

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND ARISTOCRATIC FAMILIES IN THE XIXth AND BEGINNING OF XXth CENTURIES IN CRAIOVA AND BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

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Abstract: The present study aims to analyse the way in which the registered social biographies of some personalities of Craiova influence the way of establishing the collective memory and implicitly, the valuation of the local patrimony, in our case the historical monument houses of the city. Specific theories and methodology of urban ethnography can provide useful oral accounts on local heritage, including insight on social changes marking the middle of the last century.

The issue of the “open” ethnological document, of the collections of social biographies that can be consulted and later explored for various ethnographic and sociological reasons represents another direction studied in this article. Life stories, sometimes called “petty stories”, fascinate not only from an aesthetic or slightly nostalgic perspective, as is sometimes the case with memoirs, but with the variety of the approaches they make possible in the field of social sciences. Being the “lived history”, the descent to the individual-speaker who becomes the main actor in a broader socio-cultural and historical context, the characteristics of the living phenomenon should be highlighted when recording, registering some of its marks.

Archiving inevitably involves a standardization of the lived fact, so the researcher is required to pay special attention to the recording and preservation of life stories, taking into account the dynamics of the “open” ethnological document.

Keywords: urban ethnology, social biography, local heritage, ethnological document.

Between Craiova city and Bucharest – the capital of Romania – there are many resemblances regarding their XIXth Century’s architecture. Bucharest was called at the time “Little Paris” because of its “à la française” architecture. Craiova is the second town, after Bucharest in the south of Romania and its architecture keeps its characteristics on the main old streets of the city. The present study tries to highlight, in a comparative manner, the main characteristics of old parts of the cities as they are valued today by local people, administration and cultural tourists.

Craiova was called “the town of the 1000 millionaires” because of its high society members – aristocrats that were the owners of houses, commercial buildings, and land in the city and in the rural parts of Oltenia (Lesser Wallachia). Many Italian

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and French architects were employed by these aristocrats to build their houses in Craiova. This is how it is explained the French architecture influences on the XIXth Century's architecture of the city. The earthquake from 1977 changed the configuration on the main street in Craiova – Unirii Street; many of the aristocrats' houses got ruined. But there still are some of them that remained intact: The Art Museum, Minerva Restaurant, and many others. The ruins are still alive in the memory of the '40-'50 generations, they remember and talk about the image of the old town as they kept it in their memories. The commercial center of Craiova got renovated and recuperates in part its own old charm from the XIXth Century's atmosphere – reconstructed architecture, statues and pictures on the walls of the buildings representing chariots and old fashion clothes.

In both cities, Craiova and Bucharest there are guided tours organized by local people, where the history of towns is presented. The history of old architecture and the lives of Romanian aristocrats become alive during a stroll in the city. The history of old pubs and their picturesque names is also part of the city stories –The Gentle Lamb, The Golden Boot, etc.

In Craiova, there is the old commercial center – Street Panait Mosoiu, where you can find the Dianu Houses. Next to them is “Răscruciul mic” – old commercial houses, named “The working class of Romania” during the communist period of time, today is called Lipscani s it was in the past (at the beginning of the XXth Century) and it is now.

THE METHODOLOGY – THE SOCIAL BIOGRAPHIES OR LIFE HISTORIES

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.

SOCIAL BIOGRAPHY – AN “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. These observations must also be attached to the implicit requirement of any contemporary social study, namely to establish their own collection of documents necessary to explore the research theme addressed: "the researcher must be an experienced fieldworker, whose starting point in building up a study would be his own collection"¹. 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"².

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"³. The researcher is in a position to explore life experiences, to "provoke" even attitudes towards certain events "forgotten" sometimes by the interviewed. Between the two – researcher and interviewer, a spontaneous relationship must be established. 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 research process, 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 mentioned⁴, nor the purpose of the research, such abstract distinctions placing themselves in the sphere of some didactic aspects, because the social document is also interrogation, and construction, and creation.

SOCIAL BIOGRAPHIES/ LIFE HISTORIES

The first field informant is the well-known in the Romanian artistic field, the graphic designer **Gabriel Bratu**, aged 83 in 2020, born on November 4, 1937, who tells us: "The houses in Craiova were built according to French and Italian models.

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

² *Ibidem*.

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

⁴ Fruntelată, Ioana R. *Narațiunile personale în etnologia războiului*, București, 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".

The boyars traveled a lot or their sons, especially in France and Italy. Their merit is that they brought here architects and French, and Italians and they also brought entrepreneurs.

Famous Della Barba, Peressutti. After Bucharest, I was the second city in the country in terms of architecture, everyone was impressed and today, too, people are impressed by what they see here.

At thirty-something thousand inhabitants, there were 300 or so pubs, pubs, but they had their charm. A few tables on the sidewalk... There was a pub on the Holy Apostles Street, where you could not find water or soda, only brandy and had a few large jars on the counter, after serving brandy you could eat a pickle from home – cabbage, cucumbers... you took a brandy, and you served another pickle... at five it closed, it opened in the evening at 7, at 8.

They were different innkeepers, but like the same customers. There was that one, Ilie Dobrișan had only wormwood. On Siloz, on the current Traian Demetrescu, when Băloi entered on the right, there was Ilie Coșoveanu after him, opposite was Gambeta, Iordache and Băluț and on Lahovari, on Working Romania was Veleanu, it was Căzănescu, Bobocică, I speak of a street, of a piece, but they had their customers and the service was as it was, not as now.

They had tasty names: La Mielul Blând was towards Brestei, it was Bobocică, and Gambeta was in Traian Demetrescu's house, he was the husband of Traian Demetrescu's sister (Traian Demetrescu was a Romanian poet, born in Craiova). There was another pub in La Cocor, on Unirii Street, as you go down to Grădina Patria Restaurant...

There were restaurants with their specifics, with their singers. Our great singers, starting with Ioana Radu, Mia Braia, Doina Drăghici later, started here, at Minerva, at Păstaie, at Cina – another restaurant. There were orchestras, like the one of the Doana brothers, who played for years at Minerva, I don't know what happened to them... It was a tradition... I don't know if you know, but after the earthquake it had to be demolished from Unirii, including Minerva, and it was said "No, it is the symbol of Craiova!" and if you notice even now, Minerva stands out, not in line with the other buildings.

And the Minerva winery, I remember, I was one evening with Ștefănescu Goangă, the singer, and I don't know who was singing anymore, because the restaurants were crowded and someone was singing, and Ștefănescu Goangă gets up and says You're wrong! It's not like that! and he starts and sings, I don't say what night he offer to the audience.

There are some special things ... For example, I was with Virgil Carianopol the poet, in the park one night, and he recited for a whole night, that is, he was excited about this park of ours, which seems to me to be the second or third in Europe and the largest in the country ... Ioana Radu the singer said: "God, when he made Heaven, he had a piece left and put it here, on the edge of Craiova!..."

It was another life of Craiova once. Every time I went to Bucharest and met various people who had lived here, they asked What else is in our Craiova? What's up with Minerva? Now it's not like that, it's lost...

Every evening there were walks on Calea Unirii, from the Palace to the corner at Select, at Minerva, you did half an hour, on one side they came here, on the other they went there, and you found out everything you wanted, each appeared with a new dress, with a new suit, were these walks every night”.

Paul Rezeanu, another field informant, born on November 9, 1937 in Breaza, researcher, former director of the Art Museum of Craiova, author of the well-known work “Craiova – The city of a thousand millionaires (History of Craiova between 1800–2000)”. He highlighted: “at the beginning of the 19th century, the most important boyar houses were located in the area between the Obedeanu slum and the churches of Saint Dumitru and the Holy Trinity.

Thus, here was the Bengescu House, built in the second half of the 18th century. It was covered with shingles and was demolished after the First World War. It was located on the site where the “Regina Elisabeta” Girls’ High School was built later, today the Faculty of Agronomy.

It housed the first cinema in the city and the first girls’ school of the “Romanian Orthodox Women’s League”. Another house of the Brăiloiu boyars – which had an inn – was somewhat on the place where today are the student dormitories on Libertății Street no. 27–29”.

From his stories I recorded a few pages, in a fascinating interview, where he concluded: “Craiova of the thousand millionaires ... I didn’t say that, Nicoale Iorga the historian said, if he said it, I can’t fight him”.

A very important personality that accepted to tell us stories about old Craiova was Mr. **Barbu Bohoreanu**. We interviewed him in the year 2015:

– **Do you remember the names of some old families from Craiova?**

–The MURGĂȘANU family – a very old family, uncle Sandi Murgășeanu – as I called him, he had lived in Paris for about 14 years, he had studied without a degree, he listened to many courses at the Sorbonne, he was friends with Titulescu and he told me many things. But in the end he lost his fortune, as did all the great landowners. But Uncle Murgășanu would take us to school, by hand, to Javei and he would talk to us in French because at Javei we also took French language courses. Also, uncle Murgășanu had a niece; she was the brother-in-law of Gigurtu – the former prime minister, the engineer Gigurtu, also from Oltenia, from here. There was also the Tănăsescu family, the tănăsescu architect, he died late, at 100 or so years old, he was the Director of Historical Monuments and thanks to which I saw most of the historical monuments from Oltenia to Bucharest, in Muntenia, Curtea de Argeș, Târgoviște and others. The CONESCU family, was also the general secretary of Craiova City Hall, was a neighbor. The IOVIPALE family, there was a prefect in the family... I need time to talk at length...

– **Do you remember some neighborhoods in Craiova, the names of some merchants, some old magazines?**

– “La Elefant”, for example, was on Calea Unirii, a big store called “La Elefant” and an elephant was also drawn, but I don’t know why, there were homemade products, in fact. There were many shops, such as Julius Meinel – a shop with goodies. On Unirii Street there was a large jewelry store, owned by a Jew, which lasted even after 1944. It was demolished. What else did I have on Unirii? Bookstores – ZAYFT Bookstore. In fact, there were three bookstores on Unirii, maybe they were the only ones, I don’t know others, but they were all grouped on Unirii. There was the important, commercial street of the city. There was also the Minerva Restaurant ... The Minerva Restaurant was a building from 1902, it seems to me, it was put into use with a restaurant, a wine cellar, even King Carol I seems to have passed by. There are many personalities who passed by, were received in this restaurant. Here Ioana Radu sang, Mia Braia, also as well as famous orchestras: Predescu’s orchestra, there were two Predești, later they sang in Bucharest, at Athénée Palace; Ileana Sărăroiu – she sang for the first time ... let me tell you ... She was discovered in a tour by Amza Pellea and my brother, Mircea Bohoreanu – actor at the Craiova National Theater – in a tour in Târgoviște. Someone invited them in the morning, before the show, outside the city, before the show, in a village a few kilometers away. And then the householder, after setting the table, they also drank a glass of wine, introduced his daughter, “I have a girl who sings beautifully”. They always sang, Mircea sang very beautifully, he thought Okay, let’s hear it! she came, and sang very beautifully. They were impressed that she had a beautiful voice and they said to her: Ileana, you ... and they also advised her father to let her take singing lessons and when you want to sing, come to us in Craiova and so on. it happened. She was 16 when she came here. She sang on stage in the Minerva garden. The last time I saw her I was at the brasserie with Amza Pellea at the Athénée Palace. He sees her and shouts: – Ileana! He came and said: Look, this is Barbu, Mircea’s brother. I remember the warm hug, my brother had died and cared for her a lot ... that’s what happened ...

– **Do you remember what nationalization was like in Craiova?**

– The nationalization of houses was sad. Fortunately, my mother was foretold, my father had died when he was 59 years old and my mother was warned by a family friend, it was the President of the Court of Appeal who told her verbatim: “– Eugenio, sell everything, otherwise it nationalizes you!”. Then the mother donated, she and we, the children, gave up one of the houses, sold one, and donated the other to our sister who was 10 years old. Yes. My mother also sold the vineyard and after a year, the one who

had taken it, you know, the poor man, nationalized it, his name was Șerbănescu. Otherwise, my father had money at Banca Eschinazi and at that time he had annuity securities, shares and he also had shares in our name, we didn't take any money, they went...

– **Do you remember some minority ethnic communities in Craiova?**

– In our country, in Oltenia, there were not many minority communities ... there were a few Jewish families, but few compared to ... I tell you in 1941, I was in Bacău, before entering the war and a month of days when I stayed there with my aunt and my uncle there was no Romanian store, one exception, only one: LA IONESCU Cake Shop, otherwise, nothing, even the bartenders were Jews. In our country, in Craiova, there were several families of intellectuals, that was also the ZAFT and SABETAY Bookstore, the brother and the doctor, Sabetay, they remained.

– **What about the Armenian community?**

– Oh, there were a few, 3–4, there were more Jews, they had 2 synagogues, one was demolished, one collapsed during the earthquake and one remained. The Armenians were several coffee merchants: CARACASIAN, AGOP AND ARABAGIAN, which Senator Vosgian also mentions.

– **What was the most important historical event you attended?**

– Well, I saw King Carol II with Iorga, at the train station in Craiova, a great event; As a child, I saw Tito and Iovanca. I once saw him in Bucharest when he came after the terrible quarrel and reconciliation, I saw him, when one night the whole square in front of the Military Academy was transformed. and one night a 4-meter boulevard and trees appeared there, as if they had been there for 40–50 years, in one night. And up there on the Academy, I was watching Tito's reception. Other personalities: Amza Pellea, other actors ...

– **How was World War II?**

– Well, we had a vineyard – 5 ha of vineyards and of course, we also had a household there and we didn't have the shortage that the others were facing – because we raised chickens, birds, fruits you want, from the beginning of spring until late autumn, I also had almonds. The almonds were thick, the trees were fine, we had bags of almonds, and we didn't even look at them. My mother used to give it to all the neighbors, I had bags, my mother was very gentle, so generous and I came from the vineyard with a gig, with bags of almonds, with nuts, fruits. At that time, everyone had fruit, they had yards, they had trees, and if you wanted to give, you didn't even have anyone, because they all had. My mother shared grapes, the ladies made almond cake. There was no bread, we ate corn, and there were also

commercials: *At a good meal, eat good bread, eat 200 g of corn.* It was the advertisement!!! And we went and took the ration, because we had the cards, which reappeared later, in 1946. But until 1946 it was like that, there was no coffee, the ladies played poker, rumi and they didn't have coffee. Coffee was made from anything; there were all kinds of grounds of coffee (zaț in Romanian). The sugar was missing, my father was fooled by someone, he bought a few boxes of sugar and they were bricks. It happens. // Chocolate was missing, there were products. The Romanians had meat, there were no butchers, but meat existed. And there the bombings, more the alarms, that in Craiova, we only had two. The war in Oltenia was not very serious, we were playing in the vineyard and they were firing machine guns, the enemy aviators were watching a Romanian plane and we were playing in the field, we liked it when we saw them fighting, we didn't think that a bullet from them ... And at night I watched them... Next to our vineyard was a very large German telecommunications station, I think there were 100 Germans. He was a German teacher in Ulm, I thought of looking for him, he also had children; he gave us chocolate and sugar. Although it was near our vineyard, they never entered without knocking on the gate, for someone to come from a distance. The house was at the top of the hill. My mother said to them: You can come in and get some water! We were the only ones who had a fountain and they had to wash themselves, they needed water, they asked, there had to be someone with them, they didn't come in alone. Well, second, they didn't take a grape. My mother gave them grapes, they didn't take them. When the retreat was over, I cried because I was attached to them. They also had children. They were able to retire, they said goodbye, and they were civilized! They also committed atrocities, I know that, but of course, maybe they didn't think so. And they had authoritarian colleagues, they did not get drunk, they never used violence, they were not aggressive. When they entered a room, they discovered themselves, stood up respectfully, no one was afraid. Inverse ... I was chased by a Russian to get my watch, even though the Russian who was staying at our house brought dog food and chocolate for Smărăndița, my sister. They had big pockets and he hid it. At first he gave Smarandita a chocolate, then he said they didn't have any more, and she didn't believe it and looked for it in his pockets, she finally found it. Yes, and he brought dog food and didn't drink. There was a pub called La Măslină, on Păltiniș. The Russian was called ȘVEȚOV, lieutenant major ȘVEȚOV. After dinner he put on his robe, put on his belt, a crutch in his pistol, Paidom! and where were we going? At the pub *La Măslină* and I asked for two glasses of soda and we drank soda. Many Russians were killed. This man would not have drunk anything. Long time ago ... who else was out on the street in that times...

- **What do you remember from school, what good friends gathered around you?**
- Let's start with kindergarten: Her name was Maternelle Fröberian, it was close to Valea Vlăiciei, about where the Italian-Romanian Bank is today, which followed the principles of the Swiss pedagogue Fröbel, and I received three tickets every day, with what I did there. Apart from the fact that I was also learning French, they also tried to see what qualities I had and did all kinds of experiments that materialized on the three tickets that had 3 different colors and that my mother or father read every time I brought them home. I kept them for a while, I was sorry I didn't keep them today, but how much happened in that library... From there I remained a colleague of PUȘCAȘU – the former rector, he stayed and died in Canada. After that, at Frații Buzești College, I had PUȘCAȘU as a colleague again. What other colleagues did I have? They all left the country ... PUȚULEANU, for example ... they all left for Bucharest. He tried to recover the Puțoreanu Houses, he has a sister and a nephew, and his wife, and the son are in Belgium. I remained friends with my colleagues, I gathered them every 10 years, and I also received a key because I gathered them in Craiova. I would gather them today, if I could...

BUCHAREST, THE HOUSE OF THE ACTOR CONSTANTIN TANASE

Very close to Cismigiu Park there is a beautiful house. The house where the actor Constantin Tănase lived in Bucharest during 1922–1945 was located on Puțul cu Plopi Street and has a footprint of 90 square meters and was built on a plot of 300 square meters, before 1900.

CASA MECCA HOUSE

The one-storey building is located on Henri Coanda Street, no. 11, immediately next to the Italian Embassy. It is built in an eclectic style, with a wide variety of shapes and ornaments, being loaded with elements in the art nouveau style (especially iron ornaments). Casa Macca is a building more than 120 years old, included in the list of Romanian heritage buildings. The Museum of Natural History and Antiquities had been established in November 1834, being recognized by an official document signed by Prince Alexandru Ghica.

BUCHAREST – THE HOUSE FILIPESCU-CESIAN

The House Filipescu-Cesianu was rehabilitated through the project Consolidation, restoration and conservation CASA CESIANU, through the Regional Operational Program 2007–2013, Priority Axis 5 – Sustainable development and promotion of tourism, Major Area of Intervention 5.1 – Restoration and sustainable capitalization of cultural heritage, such as and the creation / modernization of related infrastructures.

Near Victoriei Square, at the intersection between Calea Victoriei and Sevastopol Street, is the residence of the lawyer Constantin Cesianu. Filipescu-Cesianu House (1892) represents the arrangement of an older residence, from the years 1846–1850 and is one of the few aristocratic residences of Bucharest from the Belle Epoque, which remained faithful to the initial project. Several families from the Romanian aristocracy, such as Iancu Filipescu and Maria Ghica Filipescu, lived in this residence. Constantin Cesianu extended this aristocratic residence with the support of the architect Leonida Negrescu (1892). On this occasion, the exterior decorations, the imperial roof are made and the residence park is arranged.

CONCLUSIONS

These stories about the past of Craiova ennoble the collective memory, beautify a significant past and pass on feelings, information, vivid memories.

We observe how “life stories, because they allow the tracking of individual paths by geographical areas and social categories, are a widely used research tool. This current of study, its objects and methods will permanently mark urban studies.

Today’s Craiova is trying to recover this remarkable past, by renovating some historical spaces, such as the old commercial streets, the city center, reviving old streets names, such as Răscruciul Mic, Lipscanilor street or Panait Moșoiu street.

The center revives the past image of Craiova through several urban statues created by contemporary artists: a flasher, a child with newspapers, elegant ladies from La Belle Epoque, etc. or urban painting on the surfaces of old houses trying to recover the same atmosphere of yesteryear. We emphasize, therefore, once again the importance of social biographies in recovering an extraordinary past of Craiova, of stories that enliven the local cultural heritage.



Fig. 1. The old commercial ford of Craiova at the beginning of the 20th century.



Fig. 2. The old commercial ford of Craiova in 2020.



Fig. 3. Street Panait Moşoiu with Dianu Houses, year 2020.



Fig. 4. Urban Statue, a lady from La Belle Epoque, beginning of the XIXth Century



Fig. 5. Urban Statue of an organ-grinder of the XIXth century, year 2020.



Fig. 6. Statue representing a child selling the newspapers, old commercial center of Craiova, year 2020.



Fig. 7. Urban statue imitating the fashion of the early nineteenth century.



Fig. 8. Contemporary pubs – terraces in the old center of Craiova, year 2020.



Fig. 9. Old houses, various shops on Lipscani street.



Fig. 10. Graffiti on the back of an old house on Lipscani Street, year 2020.