

# **SOCIAL BIOGRAPHY ABOUT THE COMMUNIST PERIOD – FAMILY, PROPERTY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY**

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**Abstract:** Life histories or social biographies, sometimes called “small histories”, fascinate not only from an aesthetic or slightly nostalgic perspective, as sometimes happens with memorialistic writings, but by the richness of the approaches it makes possible in the social sciences. As it is the “lived history”, the descent to the talking individual who becomes the main actant in a broader socio-cultural and historical context, the characteristics of the account of the living phenomenon should be highlighted when recording and registering some of its marks. Archiving inevitably involves the “freezing” of the lived fact, which is why the researcher is asked to pay particular attention in the “living” preservation of life's stories, taking into account the dynamics of the “open” document. The study presents several social biographies of respondents who lived the early period of the communist regime, political changes, nationalization, collectivization, deportations, serious issues of quotas, a dynamic of state politics, but also of mentalities.

**Keywords:** social biography, communism, collective memory, ethnological document, property.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Life histories or social biographies, sometimes called “small histories”, fascinate not only from an aesthetic or slightly nostalgic perspective, as sometimes happens with memorialistic writings, but by the richness of the approaches it makes possible in the social sciences. As it is the “lived history”, the descent to the talking individual who becomes the main actant in a broader socio-cultural and historical context, the characteristics of the account of the living phenomenon should be highlighted at the time of recording and registering of some of its marks. Archiving inevitably involves the “freezing” of the lived fact, which is why the researcher is asked to pay particular attention in the “living” preservation of life's stories, taking into account the dynamics of the “open” document.

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## SOCIAL BIOGRAPHY – ETHNOLOGICAL “OPEN” DOCUMENT

First of all, what do we call an “open” document? It concerns the process nature of the phenomena investigated and the need to set up documents that can allow for a return over time, or subsequent interpretations of the collections of documents drawn up, so as not to lack certain details on the respondent's biography, socio-cultural context, recording context, etc. The absence of such details would vitiate the document irretrievably, and such situations are blessed in the early stages of folklore. These observations must also be attached to the implicit requirement of any contemporary study of folklore, namely to establish their own collection of documents necessary to explore the research theme addressed: “the folklorist must be an experienced fieldworker, whose starting point in building up a study would be his own collection”<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, “collecting should not stop at the literal transcript of the text, but should consider the close relationship between the text and the individuals and should record the general atmosphere in which the text is transmitted”<sup>2</sup>.

Hence, in fact, the exploratory nature of the collection of life's stories/social biographies, because it must respond to a research intention, a research question-hypothesis of the researcher's work, which is why “a story of life means above all exploring a field of possibilities: the details, the account of the concrete facts of life, the complexity of the emotional involvements that follow the perception of its increments and make it open to meaning, meanings”<sup>3</sup>. The researcher is in a position to tatonar, to explore life experiences, to “provoke” even attitudes towards certain events “forgotten” sometimes by the interviewed. Between the two – researcher and interviewee, a spontaneous relationship must be established, even if the intention of implicit research of the folklorist can place it in the area of the artificial, the created, the experiential. The nature of human relations fosters the establishment of a dialogue in which the researcher must have the ability to reveal himself as little as possible in order to avoid producing “desired answers”, while provoking revelations from the subject of research, already become a dialogue partner and not just a source of information.

Life stories/life histories/social biographies are always revealed as a document, an “open document” due to the process nature of the research, correlated with the dynamics of phenomena. The exploratory nature of the document highlights the fact that this is not only a stage in research, as has sometimes been mentioned<sup>4</sup>, nor the purpose of the research, such abstract distinctions placing

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Degh, *Story-telling in a Hungarian Peasant Community*, translated by Emily M. Schossberger, Indiana University Press, Bloomington/ London, 1969, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> Smaranda Vultur, *Memoria salvată – Evreii din Banat, ieri și azi*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2002, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ioana R. Fruntelată, *Narațiunile personale în etnologia războiului*, Bucharest, Ager Publishing, 2004, p. 18: “the ethnological document does not aim at the purpose of ethnology, but at the necessary stage of the constitution of the object, the cornerstone of the interpretive edifice”.

themselves in the sphere of some didactic aspects, because the ethnological document is also interrogation, and construction, and creation.

Moreover, a viable ethnological document is the one that allows new openings, new approaches, new starting points, new interrogations. In this respect, Ricœur emphasized: “in epistemological terms, the autonomy of history from memory is affirmed with the greatest force at the level of explanation/understanding. (...) there is no document without question, no question without draft explanation. The document becomes evidence precisely in relation to the explanation”<sup>5</sup>.

Although Ricœur refers to the historical document, extrapolation can also be done in the field of folklore, taking into account the characteristics of archiving and “historization” of socio-cultural facts. Thus, he stated that “nothing is in itself the document, even if any residue of the past is potentially trace. For the historian, the document is not simply given, as the idea of the left trace might suggest. He's wanted and found. Furthermore, it is circumscribed and, in this respect, constituted, established as a document, by interrogation”<sup>6</sup>.

The author also makes direct reference to oral history documents/social biographies, highlighting that “the same characterization of the document through the interrogation that applies to him applies to a category of unwritten testimonies, recorded oral testimonies that the microhistory and the history of the present time use a lot. They play a considerable role in the conflict between the memory of survivors and the history already written. Those oral testimonies do not constitute documents until they are recorded; they then leave the oral sphere to enter the sphere of writing, thus removing the role of testimony from the current conversation. It can then be said that the memory is archived, documented. Its object has ceased to be a memory in the proper sense of the word, i.e. it is no longer in a relationship of continuity and closeness with a present of consciousness”<sup>7</sup>.

Although the boundary between qualitative and quantitative studies is very strict, it is necessary to use cumulatively several techniques and methods of investigation in terms of achieving viable results. Qualitative methods are characterized by a great freedom in addressing both the topics and the interviewees.

Characterized by fluidity, improvisation, qualitative studies are carried out in an open horizon, but not without organization. This is why it is much better in a spontaneous context, which leads to the active involvement of the interviewees in the dialogue, in a climate which, although aimed at recording, must preserve and foster the conduct of a natural dialogue situation.

This attitude will also favour the openness, the spontaneous orientation of the theme addressed to ramifications not initially taken into account, but which prove

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea*, Timișoara, Amarcord Publishing, 2001, pp. 221–222.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 216.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 216–217.

fecund along the way. The rigour, the predetermined structuring of questionnaires, field surveys – quantitative methods, come to complete in an extensive, sometimes statistical manner, the elements observed at the level of small communities, but a viable organization of them cannot be achieved without a qualitative, indicative pilot study.

Methodological, sociological super-rationalization specific to quantitative methods is sometimes far too rigid in the surprise of aspects of socio-cultural detail of particular cases, even atypical compared to the general situation, thus losing relevant information. The role of qualitative studies, including the method of using life history is very often used, is one of major importance especially in such “small” cases, but relevant to the whole community. We can consider as fecund such a orientation of the method of using life stories/life historys/social biographies on the relevant case, on “talking characters”, whereby the community, social structures can be investigated as a reflection of particular situations, in the “fact (of life) lived” under the conditions of our investigation – the status of the property and the dynamics of mentalities in the post-communist period.

At the same time, the possibilities of manipulation in directions without scientific basis of oral history documents/social biography must be mentioned, “enthusiasm for *the stories of life* leads to some exaggerations, whether they are regarded as an object or as a method of study. From an ethnological, anthropological or narrative point of view, relativity and fragmentarism induced by the absolutization of an individual perspective can lead to interpretations of no scientific value”<sup>8</sup>.

Setting up the collection of oral history/social biographies requires double, methodological and at the same time deontological attention. In this respect, the methodological requirements intersect with those of professional ethics. They can be easily correlated with the objectivity-subjectivity binoma, and the creation of any ethnological document must relate to this issue. Thus, 'taking into account the context variables that give the uniqueness of each performance in oral cultures, we must accept that ethnological documents are partially fictitious productions, the result of the integration of the meaning transmitted by the creator (interpreter) into the grid with subjective cracks of the researcher's competence and objectives. Up to a point, even the most quantifiable scientific objects suffer from relativity, because they are developed mentally aspiring to the optimal state of knowledge, but do not undeniably achieve the ultimate truth”<sup>9</sup>.

A possible definition of the ethnological document is found in the work of Ioana Ruxandra Fruntelată, *Personal Narratives in the Ethnology of War*: “the ethnological document should be an act by which a fact of popular culture is found or a written or printed text or other testimony serving to the knowledge of a real

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<sup>8</sup> Ioana R. Fruntelată, *Narațiunile personale în etnologia războiului*, Bucharest, Ager Publishing, 2004, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 12–13.

fact of popular culture, current or past. Simplifying, we could say that the **ethnological document** is an inscribed by which ethnological value is attributed to a fact of reality. Talking about *oral documents* is inappropriate, because, as we have seen, the meaning of the word document implies a fixation on a material medium (paper, tape, film, CD-Rom, the latter three more accurately recording the oral element) which ensures the controllable character and the quality of tangible evidence of the documents. In order to become an ethnological document, the fact of nonmaterial folk culture must be *textualized*, i.e. drawn into an archival scriptural or audio-visual *statement*, with an *inner coherence, clear boundaries and a spatial fixation to ensure its permanence over time*<sup>10</sup>, according also to the opinions of Nicolae Constantinescu<sup>11</sup>.

The alteration of the “authenticity” of the material subject to registration/archiving is inevitable, with the researcher having a number of tasks designed to counteract this situation, more “in the case of elements studied marginally in the history of the discipline up to him, the ethnologist becomes, through his scientific prestige, an authenticator of the ethnological document”<sup>12</sup>, because “the objects of ethnology are not given as such, before the research”<sup>13</sup>.

The configuration of a scientifically viable document should take into account the detailed completion of *a context file and a storytelling file*, designed to provide sufficient details to limit the possibilities of unscientific handling of the document. Clarity of the definition of the context of data collection, respect for the confidentiality of data, for the identity of the interviewee and ensuring the confidentiality of his answers meet ethical requirements specific to ethnological research, while allowing a broad theoretical approach, ensuring the “reading” of the document as nuanced as possible, thus avoiding manipulations of any kind of the document.

An important aspect of the deontology of ethnological research, in particular related to the study of life histories, is the question of the approach to meaning that the interviewees attach to their own oral biography. Numerous documents relating to the ethics of research have been published, of which we will mention three ethical codes specific to folklore: one relating to copyright (*Draft Treaty for the Protection of Expressions of Folklore against Illicit Exploitation and Other Prejudicial Actions*), another governing the preservation of folklore documents, in the process of their creation and use (*Recommendations on the Safeguarding of Culture and Folklore, 1989*) and a third that refers to the behaviour of the professional folklorist (*A Statement of Ethics for the American Folklore Society, 1988*). However, the particular conditions that may lead to the conduct of research

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>11</sup> Constantinescu Nicolae, *Lectura textului folcloric*, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing, p. 56  
*apud* Ioana Ruxandra Frunteletă, *cit. work*, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ioana R. Frunteletă, *cit. work*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Copans, *Introducere în etnologie și antropologie*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 1999, p. 36  
*apud* Ioana Ruxandra Frunteletă, *cit. work*, p. 14.

can create unusual situations, in which the researcher must find ethical ways to respond to these inevitable challenges of field work, “there is no substitute for continuous and alert observation, for judging and making decisions on ethical issues as they arise in the daily work of the scientist”<sup>14</sup>.

Another aspect that must find formulations within the deontology of ethnological research is the one raised by the narrator's confrontation with his own life, the reliving of certain moments, sometimes dramatic, which requires a careful and tactful methodological approach.

In terms of both methodological and ethical aspects of the configuration of collections of oral history or social biography, we consider it viable to develop and deepen the conceptualization of the “open document” during the course of our research, due to its fecund valences that it highlights. We will present below some social biographies of respondents who lived the early period of the communist regime, political changes, nationalisation, collectivization, deportations, serious issues of quotas, a dynamic of state politics, but also of mentalities.

**... “They gave a lot of meals to get rid of the land, to see it confiscated, I think, that it was something other than to give it to the collective, that's how you would have had some rights”...**

A.

1. Name and surname: Georgeta Ștefănescu
2. Age: 70 years old in 2013
3. Date of birth: April 13, 1943
4. Employer: “Flacăra” Newspaper
5. Retired.

“When I was born, it was in the middle of World War II, I was born on Tuesday. We were at war and people were feeling it. But some Germans came over us there, parents of my father had build a very beautiful new house, double-decker, it was one of the most beautiful houses in the village of Moțaței and some Germans came and occupied it as they occupied everything, but they were extraordinarily nice and kind to the family, they did not destroy anything, with the ladies of the house they behaved very nice, they left and left a very good impression in their passage. They'd have been tired of the war because they were close to finishing. And there were children in the village, because they hadn't taken us elsewhere. During the bombing everyone from Bucharest came to Moțaței, there was food, anyway, in the country you found a polenta, a fish, birds and all this were easy to find.

My mother was a woman locked in herself, never, while I nagged her, she didn't know what time she gave birth to me, she always told me something else.

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<sup>14</sup> Lauri Honko, *Toward the Ethics of Textualisation* în “FF Network for the Folklore Fellows”, November, 2000, Publisher: The Folklore Fellows by courtesy of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters and the Kalevala Institute, *apud* Ioana Ruxandra Frunteletă, *cit. work*, pp. 15–16.

I didn't know my mother went to school at a boarding school, I didn't know she knew German, French. She was locked in her inner self without externalizing herself, perhaps because of the hard times we were going through, and she was afraid to confess these things. My father... I was extraordinary close to him, he was the God of my life, literally, until he died. From the time I was born to his death, he was the God of my life. My father was a man of extraordinary generosity, he had an extraordinary bass voice, they wanted to take him to the Opera House, and here's another whole story, and his father – who was mayor of the village – didn't let him. Pache Ștefănescu was the name of my father's father. Beautiful both of them, as tall as the door. Grandfather after father is not very present in my memory, he died in '44-'45. But about my grandmother from my father, I have many memories. When I came home – it was very rare to stay together because on summer holidays we used to go to the camps. She went to bed around 9 o'clock in the evening, and at about two o'clock in the morning she came to the door of my room – I was writing, reading, feeling at ease. *Let's have a cup of happy coffee!* was her exhortation. My grandma, all her life, had a gift for telling stories, I remember the evening sittings we used to make when we picked the corn, when we picked the vineyards... It was crazy, all the kids were coming, she was telling all the legends of the earth, the children were enveloping themselves in the smoke of the fire that was burning there, oh, and my grandma was able to tell stories for two weeks, not a week, all the community was listening to her with a gaping mouth, her telling all kind of stories, where she made up so many stories... with the Turks, with the war with the Turks... she was convincing them, telling them where the Turks have been, where they have trained... Well, my mother never got along with my grandmother, didn't like her, but she didn't trample on her, the two of them had no affinities at all. I, on the other hand, had affinities with her father, my great-grandfather, who was a merchant. All these old-fashioned stories you can bring back to life like this, like stars, they are so beautiful.

My mother was a fighter beyond measure, with a fabulous energy and endurance almost.

My father was taken to prison because he had been in the Peasant Party and we were in the category of kulaks, they had taken him and we did not know where he was taken, and those who took them did not have 4 school classes, they came to my mother in the evening, punched the table with their fists and ordered her to bring 2,700 by the next day, and I don't know how many pounds of milk. As in my mother's words, because she was also screaming at them, that Even if I dried the wells and still couldn't bring so much water, not milk. Her sister, Agrippina, had come to help her, because she knew that my father was in prison, and we had all that land they didn't want to take in the collective. I understood that the two of them gave a few meals to get rid of the land, because we were kulaks according to I don't know what decree, I was too young. They gave a lot of meals to get rid of it, they had 100 pogoane, so 50 ha, with a pond, with everything, well, they wanted the land to be confiscated, I think, that it was something else than to give it to the

collective, that that's how you had some rights. Eventually they gave the land to the CAP (agricultural cooperative), because my father came and talked to the new mayor, the poor man, and they gave me a certificate that I was a CAP member, I was a student.

Oh, what happened to me during high school and my bachelor studies, even in my sleep I had to know how many hectares I had, I would have said 3 ha and a half, which belonged to my grandmother, they could beat me, I only knew these. So my mother was a fighter, she would take us to the field, without forcing us to work, well, I – nosy and such a big heart, I was working on the picking of the inn and I would get up and say *My back hurts!* I was such a moggy, I was in kindergarten, in the first class, and I worked in the fields there. I got close to my mother after my father died, but my father was my God, even though my mother carried all that weight, I saw her go loaded after him everywhere, she met him on the train when he was arrested, she went to Bucharest to talk to all these generals in Ciocâltei so she could retrieve him from only God knew where he was in, in those prisons, no files were made. So she was a fighter, I understood why she locked herself in like that, she was always afraid that others would hurt us if too many things came out. And now, after the land was given to the owners, after the revolution, she said for a year that she didn't take an ounce of land, not to hurt Dana, my niece, she was too scared. She was an injured woman, locked herself in. My father was different, my father knew I was writing poetry and listening to them. I was very small, a midget, and I followed him in his walks, when he walked with his hands behind his back, I imitated him too and I was always behind him. And he told very beautiful stories, he had inherited his grandmother.

When I was in the 5th grade, we moved to Băilești. They hadn't taken our vines yet, that's where I went and I felt free.

In '59-'60 I finished high school. They rejected my file for college and I went to Timișoara. There I was assigned as a substitute teacher in education in Domașnea-Cornea, a very rich and beautiful commune. Two years I stayed here was great. There was no collectivization here. My sister graduated from college and was given a studio apartment. Then I went to college in Bucharest where I had my sister, there were no more problems with the file.

I wish the young people to manifest as people, to manifest their kindness, to drive away their anger; we had it too, but it was not so, we danced awkwardly, and we freed ourselves, the closure in themselves leads to selfishness, as it passes time settles down, and they are beautiful and must manifest in beauty and goodness.

**... “What I can remember is the fear, the fear that reigned in the family”...**

B.

1. Name and surname: MBP
2. Age: 73 years old in 2013
3. Date of birth: 1940
4. Retired.



I was a child when regimes changed. What I can remember is the fear, the fear that reigned in the family. The first thing, the first confrontation was when the Russians came into my grandparents' house in the country, and how I perceived with my child's mind how it suddenly got dark because they pulled everything out of the closet, everything, and it was my grandfather's office by the window. Even though the windows were big, like it was in a house of householders. And it's like I see my grandfather in bed and I started crying because a Russian slapped him. But why? They were looking for jewelry and, in fact, they found them, because someone told them that Grandpa had put them somewhere near the cauldron, he had put them in beehives, in one of the beehives. They already knew there was going to be a search because they'd been notified. At the command in Strehaiia where the Russian troops were, there was a translator, a Bessarabian engineer, engineer Gruief, then I was a classmate in primary school with one of the three Gruief girls, Tamara was her name, and the engineer's wife had been a teacher. I hadn't been to kindergarten or school, I guess it was after '44, after '45, and this Gruief engineer, the translator, sent word to my father's brother, the doctor from Strehaiia, who he knew, that there would be a search to our grandfather's house. Dad was in captivity at the time, and nothing was known about him. I came in the summer of 1946, so at that time it was not known if he was still alive or not. So these were my first images that stuck in my mind that the house was suddenly getting dark. Later, when I came home, I knew that my grandfather was putting a row of thick clothes aside, and then I understood why, that if he was arrested, he would have thick clothes there. I later realized this, and then I found out from the stories that my grandmother made some cloth bags full of breadcrumbs, cut the bread and dried it for when he had to run away or if he was arrested.

But as how I perceived this change ... I was in kindergarten, on the wall was the picture of the King with the Queen Mother having some pearls... of course we, the children, were enchanted by those pearls of the Queen. And then, in first grade, we saw other paintings, with other characters we didn't know, we kids weren't interested in. Although we felt it was dark, our childhood went on.

At the King's abdication, my father came and told us: *The King has abdicated! That had to happen too!* Another sequence was when a policeman came and told my father that the belts were broken at the mill, something happened at the mill, and my father said: *Good thing this is gone too!* So they couldn't wait to get rid of everything they had. Then came the dismissal of my father, who was a magistrate, he was an adviser to the Court of Appeal and I didn't feel it as something serious ... People didn't even think it was something serious ... Of course they were worried, but they still thought it was temporary, that something could happen and everything returned to normal, they could not imagine that some totally unprepared people could lead a country, even though the occupier was here and was a good example. ... yet people hoped. However, my father did not take his robe from the Court and someone brought it to him, and he also had a meal with his friends, the act was quite reckless, now I realize, but then I did not take it into

account either. And then I saw that my father was quite jovial ... *Oh ... let me tell you a joke ... You know officers are no longer allowed to smoke ... Why is that? ... Well, they're straws and they're on fire ...*

Then began the material hardships that I felt, so little, and a slight ostracization from society, even against me, as a child, at school... I was a little enemy. Oh, something else I remember, we were told to stop saying "Good morning!" when we came to school, and say "Long live the Romanian People's Republic!" and we were at the entrance, there was Mrs. Gruief, engineer Gruief's wife, and I say: "Long live the Romanian People's Republic!", and Mrs. Gruief says *Leave it, dear, that she lives without you saying it!*

I was at an uncle's and they had some friends visiting, there was also the veterinarian Basica, I remember him because he later died in the canal, and... *Well, you guys, did you learn anything at that kindergarten? Sing us something!* And I and my cousin, Viorel, who was younger than me but very talented, he played the accordion without taking lessons, but he had talent, and we started singing "Long live the King!", Because that's what we knew, and Dr. Basica said *It's out of date, but it's good!* So that's what's left in my child's mind.

Then, in '49 or '50, Grandma got sick, and that winter my grandfather went to Baia de Aramă, to Pades, where they were coming from, where grandma was coming from – she died a year or two later; and one of the reasons was to get out of the authorities' sights, because he was afraid of an arrest. And when they kicked him out of the magistrate's office, my father handed over the hunting gun. He realized he was undesirable. And that he could always get a set up.

Then I asked him in his last years of life: *Father, when did you realize the Communists weren't going to leave? ... By '48, after the king's departure, there was no hope...* And in the '76s when my father died, I asked him how we could escape communism? And my father said *Only if something happens inside Russia...* And, in fact, so it was.

A tragic moment in my life as a child was the arrest of my maternal grandparents, who had raised me after my mother's death, my mother died in '42 when my father was away at war, came to the funeral, and then returned in the summer of '46 from captivity. One morning my father got a note from a pharmacist, my godmother, that she saw grandpa in a truck with a sun hat on his head, and he realized there was something. My father went home, made a small family council, Suzana was there also, our housekeeper, a Sibian. And we went; my uncle was still at the hospital, so it was then with the principal's home built into the hospital. And they talked, and I think I understand they're going to be taken to the big train station, two miles away, and I ran, and Suzana, the cleaning lady, was running after me, and I don't know how I got in, I was a child, I don't know if I snuck in, I got a soldier in front of me at the entrance to the platform, I don't know how I found them. I think that's what I forgot, I guess I've never remembered the search, my struggle to find them, the despair, I didn't remember it, but I saw them

in that wagon of animals, they were sitting on the left and I saw a woman and a young man and an animal, a cow or a horse, so together.

I found them, I started crying, sure, they were crying too, and then they searched, Grandma was very tidy, very organized and she found a handkerchief to wipe away my tears, a handkerchief that had playing cards printed on – the acorn, the clover, the drum... It's like I see them... it's as if I see them ... the colors remained in my mind ... the image, and they gave me some more memories that were close to me: the outline of the hands taken every year on my birthday, to see how much I grew up, and probably the photos I have, they gave me then ... I loved them very much. In the summer we sometimes came to them, but we were not allowed to enter in our grandparents' house. These are the memories of a child at that time ... In the sixth grade I was not made UTM-ist (member of UTM/ Union of Young Workers – our note), me and the miller's daughter, they made us stand up because we're enemy elements, we didn't deserve to be UTM-ist, I felt guilty; then it was possible later, in high school; anyway, I was a child, they created a feeling of guilt in me, they were masters at inducing guilt ...

When my grandparents arrived in Bărgan they were given a number of houses, they sat in plain field and then some terrible rains began, they had a tarpaulin made of tent cloth as shelter from the rain, then they began to dig a kerb, they and a woman from Banat, and they lived in this kerb where from the ceiling, from the walls grew wheat and barley. They came back after five years, they wouldn't let them come back, to settle in their household, they didn't even go into the house. After six months they were allowed to enter and with what they had, they went on with their lives as best they could. This was the gift that the Communists gave to a teacher, school inspector, invalid from the First World War, former member of the Romanian Parliament and who left with the tongue of death to be written on his cross: *I am proud to have given a piece of my body to Greater Romania*. And so it says on his cross. There were many like him. A, and what was said in the family: that his luck was that they took him to Bărgan, because otherwise, he would have been put in jail.

Another special moment was the meeting between father and his brother when my father returned from captivity. They were very close; they lived in the same village, as we, their children, still are. Nothing was known about my father, soldiers started coming from Russia, first came the Tudor Vladimirescu Division, who were considered axe tails, and so it was. And when we found out someone had come... we asked if he knew him. I knew he was alive because he sent a letter through a comrade, Puric – someone from the family of Dan Puric, the actor, this Puric was from Padeș in Baia de Aramă... “a comrade who has the good fortune to see the country before me and I, if I never see you again, to know that I'm dying thinking of you”... I have the letter. It was written in the summer of '45, we were in the summer of '46. And my uncle had just come down to the North Station, he was going to buy instruments for the hospital. And he sees a big group, he realizes they're from Russia, because they were cut, they were shaved, their clothes... Then

he approaches a bank and says: *Do you happen... to know....* and says my father's name. And the others answered that he just got up from the bench. He went to him, but did not recognize him, fortunately he was recognized by my father, who had changed a lot, had lost a lot of weight, was another man. But he did not come then, because they kept him in quarantine for about two weeks, and when he came home, he ate very little to recover.

Everyone paid, some more, some less ...

**... “The poor man, he had turned yellow, what was his fault that those old clocks sang like that...*Deșteaptă-te, române! (Wake up, Romanians!)*”**

C.

5. Name and surname: Vergiliu S.

6. Age: 79 years old in 2014

7. Date of birth: October 26, 1935.

8. Retired.

I completed my studies along the way, went to a vocational school, went to the die-cutters school for four years, until 1953. And I finished high school along the way. I worked from 1953 to 1954 at “Electroputere” as a die-cutter. When it was that big snow, some people talk about it. I was working overtime, willingly, not because I had to, and I was going to high school at night. I had already passed the 9th grade when I arrived at a railway near the Barbu Drugă Biscuits Factory on the Calea București Street. There was a railway, which led to Jiu station, going to Calafat. I made it to Jiu Station, but from there I couldn't walk because it was a metter-and-a-half snow and I went back to work, sleeping on iron, tin tables. It was hard.

We had our neighbor Marinescu Petre as highly qualified specialist. I went to school under his guidance for about six months. I then decided, together with a colleague, to go to college in mining topography. We gave all the differences: topography, mineralogy, mining geometry and mining technical drawing, how to make an armature, we had good teachers, we finished two years, they gave us some certificates but we were not engineers even if we finished three years. I finished with “very good” grading as the grading was back then, I only had one good average, at Romanian Language. Then I came here to Craiova and they gave me distribution to the Agricultural Directorate and placed me in Craiova District. The first time they sent us to a land registry, to do what they do today with the cadastre. This country will do well if this cadastral part succeeds. It's a great thing in our century. The first cadastre was made by the Austrians on the lands they occupied. And another cadastre was made in Bărăgan and I don't know if in Dobrogea also. The first cadastre was made by the Austrians on some maps called *zincuri*, in 1812. I worked on them. And here it was not called cadastre, it was called *land records*. That is, taking the plots as they were well outlined, you began to nominate it on the plots and mention the owner, but well established, with the Agricultural Register,

because at that time quotas and taxes were paid. It was during the communist era, in 1955, when I came from Petroșani. What happened? To be honest, I didn't like the mine very much, because I practiced there. And we moved on to this land record. It was done before moving on to collectivization, it had already begun. The first collectivization had begun in 1949 in Dobrogea. Who doesn't know what collectivization is and what agriculture Dobrogea had done and what it is now... I also came here, to Craiova. And I did it for the first time at Studina, in a village called Studenița. Plotted like this, with the owners... How it was done... the owners and then, the way of use, which had to remain intangible, that's why it is sought not to put wheat all over the country because then you have no one to sell. In 1956, in November, until the counter-revolution in Budapest took place, quotas were given, they ended with quotas and only taxes were given and collectivization was carried out. And collectivization has begun. I went too, but not to too many, I went to Bratovoiești where... They took this plot... comrade, we'll make a collective here... and they identified it, and not being this land record, that is, this parcelation to know whose it is and how it is, they took it from one end. They had come to the laughter of the world, thus, changing the land from the commune to the commune, they had reached Roșiori, because you gave them the land, but where you gave it was woe, disaster.

I also went to Bratovoiești, to Puțuri, which belongs to Castranova. It was called Cacaletți, but then it was called Castranova, because it is towards Celaru in that part, above, you can see somewhere a pier, where there was a Roman camp, from there appeared Castra Nova, Cetatea Nouă (the New Fortress). Then we were assigned to make land records in the Bucharest region. In our place it was the Craiova region, in Bucharest, it was the Bucharest region, in Ploiești it was the Prahova region... I was assigned to the Bucharest region, I only had about 700 ha in Turbați commune, that's what it's called, it's on the bank of Snagov. And then they moved us to a commune, Fierbinți, and there we had a territory, I don't know how much it was, because I know that I didn't rush to take up a large area, so I could finish it by winter. And it was Fierbinți commune, it had three territories, I took Fierbinții de Jos. I lived in a house with a family, I finished my work. I came to Craiova because I had to go to the army, in 1956, in the fall. And this was my journey. I also worked in Rojiște, but on small areas, 50–100 ha, in Predești, in Pleșoi and I also worked in Podari, in the spring of 1956.

In 1957 I went to Bratovoiești, they sent me to a merger. And at that merger I had a colleague, an agronomist, Vasile... Vasilescu... it was said that he would have some problems, he was from Moldova, from Bucovina. And I was telling you that they would end up by sending them to Roșiori with the land. And a mad mayor drew his pistol to calm the people, or they would fight with the one who gave them the land. And there was a scandal. And then the first secretary, his name was Stroe, from Craiova district, he said: *Go and move your parents to the collective!* And I went to the countryside, to me, to Frățila, the commune where I was born, and it used to belong to Vâlcea. All the communes were from the Oltenia region. And I

went... I have the certificate at home, which says that my father went to the collective because there was no CAP in the area. Then they made it, but they'd better not do it anymore, because it was a disaster. And that guy didn't really think there was no CAP in the area, and having a problem with my family, it was starting to bother me to go from side to side, I said it was better to go back to the factory, it was hard, I had to sleep in the town hall, I couldn't find food, I ate at other people's home... They once sent me to a dispute between two neighbors in Pleșoi and we managed to reconcile them. And they invited us to dinner, it was the end of the year, but we had to work. And as we sat at the table, and a clock began to sing *Deșteaptă-te, române!* (Wake up, Romanians!). The poor people were frightened, the party activist was a teacher from Livezi, he was a good man and he said to him: *Well, man, shut him up because he sang enough to us,* 'cause then it was forbidden to sing «Trăiască regele» (Long live the king), «Deșteaptă-te, române!» (Wake up, Romanians!)... Ceaușescu let them go... And that was about it, poor man, he had turned yellow, what was his fault that those old clocks sang like that...

When I was born, my mother and father were homeless; I was born in October 1935, just as they were making a room in the house. My father was a farmer, although his parents wanted the best for him, he had worked as a shoemaker for 4 years in Craiova, but if he did not like his job... And then the "cobilitarii" (yoke men, men carrying the "cobilita") who came to Craiova were fashionable, they made money, it's true. They brought vegetables to the ladies on order... it was like that at that time... They brought in big baskets, and with the yoke ("cobilita"= wood carrying device worn on shoulders)... I have it at home in the country, my dad's "cobilita", I don't have baskets, but I still have the "cobilita". They sold yogurt in vans. And with that they made their home. Then in '39, after I was born... it was very good. I have some photos where you don't say they're peasants. The war started in '39, at the same time my sister, who is in Bucharest, was born. So the hard work began. My father was taken to the war and he came in '44, I think, from the war. In '40 or '41 there was a drought and no cereals were made, and my grandfather was a forester on an estate of the Pazu boyars, but their name was Giurăscu. I found Ion Pazu there, deputy of Dolj in 1896, but their family name was Giurăscu, and I remember, the castle was still there, but it was ruined. And I remember that his name, Ion Pazu, was written on the stables, where the hay barn was, but their real name was Giurăscu. He had only one daughter. In 1916 the girl married an officer, who died in the war. And she had no children. And she remarried a general, that's how I remember my father telling me, the general was from Severin, with whom she had a child, but on top of that, that's what happens when the dust is picked, her child died and then her husband died. So she was left alone. And summer was coming. In the winter she lived in the city, she lived with a girl, a governess she called Fraila ... in German meant *young lady*, and she had brought her to teach her German, French... which was fashionable then. And she stayed by her side. And when the estates were nationalized, in March or April 1949; on July 11, 1948 was the nationalization of the industry and in 1949

were also nationalized the estates of the boyars. Although the agrarian reform law of 1945 stated that those who have 50 ha should not have their land taken away, they also confiscated their fortunes, I know that they gave only about 2,500 square meters to those who they had been at war.

By the way, let's make an accolade, my father went to war in 1939 and came in the fall of '44. They had reached Czechoslovakia and then returned. That was their strategy for them, to win the war with Berlin and Germany. And they came back, and I remember, I was a kid, in second grade, my sister was little. He returned from war... he was walking, from Craiova, he had reached Motoci, that's the name, from Motoci there was a road, it was Gaia, Mijlociu and my father was coming to us. And some women on a hill there shouted that Grigore of Barbu was coming. When my father entered the yard, he was bearded, with a mustache and was 35 years old at the time, because he was born in 1909. I say what he said, I don't care, he was a gendarme, he was taken in a regiment... and made the army as a gendarme in term, i.e.obligatory, in Bessarabia. And he learned a lot from the Bessarabians. First of all, in terms of the household, they are very worthy people, but they like to drink. And they took him; there was a unit in Domnești, near Ploiești. And from there they took him and he returned there when the front broke. When someone said it was hard, he said, how hard? I came from Moldova, I crossed the Prut through the water, otherwise they bombed us, because the bridge had been bombed. And we crossed the Prut through the water, luckily we didn't drown. And we came from there on foot, to Ploiești, with the pistol in our backs, with cartridges in it so we could defend ourselves; we were coming in a mess. Then they grouped them again, in Ploiești, in the regiment and the Russians took them through Hungary, then to the Tatra Mountains.... He told me about the Tatra Mountains, he was an infantryman, they were walking. Then he returned to Ploiești and when he returned, they saw him older, he looked older, no longer having any military records, which had been destroyed, they asked him how old he was and he said 54 and so they sent him home. And he came home, and then a few more years passed before he managed to get his military record.

And what he was telling about when he was at war, he was telling, but people can't believe it. My grandfather spent his time on Ion Pazu's estate, because he was a forester. And this boyar had a conscience, and this was a good man, I did not hear from anyone, not even from my father who was a child, to slap anyone. He was good, because there was another bad boyar in the area. And it was a drought and we ran out of corn, because corn was the main food, polenta. And the barley was made. Well, in my yard, I threshed the barley with the oxen, the legs and the sticks, I beat and made barley bread, you guessed it ... it doesn't come out, the rye still works, but no barley bread comes out, no. It's bad, with thorns, it doesn't wind well, it's black as the earth, well, and yet we ate it and grew up big, strong, because I also have a strong sister, so we did well. How did we eat? What did we eat? My grandmother came from a commune, Damian, that's what she said, close to Murta, she was the daughter of a priest, that's what I heard, I didn't research, I was there,

visiting some cousins, that's how my father called them. Well, there were 14 children, and she left home to become a maid, a cook, my grandmother was a perfect cook, short and a little fat, strong woman, she also had six children, and she made us "grandma's butter". She made us soup from wolfberry, from sorrel ... and sour it with wax cherry ("corcodușe"), with sour grape ("agurida")... you see, that's what we lived with ... The pig was for Christmas, and then it was over. I would pick pears, make vinegar from those red horns, which my mother would put in bottles or jugs to sour and very good vinegar would come out. And we ate horns in the winter or all the pears or forest apples –because there wasn't even an area where the fruit trees would do well – we took fruits and put them in the wheat and ate them in the winter without any problems.

The holidays were beautiful in the village. Let's take them in succession. "Lăsata Secului" was special when we were fasting from the food before Easter. Some went up one hill, some went up another hill. And some were with the bugles; my grandfather was a gornist in World War I. And the boys with the bugle were shouting at the girls, some on one side, others on the other, 'cause the children were many, my ancestors were Paul, Radu, Marincea, Maria... and these five brothers had 42 children. So they made childrens, no joke, as God gave them. When I was younger, I used to walk with them in the hills. At the end of "Lăsata Secului", the grandchildren would come, go to their godfather, to the old man, with the "plocon", and there would be parties. And then there were "Păresimile". We were not eating sweet. My grandma was old, they were poor, but they didn't eat sweet. And I remember, I don't know what it was, but there were the jars of honey, and it used to be the "uleiurile" – that's how they called the hives, and when they took the honey, the bee family would be destroyed, and they couldn't afford to ruin the hives. And it was beautiful then, that my grandma made bread on the hob, "azima", and put honey on it, and I ate until my belly cracked...

And then came Easter. Easter was beautiful! We had Easter for three days. We have two churches in this commune, former Frățila commune ... when it was Easter, the priest came, because there was only one priest, he came here at night and in the morning to the other church. And I was eating Easter bread, eggs were clashing, and eggs were being laid over the graves, and that seemed great to me, if someone gave me an egg it was a big deal ... I had eggs, but those ones were different. And this was Easter Day, and the next day, Monday, we had a feast at the church, and we had alms there, so the world went with baskets, jugs of wine, damigens, bottles of brandy, and they were having a party ... the priest was sanctifying all that alms and the people were having a party there with their relatives because they each had separate tables, some were sitting on the grass, if they had larger families. And it was 10–12 o'clock, and then it was "hora". When people were let go on the islaz, they made "hora". Tuesday alm was made at the other church, we went to the "hora", because the people belonging to the other church came to us too. Another celebration was "Înălțarea" (Ascension). People would go with food ... "găteală"... that's what they said back then, prepared food,



they'd go and lay out some meals and make alms. I'd go with my grandmother, we'd meet other cousins, and then the “hora” was made, the “hora” of Ascension.

Another celebration was on the occasion of Saints Constantine and Elena, the holidays were respected. People went to church, the ones which had these names celebrated... And they were giving charity. Then came Sts. Peter and Paul, on June 29<sup>th</sup> it seems to me that it is, and those who had these names, gave drink, went to church. And the next one was St. Ilie, who waseagerly awaited. First of all, we were going to the fair, to Oteteliș. It was a big family of Otetelișeanu boyars, it is written about them in *Bijuterii de familie* (Family Jewelry) by Petre Dumitriu or something, the title may be another, but the author is this. That's why he stayed in conflict with the Vârvoreanu and the Otetelișeanu family. He wrote about them in Ceaușescu's time. He also wrote the novel *Drum fără pulbere* (Road without Dust), the canal, where was a massacre, and the canal was not invented by Gheorghiu Dej. Dej did bad things, not like Ceaușescu, he put intellectuals in prison. Even if the Russians told him, he shouldn't have. People of great value died in prison. And it seems to me that the Danube-Black Sea Canal was designed by the Germans, by the royal family, because the Danube connected Europe to the Black Sea and connected Western and South-Eastern Europe. And Dej started doing it; he did it with the detainees. All they had was a dig and a shovel; you couldn't work just like that. Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't an extermination point.

In 1948 I was 13 years old, in Craiova, when, on June 11, the means of production, factories and enterprises were nationalized, but there were still small craft workshops – shoemaking, tailoring, taverns, private individuals who repaired bicycles, watches, etc. Well, I was there when the nationalization was done, because I was an apprentice of Brătășanu, and the state took everything from them. We remained disciples of Brătășanu, but also on our own, then in 1949 we went to the Vocational School, because vocational schools were set up, they were called *work reserves*.