndicate in Pitești has amateur band specializing on operetta."¹⁵²

What the cultural activists at the Agitation and Propaganda Section were failing to take into account was the separation that still existed between the working class and those working in the educational sector, in terms of cultural and artistic tastes, while remaining strictly focused on their own propaganda materials that prescribed ever changing activities without taking into account everyday life realities. The real threat, however, as made clear by the 1970 report is that such bands, particularly young ones, tended to professionalize, that is to turn their activity into a permanent one, or to search for opportunities in higher education (such as attending the Conservatory, or the Theatre and Film National School). This meant that not only would their tastes change, but also their repertoire, while at the same time making them much less malleable to influences from the propaganda apparatus. Throughout the 1960s such amateur bands became the first professional popular music young bands in Romania, such as Phoenix, Sincron, Entuziaștii, Sideral, and Mondial.

Initially, they were marginalised by the regime, more tolerated than encouraged. However, by the mid-1960s the state owned Electrecord record company began to issue the first 7 inch records of bands such as Entuziaștii, Sincron, or Coral, that played beat music: either adaptations of Western hits, such as Entuziaștii¹⁵³, or of traditional folklore, played in a rock 'n' roll manner, such as Sincron, that used beat rhythms, vocalist – choir duets and electric guitar solos in their adaptation of the traditional *Hăulita de la Gorj*.¹⁵⁴ The late 1960s would bring about not just a more tolerant and liberal attitude from the

¹⁵² *Ibidem*.

¹⁵³ See <http://www.discogs.com/Entuzia%C8%99tii-Dynamite-A-Girl-Like-You-Got-A-Funny-Feeling-She-Is-So-Sweet/release/1736432> ; (last retrieved on November 29th, 2014)

¹⁵⁴ See <http://www.discogs.com/Sincron-Sincron/release/4975235> ; (last retrieved on November 29th, 2014)

state, but also the releasing of original beat songs, sung in Romania, as would be the case with the record debut of the band Phoenix. The reason for this is purely financial: initially Electrecord viewed the release of original Romanian beat songs as unprofitable, and focused on records either by Romanian bands singing in English, or on foreign singers and bands (from Italy, Sweden, France, GDR) singing primarily in English, but also French and Italian. The first EP record by Phoenix contained two adaptations by the Beatles and two original songs. When the record's success (and sales) was higher than that most such records, Electrecord allowed the band to record a second EP of original songs in Romanian. Such an example shows that finances were, at times, more important, than ideology. Throughout the 1970s more and more amateur bands starting in local houses of culture would make their way toward professionalization, while also taking part in various artistic and cultural festivals and competitions.

2.6. Reactions to Official Cultural Policies. The Case Study of Cornel Chiriac

The case of amateur bands turning professional and opening up toward Western influences played a significant part in the history of festivals and artistic competitions, especially in urban areas (large centers, as well as small towns) and for the young generation. Western radio station, particularly US sponsored ones, like Radio Free Europe, small contraband traffic in the border areas, especially in the western part of Romania, and, equally important, international tourism, that allowed foreign tourist to bring in their own everyday life consumer culture to Romania, all these influenced youth culture as well as amateur artistic activities. However, at the moment, it is difficult to assess how these exchanges were possible, what their influences were, and, more importantly, what negotiations (formal or informal) took place between various state institutions and ordinary people. Oral history interviews are one such solution, both in terms of sources and in terms of investigating the issue. Another source is represented by the Securitate files. Ordinary people, as well as celebrities, found themselves either kept

under surveillance, or approached and forced into becoming informants. Of course, when reading such files, one has to take everything with a grain of salt. Despite its fearsome reputation, the *Securitate* (formally known as the Department of State Security: Departamentul Securității Statului) was primarily a bureaucratic institution that needed to maintain an everpresent image in front of the RCP that it was the one institution to rely on in order to keep things under control. In doing so, the Securitate kept huge amounts of informative reports on various people, in many cases just for the sake of providing the Party leadership with the image of laborious activity. Even the smallest details were recorded, either by zealous Securitate officers, or simply offered by informants who thought they were thus showing the cooperation. These details, found passim in various such informative reports, can be used in order to reconstruct the youth culture of the 1960s and beyond, as well as everyday life activities that would be otherwise lost or neglected in present day memories. One such case is that of Cornel Chiriac's *Securitate* file.

Cornel Chiriac was a radio producer, journalist, and, occasionally, a jazz drummer. He remains famous, however, for his radio broadcast for Radio Free Europe, named *Metronom*, from 1969 until 1975, when he was assassinated in Munich.¹⁵⁵

In the early 1960s while he was a high school pupil in his native town of Pitești, Chiriac came under the attention of the *Securitate* for so called "subversive actions" [*activitate de agitație cu caracter dușmănos*].¹⁵⁶ According to the Securitate agents who were keeping Chiriac under surveillance, Chiriac had manifested a "hostile attitude toward our country, the Romanian People's Republic" and had condemned Romania's attitude and policies toward the promotion of jazz music.¹⁵⁷ He was also presented as a follower of "the surrealist abstractionist movement, which is a reactionary movement with no materialist basis whatsoever."¹⁵⁸

Because of this, the Securitate infiltrated collaborators among Chiriac's close friends in order to find out about his habits, musical tastes, correspondence, and sources

¹⁵⁵ See Daniela Caraman Fotea, Cristian Nicolau, *Dicționar rock, pop, folk*, [Rock, Pop, Folk Music Dictionary], Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999, p. 89-91.

¹⁵⁶ The Archive of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Files [further presented by its Romanian acronym ACNSAS], File I 204265, Surveillance File for Chiriac, Cornel, Volume 1, p.5.

¹⁵⁷ ACNSAS, File I 204265, Volume 1, p. 7.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p.4.

of information.¹⁵⁹ Chiriac was openly expressing his disdain for the difficulties of having access to jazz music in Romania, as well as of popularizing jazz music, in letters to his friends, some of which were intercepted by the Securitate.

In a letter to a certain Mr. Colan, Chiriac expresses his frustration at not having received any feedback from the *Contemporanul* magazine, after he had sent an article about the history and importance of jazz music:

“I was a bit rushed in my last letter since I was under pressure with my letter to the *Contemporanul*. The sixteen pages in which I presented my points of view and opinions on jazz have cost me a night without rest.

I haven’t received any answer until today. I don’t know what to believe. Anyway, I’ll keep on waiting. I have also sent them a note on the Electrecord record which has kept me busy for almost a month. I have also put forth a proposition about an introductory class on jazz in a magazine column inside the *Contemporanul*, dedicated to the topic.

I even went as far as citing a quote from the “Bases of Marxist-Leninist Esthetics” regarding music. Indeed, I did write in harsh terms about certain persons. Anyway, this is the last time (as it is the first time as well) when I try to write to a Romanian publication.”¹⁶⁰

The *Securitate* report containing the facsimile of the letter asked for operative measures to keep Chiriac under surveillance at all times. A few weeks later, a report from one of the *Securitate* agents, in charge of Chiriac, contained data about the latter’s room and magazine collection. The room had “jazz” written on the wall in letters made of fir cones. Chiriac also had a transistor radio which he used – according to source “Rose” – to listen to Radio Free Europe. He had also written an underground fanzine, called “Jazz Cool” which he intended to send to his friends by post.¹⁶¹

Eventually the *Securitate* intercepted Chiriac’s fanzine collection in 1963 and even had the young jazz fan report to its county headquarters in Pitești, in order to give a full statement of his actions. Chiriac acknowledged that he had been too “fiery and hotheaded” about his remarks about the republic but he defended jazz music which he

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 31 and pp. 45-46.

saw as the music of the oppressed, the music of those who fight capitalism around the world:¹⁶²

“I started working on the magazine in since (August) 1962 and I continued working until July 1963. I was not forced, neither was I advised by anyone when I took this initiative. I acknowledge the fact that I have broken the rules of our state when I started editing an illegal magazine. Its content is purely musical, politically harmless. But a fact is a fact: I have committed a crime by writing it and by disseminating it amongst the youth. [...] I saw the magazine as a means to straighten out certain problems of jazz: its deeply popular origins, (jazz is black people’s music, born in the fire of the struggle for freedom, against slavery and humiliation inflicted by the American bourgeois society, founded on the domination of the white race. I was also looking to show that there is no connection between the true jazz music and commercial productions of fashionable light music: Rock ‘n’ Roll, Twist, Cha-Cha-Cha, Mambo, etc.”¹⁶³

Chiriac’s case is enlightening not only because it deals with a music genre generally marginalized in Romania until the 1960s.¹⁶⁴ It is interesting because it shows the musical tastes and means of access to musical information for a young person who lived in the province. What is also interesting is the authorities’ attitude toward jazz. While the *Securitate* agents considered it to be cosmopolitan and reactionary, by 1963 the state label Electrecord had already released a few recordings of Romanian jazz musicians, such as Teodor Cosma¹⁶⁵ or Jancsi Kőrössy. This makes the relation between state and jazz (or other music genres) more ambiguous and shows that it could vary according to the agency of the people involved. Furthermore, the reason why jazz or beat music are important for the amateur artistic movement is that it was not considered, for

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, Volume 1, p. 132.

¹⁶³ ACNSAS, File I 204265, Volume 1, p. 131.

¹⁶⁴ Very few jazz recording had been released by Electrecord in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They were mostly presented as dance music and edited on 78 rpm records with two songs, one per each side. One exception to this was a 10inch vinyl record including world dance music and a few jazz numbers, one starring the pioneer of jazz in Romania, Jancsi Kőrössy. See <http://www.discogs.com/Orchestra-Electrecord-Dirijor-Teodor-Cosma-Iancsi-Kőrössy-Muzic%C4%83-De-Dans-Programul-Nr-2/release/4469445> . Last retrieved on July 23, 2014. Kőrössy himself would make his recorded debut on labels in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, before releasing his first album in in 1965 in Romania, the first of what was to become The Jazz Series [*Seria Jazz*]. See <http://www.discogs.com/Jancsi-K%C3%B6r%C3%B6ssy-Jancsi-K%C3%B6r%C3%B6ssy/release/1417776> . Last retrieved on July 23, 2014.

¹⁶⁵ See <http://www.discogs.com/artist/Teodor+Cosma> . Last retrieved on July 23, 2014.

the most part, by the state to be part of professional musical activities, thus being relegated to amateur activities of the young generation. This situation maintained well into the 1970s and was particularly obvious when attempting to secure a record deal with Electrecord. In an article in *Flacăra* Magazine in 1971, George Stanca, a pop music reviewer, noticed how hard it was for any pop artist to release a record, as they had to pass through several levels of official acceptance.¹⁶⁶ The most important one was to get official approval from the Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania, which only included professional musicians, primarily those with a music higher education. Amateur pop bands were excluded from the start from such membership and faced a much tougher environment, as they had to gain support from various television and radio officials, as well as from the public. Their repertoire was, usually, the most relevant for audiences, while ordinary amateur bands were mainly artificially supported by the State through factories and educational institutions. Cornel Chiriac's case study is of importance for exactly these amateur bands whose potential the socialist state never fully realised. While other such case studies are necessary in order to fully grasp the intricacies of state policies and everyday life reactions, it sets, nonetheless, the framework for analysing the negotiations that took place between state and ordinary people.

While the first part of the Gheorghiu-Dej regime was characterized by intense Sovietization and administrative changes, the second part saw the inclusion of elements of interwar culture as well as foreign musical genres, such as jazz. While the latter was still fighting its way into high circles, it also found resonance at a local level, as the Cornel Chiriac case study shows. While the source for such genres was foreign mostly, the attitude of the state toward various genres in music or theater was often ambiguous and relied more on the agents who applied its ideology and policy and well as on the reactions of ordinary people. Ceaușescu's early period continued the liberalization started under Dej until the end of the 1960s, despite continuous signs of financial constraints and efforts by cultural activists to contain artistic activities within the realms of socialist propaganda.

¹⁶⁶ George Stanca, "Cât de greu se scoate la noi un disc", in *Flacăra*, No. 7 (284)/1971, p. 14.

Chapter 3: Forging Culture within Song of Romania (1976-1989)

3.1. Preliminaries

The most illustrious example of officially created mass festivals is that of “Festivalul Național al Educației și Culturii Socialiste *Cîntarea României*”, translated as “The National Festival of Socialist Education and Culture *Song of Romania*”.

In this chapter I aim to analyze the official discourses in the National Festival “Song of Romania” (1976-1989). I will start with a definition and brief outline of political festivals. I will then focus on the structure and functions of the festival, as they were intended by the communist regime in Romania, with a specific regard on the issues of masses, leader and political rituals.

By political festivals I understand politically organized, performative and celebrative events, comprising mass assemblies, artistic competitions, having the purpose of disseminating a variety of political and cultural symbols, in order to provide political legitimacy, by constructing a newly created set of social relations, as well as a new cultural discourse. Although tentative, the definition aims at encompassing the complexity of political festivals as recurring mass discourses and practices *per se*, but also their diachronic amplexity.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Notwithstanding the latter aspect, most historians dealing with various case studies of political festivals have not put forth a definition of political festivals, focusing instead on detailed historical accounts of diverse festivals. However, without aiming at providing an exhaustive secondary literature on the topic, one should mention the pioneering researches in the field by historians such as Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1988, or Charles Rearick, «Festivals in Modern France: The Experience of the Third Republic», *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Jul., 1977). Since the focus of this study is an authoritarian regime of the 20th century, one can also mention among the secondary literature, dealing with mass culture and political festivals in authoritarian states, the following: Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle. The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000; Anson G. Rabinbach, «The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich», *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: Theories of Fascism. (Oct., 1976), pp. 43-74; Rainer Stollmann, Ronald L. Smith, «Fascist Politics as a Total Work of Art: Tendencies of the Aestheticization of Political Life in National Socialism», *New German Critique*, No. 14. (Spring, 1978), pp. 41-60; Simon Taylor, «Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism», *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 4. (Dec., 1981), pp. 504-520; Christopher Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia. The Intelligentsia and the Transition from Tsarism to Communism*,

Political festivals have thus constituted the main means for the creation of collective memories, that is, of “specific historical narratives to the public to promote a ‘social framework’ for popular identity which could authenticate political and cultural policies on both a national and a local level”.¹⁶⁸

The historiography of political festivals encompasses Nazi Germany, The Soviet Union and Fascist Italy as main case studies for the 20th century. Notwithstanding this, political festivals were also representative for various authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe, both during the interwar period and the Cold War.

Politically oriented, or politically organized festivals were a common feature of various regimes in Romania, starting with festivals and rallies in honor of King Charles II, in the 1930s, continuing with youth and work festivals in the 1950s¹⁶⁹ and culminating with the “Song of Romania” festival, in the 1970s and 1980s. The latter went the furthest with regard to official purpose, scale of development, as it aimed at incorporating all forms of artistic, cultural, as well as technical and science activities into a politically marked framework, attributing them only propagandistic and educational features.

The case of socialist Romania is of particular importance, because of the specificities of the Romanian communist regime. Whereas one can argue that all communist regimes in Eastern Europe have encapsulated nationalism into their communist ideologies at one point or another, nationalism in socialist Romania had a specific trajectory, augmented by events such as the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania (1958), followed by a second wave of forced collectivization and mass arrests

Houndmills, London, The MacMillan Press, Ltd, 1990; James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993; James von Geldern, Richard Stites, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917-1953*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995; Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades. Celebrations in the Time of Stalin*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2000; For the Eastern Europe case, see Claes Arvidson, Lars Erik Blomqvist, *Symbols of Power. The Esthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiskell International, 1987. Of particular interest are celebrations and artistic competitions developed as means of creating an ideology, by communist Parties in non-communist states. See, for instance, John E. Bonn, Nataniel Buchwald, Brooks McNamara, Mady Schuman, «Spartakiade», *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 17, Nol. 4, International Festival Issue. (Dec., 1973), pp. 99-112.

¹⁶⁸ Katherine Aaslestad, «Remembering and Forgetting: The Local and the Nation in Hamburg’s Commemorations of the Wars of Liberation», *Central European History*, vol. 38, no. 3 (September 2005), p. 385 apud Jan-Werner Muller, «Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory», in Jan-Werner Muller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 20.

¹⁶⁹ For instance, one of the most important festivals of this type was the Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship, organized at Bucharest, between August 2 and August 16, 1953.

in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and by Ceaușescu's foreign policy, of playing the maverick role within the Warsaw Pact, while retaining Marxist policies in the economic sector and developing a strong personality cult, starting with the first half of the 1970s and especially during the 1980s.¹⁷⁰

3.2. Official Sources

Official sources on “Song of Romania” are vast and multiple, as the festival was one of the main propaganda targets of official newspapers, official radio and T.V. broadcasts.¹⁷¹ The Romanian Television had a special program dedicated to amateur participants at the festival, entitled *Antena „Cântării României”*.¹⁷² Furthermore, television and radio programs also covered the festival extensively, inserting brief reports on rehearsals for various performances within the festival, or on participants and their achievements.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ For the intricacies in the relation between nationalism and Marxist ideology in socialist Romania, Katherine Verdery's study remains the most authoritative one, in terms of synthetic conclusions. Thus, Verdery argues that the communist regime in Romania adopted nationalism in its Marxist ideology, at the end of the 1960s, in order to preserve its legitimacy. See Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1991. For the collectivization process, see Constantin Iordachi, Dorin Dobrințu, (eds.), *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power. The Process of Land Collectivization in Romania, 1949-1962*, Budapest, New York, CEU Press, 2009.

¹⁷¹ *Scînteia*, *România Liberă*, *Scînteia tineretului* were the main Romanian communist newspapers. Each of these newspapers had its own columns, dedicated to the “Song of Romania” festival. For instance, *Scînteia* had the column of “National Festival “Song of Romania”, usually on page 4.

¹⁷² Anca Giurchescu states, in article from 1987, referring to the festival at that time that: “Romanian TV programs, now reduced to two hours per day, include, at least three times a week, fragments of the ongoing Festival, especially in periods marked by important political events.” Anca Giurchescu, “The National Festival “Song of Romania”: Manipulation of Symbols in the Political Discourse” in Claes Arvidsson, Lars Erik Blomqvist, *op. cit.*, 166. For an analysis of Romanian TV programs during the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu, see Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere în istoria comunismului românesc* [Standing on Marx's Shoulders. An Introduction to the History of Romanian Communism], Bucharest: Curtea veche, 2005, 443-466.

¹⁷³ The TV and radio coverage of the festival can be well and accurately observed in the Radio Free Europe Monitoring files, available at the Open Society Archives in Budapest, Hungary. For instance, for the period of November 28 – December 31, 1976, at the beginning of the first edition of the festival, there are 28 mentionings of the festival in the Radio Free Europe monitoring files. See HU OSA 300-60-4, Romanian Monitoring, Archival Box 8. For November 28, 1976, File 815. For November 29, 1976 – File 850. For November 30, 1976 – Files 882 and 883. For December 2, 1976 – File 44. For December 3, 1976 – File 65. For December 5, 1976 – Files 122, 123 and 126. For December 7, 1976 – File 180. For December 8, 1976 – Files 188 and 189. For December 9, 1976 – File 231. For December 11, 1976 – Files 279, 286 and 296. For December 14, 1976 – File 366. For December 15, 1976 – File 381. For December 16, 1976 – File 414. For December 17,

Apart from official media at the central level, dealing with information on general issues, the festival was also the focus of specialized magazines, such as *Cîntarea României* [Song of Romania]¹⁷⁴, which reported on the festival in much greater detail, focusing on case-studies, all around the country, as well as presenting interviews with both organizers and participants at the festival.

The festival was also intensively popularized through collections of books and publications.¹⁷⁵ These included literary anthologies of poetry written by participants at the festival, as well as volumes of reports regarding “Song of Romania” at local levels.¹⁷⁶ To this added numerous other publications, or books, which had tangential connection to the festival, but which were forced to mention it, as they tackled with issues related to culture or science.¹⁷⁷ Articles in newspapers or magazines were of different types. A first type was made of program-articles, without any mentioned author, which set the structure and functions of the festival¹⁷⁸. Such articles also included reports on mass assemblies within “Song of Romania”, dedicated to Ceaușescu.¹⁷⁹ The absence of the author might be interpreted as an indicator for the fact that the opinions and ideas present in the respective articles were not of any person in particular, but of everyone, in general.

1976 – File 485. For December 19, 1976 – File 494. For December 22, 1976 – Files 569 and 578. For December 24, 1976 – Files 625 and 631. For December 25, 1976 – File 660. For December 26, 1976 – File 678. For December 28, 1976 – File 702. For December 29, 1976 – Files 723, 742 and 743. For December 30, 1976 – File 762. For December 31, 1976 – File 806. The number of files available is indicative of the importance given by the regime to this festival, especially in its incipient period.

¹⁷⁴ The first issue of “Song of Romania” magazine appeared in October 1980. The magazine was by no means a new one, as it simply replaced the old *Îndrumătorul cultural* [The Cultural Guide], which appeared until September 1980. Apart from the title, there was no difference between the two magazines, as they dealt with the same issues, and had the same staff of editors and journalists. “Song of Romania” was chosen as the new name for the “Cultural Guide”, in order to relate it to the all-cultural-activity-encompassing festival. The magazine appeared until 1989. After the events of 1989, it changed its title to *Timpul liber* [Free time].

¹⁷⁵ See, for instance, an article in *Scînteia*, January 5, 1978, 4, dealing with editorial plans for publishing houses.

¹⁷⁶ One such example of an anthology is: Ecaterina Mucenic, Paula Braga, *Excelsior '87. Ediția a XVI-a*, Bucharest, 1987.

¹⁷⁷ For instance, Pierre Verone, *Inventica*, Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1983. On page xxxvii, in the introduction to the book, the author makes reference to “Song of Romania”, as the setting in which mass scientific activity could be undertaken.

¹⁷⁸ See, for instance, *Scînteia*, November 28, 1976, 1 and 4.

¹⁷⁹ For instance, *România liberă*, June 13, 1977, 1 and 3. Also, *România liberă*, July 6, 1989, 1 and 3.

A second type included editorials, written by well-known artists, or writers, dealing with theoretical problems and coined in a literary style¹⁸⁰ A third type comprised general articles on culture, which made reference to “Song of Romania”, stressing its importance for stimulating mass culture and forming the new, multilaterally-developed man, who was capable of both producing material goods, in the factory, as a worker, or in the field as a peasant, and of creating works of art.¹⁸¹ A fourth and last type included reports specifically dedicated to various performances and competition levels within “Song of Romania”, as well as reports pointing out to the negative sides of the festival.¹⁸² Surely, the critics did not deal with the nature of the festival and did not advance any real critique to the regime. They worked instead with a pseudo-type of critique, directed against artistic organizers who could not cope with the official directives, or with what the authors of the articles considered to be a “low level of artistic socialist conscience”.¹⁸³

These sources create the official image of the festival. They are indicative of how the regime perceived the festival and of the purposes for which it used the festival. Among the “wooden-language” style of articles, reports, editorials lay the political symbols and ideas which the communist regime was disseminating at a mass level.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ See, for instance, *Scînteia*, January 10, 1978, 1 and 2: Pop Simion, *Muncă și cultură* [Work and Culture]; *Scînteia*, January 20, 1978, 4: Ion Ionoși, *Democratismul culturii noastre socialiste* [The Democracy of our Socialist Culture]; *Scînteia*, January 11, 1976, 1 and 3: Paul Erdos (vicepresident of the Union of Plastician Artists), *Izvoarele limpezi ale muncii și creației* [The Clear Springs of Work and Creation].

¹⁸¹ See *Scînteia*, January 11, 1978, 4: Natalia Stancu, *Avanpremieră 1978: Filmul* [Perspective on 1978: Films]; *Scînteia*, May 13, 1978, 4: Silviu Achim, *Săptămîna Muzeului Național – act de cultură și educație patriotică* [National Museum Week – an Act of Patriotic Culture and Education]; *Scînteia*, January 13, 1978, 4: N. Popescu-Bogdănești, *Note stridente în melosul popular* [Atonal Musical Notes in Folklore].

¹⁸² See *Scînteia*, January 14, 1978, 4. *Scînteia*, January 18, 1978, 4: N. Popescu-Bogdănești, *Din pasiune și îndrumare calificată s-a născut o manifestare viu aplaudată (Adunații-Copăceni)* [Out of Passion and Qualified Guidance A Lively Celebrated Manifestation Was Born (Village of Adunații-Copăceni)].

¹⁸³ See C. Stănescu, “Potențialul artistic și educativ al formațiilor tineretului” [The Artistic and Educational Potential of Youth Formations] in *Scînteia*, October 27, 1976, 1 and 2. The author criticizes the cultural activists for not being able to integrate more and more teenagers – workers, pupils – into the festival.

¹⁸⁴ Language analysis of communist discourse has been the focus of several studies and researches. One of the most important researches is that of Francoise Thom, *Newspeak. The Language of Soviet Communism*, London: Claridge Press, 1989. (Original version, in French: Francoise Thom, *La langue de bois*, Paris: Julliard, 1987). Also, for a semiotic approach, see Rachel Walker, “Marxism-Leninism as Discourse: The Politics of the Empty Signifier and the Double Bind”, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 19, No. 2. (Aprl., 1989), 161-189.

3.3. Political Festivals in Socialist Romania: Song of Romania

Although political festivals played an important role throughout the history of the Romanian communist regime, they became even more important in the early 1970s, with the advent of Ceaușescu's personality cult and the shift toward a mixture of nationalism and socialist ideology. As regards the former, memory and commemorations suddenly found themselves in a central position, as they dealt with both the history of the Romanian Communist Party, and with the much longer – imagined or not¹⁸⁵ – history of the Romanian nation.

Political festivals took on the task of articulating the discourse of national commemorations through an extended series of cultural and artistic practices. Illustrating the regime's attempt at unified control and pompous celebrations, all local and national political festivals in Romania were joined together in 1976 under the umbrella of the so called "National Festival of Socialist Education and Culture *Song of Romania*".¹⁸⁶ As mentioned, this festival appeared in the immediate aftermath of the regime's inclusion of nationalistic elements into its official communist ideology, more precisely after the Eleventh Congress of the Romanian Communist Party (1974) and the first Congress of Political Education and Socialist Culture (1976).

Although in the shadow of the 11th Congress of the R.C.P., this latter congress is most important for the emergence of "Song of Romania", as it officially stated the

¹⁸⁵ By "imagined" I refer to the sense employed by Benedict Anderson, when defining the nation: a political community "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, New York, Verso, 1991, p. 6.

¹⁸⁶ The original Romanian title is *Festivalul Național al Educației și Culturii Socialiste Cântarea României*. The name of the festival was inspired by a famous poem, with the same title, written by Alecu Russo, in the 19th century. The original poem emphasized the love of the author toward his country, as well as the beauty of Romanian lands. In choosing this name for the festival, the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu intended to resort to national ideology as means of gaining legitimacy.

English translations of the name have varied, but without essential differences. The translation encountered mostly is that of "Song of Romania". Other alternatives are "Singing of Romania" (as the name of the festival is translated in the Subject Files of the Romanian Unit, at the Open Society Archives: <http://www.archivum.ws/db/fa/300-60-1-1.htm> Last entry: February 04, 2011). This is due to the fact that "Cântarea României" is an ambiguous term, allowing both translations. However, I consider that the most accurate translation of the name of the festival is that of "Song of Romania", and not "Singing of Romania". This is best explained by the fact that the festival was also known as "Cântare României", which can only be translated as "Song of Romania", acknowledging the existence of the dative case, and not the genitive case, as it happens with "Singing of Romania".

importance for developing a network of mass artistic activities, in order to broaden and increase the level of education for the masses. Without making any reference to a possible festival, Nicolae Ceaușescu officially stressed the importance of “developing in enterprises and institutions unitary councils of education and culture, which would organize, under the leadership of Party organizations, the entire activity of spreading science, of political education, as well as the cultural-artistic work and the pleasant and educative organization of free time.”¹⁸⁷

The festival was established in 1976 and lasted until 1989, comprising seven editions held every two years. Each edition lasted from autumn until the summer of the following year.¹⁸⁸

Structurally, the festival primarily consisted of a politically-set system of national artistic competitions, between all types of social, professional and age categories. It included several phases, starting at a lower mass level, going through county and regional phases, and ending with the republican level of competition, in which – as it was officially claimed – only the selected best of the other levels could participate. The means of competing in the artistic field were various, but the art topics for the festival had to include praises of the official regime, of the new socialist Romania and last but not least,

¹⁸⁷ Original version in Romanian: “să constituim în întreprinderi și instituții consilii unitare de educație și cultură, care să organizeze, sub conducerea organizațiilor de partid, întreaga activitate de răspândire a științei, de educare politică, munca cultural-artistică, precum și organizarea plăcută și educativă a timpului liber.” Nicolae Ceaușescu, «Expunere cu privire la activitatea politico-educativă de formare a omului nou, constructor conștient și devotat al societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate și al comunismului în România» [Presentation Regarding the Political Educative Activity of Forming the New Man, Conscious and Devoted Constructor of the Socialist Multilaterally-Developed Society and of Communism in Romania] in *Congresul educației politice și al culturii socialiste. 2-4 iunie 1976* [The Congress of Political Education and Socialist Culture. June 2-4, 1976], Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1976, p. 51.

¹⁸⁸ Few researches have been conducted on this topic, despite its importance and spectacular character. This means that the history of the festival “Song of Romania” is still under-researched. Anca Giurchescu was among the first to focus on this festival, and the first to construct a theoretical analysis of the latter. Her 1987 article on “Song of Romania” puts forth a typology of functions of the festival and its main features, focusing especially on the political uses of folklore by the communist regime. However, the article lacks primary sources and represents mainly a 1980s perspective on “Song of Romania”, while the festival was still underway. See Anca Giurchescu, «The National Festival “Song of România”, Symbols in Political Discourse», in Claes Arvidson, Lars Erik, Blomqvist, *Symbols of Power: The Esthetics of Political Legislation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiskill International, 1987, pp. 163–171. A more comprehensive, as well as more recent, analysis of the festival is to be found in Vintilă Mihăilescu, «A New Festival for the New Man: The Socialist Market of Folk Experts during the ‘Singing Romania’ National Festival», in Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev, Slobodan Naumovic (eds.), *Studying peoples in the people's democracies. II: socialist era anthropology in south-east Europe*, Berlin, Lit, London, Global, Piscataway, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 2008, pp. 55-80.

of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965-1989).¹⁸⁹ Most of these praises were accompanied by references to the national past, often in the form of commemorations. The focus of the festival was especially on amateurs, on workers, peasants, pupils, who were supposed to create new works of art in their free time, to “sing” the achievements of the socialist society.

The festival had multiple functions. Officially, its primary aim was to “contribute to the education of the entire society, of the youth, in the spirit of endless labor for the growth of socialism in Romania”.¹⁹⁰ The political culture endorsed by the festival thus included abstract values, such as labor, or education, but these were situated in more precise contexts: “growth of socialism” or the education of the younger generations. Despite the vagueness of such phrases, it becomes obvious that the political and the culture were supposed to form a synthetic approach to the overall goal, that of constructing socialism.

At a more concrete level, “Song of Romania” was supposed to serve as a propaganda instrument for Nicolae Ceaușescu’s personality cult and for the official socialist ideology, which incorporated nationalistic elements. Thus it relied on various means, such as mass-media, popular and folk music, as well as a newly created type of folklore, for which scholars have coined the term “folklorism”.¹⁹¹

Although the festival focused on amateur artists, the former also included professional artists, but their function was often reduced to that of supervising the activity of amateurs. Thus many intellectuals and professional artists came to view “Song of Romania” as a means for depriving them of their traditional status of creators of culture. Although, at an institutional level, this was more and more obvious in the increase of state control over professional artists’ unions, the relations between “intellectuals”, the

¹⁸⁹ For a program article, dealing with the main features of the “Song of Romania” festival, see the article «The National Festival of Education and Socialist Culture “Song of Romania”, a brilliant display of the love of work, of the creative virtues of our people, an expression of the democratic cultural politics of the Romanian Communist Party» [«Festivalul Național al educației și culturii socialiste “Cîntarea României”, strălucită manifestare a dragostei de muncă, a virtuților creatoare ale poporului nostru, expresie a democratismului politicii culturale a Partidului Comunist Român»], in *Scinteia*, November 28, 1976, p.1 and p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 1.

¹⁹¹ Anca Giurchescu, «The Power of Dance and Its Social and Political Uses», in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 33. (2001), p. 117.

regime and “Song of Romania” is more complex.¹⁹² By the mid-1970s, the regime had started making budget cuts in the amount of paper for magazines and books. After 1976, “Song of Romania” brought a further budget cut, by drawing in most of the state funding for artistic activities. This affected professional writers and artists directly, as indicated by reports from the *Securitate* archive.¹⁹³ Notwithstanding this, professional artists maintained their role and their work, as both supervisors and competitors, which in turned preserved their social and artistic status and augmented their incomes. Thus, the official intentions of the socialist regime turned into a series of intricate negotiations, which could mean either competing for state resources in a society marred by increased shortage, resisting to it or, simply, complying with situation, in what has been called for a different ideological and historic case study “passive participation”.¹⁹⁴

Propaganda actually meant the attempt to provide legitimacy for the communist regime, and to illustrate the social unity of the Romanian people, regardless of ethnicity or social origin. The ultimate intended function of the festival was that of creating a mass identity for the people, in order to integrate it as a structure subjected to the Party and its Leader.

The festival witnessed an increase in the number of participants, ranging from 2,000,000 members for its first edition of 1976-1977, to 5,084,000 “performers and

¹⁹² One important question for this particular discussion refers to the definition of an “intellectual class” in a socialist regime, more precisely in socialist Romania. Since the socialist regime operated with an ideology based on a static class structure, “intellectuals” were to be defined by what they were not, namely peasants and workers. Thus their role became ambiguous: on the one hand, they, together with peasants – who were gradually turning into peasant workers – were supposed to lose their specific features on the long run, by the creation of the “new man”. However, in the permanent transition toward communism, they were assigned a crucial role, that of media between the Party’s ideology and the uneducated classes.

¹⁹³ The file of Romanian poetess Nina Cassian (who was kept under surveillance by the *Securitate* for more than 12 years, for her private or public criticisms to the Party’s policies) contains several references to budget cuts in artistic activities that affected her and other professional artists directly or indirectly, as well as mentioning of the “Song of Romania” Festival, seen as a threat to professional artists’ status. Thus, in one private meeting, recorded and transcribed by the *Securitate*, Cassian complains that “while writers are deprived of all their advantages, billions of work hours are spent for “Song of Romania”, and the competitors don’t want to go back to the factories and manifest a desire for becoming professionals”. A.C.N.S.A.S., Nina Cassian (Ștefănescu Renee Annie), Dosar Informativ No. 256690, Vol. 4, file 139. This sort of complaint is expressed on various occasions in the company of fellow writers and artists. See for instance, A.C.N.S.A.S., Nina Cassian (Ștefănescu Renee Annie), Dosar Informativ No. 256690, Vol. 1, file 28 back page, file 246, or file 293, or Vol. 4, file 84.

¹⁹⁴ For the latter aspect, see Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, Yale University Press, 1989. Stephen Kotkin discusses the usefulness of such an approach for the study of the 1930s Soviet Union. See Stephen Kotkin, «1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks», *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (June, 1998), p. 419.

creators of various ages and professions”.¹⁹⁵ To these data, one should also add the number of passive participants, such as spectators, or persons in charge of organizing the performances.

As Anca Giurchescu points out, *Song of Romania* did not bring anything innovative concerning the type of artistic performances, continuing, in fact, a line of artistic festivals, which had been set up, with the proclamation of the communist republic (1948).¹⁹⁶ For instance, *Festivalul filmului la sate* [The Film Festival for Villages] existed before “Song of Romania”.¹⁹⁷ However, after the emergence of “Song of Romania”, this festival was incorporated in it, along with other already existing festivals at local or regional level.¹⁹⁸

Not just particular festivals existed well before “Song of Romania”, but also the entire structure on which the festival was based for its 13 years duration. The “Decree No. 703/1974 for Establishing Unitary Norms of Structure for Cultural-Educative Institutions” had already set out a national structure of cultural institutions, made up of *cămine culturale* [houses of culture for rural areas], *case de cultură* [houses of culture for urban areas], clubs, libraries, museums, theaters, centers for guiding folk creation and mass artistic movement and people’s schools of art.¹⁹⁹ Such cultural and artistic institutions existed long before Decree No. 703, which serves in this case only as an

¹⁹⁵ HU OSA 300-60-1. Romanian Unit. Subject Files. Box 109. Folder 804. Bucharest Agerpress, September 8, 1989.

¹⁹⁶ Anca Giurchescu, «The National Festival “Song of Romania”: Manipulation of Symbols in the Political Discourse», in Claes Arvidsson, Lars Erik Blomqvist, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

¹⁹⁷ This particular festival is mentioned, for instance, in *Scînteia*, January 11, 1975, 4. “Song of Romania” only started in 1976.

¹⁹⁸ See the mentioning of the Film Festival for Villages, 1976-1977 Edition, in *Scînteia*, December 2, 1976, 4. The Festival is officially organized under the auspices of the “Song of Romania” festival.

¹⁹⁹ See «Decret pentru stabilirea normelor unitare de structură pentru instituțiile cultural-educative 703/1973» [Decree 703/1973 for Establishing Unitary Norms of Structure for Cultural-Educative Institutions], in *Culegere de legi, decrete și hotărîri. În ajutorul activului sindical*, Vol. II [Collection of Laws, Decrees and Decisions. For the Use of Syndicate Activists], Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1974, pp. 512-513. *Cămin cultural* is defined as an institution which can be organized in every commune, as a state-financed institution, without any juridical representation, with the sole purpose of organizing permanent cultural-artistic activity. The precondition for the existence of a *cămin cultural* is that the building housing it should have at least one hall for cultural and educational manifestations (Decree 703/1974, Chapter II, Article 4, in *Ibidem.*) *Casa de cultură* is defined as a state financed institution, in the subordination of the People’s Council in every city, town, working center, etc, and without any juridical representation. The preconditions for the existence of a *casa de cultură* were that it should organize a permanent cultural-educative activity and have at least a people’s university, with three courses, a choir, a theater brigade, a dance group and a propagandistic artistic brigade. It should also have had there or four artistic and technical-practical circles (Decree 703/1973, Chapter II, Article 5, in *Ibidem.*, p. 513).

argument that the festival did not presuppose a structural innovation.²⁰⁰ The decree also emphasized the quantitative development of cultural activity and it stressed the importance of educative role that culture was supposed to assume within the socialist society. Apart from this, official propaganda was already emphasizing the necessity of increasing the cultural activity at the mass level, in order to create the socialist conscience of the new man.²⁰¹

There was one aspect, however, in which “Song of Romania” outpaced every other artistic structure created previously by the regime: the scale and the aim to encompass all forms of artistic activity at all levels – local, regional, national – and to subject them to the guidance of the Party.

The festival was only briefly mentioned for the first time in *Scînteia*, in October 1976²⁰², but the first program article in the media was on November 28, the same year.²⁰³ I consider this article to be, from the official perspective of the regime, a source of primary importance, as it covers both the structure and the functions of the festival as well as its meaning within the official ideological system.

“Song of Romania” was presented as the materialization of the 11th Congress of the R.C.P., in the domain of political, ideological and “cultural-educational” activity.²⁰⁴ The above mentioned article relies heavily on quotations from Nicolae Ceausescu’s speech, at the Plenary Meeting of The Central Committee of the R.C.P., from November 2-3, 1976, indicating him as the originator of the festival. The main objectives of “Song

²⁰⁰ The first modern houses of culture in Romania were established in 1919, although their existence predates World War I. See Gheorghe Popescu, «Primele cămine culturale înființate oficial», *Îndrumătorul cultural*, No. 4 (April, 1970), p. 54.

²⁰¹ For instance, «Universitatea populară. Atribuții și răspunderi sporite în sistemul răspîndirii cunoștințelor științifice» [People’s University. Increased Functions and Responsibilities in the System of Spreading Scientific Knowledge] in *Scînteia*, January 19, 1975, p. 1 and p. 3. Also, Vasile Tomescu, «Obiective educative în viața muzicală din județe» [Educational Objectives in Musical Activity from Counties], in *Scînteia*, April 29, 1975, p. 4.

²⁰² Nicolae Nistor, «Cîntare României. Un festival al muncii avîntate pentru înflorirea patriei socialiste» [Song of Romania. A Festival of Forward-Looking Work for the Blossoming of our Socialist Motherland], *Scînteia*, October 23, 1976, p. 4.

²⁰³ «Festivalul național al educației și al culturii socialiste „Cîntarea României”» [The National Festival of Socialist Education and Culture “Song of Romania”], in *Scînteia*, November 28, 1976, p.1 and p.4. Before that, the festival had been mentioned at the Plenary Meeting of The Central Committee of the RCP, from November 2-3, 1976. *Ibidem*, p.1.

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1. The article also appeared in *Almanahul Scînteia*, 1977, pp. 69-72. Syntagms like „cultural-educational” were frequent in the press of the time. While there was no explicit definition of the joining together of the two concepts, it can be assumed that it was indicative of the interrelation between education and culture in the eyes of the regime.

of Romania” were: the creation of new works of art, - “inspired by present-day realities, by the history of our people, by the glorious historical past of our Party and of the working class” – the quantitative increase of spectacles and concerts and, finally, the qualitative increase of artistic performances, regarding the ideological content and artistic quality.²⁰⁵ Commemorations and anniversary celebrations were, thus, regarded as primary practices within the festival and their role as serendipitous for the then present joining together of national and Party past events.

Held every two years, the festival’s framework was supposed to include various artistic competitions, starting with the mass level – held between October of the first year of the respective edition and February of the following year – the county level, also including the sectors of Bucharest – held between March and April – , the regional level – held in May in the cities of Bucharest, Constanța, Pitești, Craiova, Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Baia-Mare, Tîrgu-Mureș, Iași, Galați – and the republican level – in the last decade of May.²⁰⁶ An edition of the festival would end with the Exhibits of the Amateur and Professional Artists, awarded within the competition.²⁰⁷

Despite its broad social appeal, the festival also imposed certain criteria on the persons who were allowed to participate. The preconditions were related to the activity of the participant in mass production, as well as his/her “social and ethical exemplary behavior”.²⁰⁸ Apart from these, there were also artistic criteria: participants were supposed to “promote a revolutionary and efficiently-educative art”, and to conduct a recurring artistic and educational activity among their colleagues.²⁰⁹ Again the vagueness of the phrases comes out as striking at times, leaving considerable room for interpretations at the practice level. The educational aspect is clearly emphasized, but the criteria for what is to be considered as “educational” or “non-educational” are left out of the official picture.

Two more aspects, presented in the program-article, need to be put forth and then further explored. The first one regards the obligations of artistic formations:

²⁰⁵ *Scînteia*, November 28, 1976, p. 1.

²⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

- each formation must present for the public at least one spectacle per month;
- theater brigades will present, annually, one or two plays in one act, for the first time;
- choral and orchestral formations will take on six to eight new songs, annually;
- dancing formations will enrich their repertoire annually, with three up to four folk dances, respectively with one, two new thematic dances;
- artistic brigades will present, annually, two or three performances, for the first time;
- literary montage formations will annually prepare one or two new programs²¹⁰

The second issue regards one of the last statements of the article, regarding the fact that the festival would not be a mere spectacle, but that it would be accompanied by a “vast program of political and educational manifestations”.²¹¹

In this sense, Giurchescu identified several symbols, which were disseminated through the “Song of Romania” festival: “moral-political unity of the people”, “socialist democracy”, “multilaterally developed socialist society” and “New Man, builder of the most righteous system in the world”.²¹² These symbols were designed to appeal to masses, as they put forth ideas, such as mass unity, mass progress in the name of forming the “New Man”, in the all-encompassing framework of national ideology and socialist politics. One might find this as strange, given the initial emphasis on political education and on its enhancement, as the symbolic syntagms indicated by Giurchescu and present in official discourses could often remain beyond the grasp of ‘ordinary people’.

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

²¹¹ *Ibidem*.

²¹² *Ibidem*, p. 166.

3.4. The Role of the Masses in Song of Romania

Masses were best represented in the “Song of Romania” discourse by references to amateur artists, as well as by exploring and using traditional folklore as means of creating unity. Amateur artists were considered as the primary point of departure for the formation of the multilaterally-developed new man. “Multilaterally-developed” meant multiple specializations in totally different fields of activity. The focus was on workers, peasants, pupils who, beside their basic activities, were supposed to manifest themselves in the artistic domain as well, thus reaching the status of *new man*. The issue was a central one in official mass media, numerous articles dealing with the importance of amateur artists for the process of “advancing toward communism”.²¹³ “Song of Romania” was supposed to perform several functions for mass amateur artists. Firstly, official ideology stated that modernization through industrial and agrarian development could only be achieved by a high level of political conscience, and this, in its turn, was attainable for the masses by education. Education meant acquiring a political and artistic culture, as the two components were seen as interdependent of each other.

Secondly, the festival was designed to provide workers and peasants with means of communication of their accomplishments in the production field. Thus, officially, amateurs were supposed to provide the regime with an alternative, formally-artistic report

²¹³ See for instance: Vasile Donose, «Festivalul național ‘Cîntarea României.’ Echilibrul, armonia și frumusețea sufletească a poporului nostru în spectacolele artistice create de oamenii muncii.» [The National Festival “Song of Romania”. The Peace, Harmony and Spiritual Beauty of Our People in the Artistic Performances Created by the Working Class], *Scînteia*, May 15, 1977, p. 4;***, «Etapa republicană a artiștilor amatori» [The Republican Phase of Amateur Artists], *Scînteia*, May 28, 1977, p. 5; Simion Pop, «Muncă și cultură» [Work and Culture], *Scînteia*, January 10, 1978, p. 1; N. Popescu-Bogdănești, «Din pasiune și îndrumare calificată s-a născut o manifestare viu apludată. (Adunații-Copăceni)» [Out of Passion and Qualified Guidance A Lively Applauded Manifestation Was Born], *Scînteia*, January 18, 1978, p. 4; Ion Ianoși, «Democratismul culturii noastre» [The Democracy of Our Culture], *Scînteia*, January 20, 1978, p. 4; Constanța Lăzărescu, «Festivalul Național „Cîntarea României”. Generos cadru democratic de stimulare a creației, de formare a omului nou» [The National Festival “Song of Romania”. Generous Framework of Stimulation of Creation and of Forming the New Man], *Scînteia*, January 5, 1984, p. 4; Gheorghe Pîrja, «Ecolul spiritului combativ și surdina criticii» [The Echo of Fighting Spirit and The Mute of the Critique], *Scînteia*, May 14, 1989, p. 4; Sava Bejenariu, «Argumentele performanței artistice» [The Arguments of Artistic Performance], *Scînteia*, May 20, 1989, p. 4; Gheorghe Giurgiu, «Formarea conștiinței socialiste – în centrul activității cultural-artistice» [The Formation of Socialist Conscience – The Center of Cultural-Artistic Activity], *Scînteia*, September 21, 1989, p. 4; Șerban Rădulescu, «Afirmarea largă a talentelor din popor» [The Large Affirmation of Talents Among Our People], *Scînteia*, September 26, 1989, p. 4.

on their ideas, feelings, state of activity, etc. “Song of Romania” was the way in which they could bring their contribution to the cultural heritage of the country.

Folklore was the other main discourse which the regime sought to use and adapt. It was perceived as the center of Romanian cultural identity and, thus, it constituted a perfect means of gaining legitimacy. “Song of Romania” was supposed to discover, maintain and provide a framework for the evolution of folklore.²¹⁴ Folklore was associated with national identity, at a mass level, expressed in artistic forms. It could be changed in order to disseminate symbols of national ideology, such as cultural unity of the Romanian people, as well as ideas of present-day prosperity and belief in socialist progress.

It can be argued that one of the most important elements which gave folklore its central status within “Song of Romania” was its traditional authenticity regarding national cultural heritage. This authenticity was interpreted by the regime, on a higher and more abstract level, as the main argument for its claim of legitimacy. On a lower level, folklore was used because of its traditional popularity among ordinary people, which made it, at least in the eyes of the officials, a better channel for disseminating rigid, abstract political symbols and ideas to which people could not, by other means, relate to.

Nevertheless, “Song of Romania” had a higher purpose than just simply educating amateurs artists, or revitalizing folklore. Although official sources never mentioned this directly, it can be deducted that the festival was used as mass means of creating a complex type of identity, tangentially including artistic or cultural education, but primarily relying on political indoctrination regarding the status of the masses in report to national values within the socialist society and in report to their leader.

This particular type of identity is thus a mass identity, within which the individuals are enabled to act. In other words, individuals could act mainly through mass activity. At the level of “Song of Romania” this was best expressed in the artistic forms of choirs, artistic brigades, with fixed repertoires, which increased in numbers, but were drastically restrained in esthetical variety. The identity of an individual was supposed to

²¹⁴ N. Popescu-Bogdănești, «Note stridente în melosul popular» [Atonal Musical Notes in Folklore], *Scînteia*, January 13, 1978, p. 4.

be shaped by mass collectives, through which he could later on report to the Party or to the Leader. If intellectuals – as Katherine Verdery argues²¹⁵ – helped create the nationalistic socialist ideology, “Song of Romania” was intended to provide the mass cultural tools for disseminating the symbols of this ideology.

3.5. Leader and Commemoration

In order to point out the cult of personality and the leader’s role within the framework of “Song of Romania”, I have chosen a highly detailed article, describing the closing ceremony of the first edition of the festival.²¹⁶ Although the article is at times written in a highly personal style, the author of the article is once again anonymous, in order to show once more that the latter’s personally-conceived ideas belonged in fact to everybody.

The article deals with several moments which can be situated in the following chronological order: important spectators at the ceremony, arrival of Ceaușescu and high officials, the setting of the ceremony, the ceremony itself and, lastly, the popular celebration following the ceremony, in which Ceaușescu interacts with the masses. I will focus on two moments: the setting of the ceremony and its proceedings.

The setting is highly symbolic:

The stadium “August the 23rd”, which hosts the closing ceremony of the festival – this manifestation of unique scale in the history of our culture – is brightly illuminated, and decorated as for a celebration. On the forefront of one of the tribunes, is the portrait of comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, with red and national flags to the left and right of it.

Words of praise can be read on immense panels, dedicated to the Party and its secretary general, to our socialist motherland, to our wonderful people.

²¹⁵ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism...op. cit.*

²¹⁶ ***, «Spectacolul de gală al laureaților festivalului național „Cîntarea României”» [The Closing Ceremony of the Laureates of the National Festival “Song of Romania”], *România Liberă*, June 13, 1977, p. 1 and p. 3.

Thousands of young people form with their bodies the name of the beloved and suggestive name of the festival – “Song of Romania”.

The vast scene, arranged on the field of the stadium, is guarded by a torch, lit at the beginning of the show, symbolizing the brightness, the permanence of Romanian spirituality, and on both sides of it, are written the names of all the counties, signifying their presence to this holiday of work and creation of the entire country.

The stage is guarded by workers, peasants, *pionieri*, pupils, students and soldiers, who, surrounded by laurels, symbolize all who have engaged in this grandiose competition.²¹⁷

The setting provides a symbolic topography for the ceremony, incorporating a wide variety of symbols and also attributing them more or less importance, by their position within the setting. Two main symbols guard the stage: Nicolae Ceaușescu and the torch. Whereas, Ceaușescu is the symbolic supreme spectator of the whole ceremony, the torch abstractly symbolizes continuity and brightness, features which are directly transmitted to the Leader also.

The entire country is represented at the ceremony both in geographical terms – with the symbols of all the counties – and in terms of social and professional groups – by the workers, peasants, pupils and soldiers guarding the scene.

One observes two types of symbols, which hold significance for similar ideas or objects: human and abstract. On the one hand, Ceaușescu and the representatives of the ordinary people, on the other, torches and symbols of geographical, administrative units.

Different types of music mark the beginning of the proceedings:

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3. “Stadionul „23 August”, care găzduiește gala laureaților festivalului – această manifestare de amploare unică în istoria culturii noastre – este luminat feeric, împodobit sărbătorește. Pe frontispiciul uneia din tribune se află portretul tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu, încadrat de drapelul roșii și tricolor.

Pe imense panouri se pot citi cuvinte de slavă închinare partidului și secretarului său general, patriei socialiste, minunatului nostru popor.

Mii de tineri înscriu, cu trupurile lor, numele îndrăgit, sugestiv, al festivalului – „Cântarea României”

Vasta scenă, amenajată pe gazonul arenei, este străjuită de o flacără, aprinsă la începutul spectacolului, simbolizând strălucirea, perenitatea spiritualității românești, iar de o parte și de alta se înscriu stemele tuturor județelor, semnificând prezența la această sărbătoare a muncii și creației a întregii țări.

Scena este străjuită de muncitori, țărani, pionieri, elevi, studenți și ostași, care, înconjurați de lauri, simbolizează pe toți cei care s-au aflat angajați în această grandioasă întrecere.”

The band performs the solemn notes of the National Hymn. In sound of trumpets, the master of ceremony announces the beginning of the closing festivity. After a prolonged set of the band playing, one can hear the organ-like vibration of tens of alphorns, coming from the depths of the past, and calling people to this great celebration of Romanian culture, as they once used to call them to battle.²¹⁸

The musical overture paves the way for a parade of participants – the winner and laurels of the first edition of “Song of Romania” – simultaneously with a mass performance comprising folk songs, light music, choirs, folk dance, poetry interpretation. The themes of all these genres refer either to the joy of living in socialist Romania, or to the Party and its’ Leader.

The parade starts once more at a symbolic level:

In front of the official tribune pass, like a living river, the columns of participants. In an unstoppable wave of optimism, each county gives its respects to the festival, through its representatives, a significant act for the huge scale of this manifestation, for its truly national character.

With a true esthetic satisfaction, the spectators watch the passing of folk artists, whose costumes of a unique beauty are a live testimony of the genius of the Romanian people, of the harmony, ingenuousity and sense of colors, which mark its creations.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*. “Fanfara intonează acordurile solemne ale Imnului de stat. În semnalele trompetelor, crainicul anunță începerea spectacolului de gală. După o repriză susținută de fanfară, se face auzită, parcă venind din adâncul vremurilor, vibrația de orgă a zeci de tulnice, care, așa cum chemau cândva la luptă, cheamă astăzi la această mare sărbătoare a culturii românești.”

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*. “Prin fața tribunei oficiale înaintează aidoma unui fluviu viu, coloanele participanților. Într-un șuvoi nestăvilat de optimism, rînd pe rînd dă onorul, prin reprezentanții săi la festival, fiecare județ al țării, fapt semnificativ pentru aria urișă de desfășurare a acestei manifestări, pentru caracterul ei cu adevărat național.

Cu o reală satisfacție estetică este primită de către cei prezenți trecerea artiștilor populari, ale căror costume de o neasemuită frumusețe sunt mărturii grăitoare ale geniului artistic ale poporului român, ale armoniei, ingeniozității și simțului cromatic care-i caracterizează creațiile.”

The parade mainly consists of the festival laurels, which are divided according to provinces: Moldova, Transylvania, Muntenia and Oltenia. Oltenia is the last province to appear, as it was Ceaușescu's home land. Stating that each province is represented by its traditional costumes, the article depicting the ceremony abounds in lavish comments, on the historical past of each region, always emphasizing the ethnical unity of the Romanian socialist country, or the artistic traditional richness of its traditional provinces.²²⁰

Oltenia's parade, as well as the whole ceremony, is ended with an immense group dance – *hora*²²¹ – performed by all the participants. Nicolae Ceaușescu descends from his tribune, together with high Party officials and Elena Ceaușescu, and enters the *hora*, dancing with the people.

If the setting was highly symbolic, the actual proceeding comes nowhere shorter, regarding its use of symbols. The whole ceremony can be interpreted as a huge theater play, characterized by massiveness and concentrated symbolic framework. Every participant plays a part, a role, which is assigned according to the general symbolic representation. At the same time the proceeding – as described in the article – intends to show cohesion, as the main feature for unity.

Historical references, more or less concrete abound in this setting. The spectacle starts with the musical tones of the alphoms. It continues with detailed information on each historical province. It ends with the main commemorating reason of the spectacle, the commemoration of 100 years since the War of Independence (1877-1977). One notices that the historical references are all national in this particular case, being either part of a modern national past, or of national legends and folktales.

²²⁰ Each artistic genre is commented, as well as each example of official poetry, which is recited at the manifestation. *Ibidem*.

²²¹ *Hora* refers to a traditional circle dance, performed in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro. Romanian *hora* (in the plural: *hore*) is a type of folk circle dance, which presupposes a number of dancers who form a circle by joining hands. The dance consists of a spinning of the circle, in clockwise direction, with three steps forward and one step back. See <http://www.eliznik.org.uk/RomaniaDance/hora.htm> Last entry: February 04, 2011. Anca Giurchescu refers to the social uses of dance, arguing that traditional dances can be turned into ideological tools of propaganda, in order to symbolize social unity. Anca Giurchescu, «The Power of Dance and Its Social and Political Uses», in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 33. (2001), pp. 109-121.

3.6. Political Rituals

Political rituals are usually part of political festivals. They both resemble by their recurring character, as well as by their use of symbols. Although “Song of Romania” was primarily designed as an all-inclusive network of artistic competitions, it also presupposed the use of rituals, out of which the closing ceremony was the most grandiose and effective. Initially, the spectacle was effective for all its actual participants, who were live witnesses of the mass assembly. Through mass media, the ritual was transported into all areas of everyday life.

Such rituals were not specific to “Song of Romania” only. They emerged, and were organized with every important occasion. National holidays, visits of foreign high officials, Ceaușescu’s anniversary, the closing ceremony to “Dacia” – *Song of Romania*’s counterpart in sports activity – all constituted pretexts for developing such rituals.²²² This meant that rituals organized on such occasions resembled to a certain extent, as they were all supposed to disseminate the same general political symbols. Nevertheless, it can be well argued that political rituals during “Song of Romania” had their own specific features, as they were intended to disseminate symbols of a political culture, on the basis of artistic creations. They were not *rituals of initiation*, as described by Christel Lane in the case of the Soviet Union²²³. They fit best with Lukes’ definition, which emphasized political rituals as means of getting participants’ attention to symbols, meant to ensure social cohesion and provide political legitimacy.²²⁴

Lane also explores rituals as means of appealing to people’s common emotions and feelings.²²⁵ The political ritual of the closing ceremony for “Song of Romania” was meant to be an ideal practice, as it resorted to common emotions such, as pride of and safety for belonging to a collective, which was all-encompassing and all-powerful. Ceaușescu appears as the supervisor of this mass assembly, but at the same time, as shown before, he is capable of descending from his superior position and of integrating

²²² See, for instance various articles from mass media on special dates, such as August 23 (Romanian National Day until 1989, commemorating the coup d’état on the 23rd of August 1944, when Romania joined the Allies in fighting Nazi Germany) (the actual reports were published a day later), January 26 (Nicolae Ceausescu’s birthday), etc.

²²³ Christel Lane, *op. cit.*, pp. 74, 81-82, 89, 90-94.

²²⁴ Steven Lukes, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

²²⁵ Christel Lane, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

with the masses. Thus, he assumes two images: that of Leader and that of equal to his subjects. It should be noticed, however, that his condition as an equal of participants only appears within this ritual. In this respect, it can be argued that his descent is – symbolically speaking – a pseudo one. In fact, it is the masses that are given the opportunity to sit beside him, and not the other way around.

Joseph Roach observed the traditional role of performances and festivals of staging a reversed, temporary social order.²²⁶ This role is employed in the political ritual of “Song of Romania” also. Masses and Leader join together in the *hora*, commemorating Romania’s past and celebrating its present socialist achievements. Differences are apparently set aside. But the traditional role of festivals as reversing-order performances is reinterpreted in this particular case. The Leader only manifests his physical presence, which acts, in the official discourse, as an agent for consolidating social unity and for providing political legitimacy.

3.7. Concluding Remarks

Less than a month after Ceaușescu’s end, in December 1989, a certain Aureliu Goci referred to “Song of Romania” as a festival of “sad memory”.²²⁷ He went on to acknowledge the reality of the festival’s “infrastructure”, referring to “ordinary’s people desire to sing, write poetry, paint, act in theatre plays, dance”.²²⁸ Goci saw Ceaușescu’s personality cult as the “superstructure” of the festival, namely that particular part which was disseminated through mass media. In this sense, the author saw the festival as a failure, but was optimistic about the perspectives that lay ahead for amateur artists. Future events would prove that freedom, seen in 1990 as the foremost condition for

²²⁶ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead. Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 1-31.

²²⁷ Aureliu Goci, «Între diletantism și profesionalizare» [Between Amateurism and Professionalisation] , *Timp liber*, No. 1 (January, 1990), p. 29. *Timp liber* was the continuation of the *Cîntarea României* [Song of Romania] magazine (August, 1980 - 1989), which in its turns had continued *Îndrumătorul cultural* [Cultural Guide] (1951 - July, 1980). All these magazines dealt with mass culture and cultural policies. *Timp liber* only lasted until October 1990, when its publication ceased.

²²⁸ *Ibidem*.

creation, was not the only prerequisite when dealing with cultural activities, especially in a former socialist state that found itself in a permanent transition, facing financial turmoil.²²⁹

National commemorations continued though, as the 1989 rupture allowed a series of continuities in the discourses and practices of nationalism and commemorations. This only makes the evaluation of official policies and propaganda discourses during the communist regime even more difficult, especially when so many of the present day evaluators used to be a part of the propaganda machine during festivals like “Song of Romania”. Grasping the official intentions of the communist regime, a focus of this article, represents only a first stage. The questions of whether these intentions functioned and, most importantly, how they functioned still remain and their answers are intrinsic to post 1989 developments in Romania and in Europe.

With a relatively brief period during the 1950s and early 1960s, national commemorations have always been an integral part of Romania’s modern past and one can argue that their importance in post 1989 events was directly influenced by the intensity of such practices and discourses during the late socialist period. The latter’s fall in 1989 only shows that state legitimation proves to be a much more complex issue, going beyond national cultural practices and political rituals.

²²⁹ On this issue, see, for instance, Steven D. Roper, *Romania. The Unfinished Revolution*, Routledge, 2000.

Chapter 4: Oral History: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

4.1. Preliminaries

Political festivals had a shifting role throughout the relatively short history of socialist Romania. Initially they represented the mass cultural level of the Sovietization process started in 1948, with a specific focus on the most debated and central objectives of the Romanian Communist Party: the collectivization (in the rural areas) and the so-called process of nationalization (in urban areas). Since the majority of Romania's population lived in rural areas, the focus was mainly on collectivization, a fact which – as previously noticed - is shown by the special attention given in main official newspapers, party meetings, or cultural magazines. The strong appraisal of Soviet values (often borrowed word by word) gradually lost of its intensity once the destalinization process started in the second part of the 1950s, letting the floor open for more and more “Romanian” nationalistic elements. This is evident throughout the 1960s with several chronological catalysts marking the shift from Marxism Leninism to national communism.²³⁰

²³⁰ A first moment would be the so-called “Declaration of Independence” of April 1964, following the C.C. Plenum of the Romanian Workers' Party of the same month. Needless to say the official title, as published by *Scântea* was simply “Declaration of the Romanian Workers' Party, even though subsequent shifts in ideology added the nationalistic flavor to it. The most important step – as considered by many (see Katherine Verdery, *National ideology under Socialism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991; Daniel N. Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceausescu Era*, New York : Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, c1988, 1988; Michael Shafir, *Romania, politics, economics, and society : political stagnation and simulated change*, Boulder, Colo : Lynne Rienner, 1985) is Ceaușescu's speech of August 21st 1968 in which he condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. Initially seen as a sign of liberalization, especially in the cultural area, it was followed by Ceausescu's *Mangalia Theses*, of July 1971, regarding the Party's control over mass media with respect to the dissemination of socialist culture. The RCP CC Plenum in the summer of 1977 reiterated the “Theses” of 1971. For a discussion of Ceausescu's policy shifts, see Mihai Retegan, *1968 Din primăvară până în toamnă. Schiță de politică*

The 1970s marked clearly prominent shift towards national communism and, furthermore, towards a personality cult that would find its mass celebration in the unified form of all artistic manifestations, known as “The National Festival of Socialist Education *Singing to Romania*”. The shift was not evident in terms of doctrine, but also in terms of grandeur and actual scale of celebrations.

The 1989 events brought an end not only to the communist regime, but also to the large scale held on stadium events. Going through official sources, one is amazed at the sudden shift from glorifying articles of mass official culture to libelous accounts in the immediate post-communist period.²³¹

Notwithstanding the information provided by official written sources, studying deep Romania can offer insights into how these mass manifestations actually took place and were perceived by ordinary people and how they are remembered in the post-communist period. Thus, a perspective from below can have both a castigating and complementary role on the official views. Such an outlook, aiming at construing the memory of these festivals through the memories of ordinary people, can be most suitably done by using oral history, as an analytical and methodological tool.

In addition, oral history can provide us with answers on questions such as: How did ordinary people perceive these festivals and manifestations? What was their reaction to the continuous assault of mass propaganda conducted by the regime in all possible ways? It can also shed light on the informal negotiations processes which took place between the various participants to these manifestations, going into details about the versatile reactions people had towards the multiple types of culture performed in such festivals.

externă românească [1968 From Spring until fall. A Sketch of Romanian Foreign Policy], București: RAO, 1998, especially chapters I-III.

²³¹ Often these articles are written by the same persons. Since only a number of newspapers and magazines were allowed, being held under strict control, in the communist period, immediately after 1989 the situation was of such a nature that the same journalists who had been a part of communist mass media and propaganda system found themselves at the forefront of the new “liberated” press. For analyses of this phenomenon, see Luminița Roșca, *Mecanisme ale propagandei în discursul de informare. Presa românească în perioada 1985-1995* [Propaganda Mechanisms within the Informative Discourse. Romanian Press during 1985-1995], Iași: Polirom 2006 and Adrian Gavrilesco, *Noii precupeți. Intelectualii publici în România de după 1989* [The New Dealers. Public Intellectuals in Romania after 1989] București: Compania, 2006, especially chapters 2 and 6.

Oral history can offer possible answers to the above questions. It can also bring out new inquiries and it can shed light not just on facts and practices left outside official documents, but it can provide us with an image of the ordinary people's subjectivity toward their participation to political festival, throughout the communist period.²³² Oral history also raises numerous questions about its nature, methods of research, reliability of sources, as well as about the manner in which a collection of oral sources can be considered as representative for a general overview.

In this chapter I aim at constructing the image of political festivals in socialist Romania, as perceived and remembered by ordinary people, either as organizers, organizers-participants, active or passive participants and simple by-standers. I will start with a methodological framework of analysis, dealing with issues such as memory – historical and collective – and memories. I will analyze the way in which memory and memories influence oral history as a research science and method, in order to apply these methodological observations and defined concepts to my collection of interviews. I will then provide a taxonomy of my interviewees, based on the role that the latter had (or did not have) within the various festivals, either as organizers, participants (active or passive) or by-standers (people who did not take part in such manifestations, but were aware of them, either directly – they had relatives or friends who were taking part – or indirectly – through mass media).

Since one of the main issues coming into debate when dealing with oral history is the one concerning representativity, I will focus on several case studies, namely a town and a village, in order to grasp the institutional and cultural differences or similarities between the urban and the rural areas.²³³

²³² It should be mentioned that oral history projects have already been conducted on everyday habits and practices in communist Romania during the 1980s. One such project was conducted by the Romanian Peasant Museum in Bucharest, the result being a collection of interviews, arranged not according to interviewees, but to a series of topics, such as “queue”, “television programs”, “mass rallies”, etc. See Șerban Anghelescu, Ioana Hodoiu et al., *LXXX Mărturii orale. Anii '80 și bucureștenii* [LXXX.Oral Testimonies. The 1980s and the Inhabitants of Bucharest], Bucharest: Paideia, 2003. There is one entry dedicated to the festival “Singing to Romania”, on pages 98-99, which comprises brief excerpts from two interviews. One of them stresses how the respective interviewee managed to avoid participation, by pretending to have health problems, while the other argues in favor of the positive aspects of the festival, despite calling it “kitsch” (*Ibidem*, 99). Nevertheless, the information provided is too scarce to offer more than a subjective, general view on the festival, as seen by two subjects only.

²³³ Local history and oral history have been scarcely used together in Romanian historiography, at least when taking into account a reflexive, methodologically constructed and theoretically minded approach,

I argue that historical memory, collective memory and personal memory intermingle with each other in the narratives of the interviewees. The latter ones construct a subjective account not of political festivals, but of the way in which these festivals affected, more or less, their life experience, in order to justify their past actions and integrate them in a present-minded, socially-accepted discourse.

4.2. Memory and Memories

Most historians or social scientists who deal with memory tend to compare the latter with history, to define it as being historically-conditioned and constructed, or to emphasize the difference between memory and history, the former consequently appearing as a reaction to the latter. Conceptualizing what he calls *lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora constructs a theoretical absolute opposition between memory and history, arguing that the “acceleration of history” has led to a “conquest and eradication” of memory by the former.²³⁴ In a very literary, and sometimes vague style, Nora considers that memory is “affective and magical”²³⁵, “it nourishes recollections”²³⁶, it “installs remembrance within the sacred”²³⁷, it is “blind to all but the group it binds”²³⁸, “it is multiple”,²³⁹ “collective, plural, and yet, individual”²⁴⁰, “it takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects”²⁴¹, finally adding that “memory is absolute”.²⁴²

despite the overwhelming literature of towns and villages’ monographs, following a tradition set by Romanian sociologist Dimitrie Gusti in the late 1920s and 1930s. One such recent example, though, would be Liviu Chelcea, Puiu Lățeș, *România profundă în comunism* [Deep Romania during Communism], București: Nemira, 2000.

²³⁴ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory. (Spring, 1989), 7-8. Originally, Pierre Nora published his ideas on memory, history and *lieux de mémoire* in an opening article to a vast collection of articles and essays on how national ideology is constructed through the preservation of memory, in social practices, monuments, text books, etc. See Pierre Nora, “Entre Histoire et Mémoire. La problématique des lieux” in Idem (ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Vol. I, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1984, XIV-XXXVI. In the following, I will quote from the English version of this article, which appeared in *Representations*.

²³⁵ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History”, 8.

²³⁶ *Ibidem*.

²³⁷ *Ibidem*, 9.

²³⁸ *Ibidem*.

²³⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

²⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁴² *Ibidem*.

History, on the other hand, “belongs to everyone and to no one”; it “can only conceive the relative”²⁴³. Thus, “history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it”.²⁴⁴

In most cases for this comparison, Nora makes use of a highly ambiguous style, at times unnecessarily literary. Instead of providing answers, he raises even more questions, which remain unanswered. One might wonder in what ways is memory absolute and how can this absoluteness be defined. Still, what needs to be taken into account is Nora's distinction between memory as life, as subjectively perceived experience and history as a representation of the past, therefore as an intellectual construction, even though this distinction in itself raises numerous problems, as it disregards the intertwining and often interdependent relationships that bind history and memory, relations by which history is often a construction built on memory and memory is frequently influenced by official histories.

One can trace Nora's distinction back to Maurice Halbwachs's interpretation of memory and to the latter's distinction between two types of memory.²⁴⁵ Halbwachs operates with two concepts of memory: collective memory and historical memory.²⁴⁶ He links the existence of collective memory to that of social groups, arguing that there is a living relation between groups and collective memory, and that the only way in which an individual can express any personal memories is within the framework of collective memory as shaped within a group of individuals.²⁴⁷ He also stresses that collective memory varies according to the group in which it appears, and thus there are multiple forms of collective memory. In his definition, “collective memory... is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past

²⁴³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁵ Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) was a French sociologist and philosopher. His most important contributions were on the concept of collective memory. In his most famous book, *The Social Framework of Memory* (original title: *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*, Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1925), Halbwachs argued that memory, despite its internal, biological mechanisms, could not exist outside a social context. For further information, see <http://www.kfunigraz.ac.at/Sozwww/agsoe/lexicon/klassiker/halbwachs/22bio.htm>. Retrieved on May 2, 2010. Also, Floyd N. House, “Review” in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 31, No. 3. (Nov., 1925), 390-392.

²⁴⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, “Historical Memory and Collective Memory” in Idem. *The Collective Memory*, New York, Harper & Row, 1980, 50-87.

²⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 72 and 84.

only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the group keeping the memory alive.”²⁴⁸

Developing Halbwachs’ ideas even further and relying on Nora also, Susan A. Crane states the theoretical differences between the two concepts of collective memory and historical memory, claiming that they reside “in the decision of what to ‘save’”. History can save what has been personally lost, by preserving a collective representation of memory. Collective memory can preserve the memory of lived experience, in living experience, and sustain the loss of other memories. But morally speaking [...] collective memory cannot sustain the loss of historical memory.”²⁴⁹

Other scholars have not taken the same approach of classifying several theoretical types of memory as opposed to history, or distinguishing between history and memory. They have rather attempted to focus on both the similarities and the differences between history and memory. For instance, Paul Thompson perceives the two concepts not as a “stark dichotomy”, but as aspects of “the same thing”.²⁵⁰ Thompson argues for two different aspects of memory and of history: the personal and the collective, stating that each individual’s history is based on his own memories, and that collective memory is based upon public history.²⁵¹ Although he is right to point out the interrelationship between history and memory – an observation that makes Pierre Nora’s distinction to appear biased in its strive for absoluteness – Thompson fails to define concepts such as *public history*, or to indicate the means by which a personal history is constructed on personal memories only. This is caused by the fact that Thompson does not offer any clues to the interrelation between the memory of an individual and the social context in which the respective individual exists.

Despite their different taxonomies, or different ways of conceptualizing memory, all the scholars quoted above *think big* when it comes to history and memory, regarding the latter as being primarily a social construct. Some have even manifested a tendency to view memory only in terms of social context and practices. Focusing on the Watergate

²⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 80.

²⁴⁹ Susan A. Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 5. (Dec., 1997), 1383. Susan A. Crane is assistant professor of modern European history at the University of Arizona.

²⁵⁰ Paul Thompson, *Believe It or Not: Rethinking the Historical Interpretation of Memory*, 2. Retrieved from: http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Thompson.pdf on March 18, 2009. 16.34 PM.

²⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

scandal and its marks in American memory, Michael Schudson claims that memory is located in “rules, laws, standardized procedures, and records”, thus being “essentially social”, and also expressing “moral continuity”.²⁵² Based on this statement, Kerwin Lee Klein draws the conclusion that: “Memory is not a property of individual minds, but a diverse and shifting collection of material artifacts and social practices”.²⁵³

Such approaches have all proven useful for historical research, as well as for developing a theoretical scheme of interpretation, but they have also proved to be only partially adequate, as they have failed to identify the exact means by which the concepts, such as historical memory, collective memory, and history interpenetrate each other, as well as the fact that, in certain cases, these concepts not only interrelate, but also overlap with each other. They have also failed to take into consideration the internal, individual dimension of memory.

Two types of research, from two different fields of study, prove to be revealing in this sense. The first one has been conducted by Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman, as a case study in order to identify and analyze various internal mechanisms of memory and of the act of remembering.²⁵⁴ Drawing conclusions on several interviews taken to Howard S. Hoffman on the same subject of remembering events from World War II, Alice M. Hoffman notices, for instance that: “The first time things are done, the first time an experience is recounted it is recounted in much greater detail.”²⁵⁵ Howard S. Hoffman also develops a classification on several types of memories in the existence of an individual:

One kind is short-term and disappears when it no longer needs to be retained. Other kinds of memory are semantic or procedural, exemplified by

²⁵² Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*, New York: Basic Books, 1992, 51.

²⁵³ Kerwin Lee Klein, “On The Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse”, *Representations*, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering. (Winter, 2000), 130.

²⁵⁴ Alice M. Hoffman, Howard S. Hoffman, *Reliability and Validity in Oral History: The Case of Memory*, 107-135. Retrieved from http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Hoffmans.pdf on March 18, 2010. 16.29 PM. Alice M. Hoffman is Assistant to the Deputy Secretary for Labor and Industry for the State of Pennsylvania, and former professor of labor studies at Pennsylvania State University. Howard S. Hoffman is an experimental psychologist and professor at Bryn Mawr College. He is specialized in scientific analysis of behavior, and in mechanisms of learning and retention.

²⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 112.

the memories of how to read, how to ride a bicycle, or how to drive a car. These ordinarily require much rehearsal or practice, but once learned they exhibit little or no loss in memory in memory over the course of a lifetime. Some experiences seem to leave lingering records. Endel Tulving calls them *episodic memories*. How long are they retained depends in part on how much we rehearse them. We remember what we had for breakfast today, or even dinner yesterday, though we may not have thought about it until now. Not unless we actually rehearse these memories, it is doubtful we will be able to retain them for years, let alone decades, as seems to be the case with archival memories. When viewed from this perspective, archival memories are a subset of episodic memories. They consist of those special memories which, because of their relevance to our conception of ourselves, have been reviewed and pondered to the point that they have become indelible.²⁵⁶

Hoffman's approach thus focuses not on social contexts or social groups as frameworks for the emergence of memory, but on the biological and psychological aspects of memory, as well as the role of the individual in keeping certain memories alive, through everyday routine gestures, or habits. Although Hofmann fails in his turn to take into consideration the influence of social context for developing such routine practices and habits, looking at only one side of the story, his analysis is important for shedding light on the other side of the story, that of memory as psychological process.

The second approach is that of Alessandro Portelli, who develops an innovative view on history, memory and the construction of both concepts in his research on the death of an Italian worker during an anti-NATO protest, in the town of Terni, in 1949.²⁵⁷ Portelli shows how the steelworker colleagues of Trastulli managed to construct collectively a myth, a different memory, than the one of what had really happened, by placing Trastulli's death during the social movements of 1953.

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 129.

²⁵⁷ Alessandro Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event" in *Idem, The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories. Form and Meaning in Oral History*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991, 1-28. For further details on the significance of Portelli's work for the study of oral history, see Paul Thompson, *op. cit.*, 8.

This led Portelli to analyze the subjectivity of the steelworkers, arguing that they developed a collective memory, which acted as a history, with several functions. The first function was a symbolic one, as Trastulli's death signified the "postwar working-class experience as a whole".²⁵⁸ The second one was psychological, as the shift in time of the event acted as healing instrument, for the feeling of "humiliation and the loss of self-esteem following upon the impossibility of reacting adequately to the comrade's death".²⁵⁹ The third one was formal. Portelli could thus argue in favor of a denaturalized memory as a historical fact in itself.

His findings prove essential for shedding light on the subjective, incomplete and aleatory construction of concepts such as memory, history, historical memory, collective memory. In the above case of the steelworkers from Terni, collective memory juxtaposes with historical memory. Although Portelli is short on information on individual memory and its relation with collective memory, one may presuppose, on the basis offered by Howard Hoffman, that individual memory is shaped and influenced by the memories of others, by collective memory. It may well be that this happens not only as a social practice in itself, but also as a routine act of narrating continuously the same modified story, leading in the end to the creation of a socially-accepted version of both a history of the tragic event and of the memory of Luigi Trastulli.

These remarks on different types of memory and their relation to the historical discourse can be well applied in the case of political festivals. The radical political changes which took place in Romania, before and after 1989, have led to a special type of historical discourse, incorporating elements of the communist discourse of pre-1989 Romania, but adapting to the new historical context of post-1989 Romania. On the other hand the experiences of the festivals have been perceived differently by ordinary people, according to the role they played within the communist society, within the festivals, or according to their individual experience, education, etc. Such factors have led to what Maurice Halbwachs and later on Susan A. Crane called "different collective memories". Nevertheless, despite the existence of a historical memory of festivals in particular, and of the Romanian communist regime in general, as well as of different collective memories,

²⁵⁸ Alessandro Portelli, *op. cit.*, 26.

²⁵⁹ *Ibidem.*

the interviewees have not relied solely on these types of memories. What they remembered were their personal recollections, and one must take into account Howard S. Hoffman's observation on the psychological processes of memory, as well as the fact that these recollections mirror the interviewees' personal experiences and their own perception of what happened. Furthermore, one has to keep in mind Portelli's observation of memory as a historical construction onto itself, since this is exactly what people are doing when remembering – either individually or collectively – or when a historian constructs his or her historical interpretation, based on other people's memories. In this latter case, detailed analyses of the context, person, interrelation between historical context and person as well as establishing the right level of representativity for each case study are essential.

In the end, the memories of the interviewees are a complex and indefinable combination of general historical discourse, collective memory and personal memories. They are primarily conditioned by biological and psychological factors, but they develop and are defined in a certain social and cultural context.

4.3. The Usage of Oral History in Construing Memories

Oral history is based on what people remember, on their memories. People remember mostly what *they* think is important; they regularly reinterpret their memories attributing new meanings to them.²⁶⁰ Internal processes of memory, historically-determined social contexts have a great influence on the specific features of oral history as research science, method of inquiry or historical approach on the past. It is not the purpose of this chapter to offer or to comment in depth on the essence or definitions of oral history. However several remarks regarding its nature and main concepts need to be made before moving on to the oral histories of various persons who witnessed political festivals and mass artistic manifestations.

Alice Hoffman defines oral history as “a process of collecting, usually by means of a tape-recorded interview, reminiscences, accounts, and interpretations of events from

²⁶⁰ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994, 12-13.

the recent past which are of historical significance. ²⁶¹ Hoffman's definition of oral history is rather instrumentalist, focusing on the technical tools of gathering information and on the type of information which is gathered. She offers no insight into the term of "historical significance", making no comment on who decides about what can be deemed or not as having historical significance.

She also refers to two essential aspects for oral history sources: their *reliability* and their *validity*, as one of the major problems faced by oral historians at the beginning of their discipline was to demonstrate that their sources present these two features. By *reliability*, Hoffman understands "the consistency with which an individual will tell the same story about the same event on a number of different occasions."²⁶² She also defines *validity* as "the degree of conformity between the reports of the event and the event itself as recorded by other primary resource material such as documents, photographs, diaries, and letters."²⁶³

The way in which Hoffman selects the two main features for oral history and the way she defines them indicate her approach and vision on oral history and its uses. Hoffman does not make any suggestions about how the reliability and validity of an oral source can be interpreted according to its conformity with other sources. Her definition of validity indicates that oral history can be used primarily to provide information about the same topics as other types of sources, only through specific means. If written or visual sources do not match the information provided by oral sources, then this can only imply the invalidity of the latter. Notwithstanding the insights brought by Hoffman's theoretical explanations, one must use these much more efficiently as a point of departure rather than as canonical statements *per se*, since the multitude of historical contexts can prove overwhelming for any – imminently narrow – theoretical construction. Ultimately it is the wealth of resources and their critical analysis which prove to be the decisive factors in attributing a certain historical source its qualities of *reliable* and *valid* (not particularly in Hoffman's understanding of the terms): a reliable oral history source can be invalidated by other types of sources, irrespective of the consistency with which an interviewee will

²⁶¹ Alice Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History" in David K. Dunaway, Willa K. Baum (eds.), *Oral History. An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Second Edition, Walnut Creek, Lanham, New York, Oxford: Altamira Press, 1996, 88.

²⁶² *Ibidem*, 89.

²⁶³ *Ibidem*.

tell the same story repeatedly. In the same line of thought, the validity of several historical sources depends only partially on the correspondence between the information contained by the sources, the other criterion being, first of all, the interrelated critique of all sources, by which a single source might deny the others their validity.

Portelli takes a different perspective. He relies more on a linguistic approach²⁶⁴, arguing that: “oral history is a specific form of discourse: history evokes a narrative of the past, and oral indicates a medium of expression.”²⁶⁵ Portelli refers to the specificity of sources for oral history, showing that oral history interviews are taken with living persons. This means that one is using and analyzing sources one creates. He also notices the ironical aspect that despite the orality of the sources, the oral historian mostly uses transcripts of the interviews he is taking, or, in other words, written texts, or “the classic oral history text”.²⁶⁶ Still, what is significant for Portelli regarding oral history is not the technical means of collecting information, but the emphasis on reconstructing the subjectivity of people.²⁶⁷

As Paul Thompson points out, subjectivity, as used by Portelli, must not be taken literally. Portelli’s definition reveals a more complex understanding of the term.²⁶⁸ He defines subjectivity in this case as “not the abolition of controls, nor the unrestrained preference, convenience or whim of the researcher. I mean the study of the cultural form and processes by which individuals express their sense of themselves in history.”²⁶⁹ Thus subjectivity for oral history becomes a concept in itself, possessing its own “objective” laws, structures and maps.²⁷⁰

Portelli’s definition of subjectivity for oral sources makes Hoffman’s definition of *validity* partially invalid. Oral sources can be subjective, in that they refer to other topics than do other types of sources. If the information of an oral source does not match that provided by written or visual sources, the oral source can offer insights into *how* and *why* that specific information differed from others. Or, in Portelli’s own words: “Oral sources

²⁶⁴ Alessandro Portelli is Professor of English literature at the University “La Sapienza”, of Rome.

²⁶⁵ Alessandro Portelli, “Oral History as Genre” in Idem, *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, 3.

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 6.

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 17.

²⁶⁸ Paul Thompson, *op. cit.*, 8-10.

²⁶⁹ Alessandro Portelli, “Introduction” in Idem, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories. Form and Meaning in Oral History*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991, ix.

²⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

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.”²⁷¹ Thus oral sources simply present a different type of credibility.²⁷²

From these observations and insights one can draw the conclusion that the information drawn from oral sources depends on how the researcher interprets these sources. As Jan Vansina suggests, “interpretation is a choice between several possible hypotheses”.²⁷³ The emphasis here is on the word “choice”, as in the end it is the researcher who decides what he wants to find out from his interviewees and it is he who decides what he wants to draw out from the information provided by his interviewees. This choice depends on the intellectual background of the interviewer and on his attitude and preconceptions toward his interviews. Alessandro Portelli goes even further, developing level of interpretation and offering insight into how subjectivity operates between these levels: “The division of labor between informant and scholar, and the division of the scholar’s labor between fieldwork (collecting the data) and analysis (conducted in separate spaces and times) contributes to the perception of testimony as raw material, on which the social scientist performs a verity check and an exclusive interpretative act. The separation between the materiality of the source and the intellectuality of the interpreter is often wrought with class prejudices [...]”²⁷⁴ The failure to see beyond the “materiality” of the source leads to the failure of noticing that the interviewee develops his own discourse, and this adds to the specificity of oral sources.

Regarding this latter aspect of oral sources as individually developed discourses about personal lived experience, it is once more Portelli who refers to oral sources as narratives, in which the boundary between personal memories and socially-shared stereotypes is elusive.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different” in Robert Perks, Alistair Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 1998, 67.

²⁷² *Ibidem*, 68.

²⁷³ Jan Vansina, “Oral Tradition and Historical Methodology” in David K. Dunaway, Willa K. Baum, *op. cit.*, 124.

²⁷⁴ Alessandro Portelli, “Philosophy and the Facts. Subjectivity and Narrative Form in Autobiography and Oral History” in Idem, *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Act of Dialogue*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, 79.

²⁷⁵ Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different” in Robert Perks, Alistair Thompson, *op. cit.*, 66.

4.4. Political Festivals in Socialist Romania and their Oral Histories

The interviews gathered for the oral history approach are persons from two residences: Câmpina, a province town in the county of Prahova, 90 kilometers from Bucharest, Romania's capital and the village of Tâmboiești, situated in the county of Vrancea, in southern Moldova. The interviewees are of different age, social and professional categories and they present different intellectual and life backgrounds. As general observations, most interviewees for the town case study are or had been working in the educational field, either as teachers or pupils-students, with a few interviewees working in factories, while people interviewed for the village case study are or had been active either in education or in the agricultural sector. Therefore the two case studies cover a wide social field of teachers, pupils, workers and peasants.

Prior to conducting the interviews I have referred to series of theoretical and methodological works about oral history in general and about interview conducting techniques and methods of oral history inquiry.²⁷⁶ In conducting the interviews I have established a formal set of questions, according to the role played by the interviewee within a specific political festival, artistic manifestation, or – as in turns out in several cases – the “Singing to Romania” festival. These questions concerned both general,

²⁷⁶ Several articles on various uses of oral history in different research fields have proved useful: Barbara Allen, “The Personal Point of View in Orally Communicated History”, *Western Folklore*, Vol. 38, No.2. (1979), 110-118; Roger D. Long, “The Personal Dimension in Doing Oral History”, *The History Teacher*, Vol. 24, No.3, (May, 1991), 307-312; Bret Enyon, “Cast upon the Shore: Oral History and New and New (*sic!*) Scholarship on the Movements of the 1960s”, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, No. 2. (Sep., 1996), 560-570; Jack Dougherty, “From Anecdote to Analysis: Oral Interviews and New Scholarship in Educational History”, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No.2, Rethinking History and the Nation-State: Mexico and the United States as a Case Study: A Special Issue. (Sep., 1999), 712-723; Pattie Dillon, “Teaching the Past through Oral History”, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 2. (Sep., 2000), 602-605; Larry E. Hudson Jr., Ellen Durrigan Santora, “Oral History: An Inclusive Highway to the Past”, *The History Teacher*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Special Focus Issue: The Teaching American History Program. (Feb., 2003), 206-220.

For the technical and methodological part, regarding oral history I have used information from the following guides and articles: Barbara Truesdell, *Oral History Techniques: How to Organize and Conduct Oral History Interviews*, (Indiana University Center for the Study of History and Memory). Retrieved from: <http://www.indiana.edu/~csh/techniques.html> Last entry: March 11, 2010; *The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*. Retrieved from: <http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/pdf/InterviewingGuide.pdf> Last entry: November 15, 2008; Brian Calliou, *Methodology for an Oral History Project*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pacificworlds.com/homepage/education/essays/essay2a.cfm> Last entry: November 18, 2008; George Blanksten, Ronald Cohen, Raoul Naroll, “Social Science Methodology and the Oral History Project”, *African Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 2. (Sep., 1965), 15-23.

simple, open-ended type questions, but also closed-type questions, in order to find out details about my interviewees' accounts.²⁷⁷ My manner of inquiry was to let the interviewee organize his own narrative at first, and to intervene only if necessary, or to find out answers to problems which were of interest to me but were left unanswered by the interview subject. I have also avoided leading question, so as not to influence my interviewees' order and direction of discourse.²⁷⁸ In some cases, the interviews turned into life stories, a fact which has also enabled me to better situate the importance of the participation to artistic manifestations for the respective interviewee. Several interviewees were kind enough to have repeated talks with me, which has allowed me not only to test their reliability (in Hoffman's term) but also to redirect their narratives into areas left uncovered by the previous interview(s).

Apart from this, another important dimension that needs to be taken into account consists of the differences of age, gender, social status and intellectual background, which appeared in various ways between the interviewer and the interviewees.²⁷⁹ Several of the latter tended to view the interviewer initially as being *tabula rasa* with respect to the festival and started to narrate general information about the festivals and artistic manifestations.

²⁷⁷ See *Fundamentals of Oral History. Texas Preservation Guidelines* (Texas Historical Commission), p. 8. Retrieved from: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/publications/guidelines/OralHistory.pdf> Last entry: November 18, 2008.

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁷⁹ Alistair Thomson speaks of the "cultural awareness" of the interviewer, when conducting interviews, as an important methodological tool. "Cultural awareness is equally necessary when an oral historian is interviewing within his or her own society, which is unlikely to be culturally homogenous. Interviewers need to be sensitive to the relational and communicative patterns of particular subcultures as defined by gender, class, race and ethnicity, region, sexuality, disability and age." Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History", *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 85, No.2 (Sep., 1998), 583. I have also consulted works of Erving Goffman, regarding communication and face-to-face behavior. See Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1967; Idem, *Strategic Interaction*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1969.

Chapter 5: The Town Case Study: Câmpina

5.1. Preliminaries

Câmpina is a town situated 90 km north of Bucharest, Romania's capital. With a population nearing the figure of 40,000 Câmpina is the second – in terms of size population and industrial activity – in the county of Prahova.²⁸⁰ It has been the focus of several monographs, as well as various articles published either in geographical journals or tourism ones.²⁸¹ Its main importance, however, was that of an industrial center starting with end of the 19th century, when an oil refinery was built, which for a very brief period was the largest in Europe (1896).²⁸² The town maintained its industrial importance in the first half of the 20th century and its refinery as well as the surrounding area, the Prahova valley were primary objectives during the two world wars.²⁸³ The postwar period marked an increase in the industrial activity, as new factories were built, a fact which had not

²⁸⁰ See Mircea Buza, Lucian Badea și Serban Dragomirescu, *Dictionarul geografic al României* [Geographical Dictionary of Romania], București: Editura Academiei Române, 2008, vol 1, 236-239. See also Photo No. 1.

²⁸¹ The first monograph of the town was published in 1926 by a local teacher, with a second, more complete one published in 1989 and revised by its author in 2003. See Stoica Teodorescu, *Monografia orașului Câmpina. Istoric și documente* [The Monograph of the town of Câmpina. History and Documents], Câmpina: Tipografia Gutenberg, 1924; Silviu Dan Cratochvil, *Monografia orașului Câmpina*. [The Monograph of the town of Câmpina], Câmpina: Casa de cultură a orașului Câmpina, 1990. Part of its tourist attraction has been a small castle built by Romanian historian, writer and philologist Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu (1838-1907). Work on it began in 1893, after Hasdeu's daughter, Iulia Hasdeu, died at the age of 19, an event that dramatically shook and changed Hasdeu's life. He claimed that his belated daughter provided the plans for building the castle during sessions of spiritism (which took much of Hasdeu's imagination and time after Iulia's death).

²⁸² See Silviu Dan Cratochvil, *op. cit.*, passim.

²⁸³ Ibidem. In 1917 the German Emperor Wilhelm II visited the area, together with several marshals of the German army. Photo evidence of the visit was displayed in 2003 on the occasion of the town's 500th celebration – an obvious gesture of local pride. During World War Two, Câmpina was also one of the main targets of British and American bombing raids, together with București and Ploiești, the latter being the most important oil center in the Prahova Valley, seconded by Câmpina. See Silviu Dan Cratochvil, *op. cit.*, 45-49. Also, Gheorghe Buzatu, *O istorie a petrolului românesc* [A History of Romanian Oil], București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998. Very brief accounts can be found in WWII monographs, such as Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, Putnum, New York, 1971, 580.

economic but also social consequences. Coupled with an intensive process of urbanization started in the 1950, the industrialization marked an increase in population, through migration from rural areas to urban ones.²⁸⁴

Apart from its industrial activity, which has decreased in the immediate post-communist period and tourist attraction the identity of the town is marked by unproved claims which are irrelevant and quite ludicrous outside its boundaries, but extremely proficient inside them, such as the claim of having the highest number of intellectuals per capita.²⁸⁵

Information on the cultural activities, especially for the 19th century has been rather scarce. For the 20th century, mass cultural activities have been linked to the construction of the first high school in 1919 and improvised houses of culture, which focused on folkloristic activities. The first proper House of culture was built in the early 1960s, after its project had been approved in 1958.²⁸⁶ The Law Decree of 1974, regulating the existence of houses of culture through the country, stipulated that the House of Culture of Câmpina was a cultural and educational institution, subordinated to the town hall.²⁸⁷ The activities undertaken in the House of Culture varied from one period to the other. In 1989, Silviu Dan Cratochvil was elated by folkloristic activities and the folk dance ensembles that belonged to the House of Culture²⁸⁸, whereas today the House of Culture hosts courses on how to become a good cook, together with painting amateur clubs and folk dance groups.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁴ This migration, though only partial, was most obvious for younger generations and was also triggered by the collectivization process which marked a decrease in the peasantry's level of life, especially in its early stages.

²⁸⁵ The statement is present both in Cratochvil's monograph, though the author presents us with no statistic and with no definition of what an "intellectual" is, as well as in numerous articles published in the local newspapers (*Zarva* or *Ținta*), cultural magazines (*Revista Nouă*) as well as books and other publications of writers from Câmpina.

²⁸⁶ Silviu Dan Cratochvil, *op. cit.*, 110. The building has two halls, one dedicated to larger scale events, with 770 seats and a smaller one of only 150 seats at the upper floor, for special reunions. See also photo number 2.

²⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 113. See also Decree No. 37, 1974.

²⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 114.

²⁸⁹ See the official information provided on the House of Culture's website: http://primariacampina.ro/casa_cultura.html (last accessed: May 2nd, 2010). However, local newspapers have repeatedly written on other types of activities undertaken in the House of Culture, such a discothèques held every night of the weekend, or bars serving alcohol. See *Partener*, No. 76, 2003, p.7; *Zarva*, No. 56, 2005, p12.

For the case study of Câmpina I have interviewed fourteen persons.²⁹⁰ The interviewees are listed below. Because of the different attitudes I have encountered during these interviews, regarding the issue of making public the names of the interviewees, I have decided to name these with fictitious initials only, naming instead accurately the place, date of the interview, as well as general data about the interviewees, such as ethnicity, gender, age (using general frameworks: up to 30 years old; between 30 and 45 years; between 45 and 65 years; more than 65 years. – I have done so, partially because of lack of information regarding the interviewees' exact age and partially to maintain their anonymity), profession. It is my belief that such information on the interviewees can prove useful for a better understanding of their discourse and lived experience.

- a) R.O., Romanian, female, between 30 and 45 years old, geography teacher. Personal interviews taken in Câmpina, April 18 and 19, 2007.
- b) M.C., Romanian, male, between 30 and 45 years old, history teacher. Personal interview taken in Câmpina, April 20, 2007.
- c) G.N., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, history teacher. Personal interview taken in Câmpina, April, 20, 2007.
- d) L.M., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, Romanian language and literature teacher. Personal and group interview taken in Câmpina, April, 22, 2007.
- e) M.M., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, teacher. Group interview (together with L.M.) taken in Câmpina, April 22, 2007.
- f) A.P., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, teacher. Personal interview taken in Câmpina, April 22, 2007.
- g) V.I., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, a former pedagogue. Personal interviews taken in Câmpina, April 22, 2007; April 05th and 16th 2010.
- h) M.X., Romanian, male, more than 65 years old, a former president of culture commission. Written notes from verbal discussion taken in Câmpina, April 23, 2007. (deceased on May 1st, 2010)

²⁹⁰ Some were interviewed several times, as can be seen from the list.

- i) C.B., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, retired worker. Interview taken in Câmpina, July 27th 2009.
- j) V.B., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, worker. Interview taken in Câmpina, July 29th, 2009.
- k) I.O., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, worker. Interview taken in Câmpina, April 3rd, 2010.
- l) M.I., Romanian, female, more than 65 years old, retired (formerly worker). Interview taken in Câmpina, April 5th, 2010.
- m) D.A., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, retired (formerly a high school teacher of mathematics). Interview taken in Câmpina, April 12th, 2010.
- n) S.E., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, retired (formerly a secondary school teacher of mathematics). Interview taken in Câmpina, April 12th, 2010.

I have organized these interviewees according to a taxonomy taking into account their formal participation (or lack thereof) to political festivals or artistic manifestations. Given that most of the subjects are between 45 and 65 years of age, it results that most of them went to school (primary, secondary, high school and, in certain cases university) in the late 1950s, throughout the 1960s and early 1970s and were active employees starting with the late 1970s. Some of them went to school in the late 1950s (only primary and secondary school) and were active in industrial or agricultural domains starting with the 1960s. All of them took part more or less in artistic manifestations, as pupils and some as organizers through the “Singing to Romania” period.

My division of interviewees into organizers, organizing participants, participants (active and passive) and by-standers is purely formal as the details of their life stories are much more indicative of the processes of informal negotiation held between ordinary people and the state apparatus, especially at the local level.

5.2. Organizers

M.X. is the interviewee whose main function was to organize artistic competitions in Câmpina, within the local level of “Singing to Romania” festival.²⁹¹ Until 1989, he was also the president for the Commission of Culture in Câmpina, and this function allowed him to be in control of any artistic and cultural activity in the town, during the time of the communist regime. His case is probably the most interesting one to study, despite his refusal to offer an interview on tape. This is due on the one hand to the fact that he can offer insights to officially not-mentioned mechanisms by which the festival could take place, and on the other to the way in which he organizes his discourse about his past activities. What is important to explore is not necessarily the accuracy of his information, which is more or less relative and requires further information from different sources to verify it, but his construction of his own subjectivity, in the sense given by Portelli.

At first, he is only willing to talk about the negative sides of “Singing to Romania”, for fear he might be held responsible for what he states. Later on, when he realizes that he will not be taped, he starts to mention both positive and negative sides of the festival, starting with and stressing the former ones. For him, “Singing to Romania” meant a mass mobilization of people and materials, which led to a dynamic artistic life, in both the rural and urban environments: “in the countryside, the festival shook people up, the mayor, the priest, and the peasants”, it led them to a competition, to forming “folkloric groups”.²⁹²

He stresses the fact that the festival was the main means for ordinary people to make themselves noticed, stating that “everybody wanted to be taken into consideration”, and that workers especially were proud of having their names on posters, which

²⁹¹ This makes M.X. one of the most valuable informants, because of his former position which allows him to provide information regarding the mechanisms of cultural politics at the local level, as well as within the “Singing to Romania” festival. Despite his initial openness, he eventually became reluctant to let himself be interviewed on tape, and he only agreed to an informal discussion, allowing the interviewer to take notes. His primary fear was that letting himself tape-recorded would allow others to accuse him of having praised or even talked about the former regime. That is why his initial reaction was to mention only the negative sides of the “Singing to Romania”. In the end, knowing that what he was saying would remain totally informal, he developed his own, more unrestrained, discourse on his activity and on the communist regime. His fear and reluctance however can only hint at the atmosphere in which M.X. led his activity as a cultural activist before and after 1989.

²⁹² M.X., notes from personal discussion. Câmpina, April 23, 2007.

mentioned their participation and their eventual awards won for “Singing to Romania”.²⁹³ Apart from this he mentions that the main reason for this was that through the festival people could experience a shift of professional status: from peasants, workers, simple pupils, they could become “artists”. They could participate not only in the competition, but also go on to be part of festive celebrations, or “go on tour all over the country, especially if they had connections”.²⁹⁴

He thus sheds light on the criteria for selecting participants for higher levels or special manifestations for the festival. This is one case where he refrains himself from passing any moral judgment, letting his interviewer understand that selection by high connections is something of the ordinary, which does not need any extra comment.

He also remembers, as negative sides, the amateurism of the festival, as well as the fact that in most cases he only had to put in practice official indications which he received from a higher level. This is most obvious when he discusses the case of a “artistic-literary performance”, for which he had to make up a choir of 80 persons, mostly amateurs, workers from the factories in Câmpina, all tied up in chains, in order to remind the people of the communist inmates from the “Doftana” Prison.²⁹⁵ He not only mentions it, but he also considers it as not worthy of an artistic creation, arguing that the number of choir members was too high, and the members themselves highly inefficient. He also refers to the material means which he had at his disposal, for accomplishing such tasks, recalling that he could make appeal to factory directors for stage design materials, or that he could bring spectators for certain spectacles by bringing in military personnel from the nearby

²⁹³ *Ibidem.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibidem.* It should be mentioned that the original Romanian note was “puteau participa la un spectacol festival, sau prin țară, dacă era și o relație”. By the last term, “relație”, one understands “high connection”, the fact that there was a selection done of those who were supposed to participate in more than just simple competitions, and that selection was done according to personal criteria.

²⁹⁵ *Ibidem.* The Romanian term for “artistic-literary performance” is “montaj literar-artistic”. It is very often mentioned both in official sources and in the case of the persons interviewed. R.O., for instance, remembers that every spectacle, no matter how insignificant, had to have at least one “artistic-literary performance”. The latter presupposed a combination of several artistic genres, such as choir, poems, as well as theatrical elements. As for the prison of Doftana, this became a central highlight during the communist regime, due to fact that it was the place where Romanian communist leaders were imprisoned during the 1930s. The 1940 earthquake caused the death of several leaders, adding a dramatic element to the official history of the Romanian Communist Party. Later on, starting with the 1950s until 1989, “Doftana” was turned into a museum and became a site of pilgrimage for pupils and students all over the country. It was also the site for numerous celebrative, commemorative and festive events. The prison “Doftana” (taking its name after a river which flows nearby, is situated in the Prahova County, approximately four or five kilometers from Câmpina. For further information, visit: www.telega.ro Last entry on May 15, 2007.

camps in the area. His information leads to a possible conclusion that the festival had become a structure in itself, a sort of parallel field of activity, in which everybody wanted to succeed. But his information is also incomplete; he refers to connections for certain participants, but he does not mention in which way the contributing factories were repaid. Official information on this aspect is nonexistent. One can presuppose that such material contributions were obligatory, as failure to provide help could always be interpreted as lack of interest on behalf of the factory director, regarding the artistic activity of the town. But at the same, as M.X. suggests, such collaborations were a perfect opportunity for establishing connections.

The festival provokes a shift in professional status for workers, but also for professional artists, who start to neglect their basic activity and become advisors for different spectacles for “Singing to Romania”, an activity which, according to M.X. brings them material and social status benefits. The source of all negative aspects lies, according to M.X., in the political implication which existed in every aspect of the festival and of his activity as an organizer. This is best reflected in the members of the juries who were in charge of selecting the participants. These juries were made up of the town secretary of propaganda – “who always used to sit on the right side” – the Director of the House of Culture – M.X. -, the director of House of *Pionieri*, and a music or sports teacher, according to the event.²⁹⁶ M.X. considers himself and the Director of House of *Pionieri* as specialists, identifying the political side of the jury with the secretary of propaganda. Occasionally, the jury was assisted by a political activist from Ploiești, the capital of the Prahova County, the final decision remaining with him in such cases. M.X is ambiguous when referring to the process of selecting participants, stating that this was

²⁹⁶ M.X., notes from personal discussion. Câmpina, April 23, 2007. M.X. mentions two institutions which were central to the cultural and educational activity of every town during the communist regime: *Casa de Cultură* (translated “House of Culture”) was an institution where all the cultural activities of the town were organized, starting with artistic exhibitions and ending with theater performances, etc. *Casa Pionierilor* (roughly translated “House of Pionieri”, where *pionieri* referred to the status received by all pupils starting with the second grade. In order to combine the educational and propaganda aspects, education during communist Romania was not organized only according to primary, secondary education and high school. It also comprised of three educational and political levels: *Șoimii Patriei* – “The Hawks of the Motherland” – comprised children in kinder garden and pupils in the first grade. *Pionieri* – translated as “Pioneers”- comprised pupils from second grade to those who from eight grade. Members of UTC, *Uniunea Tineretului Comunist* – The Union of Communist Youth – comprised pupils who were fourteen years old or older. The latter was the last stage until becoming a full member of the Romanian Communist Party. There were cases when not all pupils were made *pionieri* or Members of UTC, as it can be found from this oral history case study also.

done through negotiations. But his mentioning of the activists indicates clearly that the political factor was the decisive one in all cases. The Party was again present by specifying the number of spectacles which were supposed to be played, as well as the duration for each performance.²⁹⁷ This quantitative approach to the artistic environment allowed the participation of a large number of amateur artists, but this also affected the negotiations, as it allowed everybody to support his/their own favorites.

M.X.'s discourse is a nostalgic one, in the sense that Svetlana Boym uses for the term "nostalgia": "a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday".²⁹⁸ In other words, M.X. combines two images, that of the general past, and that of his activity during the communist regime, when he could afford to set up spectacles, to have an audience for those spectacles, and to make his own connections with what he calls "artists from all over the country".²⁹⁹ His recollections are about the entire period when he was a director of the House of Culture, and it becomes evident that this is the center of his activity. 1989 marked a breakthrough with the past in certain aspects, but at the same time it allowed for the remaining of many of the old habits and practices. After 1989, the political lost complete control over the artistic performances, but at the same time, as M.X. bitterly³⁰⁰ remembers, the house of culture still depended on funds provided by the mayor, who belonged to a certain political party. All major political parties could hold conferences in the halls of the house of culture, as M.X. could not afford to refuse them and thus lose their financial support once these were in power.³⁰¹ This type of discourse can be interpreted at a broader level, indicating an element of continuity in M.X.'s activity: the dependence of artistic and cultural activity on political power and influence. The discontinuity appears at the moment when the house of culture cannot rely on artists and on spectators for its performers and it is subjected to the laws of offer and request. This is where the source of M.X.'s nostalgia lies, in the fact that during communism artistic performances could benefit from all types of sources – materials, instructors, professional artists – because the

²⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁹⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, xiv.

²⁹⁹ M.X., notes from personal discussion. Câmpina, April 23, 2007.

³⁰⁰ "Bitterly" is, of course, a personal and subjective remark on the tone of the interviewee's voice, when recalling his activity at the house of culture, after 1989.

³⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

political power dictated so. This discourse is most obvious when M.X. refers to artists *then and now*: “back then, they would perform for a hot meal, booze and because they could get to see the country, nowadays they show up, only if the *recipe* is high enough”.³⁰² This adds to M.X.’s personal nostalgia for the times when he was a younger and more important person to the community person, as age plays an important part in his construction of discourse.

Nevertheless, there is information which M.X., consciously, or unconsciously, does not offer. He restrains, for instance, from saying anything about how he made use of his influence and power in administrative decisions. His subjectivity is that of a local representative of the communist nomenclature. It neglects any considerations on events at a broader, regional, or national level, and it is constructed on his own activity at the house of culture, around his nostalgia for the general context which, in his own opinion, allowed him to organize important spectacles, and for the personal context of his youth.

1989 marked a shift in the importance of the genre of spectacles M.X. was organizing. From mass-spectacles, centered around the glorification of the communist party and Nicolae Ceaușescu, which occasionally allowed for a representation of the classic repertoire (literary theater, poetry which was not composed during the times of and for Ceaușescu), spectacles became mainly entertaining shows, which depended not on the Party’ material and financial support, but on the actual popularity of the respective show among the local community, and, ironically, on the financial support of ordinary people who paid for their tickets, in order to watch the spectacle, instead of simply being brought up to assist it.

5.3. Organizing Participants

R.O. played different roles within political festivals and mass artistic manifestations (namely “Singing to Romania”). Initially, at the beginning of the 1980s, she was only a participant³⁰³, but toward the end of the 1980s, as a teacher, she

³⁰² Ibidem. The Romanian term for “recipe” is *rețetă*. By it, M.X. refers to a slang term denoting the sum of money which a performing artist gets paid with for participating to a show.

³⁰³ See annexes no. 4 and 5.

participated in the competition, leading a group of pupils. As teacher, she remembers one such participation, when she and her group of pupils performed a song based on the children's poem "The Grasshopper and the Ant", by Elena Farago.³⁰⁴ As a teacher participating in the competition, she remembers it to be a boring activity, but one which had to be fulfilled, as it considered an extra artistic-cultural activity for teachers.

R.O. has one photograph from that participation.³⁰⁵ The photograph depicts her playing a mandolin and three of her pupils, dressed in uniform, singing and watching R.O. as she plays. There are no official symbols, posters, banners to be seen in the picture, and the overall image is that of a school celebration, which is performed just for completing another ordinary task. R.O. has no special recollection about this image and therefore the latter can be considered as a neutral picture, lacking any complementary discourse which could confer it any particular message.

L.M. presents a similar case, of a teacher who organized dance and performance groups, in order to participate to the local and county levels of "Singing to Romania". Unlike R.O., he was more involved in such activities, partly because of his profession – a teacher of Romanian language and literature – which forced him officially to participate and partly because of his official duties as a coordinator for the Union of Communist Youth.³⁰⁶ His primary focus, when remembering the festival, is not on the latter, but on school activities and performances which had to be fulfilled as any other ordinary task. The festival, in this case, becomes only the context for organizing spectacles, or artistic "actions" (he refuses to name them "activities", as he considers them unworthy of such a name), or for keeping pupils under control.³⁰⁷ L.M.'s attitude toward the festival is generally a negative one, and he considers it a failure, because of its "mass action features", and, in the end, just another task with no efficiency for its initial purposes: "they [the pupils – m.n.] would sing just for the sake of singing and they would dance just for the sake of dancing. The pupils were getting bored, and there was no real connection

³⁰⁴ R.O., personal interview. Câmpina, April 18, 2007. Elena Farago was a Romanian poet (1878-1954). She wrote mainly poetry for children. For further information see <http://cerculpoetilor.net/poet.php?idp=29> Last entry: May 15, 2007.

³⁰⁵ See Annex No. 3.

³⁰⁶ L.M., personal interview. Câmpina, April 22, 2007.

³⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

between the performing artists on stage and the audience”.³⁰⁸ But despite this, he considers that the festival was useful, as it “kept the kids busy, it taught them something, instead of letting them waste their time”.³⁰⁹ Apart from this, he also mentions that official indications of allowing only the good pupils to participate were often disregarded, arguing that: “if you have an A pupil who cannot sing anything and a C pupil who can really sing, then you also give the C pupil a chance to do what he can do best”³¹⁰ His wife, M.M., was a kinder garden teacher and she used to organize spectacles, which among children’s poems, included songs praising socialist Romania and Ceaușescu. She considers this an ordinary event, arguing that everybody was forced to praise the regime and its leader, and that, to a certain extent, it was a normal thing to do.

Whereas R.O.’s discourse on her participation as a teacher is rather summative, both in terms of information and attitude, L.M., on the other hand, presents us with more information. As for his attitude taken on this information, he simply takes distance from what he remembers, and his narrative seems more of an official report, holding two main characters: teachers and pupils. He recalls and he passes simple judgments, positive or negative, on actions he was often part of. For instance, he remembers how pupils of Protestant religion were forced to participate to the repetitions to the festival on Saturdays, and how these were punished for not attending it. The punishment came from teachers it consisted in low grades or exclusion from the communist youth organizations, such as “Șoimii Patriei” or “Pionieri”. He does not add a personal dimension to such events, and he projects them as ordinary happenings within a certain political context which is now gone. He adds a new interpretation to Ritchie’s observation that people give actions new significance according to their later consequences.³¹¹ L.M. maintains his recollection, he deems it morally negative, but he distances himself from it and adopts an impersonal narrative style. He gives no particular significance to the events.

A.P. recalls how she would organize school spectacles at the end of each year. She does not remember the “Singing to Romania” festival, however she does remember that

³⁰⁸ *Ibidem.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibidem.*

³¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

³¹¹ Donald A. Ritchie, *op. cit.*, 13.

everyone had to sing or perform poems, songs about the regime and Ceaușescu.³¹² She even wrote several such poems, as a pupil, during the 1960s but also as a teacher, during the 1970s and 1980s.³¹³ She recalls textbooks of political poems as her sources of inspiration and states that she enjoyed writing poems since she saw in them a normal literary exercise, without any aesthetic importance.³¹⁴

5.4. Participants

I operate, for this category, with a broader understanding of the term “participants”, by which I mean not just those who acted as performers, but also spectators. I consider this to be useful in order to explore the perspective had not only by people directly involved in the festival, but also persons whose activity was only tangential to it.

Thus, participants can be divided into two sub categories: active participants, comprising persons who participated to the various competitions of the festival, either as pupils, students, workers or peasants. This sub category includes both amateur and professional artists. By the former, I understand different social and professional categories whose main occupation was not within the artistic or cultural field and who were forced by the regime to compose, create amateur works of art, in order to fit in with the image of communist “new man”. By professional artists, I refer to musicians, actors, writers, painters, or sculptors, who had a formal training in an artistic and cultural field and whose main activity resided in producing works of art.

The second sub category is that of passive participants. By this I understand persons who did not participate directly in the festival, as performers or instructors for artistic performances, but whose professions had them perform duties which intermingled with “Singing to Romania” or with other political festivals prior to the latter. For instance, I refer to teachers who were in charge of bringing their pupils to watch the competitions and performances for festivals.

³¹² A.P., personal interview. Câmpina, April 22, 2007.

³¹³ See a facsimile of the sketches of such a poem in Annex No. 6.

³¹⁴ A.P., personal interview. Câmpina, April 22, 2007.

5.4.1. Active Participants

R.O., mentioned before as a participant-organizer, was also an active participant to the festival, as a high school pupil in the town of Breaza, near Câmpina. As a participant, her main recollection is that the festival gave pupils a goal to achieve, and that, despite the political involvement and control, it allowed young talents to come out into the open. Apart from literary-artistic performances dedicated to Ceaușescu, there were also “complex choirs, or dance performances based on classical music such as Tchaikovsky”.³¹⁵ This time she focuses mainly on the professional features which certain performative groups within the local level of the festival had reached through the dedication of their instructors. Her personal photographs from this period are even more suggestive than her oral testimony, in the sense that they summarize her entire discourse. One such photograph depicts R.O. in her folk costume, right after one competition in which she had participated.³¹⁶ Unlike the previous case, the picture is saturated with political symbols, such as the portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu, posters with quotes from his speeches, or poems and slogans praising the Party and its leader. In this sense the picture holds a symbolical topography, dominated by the painting of Ceaușescu, which rests above the room and R.O. She looks straight into the photograph, but the focus is not on her, but on her folk costume. This is evident from the words she had written on the back of the photograph: “December 4, 1980, Eleventh grade. After the show. The costume from the performance”.³¹⁷ Another photograph taken on the same occasion presents in the same cadre R.O. together with a group of colleagues.³¹⁸ Again one sees the official painting, slogans, posters, but the back of the photograph indicates that its meaning is to be a visual reminder of a group of pupils. The historical context, both general and particular, remains in the background. These photographs corroborated with R.O. narrative indicate that the focus is on the personal experience, in a narrow, local context, in which the political is seen as something which is permanently imminent and inescapable, but never central.

³¹⁵ R.O., personal interview. Câmpina, April 18, 2007.

³¹⁶ See Annex No. 5. Also, R.O., personal interview. Câmpina, April 19, 2007.

³¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

³¹⁸ See annex no. 4.

M.C. is aware of his own subjectivity when recalling his participation to the festival. Now, a teacher of history, he applies different theories of oral history he learned as a student, to his own memories. Nevertheless, he perceives the dualism between subjectivity and objectivity in the classical manner, as observed by Elisabeth Tonkin, seeing the two as opposites, and deeming his “subjectivity” in terms of inaccuracy and unreliability.³¹⁹ He is not aware of the importance of his subjectivity, as defined by Portelli, and he states: “What I mean to say is that my information is inaccurate, because I was at the age when instincts are more important than the desire for accurate information. We did not have access to information as kids nowadays have, and I was not interested in this festival and in what was on TV.”³²⁰ However he made one exception from his rule when he watched his participation on TV, to musical performance, which had been directed at the “Doftana” prison, in his home village, of Telega.³²¹ The performance was a symbolical one, and it was held at the beginning of the summer. It consisted of a number of participants, of various social, age and professional categories, which were supposed to form the figure of Romania. In the middle of this group there was a choir, situated so as to form the figure “XX”. The design was set to mark the anniversary of twenty years from the 9th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party.³²² M.C. recalls that he was taken to the prison early in the morning and that they had to simply stand still, while the choir was miming the lyrics of several propaganda songs, the actual music being playback.³²³ Several persons fainted during the filming, but it made no difference to the directors who continued their work until they considered it finished. For M.C. this was no burden, as he

³¹⁹ Elisabeth Tonkin, “Memory Makes Us, We Make History” in Idem, *Narrating our Past. The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 95-96.

³²⁰ M.C., personal interview. Câmpina, April 20, 2007.

³²¹ Telega is the village where “Doftana” prison is located. It is situated 6 kilometers from Câmpina. For further information, see www.telega.ro. Last entry: May 09, 2010.

³²² M.C., personal interview. Câmpina, April 20, 2007. The 9th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party was held in July 1965, after the death of the Romanian communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Officially, the Congress was held under the principle of collective leadership, of both the Party and the country. Unofficially, leadership was assumed by a triumvirate, which comprised Nicolae Ceaușescu, Chivu Stoica and Ion Gheorghe-Maurer. Later on, Ceausescu would dispose of his colleagues, assuming total power and control over the Party and the country. During the 1970s and 1980s official press identified the 9th Congress with the beginning of Nicolae Ceausescu’s “Golden Age” (in Romanian, “Epoca de Aur”). For further information, see Adrian Cioroianu, *op. cit.*, 395-396.

³²³ M.C., personal interview. Câmpina, April 20, 2007.

was young and animated by the desire to see himself on TV and become something important.³²⁴

R.O. and M.C.'s recollections are similar in that they rely heavily on subjectivity, without passing any moral judgment or without manifesting any kind of nostalgia. This is mainly due to the fact that all of them were still young when the respective events took place.

5.4.2. Passive Participants

“As far as I know...from what I remember...”³²⁵ This is how G.N. begins his oral narration about the festival and his participation to it. He is a teacher of history and this has a great influence on his discourse, as he begins it in the form of a history lesson, classifying the effects of the festival into negative and positive. He starts with the negative effects, stating that “Song of Romania” was related to “a personality cult of Ceaușescu, of neo-Stalinist type”.³²⁶ Then he moves on to the positive effects, arguing that the festival allowed for the discovery of “raw talents”, who were brought out into the open and were allowed to manifest themselves.³²⁷ As a passive participant, he was forced to accompany his pupils to various spectacles and mass assemblies in honor of Nicolae Ceaușescu. He states that the directors of the school where he had been a teacher accepted his refusal to participate to the festival, because of subjective, personal reasons.³²⁸

On the one hand, he recalls that pupils were happy to see their colleagues on stage. On the other hand, he remembers the repetitions for mass performances on stadium at Ploiești, without making it clear whether he was impressed by their scale, or whether he perceived them as a burden.³²⁹ One might interpret his attitude as that of person who considers that he was a part of a stressful, but important event.

³²⁴ *Ibidem.*

³²⁵ G.N., personal interview. Câmpina, April 20, 2007.

³²⁶ *Ibidem.*

³²⁷ *Ibidem.*

³²⁸ *Ibidem.* G.N. states that he explained to the school directors he could not attend the rehearsals for performances, because of his time schedule, and the directors understood him.

³²⁹ *Ibidem.*

G.N.'s discourse is twofold: he refers to the festival in a general way, in the form of historical discourse, and then he recalls personal memories about the festival, but without integrating these memories in the broader historical framework which he had created previously.

V.I. had a similar function, of accompanying pupils to spectacles and artistic manifestations, although not as a teacher, but as a pedagogue. She was also an active participant, as a dancer, during 1971-1972, for a local folk festival, held in her home village, near Câmpina.³³⁰ Later on, after becoming a pedagogue, whose mission was to supervise pupils in the campus, she had to take them to watch movies at the cinema every Saturday evening, or various artistic performances, during the week.³³¹ V.I. provides useful insights to the means which education institutions had at their disposal for controlling pupils' activities.

This becomes evident from a series of documents and reports about her activity, which she kept for herself as personal reminders. One such document is an activity plan, for the school year of 1979-1980, which mentions administrative, planning and educational-artistic activities which had to be fulfilled over the course of one year.³³² Among the artistic activities one finds obligatory subscriptions to newspapers such as *Scântea Tineretului*, the communist official newspaper for youth, but also scientific research magazines such *Gazeta matematică* [Review of Mathematics].³³³

What is of interest is not the plan in itself, but V.I.'s comments upon it. V.I. refrains from passing any kind of moral judgments. She only makes brief comments on each of planned activities. She perceives every activity from the plan of activity as a natural, normal one, in which the political is of secondary importance. The forefront of the entire image is taken by social relations that appear between pupils, between pupils and pedagogue, or between pupils and their teachers. She also refers to relations based on control, which is at a professional and not at a political level. For V.I., control does not

³³⁰ V.I., personal interview. Câmpina, April 22, 2007. The festival at which V.I. participated as a dancer was a local one, called "Crăițele". After 1976 such local festivals would be integrated in the framework of the "Song of Romania" festival.

³³¹ *Ibidem*.

³³² See Annex No. 7, Activity Plan for School Year 1979-1980. (Facsimile)

³³³ *Ibidem*. Also, V.I., personal interview. April 22, 2007.

necessarily mean political control, which is still present, but of secondary importance, it means control from her direct superiors, such as the school director.

V.I. has been interviewed several times. If in the first interview she was rather neutral about her activities as a pedagogue and did not show any positive or negative attitude towards her activities, either as a pupil or young teacher taking part in a folk dance group, in the latter interviews³³⁴, she remembers her taking part into the dance group “Crăițele” as “a very beautiful moment, which I enjoyed immensely”, expressing regret for not having pursued dancing into a career as “I did not have the necessary time, plus there were others who were more talented than I was and the selection was very strict”.³³⁵ If she expresses nostalgia for these types of dances, without relating them to any official policies taken by the state, her memories of her activity as a pedagogue are grimmer, both because of certain undisciplined pupils and because of the high school head teachers who were extremely strict about schedules, but who also had their own groups of protégées within the high school group: “When you get to a certain age, it doesn’t really matter whether you enjoy it or not³³⁶, you just do your job and try to do it the right way. The director of my high school was known for his toughness on pupils and teachers alike, so he could be extremely stressful. But the worst thing about it was that you could see, in time, he had his own...how to call them...protégées, with whom he was much kinder. And even if you know this is not right, you try to ignore and get on with what you have to do.”³³⁷ V.I.’s attitude is that of a survivor for whom issues such as cultural activities are of lesser importance, when confronted with daily problems and a difficult schedule.³³⁸

D.A. and S.E. find themselves in a rather similar situation. Both were teachers of mathematics during the 1970s and 1980s and underwent basic and higher education

³³⁴ V.I., personal interview, April 5th and 16th 2010.

³³⁵ *Ibidem*, April 16th, 2010.

³³⁶ My question had been whether she enjoyed going to festivals or theatre with the pupils she was supposed to direct as a pedagogue.

³³⁷ *Ibidem*, April 16th, 2010.

³³⁸ As she recalls, her schedule was from 6.00 AM to 8.00 AM and afterwards from 3.00 PM to 9.30 PM. She also mentions the extra hours she and other teachers were supposed to do, harvesting crops or taking the pupils to clean out animal farms whenever Ceaușescu would pay a visit to Câmpina. The latter piece of information also proves important for the incomplete level of urbanization undertaken in Romania, as many of these so called animal farms turned out to be coops which people who had just moved from the country side into the newly built blocks of flats were keeping near their new homes. V.I., personal interview, April 05, 2010.

throughout the 1960s and early 1970s in provincial universities.³³⁹ Neither of them actively took part in “Singing to Romania” festival, though their memories of the reasons for not doing this are different. D.A. recalls that “math teachers were not important for these kinds of manifestations; you know...we were more... in the harvesting sector. Humanities teachers, sports teachers, these were the primary organizers.”³⁴⁰ On the other hand, S.E. remembers: “we, the teachers for secondary school, were not supposed to organize such things. Sure, we would take the kids to shows or to parades whenever Ceaușescu visited Câmpina. We had to organize these grand parades and a lot of repetitions were necessary for this.”³⁴¹ S.E. offers interesting insights into the informal processes which were part of preparing for such a manifestation, stating that most often, the same plays of poems which were put on stage for school celebrations or “Singing to Romania” were part of parades. “Before each important parade, we used to rehearse at least two hours a day, either after classes, in the summertime, or before them, during winter. Surely, during these periods, we all knew we had to be much more indulgent towards pupils in class, especially towards those who were actively taking part in a manifestation. When you live in village near Câmpina, you spend an hour coming to school, two hours rehearsing, then another five in class, then another to get back home, then nobody is going to ask that much of you”.³⁴² This shows how the official stahanovistic requirements were negotiated at the local level by people who knew how to literally observe the official etatization of time (in Katherine Verdery’s terms)³⁴³ by adapting it to their own capabilities.

C.B. took part several times in artistic manifestation organized by the factory in which he was working, but he only played small roles in a few humoristic plays: “I had no talent for such things. I knew that, they knew that, but they wanted to show everybody was there, you see, everybody had to make his or her own contribution and since I had to voice they gave me these small parts in a few plays.”³⁴⁴ He didn’t always take part in

³³⁹ D.A. went to university in the city of Ploiești, 30 km away from Câmpina, while S.E. went to university in Baia Mare, in the northern part of Romania.

³⁴⁰ D.A., personal interview, April 12th, 2010.

³⁴¹ S.E., personal interview, April 12th 2010.

³⁴² S.E. personal interview, April 12th 2010.

³⁴³ See Katherine Verdery “The Etatization of Time in Ceaușescu’s Romania” in Idem, *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996, 39-57.

³⁴⁴ C.B., personal interview, July 27th, 2009.

rehearsals, as he knew the play director, his foreman and for small services he was allowed to skip them, especially since his part consisted of only a few lines:

“Let’s say you have humoristic play, something to laugh at, like, two workers, one who is hard working and another one lazy. And the point is to ridicule the lazy one. Sometimes the play had extras as well, like a third or a fourth worker who would pass on by say something, make a comment for the audience about the lazy worker, stuff like that. Nothing big. You don’t need rehearsal for that! (*laughs*) But they would make attendance lists and I had to be on ‘em. So, the foreman or the play director would ask me to do a job for them, I don’t know, help them paint their garage or go and buy something and they would put me on the list.”³⁴⁵

C.B.’s comments and information are extremely valuable when it comes to shed light on the informal practices which lay behind the official requirements and propaganda statements. They only show how an artistic manifestation could become the occasion for social and power relations to make themselves noticed in a working environment.

5.5. By-Standers

I.O. worked as an electrician and since his job involved a lot of traveling around the country, depending on the assignment his team was given, artistic manifestations were out of the question. “No, I had nothing to do with that, I know there were such things, but we didn’t do it, we had hard work ahead of us”.³⁴⁶ One almost gets a sense of pride in his words when he denies ever having taken part in artistic manifestations or in the “Singing to Romania” festival, which he considers as “things for those who had time for them”, which was not his case. Notwithstanding his noninvolvement with “Singing to Romania”, he was supposed to “march for Romania”, on national holiday parades. But he

³⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, personal interview July 27th, 2009.

³⁴⁶ I.O. personal interview April 3rd 2010.

managed to avoid most of these, as he remembers: “Whenever there was a parade, we had to be present for them³⁴⁷ to make an attendance list. I would go there, say ‘present’ and then just slip away, without them noticing me. I would go home and watch a football match on T.V., especially when *Dinamo*³⁴⁸ played.”³⁴⁹

V.B. worked in the same factory as C.B., but she never took part in any artistic activity, as she simply refused to do so. She does not remember being forced into taking to such festivals or to have been penalized for her refusal, even though she does admit that “some, who would step in and take the stage, would get tickets to the seaside much faster than the rest of us”.³⁵⁰ When asked about her feelings towards these manifestations or whether she ever watched them, V.B. says that she did enjoy certain parts, whereas other were “funny”, because of the way they were interpreted by certain work colleagues.³⁵¹

M.I. worked in the constructions sector initially and afterwards was relocated to a sylvan factory nearby Cămpina. She has no recollection of artistic competitions, only of parades to which she had to participate each time she was summoned to do so. She remembers these parades as something which would get her out of the everyday monotony.³⁵² Throughout the interview she did not express any positive or negative attitude towards the type of artistic manifestations that were paramount to the socialist regime, although one could guess a sense of nostalgia for the period, caused by what she called “a feeling of security, of knowing you had a job and that job was yours ‘till the end, unlike today”’.³⁵³

³⁴⁷ The term “them” is omnipresent in many narratives of my interviewees (especially working class) and this case is no exception either. It is semantically almost impersonal, referring to an authority which is always supposed to control you but which can be, sometimes, by-passed.

³⁴⁸ Dinamo was and has remained one of the most important football teams in Romania over the past 60 years. During the years of the socialist regime when there were no private football clubs, Dinamo was supported by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. See http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinamo_Bucure%C5%9Fti (Last accessed: May 06th, 2010).

³⁴⁹ I.O., personal interview, April 3rd 2010.

³⁵⁰ V.B. personal interview, July 29th, 2009.

³⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁵² M.I. personal interview, April 5th, 2010.

³⁵³ *Ibidem*.

5.6. Conclusions

Oral history analysis presents two types of findings for the case study of political festivals in socialist Romania. The first type refers to information which contradicts official claims about the functions, structure and resources of these festivals. Official media maintains complete silence, when it comes to the material and financial means, by which organizers were able to stage mass performances, or to conduct festivals in their various levels of competitions. Corroborated with other types of written sources, especially at local level, oral history can offer insights into how these festivals became a structure in themselves, which made use of various resources, through unofficial channels. M.X.'s information proved to be a starting point in this respect.

Information provided by the interviewees has also shown how ordinary people dealt with official directives; in certain cases, those who were allowed to participate in the competitions were not necessarily the best pupils or the hardest-working persons – as official sources claimed –, but whose who were considered to have a native artistic talent. In several cases (presented by R.O., A.S.), the official aim of occupying the entire people's time with working and artistic activities was ignored, and often people skipped their every-day activities or profession, in order to accomplish the cultural tasks of political festivals or mass artistic manifestations.

The second and probably most important type of information, provided by oral history lies with how interviewees construct their subjective narrative about their past and political festivals. One also needs to explore the interrelations between historical memory, collective memory and personal, which appear in these two oral history case studies.

Most interviewees construct their subjectivity around their personal experience, but they always related themselves to the general context, without making any strong connections between the two. Organizers, organizer-participants, active or passive participants, by-standers have different recollection and memories and they pass different judgments, which are caused, first of all, be their own personal experience. These are also caused by the different roles each interviewee has played within the festival. In this respect, an obvious example is M.X., who, as a former organizer, is more focused on the political control aspect, than those who were simple participants.

Different functions are not the only factors that matter in the analysis, despite the fact that the oral history interviews were structured according to this criterion. The criterion of age differentiates between nostalgic and non-nostalgic persons. Nostalgia itself varies according to personal experience. It is also, as M.G.' narrative reveals it, a sign of not craving about the past, but of being unsatisfied with the present.

Intellectual background is also important when analyzing the way in which each person develops his/her narrative. It contributes to their memories in the sense that it makes people more or less aware of the existence of a present socially-shared historical memory on communism in general and on political festivals in particular, and it provides several interviewees with the means to operate with this historical memory and to include it in their narrative discourse.

5.7. List of Annexes to Chapter 5

Annex No. 1: *Casa științei și tehnicii pentru tineret* (The House of Science and Technology for the Youth) Source: Postcard from the 1980s.

Annex No. 2: Front Photo of the House of Culture in Cămpina during the 1980s (Source: Silviu Dan Cratochvil, *Monografia orașului Cămpina*, 1990, p. 153).

Annex No. 3: *Casa pionierilor* (House of Pioneers) Source: Postcard from the 1980s.

Annex No. 4: Photo of R.O., as a teacher with a group of pupils, during an artistic performance (R.O., personal archive).

Annex no. 5: Photo of R.O. and colleagues after the artistic-literary performance, at local level, for “Song of Romania” (R.O., personal archive).

Annex No. 6: Photo of R.O., after a literary-artistic performance at a local level, for “Song of Romania”. December 4, 1980. (R.O., personal archive).

Annex No. 7: Facsimile of sketches from a poem glorifying the Romanian Communist Party, written by A.P. (A.P., personal archive).

Annex No. 8: Facsimile of an Activity Plan, regarding the various means intended to educate pupils (V.I., personal archive).

Annex No. 1: *Casa științei și tehnicii pentru tineret* (The House of Science and Technology for the Youth) Source: Postcard from the 1980s.



Annex No. 2: Front Photo of the House of Culture in Câmpina during the 1980s
(Source: Silviu Dan Cratochvil, *Monografia oraşului Câmpina*, 1990, p. 153).



Casa de cultură

Annex No. 3: *Casa pionierilor* (House of Pioneers) Source: Postcard from the 1980s.



Annex No. 4

Photo of R.O., as a teacher with a group of pupils, during an artistic performance (R.O., personal archive)



Annex no. 5

Photo of R.O. and colleagues after the artistic-literary performance, at local level, for “Song of Romania” (R.O., personal archive)

Front cover.

Back cover.
A list of R.O.'s colleagues
is written on the back cover
of the photo.

Ilie Măriaș
Aparat Sing
Voiculescu Reta
Radu Măriaș
David Măriaș
Brighinaru Marcela
s. a XI-a
H61

Annex No. 6
Photo of R.O., after a literary-artistic
performance at a local level, for “Song of
Romania”. December 4, 1980. (R.O.,
personal archive)

Front cover:



3-XIII - 1980
clasa a XI-a. După spectacol
1312
costumul de la waltz.

**Back cover:
“December 4, 1980. 11th Grade.
After the show.
The costume from the performance.”**

Annex No. 7: Facsimile of sketches from a poem glorifying the Romanian Communist Party, written by A.P. (A.P., personal archive)

Partidule, iubit conducător
Tu ne conduci spre un mândru
viitor

Ne călăuzești spre un mândru
se-vedeami spre ce e bun și drept
Bănuim viteoz și înțelept
Tu te-ai născut în barăile
(Tu venim de resturile și de jale)
și sângi revult a uns pe o uoastă
glie

~~Pr-triumfal~~

Da ai ieșit biruitor,
Partidule, iubit conducător,
Tu ne-ai adus un cer senin, curățat
și-ai arătat la lumina-ntregă
Căci este stejar în fața noastră
diaga

C-ai alungat și lacrimile n-avezi
și ești mereu alături de noi
Deu, He-ți dai o uoastă și-ai
retreaga

Partidule, conducător
diaga,

Translation into English of the amateur political poetry sketches of A.P.:³⁵⁴

Party, our dear leader
You lead us toward a proud future [*line erased in the original*]
You guide us toward a proud [*line left unfinished*]
You lead the way toward what is good and right [*an arrow indicating that the line should come after the first verse*]
Courageous and wise old man
You were born in battle
In sad times of sorrow [*verse put between brackets*]
And there was blood shed on our land

For the triumph [*line left unfinished and erased in the original*]
Still you won the battle,
Party, our dear leader.
But you brought us a clear sunny sky [*line erased*]
And showed the world
There is a master in our beloved country
For you put an end to tears and hard times
And you are always with us
Thus, we give our life to you
Party, our dear treasure.

³⁵⁴ The translation is mainly literally, in order to describe most accurately the message of the text, disregarding the rhyme and rhythm of the original text, in Romanian. The comments between brackets belong to the translator.

Annex No. 8

Facsimile of an Activity Plan, regarding the various means intended to educate pupils (V.I., personal archive)

ANUL SCOLAR 1979-1980

PLAN DE MUZICA
Trimestrul I

Obiective	Mărcini și măsuri de realizare	Termen	Cine răspunde
I. Organizarea colectivului.	1. Prefăcerea regulamentului de organizare și funcționare a internatelor și cantinelor școlare.	1.X.1979	Pedagogul
	2. Alegerea comitetelor de internat și cantină.	1.X.1979	"
	3. Intocmirea registrului.		
	4. Repartizarea elevilor pe dormitoare.	1.X.1979	"
	5. Stabilirea programului zilnic	1.X.1979	"
	6. Organizarea serviciului la internat și cantină- accentuarea autogospodăririi, autoservizii.	Periodic	"
II. Ridicarea nivelului la învățatură.	1. Organizarea meditației.	1.X.1979	"
	2. Urmărirea frecvenței la cursuri.	Permanent	"
	3. Menținerea legăturii cu profesorii, diriginții și părinții elevilor.	"	"
	4. Formarea unor grupe de ajutor reciproc.	Decă e cazul.	"
III. Îmbunătățirea activității educative în rândul elevilor.	1. Respectarea programului zilnic.		
	2. Urmărirea ținutei și a comportării elevilor în internat, cantină și în sfere scolare.	Permanent	"
	3. Măsuri pentru educarea politico-ideologică și patriotică a elevilor: sumarul presii, vizionarea programului la televizorul școlii.	"	"
	4. Organizarea unor concursuri de înfrumusețarea internatului: -concursuri "Cel mai frumos dormitor", "Cel mai îngrijită ținută".	Periodic	Președ. internat

..//..

Annex No. 8
Facsimile, page 2

- 2 -

Obiective:	Sarcini și măsuri de realizare	Termen	Cine răspunde.
	<p>5. Activități cultural-artistice și științifice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - abonamente la Scinteia tinerețului, Gazeta matematică și alte publicații. - participarea elevilor la manifestările culturale organizate la biblioteca școlii. - vizionarea în comun a spectacolelor, filmelor și discutarea lor. - participarea la activitățile sportive organizate de liceu. - vizitarea muzeelor "Nicolae Grigorescu", "Doftana", "Hașdeu" - organizarea unor seri literare, științifice, distractive. 	<p>Permanent</p> <p>Când e cazul</p> <p>Sâmbătă Duminică</p> <p>Când e cazul.</p> <p>Duminică</p> <p>Spre afirs. trim.</p>	<p>Prof. specialit.</p> <p>Bibliotecar Pedagog</p> <p>Profesor sport.</p> <p>Pedagogul</p> <p>Președ. internat</p>
	<p>6. Educația sanitară: întâlnire cu medicul școlii și difuzarea unor broșuri pe teme medicale.</p>	<p>Una pe lună</p>	<p>Pedagogul</p>
IV. Probleme administrative.	<p>1. Procurarea mobilierului și lenjeriei.</p> <p>2. Stabilirea programului pentru spălat-călcat.</p> <p>3. Controlarea curățeniei în internat.</p> <p>4. Controlarea activității defășurată de elevii de serviciu la cantină.</p>	<p>15.IX.979</p> <p>Permanent</p> <p>Permanent</p>	<p>Administr.</p> <p>Pedagogul</p> <p>"</p>

Translation into English of Annex No. 8

School Year 1979 -1980

Name of High School

Activity Plan
First Trimester

Objectives	Tasks and Means of Accomplishing the Tasks	Deadline	The Person in Charge
I. Organizing the Collective of Pupils.	1. Presenting the rules of organization and functioning for boarding schools and school canteens.	October1, 1979	Pedagogue
	2. Elections for the boarding school and canteen committees.	October1, 1979	“
	3. Organizing the register.	October1, 1979	“
	4. Distribution of schoolgirls to their dormitories.	October1, 1979	“
	5. Organizing the daily schedule.	October1, 1979	“
	6. Organizing services for boarding school and canteen – increasing self-management and self-service.	Periodically	“
II. Increasing the	1. Organizing private	October1,	“

level of education.		learning.	1979	
	2.	Observing if pupils attend the classes.	Permanently	“
	3.	Maintaining contact with teachers, head teachers and the pupils’ parents.	“	“
	4.	Forming groups of mutual help.	If necessary	“
III. Improving the educative activity of pupils.	1.	Observing the daily schedule.		“
	2.	Keeping the pupils’ dressing conduct under surveillance inside the boarding school, canteen and outside them.	Permanently	“
	3.	Measures for political and ideological education of schoolgirls: press review, watching the TV news on the school TV set.	“	“
	4.	Organizing competitions in order to embellish the boarding school. - contests: “The cleanest bedroom”, “The cleanest school uniform”.	Periodically	President of the boarding school
	5.	Scientific and cultural-artistic activities: - subscriptions to <i>Scînteia tineretului</i> [Scînteia of youth], <i>Gazeta matematică</i> [Review of Mathematics] and other publications. - participation of schoolgirls to the cultural	Permanently When necessary	Teacher of respective subject matter Librarian Pedagogue

	6.	<p>manifestations, organized in the school library.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - group watching of spectacles, films and discussing them. - participation to the sports activities organized by the high school. - visiting the “Nicolae Grigorescu”, “Doftana” and “Haşdeu” (<i>sic!</i>) museums. - organizing of evening literary, scientific, entertaining gatherings. <p>Sanitary education: appointment to the school doctor and distribution of brochures on medical issues.</p>	<p>Saturday Sunday</p> <p>When necessary.</p> <p>Sunday</p> <p>Toward the end of the trimester.</p> <p>Once every month.</p>	<p>Sports teacher.</p> <p>Pedagogue</p> <p>President of boarding school</p> <p>Pedagogue</p>
IV. Administrative problems.	1.	Obtaining furniture and bed sheets.	September 15, [1]979	Administrator.
	2.	Setting the schedule for washing and ironing.		
	3.	Maintaining order within the boarding school.	Permanently	Pedagogue
	4.	Controlling the activity of pupils on duty, at the canteen.	Permanently	“

Chapter 6: The Village Case Study: Tâmbioești

6.1. Preliminaries

The village of Tâmbioești lies in the county of Vrancea, in southern Moldova. 30 km away from the county's capital, Focșani, and approximately 170 km away from Bucharest, Tâmbioești is a relatively large village, by Romania's standards, with a population of almost 2,000 inhabitants, known primarily – as well as the surrounding area – for its grape vine plantations, that have constituted the main occupation of its inhabitants. At this point there is no monograph written about the village and the only written information can be drawn from two novels written by a former inhabitant which contain several historical facts hidden in the form of life stories.³⁵⁵

The most important historical fact which forms the identity of many peasants is the collectivization process which stripped them of their properties and forced them into becoming workers within the collective. Tâmbioești was hit by the second wave of collectivization from 1959 to 1961, following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania in 1958. The process marked a violent shift in the social and economic strata of the village. Several peasants, considered by the authorities as *chiaburi*³⁵⁶ who used to

³⁵⁵ Gheorghe Chirtoc, *Sirepele domnului Anason* [The Huntresses of Mister Anason], Focșani: Editura Andrew, 2007 and Idem, *Jurnalul nescris al unui sat* [The Unwritten Diary of a Village], Focșani: Editura Andrew, 2009. I have managed to have access to these two books courtesy of several of my interviewees who have lent them to me. Although highly unreliable as historical secondary literature, they are indicative of the village life style through out the communist and post communist periods. Certain data contained within the book, such as the date when the first house of culture was built have been confirmed to me by several interviewees, although one is not sure whether the latter knew these dates based on their own memories or following their own reading of the two books. See also Annex No. 1. Apart from all these, one can find scant information about Tâmbioești as a grape vine area in I.M.Dimitrescu, *Însemnări cu privire la orașul Focșani* [Writing about the town of Focșani], București: Institutul de arte grafice Bucovina, 1931, 49.

³⁵⁶ The Romanian equivalent of the Russian “kulak”. It referred to peasants who hold more than 10 or 20 hectares of land. The size of the property varied both chronologically and geographically. The term itself originated from Turkish to Romanian and had been an extremely scarcely used word until it became part of the communist propaganda.

own important properties, were arrested and their homes became residences for the new village hall, as well as for the improvised house of culture.³⁵⁷

Thus, the stage of the first house of culture in the village was extremely small and this prevented the cultural activists from staging plays at first. Because of this, the focus was initially on singing in choirs and showing movies. However, since the main hall was too small for projecting movies and for the large number of people who came to view them, the actual screening took place outside, at night.³⁵⁸

Starting with the early 1960s a new house of culture³⁵⁹ was initiated, which exists today and which has been housing all the events (school events, artistic ones, musical performances of folk singers, etc.) until present. The new house of culture also incorporated a library, which until 1989 had 17,000 volumes.³⁶⁰ In 2010 the library only has 8,200 volumes, which deal mainly with essential basic literary authors (who are studied in text books in primary and secondary school), specialized treaties on agriculture and books from the communist period dealing with propaganda issues, although it seems that the latter are on their way on being destroyed.³⁶¹ The main hall of the present house of culture is much larger, even though it serves mainly as a playing ground for school children and less often as performance hall.³⁶²

The population of Tâmbioești is a mixture of ethnic Romanians and Romani people. Until 1989 the two populations lived in almost separated parts of the village, a situation which has not changed much in the post-communist period.

I have interviewed ten people, all ethnic Romanians.³⁶³ Based on my field observations, I can state that Romanians and Romani in the village are primarily linked by economic services, with Romani doing most of the low paid jobs (such as working in the grape vines). The interviewees are listed below. As in the case of Câmpina, because

³⁵⁷ Gheorghe Chirtoc, *Jurnalul nescris al unui sat*, 56. The fact has been confirmed by all of my interviewees. See Annex 2 for the first house of culture in Tâmbioești.

³⁵⁸ According to I.P (personal interview, April 24th, 2010). and A.T (conversation, April 25th, 2010, when visiting the old house of culture). In Annex No. 9 one can see the place where the screening took place, on the left side of the building.

³⁵⁹ See Annex No. 3.

³⁶⁰ According to the current librarian.

³⁶¹ *Ibidem*. The decrease in number of books seems to have been caused by massive thefts in the immediate post communist period.

³⁶² See Annex No. 4.

³⁶³ So far all attempts to interview persons of Romani ethnicity have proved unsuccessful.

of the different attitudes I have encountered during these interviews, regarding the issue of making public the names of the interviewees, I have decided to name the latter with fictitious initials only, naming instead accurately the place, date of the interview, as well as general data about the interviewees, such as ethnicity, gender, age (using general frameworks: up to 30 years old; between 30 and 45 years; between 45 and 65 years; more than 65 years. – I have done so, partially because of lack of information regarding the interviewees' exact age and partially to maintain their anonymity), profession.

a) A.S., Romanian, female, under 30 years old, public servant. Personal interviews taken in Bucharest, May 9, 2007 and Tâmbonești, April 23rd, 2010.

b) S.B., Romanian, female, more than 65 years old, retired, formerly a head teacher and cultural activist, also a mayor. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, July 4th, 2009.

c) I.B., Romanian, male, more than 65 years old, retired, formerly a director of the house of culture in Tâmbonești. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, July 4th, 2009.

d) I.O., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, geography and history teacher. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, July 5th, 2009.

e) V.S., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, teacher of physics and chemistry. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, July 7th, 2009.

f) I.P., Romanian, male, more than 65 years old, retired, formerly a store keeper at the collective farm. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, April 24th, 2010.

g) S.P., Romanian, female, more than 65 years old, worker at the collective farm. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, April 24th, 2010.

h) T.V., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, teacher. Personal interviews taken in Tâmbonești, July 3rd 2009 and April 24th, 2010.

i) A.N., Romanian, female, more than 65 years old, retired, formerly a teacher. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, April 25th, 2010.

j) M.G., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, Romanian language teacher. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, April 26th, 2010.

6.2. Organizers

For almost 30 years S.B. and I.B. were some of the most important figures in the village of Tâmboriești and the most important persons when it came to artistic festivities and manifestations. They came in Tâmboriești in the late 1950s, just as the collectivization process “was starting to sweep across the village”, as I.B. recalls.³⁶⁴ Because of their “healthy origin”³⁶⁵ they could integrate much easier inside the ranks of the communist party and represented its spearhead when the collectivization process started in Tâmboriești. S.B. was primarily the political activist while her husband was in charge of running the then newly established house of culture. I.B. remembers how he managed to get the first film projector for the house of culture:

“It was really difficult back then to get one of these things (film projector – m.n.). I had to go all the way to Râmnic to talk to the party secretary³⁶⁶. And he said to me: ‘You got some good wine up there, don’t you?’ ‘I have, and some is for the giving.’ So this is how I got the first film projector and it was a good one, Soviet, the best there was back then!”

I.B. recalls that going to see the movies he was showing at the house of culture was the best entertainment people got and it drew large crowds not just from within the village but from the surrounding areas as well. The selection was done by Party cultural “activists at the county level”³⁶⁷ and he would show Soviet propaganda movies as well as romance or comedies. His opinion is that people enjoyed all types of movies since the

³⁶⁴ I.B., personal interview, Tâmboriești, July 4th, 2009.

³⁶⁵ The term is a literal translation of the Romanian syntagm “origine sănătoasă”, by which one would understand that a certain person did not belong to the upper class of the “chiaburi”. Throughout the communist period, but initially in the early period, persons with “unhealthy social origin” were excluded from holding positions in the administration or from having access to higher education.

³⁶⁶ Râmnicul Sărat is a town 17 km south of Tâmboriești and the largest closest town in the village vicinity. Because of this, most peasants in the surrounding areas – apart from those who had jobs in the town, in the industrial sector – went to Râmnic whenever they needed consumer products which were usually inaccessible to them.

³⁶⁷ From 1948 until 1969 Tâmboriești belonged to the region of Râmnic, within the larger district of Ploiești. From 1969 onwards after the new administrative division of Romania and the change from districts to counties, Tâmboriești became part of the county of Vrancea.

novelty of the experience was too powerful for them to actually be able to distinguish between what was propaganda and what was entertainment.³⁶⁸

S.B. held several administrative function in the village, at first cultural and educational and afterwards, in the latter period of the communist regime, political. Her narrative is highly nostalgic as she starts her recollections with a series of nostalgic questions about the fate of culture in present times, arguing that now cultural manifestations have grown to a halt.

“Sure, we said something about Ceaușescu also, but we also said about Romania, most songs were about the fatherland! And children would always learn the songs and they enjoyed them! I can’t tell you how many applauses we would get every time we got on the stage at the House of Culture to sing with the choir!”³⁶⁹

Although her memories turn out to be entangled after a while, by mixing memories about the school choirs which were highly amateurish and ephemeral and the village choir made up of teachers, doctors, engineers, public functionaries and collective farm workers – which was more professional and represented the village at all artistic competitions from the 1960s until the 1980s – her narrative offers many insights into the internal mechanisms which made a choir function in the social and economic context of a village. The village choir had been created by a political initiative, but as S.B recalls – supported by the testimonies of other village inhabitants as well – people grew fond of this activity.³⁷⁰ There were periods as well when people could not have normally afforded to take part in rehearsals for the choir, but they were forced, as S.B. always kept a strict attendance list: “After I gave birth to my first child, I remember, I would always take her with me whenever we had rehearsals, or when she was really, really young I would take her with me and leave somebody to watch after her while I was at the choir. So, how

³⁶⁸ Even though his statement is rather arguable it can prove difficult to contradict, since most persons I have interviewed about the film watching experience remember having enjoyed all films regardless of their content.

³⁶⁹ S.B., personal interview, Tâmboiști, July 4th, 2009.

³⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

could I allow others to stay home? Well, of course, there were cases when a person would get sick and we would all understand, but I tell you we put our hearts into that choir.”³⁷¹

The choir did not perform at official cultural festivities or competitions only. It also performed at weddings, especially those of the important people of the village. S.B. remembers how the choir sang “On a plain”³⁷² at her daughter’s wedding. One should bear in mind the fact that the choir consisted of adults most of whom were colleagues of S.B. in the school’s village and some even friends, although it is difficult to establish whether the relations between the people involved were mainly of friendship or animosity. S.B. offers no clues about the types of relations either and her focus is on the positive aspects of these experiences.

6.3. Organizing Participants

A.N. was a teacher from 1959 until 1990 when she retired. She spent most of her professional life in Tâmbioești where she got in 1961, after having married to a local inhabitant, also a teacher.³⁷³ Her discourse is also nostalgic, the focus being of the discipline and order that characterized all manifestations in the past. She recalls that one of the most beautiful things for her whenever there was a festivity was to see her pupils dressed in uniforms:

“I had a boxful of costumes for special events, and lots and lots of ribbons and nice things and when there a special...event, a festivity, a celebration or the closing of the school year I would get all my pupils dressed nicely in those uniforms. Even the Romani children looked so nice in those uniforms! They did not pay much attention to school, you know, since their parents would not let them learn from late autumn until early spring. They had to help their families make bricks for constructions; this is how they survived mostly.”³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ *Ibidem.*

³⁷² A traditional folk song in Tâmbioești. Many of my interviewees have told me about this song, although none could remember exactly the words of the melody.

³⁷³ A.N., personal interview, Tâmbioești, April 25th, 2010.

³⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

She offers insights into the social, economic and cultural differences which lay between the two ethnies of Tâmbioești and how this affected the integration of Romani pupils in the school environment. She also recalls how pupils were extremely proud of having all their ribbons and medals pinned to their chests, hinting at the ceremonies during which pupils were given the title of “Pioneer”.³⁷⁵ A close relative even gave her photos of such events to remind her of them.³⁷⁶

A.N. also has vivid memories of the artistic festivals which took place in the village and of those in which the village took part. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s they bore the name “dialogues” which could be “between classes”, “between schools”, “on the same stage” or “between villages”.³⁷⁷ These included participants of all age categories and her narrative focuses for a while on an award the village of Tâmbioești once got for having had the oldest participant in a competition, a person who could still play the flute at age 95. She remembers how most of the young people in the audience were amused at seeing such a performance on a stage but how they were pleased at the same time.³⁷⁸

Unlike S.B. who focused mainly on the choir, A.N. has vivid recollections of the dancing team which comprised around 61 persons, “from the youngest to the oldest”, including a “dance group made of senior inhabitants of our village whom we had gathered from all around the village to take part in the artistic ensembles, representing us wherever we would go”.³⁷⁹ Rewards for these sorts of manifestations varied according to age and social status in the village and ranged from baskets of cherries brought by the chief engineer from the collective farm for pupils singing in the school choirs to “baskets of goodies” which were usually bought by the organizers of a cultural event as rewards for the winners. What A.N. calls “goodies” consisted of consumer products, usually bought from Râmnic.³⁸⁰

She manifests nostalgia after all these manifestations, but she does not link them to her youth only and attempts to find other causes for the past stability of the village which

³⁷⁵ Pupils in kindergarten, primary and secondary school were given the titles of “Falcons of the Fatherland” (for the kindergarten level) and “Pioneers”, starting with the 3rd grade in primary school.

³⁷⁶ See Annex No. 5.

³⁷⁷ A.N., personal interview, Tâmbioești, April 25th, 2010

³⁷⁸ *Ibidem.*

³⁷⁹ *Ibidem.* See also Annex No. 6.

³⁸⁰ See Annex No. 7, a photo of several members of the choir after such an event which they had won.

she finds in the fact that the state used to control everything, including the steadiness of social relations, or the security of having a job and – especially for medical and educational personnel – a home. She remembers of times when Tâmbioești used to have as many as six doctors, two of them on a permanent basis, while the other four used to do field practice. This stability of an existing technological intellectual elite coupled with state funding for cultural events ensured the latter a permanency which suddenly ended after 1989.³⁸¹ She is also dismissive of present mass media entertainment, for being too vulgar.³⁸²

T.V. was a teacher in the village, but her activities within political festivals have more to do with “Singing to Romania”. She did not participate directly to the festival, but she had several of her pupils take part in it, including her own daughter who won an award at the regional level. This latter event, from 1988 – as she recalls – is the catalyst in her narrative.³⁸³

Despite the fact that her husband was an official of the Party and a close friend with prominent members of the local Securitate, she is fond of the moment when her daughter almost made a mistake during the regional level, addressing an insult to the portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu in a loud voice.

“That was so close! Luckily nobody heard us and Angela could get up on the stage and sing this poem...of course, it was about Ceaușescu and she hated it, but she sang it so beautifully! Everybody was impressed and at the end when they announced the award to her she was so happy! It was then that she finally learnt her lesson to keep her mouth shut, you know she never was much of an obeying person, she was very spoiled and she quickly realized that all the poems about ‘Glory to you, beloved leader’ and all that were just a pile of ...you know, I don’t have to say it.”³⁸⁴

This fragment of her narrative deserves close attention. The fact that T.V.’s daughter won an award was as important as the fact that she dared to openly criticize the dictator. Most probably influenced by the post-communist fixation on resistance to

³⁸¹ A.N., personal interview, Tâmbioești, April 25th, 2010

³⁸² *Ibidem.*

³⁸³ T.V., personal interview, Tâmbioești, July 3rd, 2009

³⁸⁴ *Ibidem.*

communism, T.V. attempts at investing her daughter with the virtues of a dissident who could still, at the same time, win the appreciation of the jury. T.V. leads us to believe that the jury appreciated her daughter's *manner* of interpretation, as the poem in itself was something to be despised. The dialectics of *manner* versus *content* is extremely important and T.V. is not the only interviewee to make this distinction.

6.4. Participants

As with the case of Câmpina I could also distinguish between active participants and passive ones. Again, active participants comprise persons who participated to the various competitions of the festival, either as pupils, students, workers or peasants. This sub category includes both amateur and professional artists. By the former, I understand different social and professional categories whose main occupation was not within the artistic or cultural field and who were forced by the regime to compose, create amateur works of art, in order to fit in with the image of communist "new man". By professional artists, I refer to musicians, actors, writers, painters, or sculptors, who had a formal training in an artistic and cultural field and whose main activity resided in producing works of art.

The second sub category is that of passive participants. By this I understand persons who did not participate directly in the festival, as performers or instructors for artistic performances, but whose professions had them perform duties which intermingled with "Song of Romania". For instance, I refer to teachers who were in charge of bringing their pupils to watch the competitions and performances for the festival.

6.4.1. Active Participants

V.S. is a teacher of physics and chemistry at the school of Tâmbioești. Before 1989 she took part in the choir and the theater play group. The reasons for doing this, she recalls, had to do with coercion more than with genuine pleasure, though she later on

admits during the interview, that there were “nice moments”.³⁸⁵ Even though she did not make any confessions during the interview, her daughter, A.S. recalled how her mother once caused the team to lose a county level competition for “Singing to Romania”, because she was too nervous and forgot her part.³⁸⁶

A.S. was in primary school when she participated with her school for the local competition within the “Singing to Romania” festival. She remembers the repetitions held during the drawing or artistic activities classes, but she also remembers vividly the actual performance, based on a photograph from the event.³⁸⁷ The photograph depicts three groups of pupils on stage, each group being dressed in one of the three colors of the Romanian national flag. The stage is dominated by Ceaușescu’s portrait, in the center and by the national flag on the left side and the Party’s flag on the right side. Apart from the political symbols, this photograph too can be disregarded as depicted an ordinary school event. At a closer look, however, one can observe the discrepancy between the pupils on stage who are dressed in their costumes and the spectators who are well dressed, thus showing not just that the time of the event was sometime during winter, but also that the hall was not heated and that the condition of the performance were mainly improvised. The entire solemnity of the event, based on the design of the stage and the pupils’ costumes, is thus shattered by the people in the audience, which mark the artificial context of the entire performance. A.S. has studied theories of oral history and she has numerous oral history interviews herself, so she is well aware that she is constructing a narrative about her subjectively lived experience. At the same time, her recollections are not interrupted by any analytical remarks on what she is saying. Her general attitude toward her participation is centered around her fear and excitement of appearing on stage, in a public context (she even thought that Ceaușescu would be present in the hall), but also by her eventual disappointment when she found out that her school did not win the competition to a superior level of the festival.³⁸⁸ Her memories are those of a child, who only perceives what is happening to her. She did not know who Ceaușescu really was, but

³⁸⁵ V.S., personal interview, Tâmbonești, July 7th, 2009.

³⁸⁶ A.S., personal interview, Tâmbonești, April 23rd, 2010.

³⁸⁷ A.S., personal interview, Bucharest, May 9, 2007. See Annex No. 8.

³⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

his visual presence, on the official painting above the stage, signified his physical presence in the hall also.

I.O.'s narrative focuses more on his individual achievements for the school of Tâmbioești and the House of Culture, even though at first he offers a few insights into his activity as member of the choir.³⁸⁹ His memories coincide with those of S.B. and A.N. in sharing the joy of singing together or “having fun, as there was no other way to enjoy oneself back then”³⁹⁰, as well as in sharing the pride of having one of the best choirs in the area, although he does not remember many festivities outside the village in which the choir participated in. Notwithstanding this, he quickly shifts towards his own contribution to the ensuring the proper conditions for rehearsals and for modernizing the house of culture in the immediate post 1989 period.³⁹¹

When listening to approximately fifteen minutes of narrative about the choir activity before 1989 and one hour and a half about the post 1989 achievements, one gets the impressions that I.O.'s primary purpose in joining the choir was to mark a new activity to his record and that enjoyment came in second on the list for him.

I.P. took part in the choir also, and his participation was a long lasting one, from the early 1960s until the late 1980s. At first, he saw it as genuine entertainment, as he recalls that was the only leisure collective time young people could afford, apart from Saturday evenings when they would gather together either at one's house or at the house of culture.³⁹² What is most interesting is that I.P. lost his land in 1961, after finally having given in to the Party's repeated requests and intimidations to join the collective. From his narrative one gets a clear view of the tragic character the event had for him, but despite despising the Party officials and hiding in barns whenever they would come to have him join the collective farm, he claims he enjoyed the singing activities as well as the movie watching experiences and his view towards S.B. and I.B is a positive one.³⁹³

The reason for this becomes more evident as he recalls his later experiences once he became a store keeper at the same collective farm he hated at first. His function allowed him to “make due” for his own needs as well as for the collective farm's ones,

³⁸⁹ I.O., personal interview, Tâmbioești, July 5th, 2009.

³⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

³⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁹² I.P., personal interview, Tâmbioești, April 24th, 2010.

³⁹³ *Ibidem*.

whenever the official requirements contrasted heavily with the existing situation (starting with the late 1970s and all throughout the 1980s). In this sense, he knew how to become best friends with the main officials in the village and, not only keep his job, despite a scant education, but become indispensable to the people running the collective farm.³⁹⁴

M.G., a teacher of Romanian language at the village school also took part in the “Singing to Romania” festival, as part of the village choir and she remembers having participated at the county level, where the choir managed to get second prize. The reward was not important or valuable, but it helped her get a promotion afterwards.³⁹⁵ Her discourse is also nostalgic not necessarily in praising the past cultural events, for which she shows no attitude, but in praising the discipline which part of the educational system.³⁹⁶

6.4.2. Passive Participants

S.P. never took part actively in any artistic festival. She had no voice and since her husband was already participating there was no official request for her to join any dance or theatre group.³⁹⁷ She did, however, attend many of the rehearsals of the choir, as her husband was on the stage, as well as the festivities themselves. She recalls most people who took part in the choir would bring their relatives with them and the rehearsal sessions also turned into socializing events.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁴ *Ibidem*. What is most interesting is his sense of pride when recalling this period. Theft, translated for him as “make due” is absolutely normal. His logic of life seems to follow that of the Party, in his own interpretation: as long as the RCP had forcefully taken his land away, he was also allowed to steal. Theft in this case becomes not a morally condemnable deed but a process by which a social and economic system regulates itself.

³⁹⁵ M.G., personal interview, Tâmbioești, April 26th, 2010.

³⁹⁶ *Ibidem*. This should not be interpreted as a sign of nostalgia towards the communist in general, as the educational system preserved most of its organization and regulations in the immediate post 1989 period, especially at the level of primary and secondary schools. More than craving for the past, she is unhappy with the present situation in the Romanian educational system.

³⁹⁷ S.P., personal interview, April 24th, 2010.

³⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

6.5. *By-standers*

At this point I have not managed to find any real by-stander for artistic manifestations, even though it becomes obvious from my interviewees' stories that there were such people. Most of them were Romani, who lived separated from the rest of the other villagers, as well as other Romanians, even though the latter's number seems to be smaller in this respect as they were much more connected, socially, politically and economically to the persons in the village who organized such events.

6.6. *Conclusions*

Another, rather paradoxical, observation which needs to be made is that by-standers tend to speak more about the propaganda and political implications of the festival, than those who were directly connected to it, especially participants. This might be caused by several factors.

Firstly, most of the interviewees were young as participants, and their focus was not on the political features, which they accepted more or less, but on opportunities to make themselves noticed, or to establish new relations. That is why, the festivals partially failed in achieving their goals, like establishing Ceaușescu' personality cult, or gathering adherence to the RCP, because ordinary people found ways of resisting to their official purposes, exactly by formally accepting it, or by negotiating them into their own lives. In reality, they dealt with it as an ordinary event, or task which simply had to be fulfilled, as part of everyday routine activity. Nevertheless, this conclusion is very much influenced by the fact that this case study focused mainly on persons who took part at local level, where the political control, as well as artistic standards were not as high as those at the regional or national level.

Secondly, this observation can be explained by the way in which interviewees develop their discourse. Several of them (R.O., G.N., L.M., M.M., M.X., A.P. in Câmpina or S.B., I.B., T.V., A.N. in Tâmbioești) discuss the positive aspects of the festivals, from various point of view, which intersect in the argument that the former led to the

emergence of artistic values. This latter argument can be interpreted in several ways. One can agree to it, as the festival indeed provided several artists to manifest themselves and show their talent. On the other hand one can argue against it, by stating the overall control of the political regime and its mitigation into artistic and cultural activities, which raise numerous questions about the actual aesthetic value of the latter.

What is of interest in this case is not the general argument in itself, but how this general argument is developed by the interviewees. They use this argument in order to justify their actions, to present them in a positive light.

One can identify in these recollections strong elements of a generally accepted negative historical memory about communism. This historical memory is present in every discourse which starts by deeming political festivals (and “Singing to Romania” particularly) as a failure. This might explain why most interviewees deem the festivals as a failure, but neglect to mention in what exactly it failed. Political festivals failed together with the entire structure of the communist regime.

Several conclusions can be drawn by comparing the two case studies. Both of them deal with local communities, although the community in the village of Tâmbioiești is much more unified, geographically and institutionally than the one in Câmpina. In Tâmbioiești people know each other, whereas in Câmpina this sense of collective living is much weaker.

Apart from a general negative historical memory, one observes a certain type of collective memory, largely influenced by the local context. This type of collective memory reinterprets the festival as a negative enterprise with positive effects for certain categories of people. It can be explored in all the narratives which start with the negative side of the festival, but then turn to its positive effects, without mentioning if these effects manifested at a general level, for large categories of people, or simply for the respective interviewee.

These two concepts, of historical and collective memory intermingle with each other and are modified by personal memories. Each interviewee reduces the festival to his own personal experience and each finds different reasons for deeming as a negative action or positive one. Whereas the negative aspect is always linked with the issue of political control, the positive aspects may vary from material opportunities to professional ones,

either financial or of a different nature, such as control over pupils. This is explainable by the fact that all interviewees experienced a dramatic change in official discourse after the events of 1989. It can be well argued that the radical political change of 1989 marked a memory rupture at the level of the collective and that it influenced more or less the ways in which ordinary people shape their recollections about their past experience. Although further research needs to be conducted on this issue, especially to other levels than the local ones, it can be stated that this memory shift defined the ways ordinary people construct their subjectivity at different levels, in order to justify their past actions and existence and to integrate them in a present-oriented collective memory.

6.7. List of Annexes to Chapter 6

Annex No. 1: A photo of the center of the village of Tâmbonești (detail) (Photo taken by the author on April 25th, 2010).

Annex No. 2: A photo of the building which housed the first house of culture in the village of Tâmbonești, starting with the 1959 (Photo taken by the author on April 25th 2010).

Annex No. 3: A photo of the current house of culture in the village of Tâmbonești (photo taken by the author on April 25th, 2010).

Annex No. 4: A photo of the main hall of the Tâmbonești house of culture (photo taken by author on April 25th, 2010).

Annex No. 5: Photo of a “Pioneer” from the day she received the title (A.N., personal archive).

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Annex No. 7: Photo of A.N. (first on the left) together with several other members of the choir, after an artistic event which they had won. (A.N., personal archive).

Annex No. 8: Photo of A.S. as a primary school pupil during a local level performance for “Song of Romania” (A.S., personal archive).

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Annex No. 5: Photo of a “pioneer” from the day she received the title (A.N., personal archive) Front Cover



Annex No. 5: Photo of a “Pioneer” from the day she received the title (A.N., personal archive) Back Cover: “Please receive with much love a portrait of your daughter in law from the day she has lived one of the most important events which can be part of a pioneer’s life – entering the pioneer organization. Igău Steluța, aged 10”.

Primit:
cu mult drag mi
portret al celei ce e
fina sumnească, atune
sînd a trăit unul din
importantele evenimente
ce dorim: vîrsta de
înținca în pionier.
-zatiei de pionieri.
Igău Steluța
la eteta de 10 ani
29. IX. 1968. *km*

Annex No. 6: Photo of several young participants in the folk dance group (year unknown) (A.N., personal archive)



Annex No. 7: Photo of A.N. (second on the right) together with several other members of the choir, after an artistic event which they had won. (Date unknown) (A.N., personal archive)



Annex No. 8: Photo of A.S. as a primary school pupil during a local level performance for “Song of Romania” (A.S., personal archive)



Chapter 7: Remaining Local in the Center: Political Festivals and Oral Histories in Bucharest

7.1. Preliminaries

There is one anecdote, told by an interviewee, which I consider representative for the relations between local and central in Bucharest, as well as between authorities and ordinary people. It contains that specific grain of irony specific to so many stories from the communist period.

“I remember one Sunday I was walking down on Victoria Road³⁹⁹. I had a date and I was supposed to wait for my girlfriend in front of the *Muzica* store.⁴⁰⁰ That day Ceaușescu was supposed to pass by there or something, and whenever that happened they would have the blue eyed boys, if you know what I mean, standing on the sides of the street, every 50 meters or so.⁴⁰¹ I remember that day was raining. And as I was sitting next to the *Muzica* store, I noticed there were very few people on the street and they were just standing there, one guy every 30, 40 meters. All of a sudden, a car pulls up, a guy gets out of the car and hands me a raincoat. Then the car takes off, stops again a bit further, the guy gets out again and hands another raincoat to another guy who, just like me, was standing on the side of the street. Only then did I realize those guys were from the *Securitate*! Anyway, my then girlfriend arrives, we go to the movies, we have a great time, but I was tensed; I didn’t know what to do with the raincoat!”⁴⁰²

The story is evocative for the sudden, brief, and pointless intervention of central authorities in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. The image created is that of two separate worlds intersecting every once in a while. And nowhere did this happen more

³⁹⁹ The original name for the street is Calea Victoriei. It is one of the oldest and most important streets in Bucharest.

⁴⁰⁰ The *Muzica* store is situated on Victoria Road, in the center of Bucharest, near the former Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party.

⁴⁰¹ *Blue eyed boys* is the common reference to *Securitate* field agents. The complete description is “the blonde haired, blue eyed boys”, as a probable allusion to the selection criteria for the *Securitate* training school. However, many testimonies refer to *Securitate* field agents as having blonde hair and blue eyes, although the description remains mostly anecdotic and there is no solid evidence to argument for such a claim.

⁴⁰² I.A. personal interview, Bucharest, February 14, 2013.

than in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. This chapter will deal with oral histories gathered from inhabitants of Bucharest. It will offer a bottom-up perspective from the one place where the top-down approach was supposed to be most effective. I will start with a brief presentation of Bucharest's history and its development as an administrative, industrial, and cultural center in the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century. This will provide the context for and a better understanding of the interviewees' stories, organized again according to their participation and role played in various political festivals, or festivities: organizers, active participants, passive participants, and bystanders. I will end with an analysis of these narratives and how they compare with oral discourses from the town and village case studies.

7.2. Bucharest. A Brief History

Until the 1870s Bucharest was just one of the two administrative centers of the then newly formed state of Romania. Iași was the other center of administration, while maintaining a certain cultural supremacy.⁴⁰³ However, since the early 1870s, with the ongoing administrative and economic solidification of the Romanian state, Bucharest steadily and ultimately won its supremacy over the Moldavian capital, as an administrative, economic, and cultural center of Romania. This turned out to be both a blessing and a curse for the developing city which would undergo continuous changes over the incoming decades and throughout the 20th century.

During King Charles I (1866-1914), Bucharest underwent an almost spectacular urban development which would mark its image well throughout the 20th century. Several urbanization projects began during this era: on the one hand they envisaged the rapid transformation of the city center, by erecting various administration centers, palaces and halls of culture, in an eclectic style, which combined Western elements of architecture

⁴⁰³ For instance the first officially titled Romanian university was set up in Iași, in 1860, while the University of Bucharest opened its first lectures four years later. For the competition between the two cities, see Lucian Boia, *Romania, Borderland of Europe*, London: Reaktion Books, 2001, especially the concluding chapter dealing with Bucharest.

(particularly French) with traditional Romanian style, particularly the so-called *Brâncovenesc* style.⁴⁰⁴ The second urban project sought a circular development of the city, from the center to the peripheries, connecting them through wide boulevards, from the heart of the city to the outskirts, or the so-called *mahalale*.⁴⁰⁵

Urbanization went hand in hand with the development of the industry and with the changes in the administration.⁴⁰⁶ The latter process involved both the formation of new ministries and the advancement of education which was needed in the formation of trained personnel (bureaucracy) for the new institution of the Romanian state, as well as in creating a body of teachers throughout the country to serve in the newly created mass education system.

Regarding the development of industry, by the late 19th century there were two industrial areals that were taking shape: one in the then southern part of the city (the areas Filaret – Șerban Vodă – Timpuri Noi), the other one in the area of boulevards Ștefan cel Mare and Coletina.⁴⁰⁷ Later on, in the 20th century, the industrial area practically moved

⁴⁰⁴ The architectural history of Bucharest (erection and demolition of buildings) is probably the most researched aspect in the evolution of the city. A brief but necessary bibliography would include: Lumina Popescu, *Bucureștii din trecut și de astăzi* [Bucharest of Yesterday and Today], Bucharest: Universul Publishing House, 1935; George Costescu, *Bucureștii vechiului regat* [Bucharest of the Old Kingdom], Bucharest: Universul Publishing House, 1944; Paul I. Cernovodeanu, *Orașul București în perioada 1545-1601, apud Istoria orașului București*, [The City of Bucharest during the 1545-1601 period, or the History of Bucharest], Bucharest: The Museum of Bucharest's History Publishing House, 1965; George Potra, *Din Bucureștii de altădată*, [Tales from Bygone Bucharest], Bucharest: Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1981; Adrian Majuru, *București. Povestea unei geografii umane* [Bucharest. The Story of a Human Geography], Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Institute Publishing House, 2007; Andrei Pippidi, *Case și oameni din București*, [Houses and People from Bucharest], Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012.

⁴⁰⁵ The modern day English equivalent of the term would be “slums”. During the 18th century however, both in Moldavia and Wallachia, *mahala* used to refer to newly formed parts of a city, where people of various social origin would live together. Thus it was not uncommon for boyars to live in a *mahala* with merchants, or other urban inhabitants. However, *mahala* ended in denominating a peripheral area of a city, inhabited by lower class people, considered to belong to a suburban culture. See Simion Câlția, “Mahalaua, indicator al urbanității” [The Mahala, Indicator of Urbanity], in *Revista istorică*, tom XXI, 2010, nr. 1–2, p. 111–122; Idem, *Așezări urbane sau rurale? Orașele din Țările Române de la sfârșitul secolului al 17-lea la începutul secolului al 19-lea* [Urban or Rural Dwellings? Towns in the Danubian Principalities from the end of the 17th Century until the start of the 19th Century], Editura Universității București, 2011; also, Adrian Majuru, *Bucureștii mahalalelor sau periferia ca mod de existent*, Bucharest: Compania Publishing House, 2003.

⁴⁰⁶ In this particular case, one needs to define the term “industry”. In mid-19th century Bucharest, the industry was mainly comprised of workshops which would last for another 50 years, until the emergence of new factories with foreign capital. In this regard, see Liviu Chelcea (coord.), *Bucureștii postindustrial. Memorie, dezindustrializare, și regenerare urbană* [Postindustrial Bucharest. Memory, Desindustrialization, and Urban Regeneration], Iași: Polirom, 2008.

⁴⁰⁷ Given Bucharest's geographical expansion over the last 150 years, one needs to bear in mind the fact that the southern part of late 19th century Bucharest is today roughly situated in the southern part of Bucharest's central area, along the banks of the river Dâmbovița. For more information regarding the

from the former outskirts of Bucharest to what used to be – in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 – the outer belt of military forts.⁴⁰⁸ The area developed significantly with the start of the 1950s, going through two waves of expansion: in the 1950s and again in the 1970s, as part of Nicolae Ceaușescu's plans of industrial development, urbanization and systematization.⁴⁰⁹ These stages were accompanied by violent urban interventions in Bucharest's landscape, affecting both residential and industrial areas, the latter mainly comprised of workshops. Thus the 1950s stage marked the erection of Casa Scânteii [The House of the Spark], modeled after the Lomonosov University in Moscow. By the end of the communist period, there were approximately nine industrial areas in Bucharest comprising around 200 enterprises and factories.⁴¹⁰

However, from the end of the 19th century and until the interwar period, Bucharest's main activities lay in the administrative and trade sectors, with a growing potential for the industry which reach its climax only during the late communist period. In this regard, Bucharest's status as administrative capital, coupled with a complex bureaucratic network, had a long lasting impact on both the city's industrial development and its urbanization.⁴¹¹ The pre-communist period saw the formation of a bureaucratic

geographical development of Bucharest, albeit from an early 20th century anthropological perspective, see Vintilă M. Mihailescu, *Evoluția geografică a unui oraș*, [The Geographical Evolution of a City], Bucharest: Paideia, 2003. The book by Mihailescu (1890-1978) was published posthumously and contains articles from the author's early academic career that were revised in the 1970s. For a more recent approach on the topic, although marginal as it is not the focus of the chapter, see Liviu Chelcea, Gabriel Simion, "Geografia, istoria și memoria industrializării Bucureștilui", in Liviu Chelcea (coord.), *op. cit.*, pp. 92-242.

⁴⁰⁸ The line of fortifications was built in the 1880s, as a preventive measure of defense against the Russian Empire.

⁴⁰⁹ See Per Ronnas, *Urbanization in Romania. A Geography of Social and Economic Change Since Independence*, Stockholm: Economic Research Institute, Stockholm School of Economics, 1984, in particular Chapter 4, dealing with economic development and industrial change.

⁴¹⁰ Liviu Chelcea, Gabriel Simion, *op. cit.*, p. 94. The authors point to the lack of sources which makes a more precise evaluation of the actual number of factories almost impossible. Their argument refers to the absence of any industrial maps for the communist period: apart from a 2005 factory map, the oldest one dates back from 1943. While this claim might hold ground, considering the chaos in Bucharest's administration, one also remains skeptical about it, since the authors did not have access to Bucharest's Archives for the communist period.

⁴¹¹ Liviu Chelcea, Gabriel Simion, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Per Ronnas, *op. cit.*, pp.140-145. The percentage of Bucharest's resident population working in the administration was especially significant in the prewar period: 35 percent working in state institutions, city administration and in state owned companies. Later on it would steadily decrease, especially after 1950, when it would be brought down by an affluence of rural population occupying jobs in the industrial sector. See Socec, *Anuarul Socec. Romania și Capitala București*, [The Socec Annual Report. Romania and the Capital Bucharest], Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Socec & Co., 1911; Liviu Chelcea, *State, Kinship and Urban Transformations during and after Housing*

class specific to Bucharest: public employees, of lower or higher rank, surrounded by an ever growing auxiliary personnel.⁴¹² By 1930 almost 15 percent of the entire state bureaucracy lived or worked in Bucharest.⁴¹³

To this one should also add the Army's contribution. Starting with the line of fortifications around Bucharest, the army played an important role in the relocation of industrial sites in Bucharest. In this respect, one should only mention that until 1950 most of the terrains in the western part of Bucharest were property of the army. Starting with the second half of the 19th century until 1945 the Army's presence in the capital was always significant. Military investments and the high number of officers and recruits were a constant and determined an increase in industrial production, especially in the textile, food, and transport industries.⁴¹⁴

One of the consequences of this state of affairs was that until 1939, Bucharest's economy was mostly oriented towards consumption and less toward production.⁴¹⁵ Furthermore, the concentration of population in and around Bucharest meant that consumption was local and depended upon the factories in Romania's capital.

The postwar period meant that Romania's economy was no longer guided by market principles. Instead it became state planned, oriented toward production as a guiding line. This was nowhere truer than in the case of Bucharest, Romania's main industrial city. In the initial phase the development of industry relied heavily on the nationalization of existing factories. Although presented by state propaganda as a leap in quality, the modernization of many factories remained more in the vicinity of wishful thinking than in that of accomplished achievements, as quite a few of them continued to work using 19th century equipment, even until 1989.⁴¹⁶

Nationalization (Bucharest, Romania, 1945-2004), Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2004, p.35-38.

⁴¹² Liviu Chelcea, *op. cit.*, 2004, p.59.

⁴¹³ Anton Golopenția, "București: Înfățișare socială. Sociologie"[Bucharest: Social Aspect. Sociology], *Opere complete*, Vol. I, Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 2002, p. 350.

⁴¹⁴ Liviu Chelcea, *op. cit.*, 2004, pp.71-73. For a detailed description of the Romanian military's initial involvement in Bucharest' economy, see Gottlieb Benger, *Rumania in 1900*, London: Asher & Co., 1900, pp. 219-228. Benger's conclusions regarding the Army's influence on Romanian, in general, and Bucharest's, in particular, economy can also be applied to the interwar period.

⁴¹⁵ Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, capitalism, imperialism*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1999, p. 45.

⁴¹⁶ Irina Ioana Iamandescu, *Arheologia industrială – repere internaționale și contribuții românești* [Industrial Archaeology – International Bench Marks and Romanian Contributions]. Source:

Some factories, like the Matches Factory [*Fabrica de chibrituri*] retained an autonomous status, while others, especially in the constructions, textile and chemistry industries, formed the so-called “integrated enterprises”. Thus, by 1965, out of more than 150 factories in existence in interwar Bucharest, there were six industrial compounds in the textile industry.⁴¹⁷ The state policy of amassing factories into industrial giants continued throughout the entire communist period. Bucharest remained the typical example of this policy with industrial compounds such as IMGB [The Heavy Machinery Enterprise Bucharest] requiring their own mini towns in order to function. This explains the emergence of new quarters around Bucharest, replacing former neighboring villages (the cases of Militari, Balta Albă, Titan, or Berceni). These became Bucharest new periphery, with a population brought from rural areas, hired as industrial workers.⁴¹⁸

This was caused by an acute lack of necessary unqualified and qualified personnel. Furthermore, because the employees of these factories originated from neighboring rural areas, or from suburban areas of Bucharest, they sought ways to eschew from industrial work and take up seasonal activities in agriculture.

Starting with the interwar period and continuing throughout the communist one, the state organized different ways to provide leisure time for workers, and this included cultural activities as well. The *Vulcan* Factory, for instance, edited the monthly *Metalurgistul* [The Metalworker] between 1950 and 1954, which turned into a weekly magazine from 1956 onward.⁴¹⁹ Between 1972 and 1974 *Metalurgistul* would reach a circulation of 7,500 copies. The magazine included the expected propaganda articles about the superiority of work under socialism, improving work conditions, record breaking outputs, etc., together with articles about every day activities, and even popular

<http://www.cimec.ro/patrimoniuiustrial/ProtectiaPIN/0%20arheologia%20industrial.htm> . Retrieved on June 5th, 2013.

⁴¹⁷ Constantin M. Herbst, *Geografia industriei municipiului București* [The Geography of Bucharest’s Industry], Ph.D. Dissertation, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj, 1971, p. V.

⁴¹⁸ Claudia Raluca Popescu used the term “industrial gigantism” to describe the industrial compounds typical for the economy of the communist period. See Claudia Raluca Popescu, *Disparități regionale în dezvoltarea economico-socială a României* [Regional Disparities in Romania’s Social and Economic Development], Bucharest: Meteor Press, 2000, p. 108.

⁴¹⁹ The Vulcan Factory was formed in 1904, its initial purpose being that of supplying drilling equipment for the oil industry. Initially it was backed by Austrian capital. After the 1948 nationalization process, it would become state property, diversifying its output and becoming one of the largest factories in communist Romania. See Vasile Arimia, Lucian Boia, Iulian Cîrțina, *Monografia Întreprinderii Vulcan din București* [The Monograph of the Vulcan Factory in Bucharest, 1904-1977], 1904-1977, Bucharest: Vulcan Factory, 1977.

music events. The *Vulcan* Factory also developed its own radio station, and by 1975, had formed its own theatre brigade, a mandolin orchestra, and a brass band. It would also form its own literary, plastic arts, and dance brigades and take part in various editions of the “Song of Romania” Festival.⁴²⁰ Leisure activities also included sports: the *Vulcan* Factory had its own stadium, as well as boxing, chess, wrestling, football, rugby, motocross, volley, handball, and athletic sports teams.⁴²¹

The case of the *Vulcan* Factory is far from singular. Most large enterprises in socialist Romania exhibited the same endowment when it came to leisure activities. Given their importance for the socialist economy and the large number of Bucharest inhabitants, it becomes obvious that the industry sector was of utmost importance for the social and cultural lives of the city as well.

The postwar period signified an increase in Bucharest’s number of inhabitants, coupled with a geographic extension of the city to include former suburbia, or to nationalize former Army properties for industrial use. Thus new industrial areas came into being and, with them, residential quarters for their working personnel. Some, such as the *Militari* area, were built from scratch, while others were centered around former industrial sites situated on the city’s outskirts, such as the *Pipera* platform, in the northern part of present Bucharest. Since these areas developed during the period of interest for this research, and since several interviewees lived or worked in these areas, we will present the latter briefly.

The Western Industrial Area or the *Militari* Area – its more popular name – came into prominence during the 1960s. By 1971 the area comprised seven different industrial activities, among which five centered on the heavy industry, one around the light industry, and another one around the food industry.⁴²² More than 13,000 employees worked in the *Militari* area during the 1970s. Other factories in *Militari* were active in medical industry, fine porcelain, and dairy products, the latter encompassing some 1,000 workers. All of the above mentioned factories were built during the 1950s and 1960s.

⁴²⁰ Vasile Arimia, Lucian Boia, Iulian Cîrțina, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-152.

⁴²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 160-163. At present the *Vulcan* Factory has ceased its activity. Several of its former buildings have been rented by small firms; others have been left in ruins. Its main building still exists. The main factory hall still exhibits work protection panels dated 1953, work equipment, fragments of propaganda posters, as well as several Social Protection Notebooks [*Carnete de părți sociale*], dating most probably from the 1980s.

⁴²² Constantin M. Herbst, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-45.

The industrial area of *Pipera*, in the northern part of Bucharest, centered on automobile industry until 1989. However, apart from this, it also included aeronautic industry branches, as well as food and forestry industries. Opposite to *Pipera*, the *Berceni-Progresul-Jilava* industrial area in the southern part of the city dealt with automobile and metal industries. Its largest industrial compound, the Heavy Machinery Enterprise Bucharest (IMGB), encompassed some 3,000 employees, being built in 1962.⁴²³ Another factory in the area worth mentioning for its impact on Bucharest's architecture is the *Progresul* Factory. It was built in 1954, initially as part of a *SovRom* Enterprise.⁴²⁴ The factory would provide construction equipment for Bucharest's metro, for the Dâmbovița canal in 1986-1987, as well as prefab concrete for Bucharest's numerous quarters of blocs.

At present these areas have undergone numerous changes. Their general aspect is a mixture of a deserted area, full of ruins and vast, unused fields, coupled with new office buildings and supermarkets. Thus, the factories in the *Militari* area have been almost completely demolished, with a supermarket, a mall, and an office building being erected in the years 2000. A new residential area is under construction in the area as well. *Pipera* nowadays houses residential areas, office buildings; its only shortage is (still) that of a road network to connect the new buildings. IMGB is still in existence, although under a completely new form. In 1990 it was divided into several firms, each with its own distinct branch of activity, from electric equipment to nuclear power devices.⁴²⁵

The former and present day landscapes have had and still have a great influence on the interviewees' narratives and reminiscences of the communist period. There seems to be an almost clear cut division between those working or having worked in administrative, cultural or education branches of activity and those who were (and to a limited extent still are) employed in the industrial sector. The former are mostly critical of the communist period and its legacy, while the latter tend to be more nostalgic.

⁴²³ Marin Luțu, *Ghidul sectorului 4* [The Guide to Sector 4], Bucharest: Colecția "Biblioteca primarului urban", 2005.

⁴²⁴ SovRoms were Soviet – Romanian economic enterprises built in the aftermath of World War Two, as part of the reconstruction process. In reality they gave the Soviet side monopoly over Romanian raw or industrial resources. They existed from 1945 until 1956, when the Romanian state dissolved them, as part of the destalinization process. See Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere in istoria comunismului românesc* [Standing on Marx's Shoulders. An Introduction to the History of Romanian Communism], Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2005, pp. 68-73.

⁴²⁵ Liviu Chelcea, Gabriel Simion, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-243.

Nevertheless, as we will see, there are always exceptions to such generalizations, while possible explanations to this state of affairs are much more complex than meets the eye.

7.3. Interviewees of Bucharest and Their Recollections

The previous subchapter dealt with the main (historical) branches of activity in Bucharest: administrative-bureaucratic, military, and industrial, out of which the first and the third came into prominence during the communist period. One small detail was left out in the relatively detailed description above: the actual number of the population, particularly for the communist period. It is a fact that, ever since the end of the 19th century, Bucharest has had, by far, the largest number of inhabitants, and that it has continuously been a center of attraction for inhabitants of smaller towns and numerous villages. During the communist period the number of Bucharest's inhabitants rose from 1,000,000 to almost 1,800,000.⁴²⁶ The explanation lies in both the geographical expansion of the city and in the demographic affluence it continued to cause up until the 1980s.⁴²⁷

The number of inhabitants in Bucharest makes a case study analysis particularly complex, especially when dealing with the issue of representativity. One must first remember the actual sense of the term *representativity*, meaning in this case “serving as a typical or characteristic example”.⁴²⁸ The word which needs to be underlined in this case is *typical*. Notwithstanding the importance of representativity for oral history cases, or for historical inquiries in general, one must mention that in the case of Bucharest *representativity* proves a much harder and more complex issue than in the town and village case studies. Whereas in the latter, the administration and cultural sources of

⁴²⁶ Ion Mărculeț, *Superlativele României – mică enciclopedie* [Romania's Superlatives – A Small Encyclopedia], Bucharest: Editura Meronia, 2003, p. 34. See also a similar approximation in Vasile Boroneant, *București: Ghidul turistului*, [Bucharest: A Tourist's Guide] Bucharest: Editura Cinor, 1992. Mărculeț's data is based on the one found in Comisia Națională de Statistică, *Anuarul Statistic al României 1990* [The Annual Statistics of Romania], Bucharest: CNS Press, 1990, p. 64.

⁴²⁷ By 1982, the state had passed a law by which only people born in Bucharest, or people married to inhabitants of Bucharest could reside in the city. The measure was meant to limit the capital's population and reduce the demographic discrepancy between Bucharest and other cities in Romania. See Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economic and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change*, London: Francis Pinter, 1985, p. 34.

⁴²⁸ This is the 3rd sense of the term, as defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. See <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/representativity>. Last retrieved on June 10th, 2013.

power were limited in terms of personnel, Bucharest offers a much wider web of administrative institutions: one could call it an assembly of local case studies, for each quarter of blocs, for each sector, all supervised by a secondary administrative web of central authorities. In this case, *representativity* becomes secondary to the task of providing actual descriptions of everyday lives of ordinary people and how these interacted with the official policies and ideologies described in the chapters on political festivals during the 1950s and 1960s and on “Song of Romania”.

7.4. Organizing Participants

I.A. is an actor. He has worked at Puppet Theater [*Teatrul de păpuși*] and at the Țândărică Animation Theater before and after 1989. In 1985 he published a collection of short plays for children, including stories specifically directed at *pionieri* and *șoimii patriei*.⁴²⁹ Apart from that he also worked for the national television, hosting a children’s show, as well as directing several others.⁴³⁰ He started work in the early 1960s and at present he works as an actor and stage director at the “Ion Creangă” Theater in Bucharest. During the 1970s and 1980s he also worked as a choreographer for several mass festivities held on various occasions, including one for the “Song of Romania” Festival. Before 1976 he worked as choreographer or script writer for various artistic children’s festivals.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ The book was titled *Teatru – pentru copii* [Theatre Plays – For Children], Bucharest: Casa centrală a Pionierilor și Șoimilor Patriei, 1985, 430 pp. In its epilogue, the author stressed the importance of theatre as an educational means: “Because I consider Theater as a great school for forming children, the young generation, in general, a wonderful tribune from which one can play in a beautiful way, not by formally teaching, but by using metaphors. This way, one can raise all our principles and concepts of life, family, society to the level of an art form. Let’s do everything, leave everything else aside and focus more on the education of our future!” *Ibidem*, p. 428. The introduction to the book is written by Alecu Popovici – a theater play writer who also held several function in the state apparatus during the communist period, such that of director in the State Committee for Art and Culture. He also wrote several puppet plays that displayed heavy elements of propaganda, such the idealization of the new dawn, a fierce critique of regimes in Western Europe, etc. (See Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române* [A History and Critique of Romanian Literature], Pitești: Editura Paralela 45, 2008, pp. 1396-1398). Popovici presents I.A. as “a well-known actor, an actor of great passion, carrying a show in a briefcase [...] a presenter of a most viewed TV show, a director of great shows for *pionieri*, in which the festive atmosphere was vibrating and authentic” (*Teatru pentru copii*, Prologue, p.6).

⁴³⁰ Alecu Popovici, “Prologue”, I.A., *Teatru – pentru copii* [Theatre Plays – For Children], Bucharest: Casa centrală a Pionierilor și Șoimilor Patriei, 1985, p.6.

⁴³¹ I.A. personal interview. Bucharest, February 14, 2013.

When asked how he felt about his activity before 1989 and whether he saw it as having belonged to a cultural activist, I.A. firmly denies any connection with the latter and holds a prolonged speech about what it meant to be an activist, also recalling his experiences with this category:

“Activist? No, no. I was never such a thing. Activists were those particular persons who got paid to organize Party and syndicate activities. I never got paid to do such a thing! Of course, there were cultural activists, who organized competitions, festivals, but I never really organized such things. I was too low in the hierarchy, so to speak! And activists themselves were different... I still remember the activists of the 1950s and 1960s; their education never went beyond primary school. In the 1980s it was different. Well, sort of different. I mean, those guys went to night classes and some had even graduated from Ștefan Gheorghiu! (*laughs*)⁴³²

Yes, I have quite a few memories of such people! One said to us once: *Comrades, it may not be pleasant, but it is mobilizing!* We had to go to such meetings, where there would be speeches, and so on and so forth...of course nobody assumed any responsibility for anything. *The Comrade said that, the Comrade did that, the Comrade made that.*⁴³³ Whenever there was a need to provide some argument for something, for a decision, they would all say: *The Comrade said we should do so.* And that happened all the way down to us, ordinary people.”⁴³⁴

When asked to explain what he means by “that happened all the way down to us, ordinary people”, I.A. refers to an event marking the preview for a theater play by Hans Christian Andersen:

“Once we had this preview, for a play by Andersen...I don’t remember what it was...anyway. Just before the preview we were announced that the cultural activist responsible for all theaters in Bucharest would be coming to see the play! We had prepared for the play, no problem, but still, you never knew with those fellows...they were the real cerberi!⁴³⁵ So, the guy comes, he sits down, the play starts and at the end...nothing. No clapping, no words, nothing. The guy sat there looking something in between numb and upset. So we asked him: - *Comrade Director, what do you think of the play?* To which he replied: - *I don’t know, comrades, a play by*

⁴³² The Ștefan Gheorghiu Academy was created by the Romanian Communist Party after World War Two in order to provide political education for its members and later on, for administrative, bureaucratic purposes. It was dissolved after 1989. See Adrian Cioroianu, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁴³³ In original: “Tovarășu a zis aia, Tovarășu a făcut ailaltă, Tovarășu a dres”. The term “Comrade” refers to Nicolae Ceaușescu and it has been used in many written memories and testimonies, usually with a capital letter, to stress its object of reference. For this reason, I have kept the capitalization in this case as well.

⁴³⁴ I.A. personal interview, Bucharest. February 14, 2013. The original for “that happened all the way down to us, ordinary people” is “și așa mergeau lucrurile în jos pe filieră, până la noi,ăștia de rând”.

⁴³⁵ The reference is made to mythological Cerberus, the multi-headed dog guarding the gates of the Underworld in ancient Greek mythology. The analogy is most probably made to present the cultural activist as a guardian of official propaganda.

Andersen? Don't we have our own plays? Why Andersen? No one said a word, everybody kept silent. And at that point, I had nothing better to do but say: - *Well, Comrade D.R. Popescu liked the idea of such a play and he even came to the rehearsals!* ⁴³⁶The cultural activist suddenly started smiling and said: - *Oh, but I didn't say I didn't like it! Not at all, I loved it! Good job comrades!* And so on and so forth, he kept congratulating us.

I.A. also had the chance to see Ceaușescu in person, a fact he remembers vividly. The meeting was brief and official, held at the end of one of the festivities for which I.A. had served as a choreographer:

“He seemed like a good man, to us. We didn't know what was going on in the country really. Of course, people were talking, but then again, when you have a stadium full of people and a festivity like the ones we were creating...I mean, it was hard! It was serious business! And especially when you work with children! You cannot allow any mistakes, as people would notice. So, we came up with this system, we would draw in chalk their moves on the stadium, so they would know what to do. There were also people ready to tell them when to duck, when to stand up, when to change boards. It came out nicely!”

I.A. refrains from telling any other stories about these festivities. He ends his narrative with “That's about it.” The rest of his story focuses on his experience as a puppeteer and the hardships of the theaters he worked for after 1989.

As an ethnologist, D.R. organized several exhibitions, focused on folk costumes, and folk culture. Several of these exhibitions were part of the “Song of Romania” festival, and in this case, as she recalls, ethnologists were just the persons who set the stage and the objects on display. In most cases, it was political activists who decided the theme of the exhibition and who had the final word, regarding its design.⁴³⁷

Unlike most cultural activists, with no proper training in cultural activities D.R.'s was a researcher. But similarly to many interviewees, she also manifests nostalgia, not for

⁴³⁶ Dumitru Radu Popescu is a Romanian writer and a former communist politician. From 1980 until 1990 he was president of the Romanian Writers' Union [*Uniunea Scriitorilor din România*]. From 1979 until 1980 he was also a member in the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. According to anecdotes and testimonies by other fellow writers, he had earned the nickname *D.R. Popescu-God*, for his influence on Nicolae Ceaușescu and authority in cultural matters. See Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 1099-1105.

⁴³⁷ C.R., personal interview. Bucharest, May 7, 2007. One such example, very indicative of the atmosphere of censorship and professionalism of political activists is the following: “For one of the exhibitions we had to put up a huge photograph of the “Madrigal” choir. The photo showed the members of the choir singing and the conductor, who was facing his choir, thus appearing with his back towards everyone who would look at the picture. When they came to give their approval, one of them ordered the picture to be put aside. We asked: “Why?” And he said: “You want someone to turn his back on comrade Ceaușescu when he comes to visit the exhibition?” Of course, he never came to visit it anyway....” *Ibidem*.

the communist regime, but for her activity as a researcher. That is why she organizes her narration around her researches and her scientific findings around general theories of folklore, often disregarding her initial focus, on “Song of Romania”. Her attitude toward the festival is generally negative, but not without its ambiguities.

Her negative attitude comes mainly from the fact that she regards the festival as a political tool of propaganda, which only intermingled with professional research on folklore. In this respect, she refers to the ways in which folk motives from one traditional region of Romania were applied to costumes from other regions, in order to symbolize the cultural unity of the Romanian people.⁴³⁸ Despite this, she also mentions how the group of researchers which she was a part of, won several awards within the festival, and she refers to the latter as the context in which many traditional folk artisans could make themselves noticed and claim national and international fame, for their products.

Unlike a cultural activist for whom the festival provided the main means and pretext for his activity, D.R. was not dependent on the festival to such an extent. “Song of Romania” might have meant several diplomas which could be taken into consideration within the professional field of activity, but apart from that the festival was insignificant as means of reaching a superior professional or social status. Like in the previous case, D.R. also broadens her discourse to cover the post 1989 period and her nostalgia is also influenced by her age and centered on her past professional activity. She feels no need to be nostalgic about communism, as she did not depend on it to a large extent and the post 1989 events only permitted her to expand her activities as a researcher and to organize folk exhibitions abroad.

7.5. Active Participants

B.A. worked in the textile industry from the early 1950s until 1986 when she retired. From 1955 until 1967 she was also an active member of the factory’s artistic brigade. She has fond memories of her participation to the brigade and thinks that things

⁴³⁸ *Ibidem.*

got worse with the passing of time, not just in economic or social terms, but also in terms of cultural activity.

“Oh dear, I was so talented, I couldn’t have missed the artistic brigade! Or the literary montage! And it was beautiful. We would rehearse on our own, but we would also go to formal rehearsals, the foreman would allow us to go, so we used to skip work hours in order to get the play right. And it was such a pride for the entire factory when we would appear on stage! They had all sorts of competitions during those days, it wasn’t just about work [...] you had to cultivate yourself a little bit, not like today when everyone watches TV [...] then again, today you have no more workers...because you have no more work!

Yes, I took part in such festivities, as a single performer, or as part of a group. I knew Russian, so they put me in the brigade choir, we would sing all those Russian folk songs, Kalinka...and others. I also played in theater groups. And it was really great, we used to get involved, not like today’s youth, roaming the streets, the bars, sleeping in the ditches, as they are too drunk to get up, God have mercy on their souls. There are very few worthy people nowadays.

Song of Romania? Yes...I know it...I mean I know if it, I have heard of it, but I never took part in it, I was too old. I left the artistic brigade in 1966...no, in 1967, I said to myself: *I have had enough, it’s time to let others take the stage!* But with “Song of Romania” it was different. The person in charge of cultural activities changed. A new guy came, he was very unworthy. I didn’t get to know him personally, as I had already left the brigade, but I heard people speak. So, no, “Song of Romania” was different. I never even saw any festivity. I didn’t have any more time, I had two kids to raise.”

C.B. was a student at the time he took part in a “Song of Romania” artistic activity. A so-called literary-artistic montage he remembers vividly and deems worthy of act of dissidence.

“I think it was in 1984 or 1985 when I got the mission to organize the literary-artistic montage for the department. So I got a bunch of students I had never seen before, they were part of the same mission, just like myself. And I went to the bookstore down on Polizu Street and I bought four or five poetry books. You know those kinds of books...full of patriotic poetry from all the classic Romanian poets. I looked for all the poets I could remember from high school, the ones with any patriotic vibe in them. First I told the students what I was planning to do: select the most outrageous and patriotically bloated lyrics from all the poems. Honest to God, I did that! I could not find the most outrageous lyrics I remembered in the books I had bought, but I knew it by heart; it was from “The Party” [Partidul] by [George] Țârnea. And it sounded like this:

The Party is in all there is, in all there is the Party

*It is in all things laughing in the sun.*⁴³⁹

And the subversion, or diversion, if you will, had a stunning success. The students got the whole idea, they liked it, otherwise the whole thing would have been completely boring. We made the selection as a group. I told them: - *Guys, they can't do anything to us.* Usually the texts from literary-artistic montages underwent censorship, although we never knew who the censor was. So, you could always end up with your text banned, or with a recommendation attached to it: *take this out.* But that was not our case! In case somebody tried something, we would have showed him the book: *Look, it's written in the book, it's official!* So no one could mess with us. The text, in its entirety, belonged to us. I don't know if you can imagine thirty stanzas taken out of thirty poems...of course we had them all arranged, so that they would sound good! And guess what: we got second prize with it! No one won first prize..."

7.6. Passive Participants

A.P. was 12 when Ceaușescu lost power. She was a passive participant to the “Song of Romania” Festival, as a *pionier*, but she describes her memories as “vague” and “not exactly informed”.⁴⁴⁰

“Song of Romania? I do have a vague memory that it used to be broadcast on television...but maybe I am mistaking it for something else. I do know they once took us from school to see one of these shows, held at the Opera House. We went with our teacher, the entire class. Maybe the ones from the A class went also, we were class C⁴⁴¹. Both classes got good grades, awards, because we learned well, we used to collect the highest number of jars, paper, that kind of stuff.⁴⁴²

And the awards we got were often trips, shows – I don't know, the everlasting socialist competition of which we weren't exactly aware at that time, I mean I wasn't -. Yes, I think I was in 3rd grade when we went. They probably didn't have any spectators, so they thought they might as well bring us. I am just making an observation, it's not like I am getting annoyed by it post-factum. Anyway, we didn't have any choice; we were going to the show during class time. The

⁴³⁹ Original lyrics: “Partidul e-n toate, e-n toate cele ce sunt/Și-n cele ce mâine vor râde la soare.” George Țârnea (1945-2003) was a Romanian poet. He is considered today to have been a rather minor poet (see Nicolae manolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 1397). During the communist he wrote several poems dedicated to the Party which made him extremely popular in official circles.

⁴⁴⁰ A.P. personal interview, Bucharest, November 13, 2012.

⁴⁴¹ The Romanian educational system divides a yearly generation of pupils into several classes, or collectives, from A to B, C, D, E, F, depending on the number of pupils enrolled in a certain primary, secondary, high school, in one year.

⁴⁴² School activities during the communist period, and particularly during the 1980s comprised recycling and reusing of old, used objects. See Șerban Angheliescu et al., *Anii '80 și bucureștenii* [The 1980s and the Inhabitants of Bucharest], Bucharest, Editura Paideia, 2003, p. 22.

show was in the morning, at ten, maybe eleven in the morning...and since we hadn't been told where we would go (or because I hadn't heard, as I was and am too dreamy) and who would be performing, I spend one and a half hours just looking at things in the hall of the Opera House. I had never been to the Opera before! I do remember there were people on the stage playing guitars, dancing folk dances. They must have been pretty good at it too, but for a nine to ten year old kid like I was...it was pretty boring. Nothing ever caught my eye, except, maybe, for the dusty appearance of the entire show and the general lack of enthusiasm. I thought the stage, with its dust and old, well-worn wood, was more fascinating. Anyway, we were the only people in that opera hall and we occupied the front row seats. At a certain point, there was a play, I think, but I don't remember its topic now. The folk costumes must have been from Oltenia, anyway from the southern part of Muntenia. I had gotten to know folk costumes pretty well, after all those *Floarea din grădină* shows!"⁴⁴³

Unlike other interviewees, A.P.'s narrative is self-analyzing, retrospective and bears the marks of a speech prepared in advance, rather than those of orality. At the same time, however, given her humanistic education, her discourse combines flashes of memory with an intellectual narrative, which comes across like a comment of her own remembrance. When asked what she thinks of that particular show, her response intercalates general facts of Romanian communist history with actual bits and pieces of personal narrative:

"What do I think? ... Well, like in all things, there is a good side and a less happy one. Of course, there was propaganda; I don't remember the texts of the songs, but they might as well have been about the Party. I remember those people up on the stage; they did not seem to be there on their own initiative. Maybe not everyone had willingly accepted to be part of an artistic collective; maybe some even rejected the very idea of collective in the first place. But I don't think things were that bad: music is music, lyrics don't matter, and some songs from that period have great music. And if you really want to go up on that stage and perform, sing, play, whatever, then perhaps it matters less what you have to perform. I mean, great actors in Romanian theater have played in ultra-politicized things. Maybe it was just part of the quota they had to fulfill; I imagine it would have been difficult for them to abstain from doing it. And then again, a role is a role, no matter what, you have your text and you do your best with it! You try and you turn some RCP mayor into Hamlet Mark Two, like Amza Pellea did with *Comoara din deal*."⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ A.P. personal interview, Bucharest. November 13, 2012. *Floarea din grădină* [The Flower from the Garden] was televised show presenting mostly folk music and dances. It ran on Romanian National Television during the 1970s and 1980s.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibidem. Amza Pellea (1931-1983) was a Romanian actor. He is widely considered to be one of the greatest and most beloved actors in Romania. *Comoara din deal* [The Treasure from the Hill] is a 1976 televised play about a mayor (Petre Dinoiu, played by Amza Pellea) defending his village against the

A.P. has more vivid recollections of other official school festivities that were not necessarily part of “Song of Romania”, but bore many similarities. Unlike the festivities for “Song of Romania” she did take part in festivities for *pionieri* formations.

“Other festivities? Well, all the festivities I took part in, while being in an educational institution before 1989, had something in common: they required long rehearsals, they had to be perfect. The feeling I got was that if this didn’t happen, then something unpleasant would happen to all of us. We would skip classes in a row, just to rehearse for a celebration.

The most accurate memory I have is from when we became *pionieri*, in the second grade; that was in 1986-1987. First of all, not all of us were made *pionieri*. Three pupils in my classroom were left at home that day. They had very low grades and the outcome for them was to become *pionieri* only a year later. It was like they were isolating them, regardless of their own situation, of their families’ income. I think one even ended up in a correction school in Lugoj.⁴⁴⁵ I thought it was a great shame...but what did I know?

Anyway, we rehearsed, like we were in the army; where, when we should sit down, or stand up, in what order we would align, what songs we had to sing, national anthem included. The people in the A class underwent the same treatment, they were to be made *pionieri* the same day as us. We were very happy when we found out that the place of the festivity would not be the schoolyard, or some banal park, but the monument of Aurel Vlaicu, on the DN1.⁴⁴⁶ In our mind, or at least in my mind there was a kind of excitement, of joy that we would basically go on a trip.

During rehearsals for the event, comrade teacher – that’s how we used to call her back then – taught us how to wear our uniform, how to fix our tie, how to put our cap on, how to pin our insignia (in the form of a small red flame). My belt was too large, but I liked my wrinkled skirt a lot. I remember I didn’t have any white sock and black or brown shoes, so my mom had to get them for me.”

A.P. also has a photograph from the ceremony. She remembered the small details about her uniform before finding the photograph.⁴⁴⁷ The latter help remember the context of the ceremony:

irresponsible plans to build an industrial compound up on a hill nearby. The hill is believed by the villagers to hide the very spirit of their locality. See Marian Tuțui, *O scurtă istorie a filmului românesc* [A Short History of Romanian Cinema], Bucharest: NOI Media Print, 2011, p. 89.

⁴⁴⁵ Lugoj is a town in the Timiș County. The fact that a pupil was sent from Bucharest across the country to its western part, might also underline the severity of the punishment.

⁴⁴⁶ Aurel Vlaicu (1882-1913) was a Romanian engineer, airplane builder, and pilot. He is considered one of the pioneers of Romanian aviation. In 1910 he designed and flew his own airplane for the first time. He died in 1913 while attempting to cross the Carpathians. The place of his death was marked by a monument, erected in his honor. See Valeriu Avram, *Aurel Vlaicu – Un pionier al aviației române* [Aurel Vlaicu – A Pioneer of Romanian Aviation], Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1995. DN1 [Drumul național 1] is National Road number 1, referring to the road connecting Bucharest to Brașov.

⁴⁴⁷ See Annex 7.2.

“The ceremony itself was mainly about movement and artistic festivity and it went well. I think. We were supposed to take an oath, on the flag...Yep, that also. I don’t remember exactly what the oath consisted of; pledging allegiance to the socialist motherland, probably. We found the ceremony not without importance and dignity, although none of us could have said what the importance and dignity were all about. I found the place disappointing, it was clear they could have taken better care of it; the ones standing in the back, the tallest, were standing in the grass.

The climax of the ceremony was when the teacher put the tie around our neck and pinned it with a transparent plastic ring. Just a side story, my mom told me that in her days, they used to pin the tie following the Soviet model. I would lose several rings over the years, a real tragedy, since we were not allowed to tie them. Anyway, after this, each pupil would go to the exact place that had been assigned to her/him. I know we looked at each other and were forcing ourselves not to laugh, since we thought we looked silly, especially because of the caps.

Later on, once we got back to school, we had a meeting, to elect our group and troop commanders.⁴⁴⁸ Obviously, they were the best pupils, they got the highest grades, but they were also...well, they came from ...different families, their parents were in the military, teachers, professors, or doctors. A social elite, but even as kids we saw them as having privileges the rest of us did not enjoy. At the opposite side there were those pupils, who had not become *pionieri*, and who came, without exception, from very poor families.

We could choose the group we would be part of. But that came with a problem, until it became obvious that the group which happened to include the son of a teacher only numbered three or four pupils. I forgot to mention, we could choose our group depending on our own personal sympathies; and no one liked that particular guy. For troop commander we voted for a girl, the only one I ever saw wearing blue jeans before the Revolution.

So, my general impression was that everything happening around us was complicated and hard to understand. All in all, I never had any special feeling toward those moments, with a few exceptions; I found out what it meant to be discriminated and excluded – I refer to myself, but also to those colleagues who were not made *pionieri*. And, yes, there was the joy of leaving the city and going to the mountains.”⁴⁴⁹

One special recollection A.P. has – which is worth mentioning in this case – is her impression on colleagues who took part in “Song of Romania” or other important festivities of the time.

⁴⁴⁸ The *Pionieri* Organization was organized around *detașamente* [troops] and *unități* [units]. A troop of *pionieri* consisted of the pupils in a classroom; a unit comprised the troops from an entire school. A.P.’s recollection of the *pionieri* divisions is erroneous, but I did not interrupt her narrative during the interview. For the divisions of the *Pionieri* Organization see the document on the 40th Anniversary of the *Pionieri* at the National Archives, RCP Central Committee Fund, Chancellery Section, File No. 4/1989, page 1, article 2. By *group*, A.P. refers to troops and by *troop* to units.

⁴⁴⁹ A. P. personal interview, Bucharest, November 13, 2012.

“Once they came to our school for something I thought to be very strange. I don’t remember the people; anyway, they were strangers to us. The Party Congress was about to take place and they needed as many *pionieri* as they could get to fill in the Congress Hall at the end of the meetings. The *pionieri* were to stand up in those places between the walls and the seats. I think their mission was to sing, to wave some white scarves, to applaud...oh yeah, and to bring flowers to the Comrades...

That I thought all that was strange, that is one thing. I had never asked myself who were those children where they came from and how they got there in the first place. But what I really thought was unfair and strange was the criteria for selection. Sure, they had to have high grades, not to be the last of the bunch, so to speak. But they had to be tall, to have the same height, not to wear glasses; in one sentence, they had to look good on screen. And that was one more opportunity for me to feel excluded right from the start from something I saw as a chance for me. A chance to do and see things that seemed new and important. And the criteria were hard to understand for me as a child. I guess my aspect – a bit fat, too small – was not desirable. My brother, though, got selected, and because of that he had to provide information about our parents. That was when I found out he did not know our mother’s age. But the good thing about it for him was that he was excused from classes; on the other hand he had to go to rehearsals with the other *pionieri*. The stories he told us were the same as the ones we already knew: quasi-military exercises, endless rehearsal of the same things, waving scarves... . My mom was more worried about the food they would give to him. She found out it was cheese sandwiches, which was better than we had at home, so she calmed down. I don’t remember if my brother actually took part in the final scene of the Congress. In any case, he was happy because they gave him cookies, the rest didn’t matter.

So, I don’t even know whether my impression was about the regime at all. My reaction to all this was subjective. I became aware that exclusion is made on less objective criteria, but I didn’t grasp any political nuances in the whole thing. The injustice was personal, not institutionalized.”

When asked what her impression was of the regime in general and what she thinks now about it, A.P. remembers another story which she deems evocative for her entire experience with the communist regime and its immediate aftermath:

“We were in third grade. Just to be more precise, the year was 1987...or maybe it was the spring of 1988? Anyway, a day just like any other day. The director of School No. 143 (our school) enters the classroom together with another comrade. I remember it was sunny outside and that comrade director planted herself in front of the first row, in the middle. She asked us if we knew the official title of the Comrade. I don’t think she actually used the term *titles*; maybe she used some other word. Someone raised his hand and said the most obvious one: Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party. Comrade Director said: - *Good, another one*. Nothing. Nine

year old kids; how were we supposed to know? I have nothing better than to say: Supreme Commander of the Army. I had heard it on the radio and had been impressed by it. Comrade Director: - *Good, another one.* Again silence, which was only interrupted when she walked out the door calling us stupid for not knowing all the official titles of Ceaușescu. To this day I have found out what happened to our teacher because of that mishap - not that I care too much, she was arrogant and not very bright anyway – or to that comrade inspector; I presume she made it very far after '89.

I might be repeating myself, the injustice was personal, it did not come from a political regime. Though I did get mad at that director: how in the hell were we supposed to know all those things, we were kids! But even so, that particular episode was only one in a string of daily episode during our lives in school. Another thing I remember about the “regime” – as you call it – in 1988-1989 there were all these people on the radio, on television, peasants, miners, etc. who, at the end of the newsreels would say they would vote for the Comrade to be re-elected as Secretary General. It seemed like they had learned their text by heart. It never crossed my mind to doubt their sincerity at that point, but I was wondering about the unanimity of their voices and statements.

And since I had nothing better to do, one evening I voiced my wondering out loud. A festivity had been on TV for several hours, a live broadcast. I liked those festivities, though they were boring and monotonous. But they were on TV and I could see new faces, I used to look at the clothes people were wearing, the expressions on their faces. And during this festivity, which was in honor of some important event I forgot about, there were the usual songs, long poems interpreted by more or less known actors, choirs, etc. So, at one point I had nothing better than to ask in a loud voice: why don't they sing about anything else other than about love and the Party? I don't think I got an answer to my question.”⁴⁵⁰

S.I. was a worker at the Vulcan Factory during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. In the early 1990s he left his job and started working for a private engineering company. During his time as a worker, he went to numerous festivities, more or less official. Among the shows and festivities he went to, his recollection center on the ones he went to with his children and the ones featuring folk and pop music bands.

“During holidays, I would take my kids to see children's shows, puppet shows, that kind of stuff. The Țândărică Theater, the Ion Creangă Theater, those were the main places my children loved to go to and I went along with them. There were also small festivals in parks in Cișmigiu, in Herăstrău, or in the smaller parks in the bloc sectors. You didn't have to pay a ticket, anyone could go and watch for as long as they pleased.

⁴⁵⁰ A.P. personal interview, Bucharest, November 13, 2012.

But I also went to festivals for young people, that's how they called them. Florian Pittiș would feature in shows at the Bulandra Theater.⁴⁵¹ The show was called „The Poetry of the Young Music”, and Pittiș would tell the story of the Beatles and put records on, while presenting large posters. We were a constant bunch, those of us who would go to see such things. Some came to the show wearing blue-jeans, long hair, and Adidas shoes.⁴⁵² They also played Romanian music, like Iris – *Trenul fără bani*.⁴⁵³ The song was about those who travelled by train without a ticket, which was an attitude not readily approved by the UTC.⁴⁵⁴ We would also listen to “Blowing in the Wind”, the Romanian version, sung by Pittiș.⁴⁵⁵ The atmosphere was great, very...beatnik.⁴⁵⁶ People would sit down on the floor, sing in choir, clap their hands. You really felt you were free.

I also went to the Opera, mostly for the kids. They had music concerts, especially centered on children's education. But there were also festivals at Sala Polivalentă⁴⁵⁷, Savoy, with

⁴⁵¹ Florian Pittiș (1943-2007) was a Romanian actor, theater and radio director and folk singer. He is widely considered to be one of the most important supporters of the folk and rock movement in 1970s and 1980s Romania, either as a promoter for bands in student clubs, on the radio, or on national television. See Doru Ionescu, *Timpul chitarelor electrice – jurnal de călătorie în arhiva TVR* [The Time of Electric Guitars – A Research Diary from the Archive of the Romanian National Television], Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006, pp.56-69.

⁴⁵² The original term is *adidași*. While in most case the term actually referred to Adidas shoes, it became referential to any Western brand of shoes.

⁴⁵³ *Trenul fără naș* – the actual title of the song [The Train without a Conductor] is the second song from Romanian band Iris' first album released in 1984. Iris is widely considered to be one of the most important bands in Romanian rock history. Formed in 1977, the band adopted a hard rock/heavy metal style throughout the 1980s, influenced by bands such as AC/DC or Judas Priest. The style and, in particular, the singer's voice – considered to be unmelodic and closer to shrieking than to officially accepted singing – caused the band continuous problems. The above mentioned song had been written around 1981 but was only recorded three years later, after the band was allowed to record their first album on the state label *Electrecord*. This was only possible after Adrian Păunescu, a poet and director of the *Cenacul Flacăra* [Flame Circle] intervened on their behalf. As a coincidence (or not) *Trenul fără naș* has its lyrics written by Păunescu. See Doru Ionescu, *Club A 42 de ani*, Bucharest: Casa de pariuri literare, 2011, pp. 89-96. The song has been considered as containing subversive lyrics, alluding to the state of affairs in Romania at that time. *Ibidem*, p. 93.

⁴⁵⁴ UTC – The Union of Communist Youth.

⁴⁵⁵ Bob Dylan's song “Blowing in the Wind” was translated into Romanian by Adrian Păunescu, sometime in the early 1970s, after Păunescu had returned from a trip to the US, in 1969. Păunescu left for the US on a scholarship and, while there, he interviewed Romanian born scholar Mircea Eliade and came into contact with the hippie movement. This would serve as inspiration for his own *Cenacul Flacăra* [The Flame Circle] which consisted of poetry (mostly written and interpreted by Păunescu himself), folk and rock music. The Circle enjoyed tremendous success in the late 1970s and 1980s until 1986 when it was banned following an incident in the town of Ploiești when several people were killed and numerous others injured during a storm. See Doru Ionescu, *Timpul chitarelor electrice*, pp. 78-90 and Idem, *Club A 42 de ani*, pp. 6-7 and 56-59.

⁴⁵⁶ Original word used: *nonconformistă*.

⁴⁵⁷ *Sala Polivalentă* [roughly translated as Polyvalent Hall, or Multipurpose Hall] is a multi-purpose hall in Bucharest, located in *Parcul Tineretului* [Youth Park]. It houses concerts, as well as indoor sport events. It was erected in 1974 and was known as *Palatul Sporturilor și culturii* [The Sports and Culture Palace] until 1989. See <http://www.salapolivalenta.ro/index.php/istoric-sala-polivalenta> . Last retrieved on June 20th 2013.

Marian Nistor, would perform there.⁴⁵⁸ Also folk music. Irina Loghin, Dolănescu, Sofia Vicoveanca.⁴⁵⁹ There were concerts when the performer would have a heater up on the stage and the people in the audience would wear winter coats.

Oh, and we also went to such festivities, Song of Romania, Daciada, all those festivities.⁴⁶⁰ Again, mostly for my kids. Once I went for several buddies, working colleagues, they ended up in the artistic brigade at Vulcan and the rest of us had to go and see them perform. They had this theater play, something about workers, I don't really remember. It was nice, we laughed so hard at their performance, I don't even know whether it was a comedy or whether we were just making fun of them. It also meant we could skip working hours, I mean it wasn't like we volunteered to go and see them, the foreman, or more often, the activist would come and say: - Tomorrow we go to see this, as part of...the cultural activities...something like that, I don't remember."⁴⁶¹

M.P. worked as a researcher at the Institute for Folklore Research and later on, after 1989, at the Romanian Peasant's Museum. She was a passive participant to several festivities for the Song of Romania Festival. She claims she never took part in the festival in any other way. M.P. deems her experience as a passive participant to Song of Romania as part of the so called *muncă patriotică* [patriotic work].

“Yes, everything was patriotic work. Mostly a waste of time and, sometimes, quite ironic. I mean, I do not know whether you understand how embarrassing it can be to witness a show of folk dances and to notice every single mistake in the performers' costumes. They were not traditional folk costumes anymore! They were just mish-mashes⁴⁶² of various styles, brightly colored; no peasant would have actually worn such things.⁴⁶³ And we were supposed to clap our hands to that! Once they even had us go and

⁴⁵⁸ Savoy was a rock, and later on pop music band in Romania, in existence from the early 1960s until 1992. See [http://www.discogs.com/artist/Savoy+\(5\)](http://www.discogs.com/artist/Savoy+(5)) . Last retrieved on June 20th, 2013.

⁴⁵⁹ Irina Loghin (1939-), Ion Dolănescu (1944-2009), Sofia Vicoveanca (1941-): folklore music performers.

⁴⁶⁰ Daciada was the sports counterpart to Song of Romania, initiated roughly during the same period. In 1976 The Executive Political Committee of the RCP gave the green light to the Daciada project, seen as “a nationwide competition meant to stimulate mass sport”. See Mihaela Andra Wood, Superpower: Romanian Women's Gymnastics During the Cold War, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010, p. 76. Accessed from https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/16106/Wood_Mihaela.pdf . Last retrieved on June 21st, 2013.

⁴⁶¹ S.S. personal interview, Bucharest, July 8th, 2012.

⁴⁶² Original term used: *amestecături*.

⁴⁶³ This remark is similar to that of anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu. See Idem, “A New Festival for the New Man: The Socialist Market of Folk Experts during the ‘Singing Romania’ National Festival”, in Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev, Slobodan Naumovic (eds.), *Studying peoples in the people's democracies. II: socialist era anthropology in south-east Europe*, Berlin, Lit, London, Global, Piscataway, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 2008, pp. 55-80.

harvest potatoes! The activist said this to us, I'll never forget: - Well you people are already familiar with life in the countryside, aren't you? So why do you complain? Luckily, we knew the area we got sent to. I mean, we had done field research there. And we managed to sort things out, we had some peasants do the work for us, we paid them.

The most ironic thing was when we got called to clean up the toilets of the Cinema from the Magheru Blvd. The entire personnel from the Institute of Folklore were put to work to clean a stinking toilet! It happened after the 1977 earthquake. And while we cleaned up the rubble and used dirty mops to clean even dirtier parcel, the cleaning women stood and watched how we did their job. And they were careful to criticize us whenever we would miss a spot! After this we went and protested to our Party secretary. So he went, shyly, to his Party secretary and the message we got was: - *You did not clean any toilets. Honest to God, we did clean them!*"

F.P. was also a researcher at the Institute for Folklore. Her story was about the one moment she was invited to take part in Song of Romania, as a consultant. The outcome was not among the most pleasant ones, both for her and for the cultural activist who put her name forth on the consultants' lists. According to F.P. her greatest luck was the fact that the entire scene happened in 1989 and not before.

"Let me tell you a few things about how I see the development of folklore in the 20th century. First there is the peasant who creates songs spontaneously and informally. Such artists would come up on stage to make their community known to the general public. Then there are all those ensembles of peasant-artists, as I call them, well trained, to meet up with the demands for an artistic band. This is where I think "Song of Romania" started; it led a fight against any kind of individualism. No individual performers, only groups of three, four people, singing on stage. This all led, of course, to what we all know today, or anyway, used to know as "songs of new life".⁴⁶⁴

But the only time I came close to "Song of Romania" was when I was asked by an activist to become part of some consulting board for a series of competitions. We went all the way to Târgu Jiu.⁴⁶⁵ The meeting was presided by some director in the Ministry of Culture and Socialist Education. And during the meeting with us, the soon to be jury members of something like, the director starts mentioning Maria Tănase as *the great singer of Romanian folk songs who*

⁴⁶⁴ The original term generally used in secondary literature, testimonies, as well as by my interviewee is "cântece de viață nouă". The term refers to a category of songs, usually of folkloristic inspiration, focusing on general optimistic themes, praising the achievements of the new regime. They are generally considered to have emerged in the 1970s (see Vintilă Mihăilescu, *op. cit.*, p. 60). However, there are archival recording of such songs, on 78 rpm records, which dates them back to the 1950s and early 1960s. After the early 1960s *Electrecord* would stop using 78rpm records made of ebonite, and start using 10 inch vinyl records.

⁴⁶⁵ Târgu Jiu is the county capital of Gorj, in the traditional province of Oltenia.

made Romania famous all over the world and so on and so forth. I don't even remember how I started talking: - Comrade director, I just don't understand how we can be in Oltenia and talk about Maria Tănase⁴⁶⁶ when this province has a truly great singer, Maria Lătărețu⁴⁶⁷ who is not only a vocal singer, but also a *cobza* player.⁴⁶⁸ I also add that she used to sing magnificently at weddings with the gypsies in her ensemble.⁴⁶⁹

Complete silence followed. The director gets up and starts accusing me of having dared to compare the great Maria Tănase, *a representative singer for our folklore*, to a fiddle-playing woman. I think he also alluded to her Roma ethnicity. Nothing happened on the spot. However, everyone avoided talking to me, no one even mentioned anything about my unpaid train ticket and hotel room reservation. I left that building cursing myself for not having the calm of my sister who every day would greet the postman politely, take the newspaper, then tear it to pieces and throw it in the garbage bin.

Two weeks later, at the monthly meeting of researchers in the Institute we get a visit from a comrade under-minister. The director had brought him on purpose to accuse me of having desecrated Maria Tănase's name. However, the under-minister simply told me to pay more attention to the real values of the country and watch TV more often, in particular the TV broadcast *Treasures of Folklore*⁴⁷⁰ and take comrade Marioara Murărescu⁴⁷¹ as an example of true research in folklore.⁴⁷²

7.7. By-Standers

A.C. eschewed both the Party and any participation to Song of Romania. The interesting aspect about his narrative is that while he dismissed the Party as lack any sign

⁴⁶⁶ Maria Tănase (1913-1963) was a singer of Romanian folklore. She is considered to be one of the best singers of Romanian folklore and arguably the most famous, especially outside Romania. See Viorel Cosma, *Figuri de lăutari* [Portraits of Fiddlers], Bucharest: Editura muzicală, 1960, p. 123.

⁴⁶⁷ Maria Lătărețu (1911-1972) was singer of Romanian traditional folklore. She remains one of the most highly appreciated performers of Romanian folklore and, occasionally comparison are made to Maria Tănase, favoring the former as having been more authentic, more talented and as having had a better vocal technique. See Marin Brînar, *Maria Lătărețu și cântecele sale* [Maria Lătărețu and her songs], Bucharest: Editura muzicală, 1989, pp.6-7.

⁴⁶⁸ Cobza is a multi-stringed instrument, similar to a lute. It is specific to Romanian, Hungarian, Moldovan folklore. See Victor Cosma, *op. cit.*, p. 56 and passim for numerous references to the instrument widely used by fiddlers.

⁴⁶⁹ The original term is *taraf*.

⁴⁷⁰ The original title for the TV show is *Tezaur folcloric*.

⁴⁷¹ Marioara Murărescu (1947-) is a TV producer, most famous for the TV show *Tezaur folcloric* which was also partly politicized during the communist period. Marioara Murărescu defended herself, claiming that if she hadn't made certain compromises, the entire show would have been cancelled and thus truly talented performers would have remained without any mass-media means of publicity. Source: <http://www.tvrplus.ro/emisiune-tezaur-folcloric-42> . Last retrieved July 04, 2013.

⁴⁷² F.P. personal interview, Bucharest, April 09, 2013.

of authenticity and ideological substance, he has a more positive outlook on festivals like Song of Romania, appreciating the value of certain performers.

“I worked in a factory, I designed things, my work relied on a board and crayons as utensils. And every once in a while the foreman, who was also the activist, would come and ask me, would ask the other guys if we would join the Party. I always replied: - Listen buddy, when you guys become illegal again, I’ll be the first to join your ranks!⁴⁷³ Most probably he never reported me, otherwise who knows what might have happened. But it was always the same guy; all the other activists would leave me alone. And besides, I was a nobody, I had no rank, I could have said I shat on the Party. Of course I didn’t, but I had a lot of trouble with the guys from the Party. The director of my factory section would always come up to me and ask me for favors. – *Get the guys in your section and get this fixed for me.* Petty work, nothing too hard, the boys had to paint the fence for his house, stuff like that. But even those things did not get me off the hook. Once, during a factory meeting, one activist accused me of being cosmopolitan. This would stick to my reputation for a long time. I don’t even know why he called me that. Because I used to read? Or go to artistic performances?

And since we talk about artistic things, let me tell you: serious teachers and artists never took Song of Romania seriously. Although it [the festival] did have a positive effect as well, meaning that certain artistic values were promoted from time to time. Creators of art thus managed to make themselves noticed and this is a positive aspect, we have to acknowledge this. But on the whole, the festival was kitsch. With certain positive aspects...good things. For instance I once saw a folk dance ensemble directed by a former colleague of mine, who worked for the city center of education and culture. They were absolutely fantastic! And Privighetorile din Niculițel [The Nightingales from Niculițel] who were a folklore choir, again they are also great. One of the nightingales, so to speak, was gorgeous, she had a divine voice. The voice of an uneducated soprano. Simply talented, magnificent. I saw both ensembles when we were taken to see Song of Romania performances. It happened every once in a while.”⁴⁷⁴

C.R. remained ignorant of the Song of Romania Festival. Of other festivals in the 1960s, she remembers little. The only reason why she remembers them at all is because she almost took part in such a school festival during her secondary school, in the 1960s. Her memories bear striking similarities, at times, with those of A.P.

“Why I never got to take part in any festival...I think I must have been in fifth grade, that was in...1968, when they came to recruit pupils for a festival, I think it was called “Proud

⁴⁷³ In original: “*Bă nenicule, când o să intrați în ilegalitate voi fi primul membru de partid!*” The reply refers to the period between 1924 and 1944 when the Romanian Communist Party was declared illegal in Romania. According to certain authors, by 1944 the RCP numbered less than 1,000 members. See Cioroianu, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴⁷⁴ A.C. personal interview, Bucharest, August 20th, 2011.

Flower”.⁴⁷⁵ We weren’t even supposed to actually perform songs, or dance anything. Whenever there was a singer up on stage, she or he would have an ensemble...a group of pairs, boy and girl, dressed in folk costumes. They would just swing stupidly all the time while the singer would perform... (*Laughs*). That should have been our job. It was mandatory. It had happened to my older brother a year before me. My brother did not want to go up on stage for anything in the world. Luckily, he didn’t have to, because he wore glasses. Since I didn’t want to go either, my mother came up with the idea to use the same argument, in order to get me off the hook. And it worked! The funny part is that I hated myself for having done that later on, since all my colleagues who did go had a lot of fun and a lot of stories to tell.”

S.P. is a rather lonely and retired person, spending his days mostly reading books of history and physics. He is well over seventy years old, and he was a passive witness to the entire Romanian communist history, which he now rejects and deems responsible for the actual economic, social and moral state of Romania.⁴⁷⁶ After a series of personal tragic events, he chose to isolate himself from social life and not only: “after I realized what politics in communist Romania was all about, I stopped watching TV. I only watched the films and the show on New Year’s Eve.”⁴⁷⁷ When asked about “Song of Romania”, S.P. argued that it seemed to him like “the image [...] of many cheerful people, surrounding a dead person”.⁴⁷⁸ The festival was a complete failure, as it did not manage to produce anything worthy: “it did not bring joy to those who were poor and unhappy”.⁴⁷⁹

“I have nothing to say about Song of Romania, really. Like I’ve said, the image I had was that of many cheerful people surrounding a dead person. Very unusual and quite disturbing. But I would apply this image to the whole specter of communism, especially during the 1980s. A complete waste of time and resources.”

His narrative lacks any kind of precise information on the festival. But this is not of interest in his case, as a by-stander. What is of interest is his overall image of a structure he was not part of. “Song of Romania” does not stand out in any particular way, except for its officially, forced atmosphere of fake celebration. As in the case of the other interviewees his narrative discourse is marked by nostalgia. Opposite to the other

⁴⁷⁵ The Festival “Floare Mândră” was a folklore festival held in cities and villages throughout the country. It existed since the early 1960s until 1976 when it was incorporated into the greater „Song of Romania”. See *Îndrumător cultural*, no. 6/1962, pp. 20-21 and *Ibidem*, no. 9/1976, p. 6.

⁴⁷⁶ S.P., personal interview. Bucharest, May 7, 2007.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

nostalgic interviewees, S.P. distinguishes between two historical periods, to which he confers absolute features: the first one is that of the communist regime, with a totally negative side, while the other is the interwar period, which marked the development of Romania and has totally positive connotations. He uses the case of “Song of Romania” to exemplify this, by praising famous folklore, or popular singers, like Ioana Radu or Maria Tănase, who, in his opinion could not have appeared as a result of “Song of Romania”.⁴⁸⁰

7.8. Concluding Remarks

Before detailing the narratives of the interviewees in this chapter, I made use of a definition for the term representativity, focusing on the term *typical*. The one question one should ask though when encountering this term is: *typical for what?* The sense of the word *typical* refers to the essential characteristics of a group, to features conforming to a type.⁴⁸¹ However the narratives of my interviewees offer more space for individual complexity, than for common types to be abstracted.

There are, nevertheless, several things the narratives have in common: most interviewees refer to the state apparatus, or to higher members in the hierarchy as “they”. The interviewees thus find themselves in the passive voice, as they are the object of state activities. The similarity for all interviewees is even more striking as some were adults during communism, whereas others were only children. Both organizer participants manifest nostalgia toward their past, and both manifest it for personal reasons, related to their own professional activities, not for any ideological reasons. I.A. is nostalgic about the pre 1989 period as it was his time as an actor and puppeteer. D.R. is nostalgic about her activity as a researcher at the Institute for Folklore. I.A. refers to supreme argument used by activists and by all other people “down the chain of command”: the invocation of a superior cadre in order to justify a certain action. In his account this works both ways, from the top-down, but also from the bottom-up. In the first case, the activists – whom he despises, although he collaborates with them – refer to Nicolae Ceaușescu as an irrefutable argument for any decision, or as a scapegoat for any unpleasant situation.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibidem*. Ioana Radu (1917-1990) is considered to be one of the greatest Romanian traditional singers. Maria Tănase (1913-1963) was a Romanian singer of traditional and popular music. For further information see http://www.passiondiscs.co.uk/e_pages/romanian_e/jurcd06.htm Last entry: June 15, 2013.

⁴⁸¹ See <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/typical> . Last retrieved on July 23, 2013.

However, I.A. also uses this logic in order to defend the play by Andersen in front of the cultural director. The direction of the relations of authority might be vertical, but it is used in both senses.

Both I.A. and D.R. refer to the professional aspects of their career when discussing official festivities, such as Song of Romania. I.A. insists on the technical aspects of the choreography, on his pedagogical work with children, and on all the little tricks they had to employ in order to achieve the choreographic performances on stadiums. There is never any mentioning to ideology in his discourse. The same happens in D.R.'s case. In fact both interviewees reject the political aspect. This might be explained by the context of their recollection; the post-communist period mass-media and various factors of power created a type of discourse condemning communism politically. Thus, people tend to leave out the political aspect in their narrative and give it a different focus: it was their profession; they were proficient at it, etc. It is not the purpose of this research to provide any moral judgment, but as a simple observation, both the media and the ordinary people are looking for explanations to justify for their own past (and more importantly, present) actions. In doing so, they leave out one aspect; this might partly explain the legitimacy the regime had until 1989. The cause for the latter is not motivational, as no one seems to have acted out of communist belief. It has a more instrumental nature; while officially claiming to inspire revolutionary ideology and to forge the new man, cultural activists and nomenclature members were aware of the former's futility – including for themselves – but were nonetheless using it for their own ends and tolerated its usage by other in lower ranks, as long as it did not affect their own position. This is well complemented by Alexei Yurchak's interpretation of performativity. According to Yurchak, since the late Stalinist period, there were no more significant changes in the communist ideological discourse in Soviet Russia. This led to a change of focus in discourse, from the *descriptive* to the *performative*. In simpler terms, since all discourses remained the same, the only means to individualize them was when reading them, interpreting them, in other words, *performing* them.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸² Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Ithaca NY: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 283-290.

There were minor incidents such as the one described by F.P., the ethnographer who challenged the official view that Maria Tănase was superior to Maria Lătărețu. Such moments were easily overcome not through argument debates, but hierarchy.

The active participants to festivals have almost opposing narratives. B.A., the textile worker, is very fond of her memories as an amateur artist and highly nostalgic about the 1950s and 1960s period when she was active in the factory's artistic brigade. In her case, it is interesting to notice that her negative or positive reaction had more to do with the people implementing policies than with policies themselves. On the other hand, C.B.'s experience as a student is full of irony and the only reason to remember it has more to do with the unexpected reaction of the selection jury. His story illustrates Yurchak's theory of performativity even better, though at a different level, that of literary propaganda. Since all poems had the same topic and utilized the same language, their discourse became interchangeable. The explanation for winning second prize might well have to do with the performance of the compiled poetry, as well as with a jury incapable of sensing the forged poem.

A.P.'s story as a primary school pupil illustrates the ambiguity toward official festivals and festivities. While rebuking the dusty stage of the opera hall and the performers' lack of any passion, as well as the mandatory participation to such shows, she has fond memories of the music which she does not differentiate from the one saw in Romanian movies or on national television. Her familiarity with folklore songs is evident throughout the interview. However, festivities are not just a cultural opportunity, but a social one as well. She remembers more vividly the social discrimination of her colleagues, as well as her own discrimination, although for other reasons. The personal and the political encounter each other often in her story, but the political is always secondary as this is apparent not only in her narrative but also in her own self-analysis.

As a passive participant, S.I. preferred going to shows specifically oriented toward youth culture where the audience felt the atmosphere was less restrained than at official festivals. This is apparent in what he remembers from each type of show; from the pop and rock music shows, he remembers the music, the poems, and the bands. From the Song of Romania shows he remembers little in terms of artistic content, and more about the social or political context that made him go there in the first place: either for his

children, or for his colleagues (in other words, directly or indirectly mandatory presence). In the latter case the memories are not about the festival's artistic content, but about the poor performances of his colleagues.

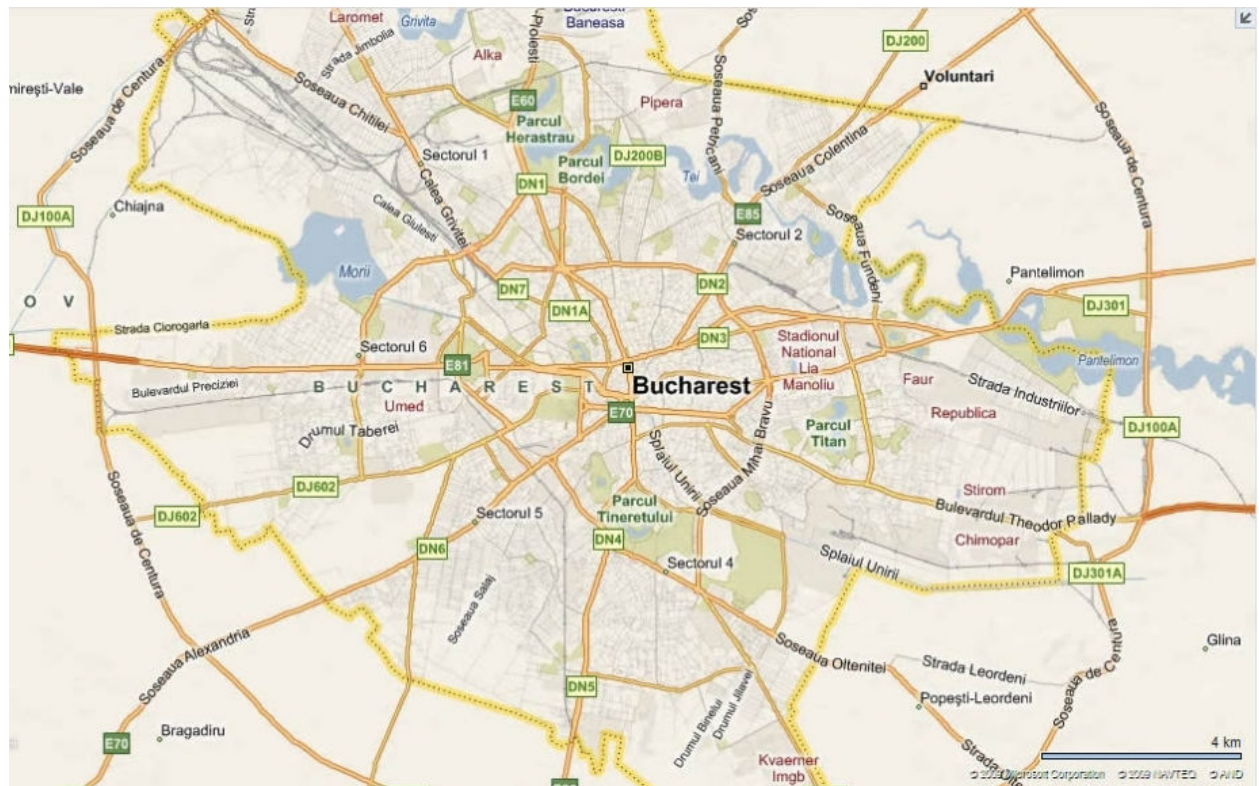
While S.I. saw his passive participation to the festival as simple conformation to official requirements, M.P., an ethnographer, deemed it as part of patriotic work, a series of mandatory, pointless and humiliating activities which she sees as unfit for her intellectual status. The by-standers again provide individual narratives of their attitudes toward political festivals. A.C. never joined the Party, but did manage to get by, and is ambiguous toward the usefulness of political festivals like Song of Romania; while claiming they were never taken seriously he acknowledges the existence of great folklore ensembles, underlining the fact that their performers were not professionally trained artists, but naturally gifted amateurs.

C.R.'s recollection is somewhat similar to that of A.P. in that she regretted not having taken part in the festivity, after she heard her colleagues' experiences. She does provide insights into the informal practices of eschewing from participation to festivals, based on the very selection criteria that school was using. Finally S.P. considers such festivals in general and Song of Romania in particular to have been a total failure, although he does not provide any evidence or arguments to support his claim. In this last but not least case, it is interesting to notice that the most negative attitude toward the festival comes from a person who did not have anything to do with it.

In analyzing the stories of the above interviewees, one should not focus on their representativity. The actual focus, as should be the case for most oral history interview, is on the individual experience and how this relates to outside/upper influences. One can argue for or against them as being representative, mostly according to one's present political interests. What matters in this case is that they turn the entire picture of how ordinary people perceived and reacted to political festivals into a more complex and detailed one. Furthermore, when comparing their stories with those of interviewees from the town and village case studies one notices many similarities in terms of attitude and ways to negotiate their position, despite an increased control originating from the center.

7.9. Annexes to Chapter 7

Annex 7.1. Map of Bucharest at present (2013)
Source: Rezistenta.net (Last retrieved on July 20th, 2013)



Annex 7.2. Photo of A.P. at the *Șoimii patriei* ceremony
Source: A.P. personal collection



Annex 7.3. Photo of A.P. at pionieri ceremony (Aurel Vlaicu Memorial Monument)

Source: A.P. personal collection



Conclusions

“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must keep silent”
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

This thesis aimed at providing an analysis of political festivals in socialist Romania, seen as an instrument of conferring legitimacy to the regimes of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu and of creating a mass identity for ordinary people. Moreover, it has aimed at exploring the reaction of ordinary people to this tool of mass propaganda, as well as their subjective recollection of the festival. It also aimed at examining the structure and functions of political festivals in communist Romania, during 1948 and 1989, having focused especially on their roles in mirroring the official communist ideology and its shifts between the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and nationalism, as well as in shaping a new type of culture for members of the working-class and peasantry. The research hypothesis for this thesis has been that political festivals in communist Romania mirror the way in which the official regime developed its ideology, as well as the changes which took place at this ideological level, more exactly, the shift which occurred toward the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, from a Marxist-Leninist to a nationalistic type of socialist regime.⁴⁸³

The thesis illustrated political festivals as instruments of institutional and mass control, and as means of self-representation for the communist regime, with the purpose of providing political legitimization. The research focused on a comparative perspective, developed at two levels: a chronological one – between youth and workers festivals in Romania, during the 1950s and 1960s, and the so-called *National Festival of Socialist Education “Song of Romania”*, during the 1970s and 1980s – and a structural comparison – between the official image of festivals in propaganda, at a general level, and that of festivals as perceived by ordinary people, at a case-study level.

A particular focus of the thesis has been the Festival “Song of Romania”. For this this particular Romanian political festival of the 1970s and 1980s, I have construed its anatomy and physiology, integrating it in a general conceptual framework of political festivals and political mass rituals, and relying on a comparative perspective, between the

⁴⁸³ See Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1991.

official image of the festival, drawn from propaganda sources and the subjective perception of participants, drawn from case-study analysis. The purpose has been to demonstrate that official aims for “Song of Romania” had a perverted effect at the mass level, and to identify how this festival shaped ordinary people’s perception of art and culture.

Regarding the academic usefulness of this thesis, it should be pointed out that studies of Romanian political festivals have benefited from little attention, which has failed to shed light on their importance of study for identifying the nature of the Romanian communist regime, as well as for bridging issues such as political ideology, art and popular culture. Thus, taking as point of departure the study of political festivals in communist Romania, the research conclusions can be of importance at a broader level, concerning the nature of communist regimes in general and how art and politics intermingle at the level of mass popular culture.

As shown, the variety and the impressive number of festivals occurring in different types of civilizations, societies and political regimes, as well as the different manifestations which they comprise, have led to an ever-increasing number of studies focusing on festivals in general and on political festivals in particular.⁴⁸⁴ Such researches have focused on case-studies, both chronologically and geographically, attempting to identify the historicity of political festivals as well as to integrate their particular conclusions in a more comprehensive conceptual framework. Most of these researches, however, have failed to put forth a clear-cut conceptual definition of political festivals, developing instead a descriptive approach on of the topic while concentrating on the main functions of political festivals. Karabaev constructed a generally-encompassing, but particularly-inexplicit and vague definition of political festivals, stating that the latter are festivals “which developed under the influence of historical processes”.⁴⁸⁵ He provided this definition as he developed a typology of festivals, according to purposes each of

⁴⁸⁴ The following constitute only a basic selective bibliography to the topic of political festivals: Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988. James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Claes Arvidsson, Lars Erik Blomqvist (eds.) *Symbols of Power: The Esthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell, 1987. Simon Taylor, “Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism” in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.32, No.4. (Dec., 1981), pp. 504-529.

⁴⁸⁵ M. Karabaev, “Festival-Ritual Culture as a Factor of Social Progress” in Said Shermukhamedov, Victoriya Levinskaya, *Spiritual Values and Social Progress*. Online version available at: <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series03/IIIC-1/contents.htm>. Retrieved on February 28, 2011.

them serves, but his taxonomy failed to take into account that such criteria are often interchangeable and can only lead to ambiguous differentiations.⁴⁸⁶ Other renowned researchers of the topic, such as Ozouf and von Geldern identified only the main purpose of festivals, without offering any explicit definition. Thus, Ozouf stated the power of unifying people and masses as the main function of political festivals, in parallel with stressing the ambiguity of such festivals especially in the historical context of the French Revolution.⁴⁸⁷ Rearick also put forth festivals as “important means of creating unity”.⁴⁸⁸ Similarly, James von Geldern stressed a similar statement, although he also provided insight into other aspects of festivals, such as their function of integrating past culture in order to create a new one, disseminated at a mass level.⁴⁸⁹ On the other hand, both Ozouf and von Geldern discussed about political festivals as able of mirroring the historical contexts and political regimes within which they occur.⁴⁹⁰

Apart from such approaches, political festivals are also integrated in the more-encompassing conceptual framework of political religions and political rituals.⁴⁹¹ Relying on Emilio Gentile’s approach on fascism and communism as political religions⁴⁹², Hans Maier stated that political festivals were an instrument of mass politics in both communist and fascist regimes, the means for creating the “new human being” as a collective person.⁴⁹³ Without directly referring to the concept of political festivals, Steven Lukes used the term “political ritual” and stressed its main function of social integration, as a “rule-governed activity of symbolic character which draws attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance”.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸⁷ Mona Ozouf, *Op. cit.*, p. 16-21.

⁴⁸⁸ Charles Rearick, “Festivals in Modern France: The Experience of the Third Republic” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 12, No.3 (Jul., 1977), p. 441.

⁴⁸⁹ James von Geldern, *Op. cit.*, pp. 72-75 and pp. 86-88.

⁴⁹⁰ Mona Ozouf, *Op. cit.*, p. 23. James von Geldern, *Op. cit.*, p. 208-211.

⁴⁹¹ See, for instance, Hans Maier, “Political Religions and Their Images: Soviet communism, Italian Fascism and German National Socialism” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 7, No.3, 267-281, September 2006, pp. 267-281.

⁴⁹² For this interpretation, see Emilio Gentile, *Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997. Also, *Idem*, “Fascism as Political Religion” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 25, No. 2/3, May 1990, pp. 229-251.

⁴⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 274-275.

⁴⁹⁴ Steven Lukes, “Political Ritual and Social Integration” in *Sociology*, Vol. 9, 1975, p. 301.

Based on the above conceptual framework, I defined political festivals as politically organized performative and celebrative events, comprising mass assemblies, artistic competitions, having the purpose of disseminating a variety of political and cultural symbols, in order to provide political legitimacy, by shaping a newly created set of social relations, as well as a new cultural background.

Political festivals have constituted an important means of institutional and mass control, as well as of creating a new type of culture, in communist Romania. Youth and workers festivals have characterized the official cultural atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s. Later on, in the aftermath of Nicolae Ceaușescu's policy of integrating nationalism in the Marxist-Leninist ideology, in order to legitimize his personality cult, political festivals have become the main instrument of forging the new man of the communist regime.

For my research on political festivals I have used Ozouf's and von Geldern's approach on festivals as means of self-representation. I have also made use of Verdery's analysis of the interweaving between nationalism and communism in communist Romania. But, unlike Verdery, who focused on official politics and the role of intellectuals in developing such politics, I have analyzed these politics as they appear in the cultural and ideologically-educational realm of political festivals, examining the complex interrelation between ideology, official art, and popular culture in the social context of communism. Thus, the thesis focused on a much-dealt-with topic, but from an innovative perspective: that of official culture for the masses, with a particular focus on how ordinary people perceived the official politics and on the latter's effects. The conclusions drawn from this research can find usefulness and applicability for other case-studies as well, but also on a broader scale of communist regimes in general.

The research addressed the following questions: What is the development and evolution of political festivals in communist Romania? What material and discursive contexts determine the choosing or replacement of political symbols in the framework of political festivals? What elements of the former traditional culture are integrated in within political festivals and for what purpose? How are these elements modified? In what way do political festivals mirror official ideology? Political festivals as mirrors of the virtually-created image of the communist regime, or of the real consequences had by

official policies? What are the effects of political festivals on daily-life for ordinary people? How do political festivals deal with the issue of leisure, free time and continuous education? What is the role of political festivals in shaping the new-type of communist human being?

In addressing these questions the thesis benefited from a wide and diverse array of primary sources and material, taking into consideration its aims, as well as risks and limits. I relied on official press such as *Scînteia*, *Romînia Liberă*, *Munca*, *Scînteia Tineretului*, *Flacăra*, *Contemporanul*. Apart from that, I have used documents and minutes of official Party meetings, which are to be found at the National Archives in Bucharest. I have also used Radio Free Europe reports on activities in communist Romania and transcripts of television and radio monitoring, which are to be found at the Open Society Archives, in Budapest. Apart from these, I have also relied on oral history interviews with organizers of the festival at the central or local level, but also with ordinary participants, in order to identify their personal perspective of the festival.⁴⁹⁵

Despite the sheer scale and the official importance of political festivals during the socialist regime, present day discourses on the former and on “Song of Romania” in particular vary from negative general comments regarding the political use of traditional culture to mute appreciations of people who managed to make themselves noticed within the festival and later on to claim a status of professional artists. Nevertheless, remarks on such festivals seem to be rather rare, as the festivals themselves have been apparently long forgotten despite their obvious recentness. This silence is not explainable simply by their failure due to their association with the regimes led by Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu, or by their past and present deeming as a morally negative structure.

“Song of Romania”, for instance, was a political festival, in the sense that it incorporated a set of politically organized performative and celebrative events, mass assemblies and artistic competitions, with the purpose of disseminating political symbols of the socialist and national ideology of communist regime. It did not have the sole purpose of providing political legitimacy, as there were other means to achieve this goal.

⁴⁹⁵ Of great importance for such an approach might be an article by Speranța Rădulescu, “Traditional Musics and Ethnomusicology: Under Political Pressure: The Romanian Case” in *Anthropology Today*, Vol.13, No. 6, (Dec., 1997), pp. 8-12. The author’s own recollections as a jury member for such a festival shed light on internal mechanisms of political festivals which are not to be found in any propaganda materials.

By using the pretext of constructing a new culture, the festival aimed at creating a new set of social relations, at inducing a shift in social status for intellectuals and professional artists, in order to avoid any critique or resistance from the latter.

In doing so, the festivals became the ideal framework for bringing together two main components of what was intended to be the socialist order of Romania under Dej and Ceaușescu: the masses and the Party/leader. Political rituals were used extensively to mark this dissociation and traditional aspects of festivals, such as the temporary reversed social order were reinterpreted, in order to fit in, for example, with Ceaușescu's personality cult. The ultimate aim, although never officially recognized, was to create a new mass identity, in which individual values were left aside. Mass rallies at the ending festivities for each edition of the festivals proved to be an ideal source for exploring the functions of political rituals for the case of Romania, in particular, and for modern societies, in general.

The official image is, nevertheless, transformed if one construes the unexplored side of the festivals: ordinary people's response to them. Most people did not have any particular reaction, as they perceived the festivals as something normal for the respective period. Moreover, depending on their social, age and professional status, as well as on their intellectual background and access to information, people responded in various ways. They either participated in them, without getting involved, or regarded them as a formal activity, part of everyday responsibilities. They also perceived them as an occasion to be promoted, or to witness a change in social status. The festivals themselves became an independent structure, an alternative plan, which needed to be fulfilled similarly to economic plans in industry and agriculture.

Consequently it can be implied that they led to the appearance of new social relations and changes in social status for awarded participants, or for organizers. Workers and peasants suddenly found themselves applauded and praised as innovating and representative artists, and could afford financial and material advantages which were normally out of their reach. Activists organizing various competitions within the festival managed to interrelate with economic directors, in order to insure their funding. Although official sources claim that special funds were attributed to the proceedings of the festival, present interviews with organizers suggest a different version. Further inquiry still needs

to be undertaken regarding this particular aspect, but the research conducted so far on interviewees proves to be a promising starting point for revealing an entire alternative social structure, left outside official recordings.

Furthermore, political festivals can prove insightful when discussing the complex issue of how people remember communism. Historical memory and collective memories intermingle with personal memories from case to case to offer various narrative discourses. Beyond this narrative variety lies a set of patterns, out of which the most important one is the ambiguity in people's recollections of the festivals. Most interviewees have first mentioned their negative sides, only to stress the positive aspects later on, in an "it wasn't that bad" type of discourse. Two main explanations can account for this. On the one hand, the festivals comprised so many activities that, in the end, they did not take over ordinary course of events, they simply integrated into them. Despite official claims, political control varied from local levels to the national level and to that of Bucharest, allowing people to modify official requirements according to their own interests and abilities. Moreover, 1989 marked a radical political rupture with the past, at least at the official level. This meant that ordinary people had to abruptly modify their set of values and their socially accepted discursive code. Whereas before 1989 there was a code of publicly accepted discourses and private opinions which had to remain private, after 1989, most people retained only this duality but completely changed the corpus of "publicly accepted" versus "privately accepted" statements.

This research opened new questions of research, regarding the use of political festivals in Romania, during the 20th century, as well as the use of political celebrative manifestations in general. For the first issue, further research needs to be conducted on political festivals during the dictatorship of King Charles II, in the 1930s. Comparisons of such historical case studies are important for the study of totalitarian regimes during the 20th century. In this sense, the study of political festivals during socialist Romania gains importance, by adding knowledge to an under researched field, that of mass artistic and political assemblies in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, analyzing how people remember such similar mass manifestation, but from different regimes, can also prove most useful for the studying of memory about these regimes and for identifying the factors which count for their way of remembering.

This present research, however, did not just open the path for new fields of inquiry. It showed how political festivals and rituals were put to use by the socialist regimes of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu and how ordinary people reacted to them now and react to their memory in the present. When interviewed, or when simply discussing about their past memories, their recollections and their silence, in Wittgenstein's sense of the word, proved most revealing.

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- a) R.O., Romanian, female, between 30 and 45 years old, geography teacher. Personal interviews taken in Câmpina, April 18 and 19, 2007.
- b) M.C., Romanian, male, between 30 and 45 years old, history teacher. Personal interview taken in Câmpina, April 20, 2007.
- c) G.N., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, history teacher. Personal interview taken in Câmpina, April, 20, 2007.
- d) L.M., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, Romanian language and literature teacher. Personal and group interview taken in Câmpina, April, 22, 2007.
- e) M.M., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, teacher. Group interview (together with L.M.) taken in Câmpina, April 22, 2007.
- f) A.P., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, teacher. Personal interview taken in Câmpina, April 22, 2007.
- g) V.I., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, a former pedagogue. Personal interviews taken in Câmpina, April 22, 2007; April 05th and 16th 2010.
- h) M.X., Romanian, male, more than 65 years old, a former president of culture commission. Written notes from verbal discussion taken in Câmpina, April 23, 2007. (deceased on May 1st, 2010)

- i) C.B., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, retired worker. Interview taken in Câmpina, July 27th 2009.
- j) V.B., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, worker. Interview taken in Câmpina, July 29th, 2009.
- k) I.O., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, worker. Interview taken in Câmpina, April 3rd, 2010.
- l) M.I., Romanian, female, more than 65 years old, retired (formerly worker). Interview taken in Câmpina, April 5th, 2010.
- m) D.A., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, retired (formerly a high school teacher of mathematics). Interview taken in Câmpina, April 12th, 2010.
- n) S.E., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, retired (formerly a secondary school teacher of mathematics). Interview taken in Câmpina, April 12th, 2010.

Case Study of Tâmbonești:

- a) A.S., Romanian, female, under 30 years old, public servant. Personal interviews taken in Bucharest, May 9, 2007 and Tâmbonești, April 23rd, 2010.
- b) S.B., Romanian, female, more than 65 years old, retired, formerly a head teacher and cultural activist, also a mayor. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, July 4th, 2009.
- c) I.B., Romanian, male, more than 65 years old, retired, formerly a director of the house of culture in Tâmbonești. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, July 4th, 2009.
- d) I.O., Romanian, male, between 45 and 65 years old, geography and history teacher. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, July 5th, 2009.
- e) V.S., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, teacher of physics and chemistry. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, July 7th, 2009.
- f) I.P., Romanian, male, more than 65 years old, retired, formerly a store keeper at the collective farm. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, April 24th, 2010.
- g) S.P., Romanian, female, more than 65 years old, worker at the collective farm. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, April 24th, 2010.
- h) T.V., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, teacher. Personal interviews taken in Tâmbonești, July 3rd 2009 and April 24th, 2010.
- i) A.N., Romanian, female, more than 65 years old, retired, formerly a teacher. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, April 25th, 2010.
- j) M.G., Romanian, female, between 45 and 65 years old, Romanian language teacher. Personal interview taken in Tâmbonești, April 26th, 2010.

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