

**BILDUNGSROMAN FOR THE NATION  
TRANSYLVANIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE UNIFICATION WITH  
ROMANIA**

by

Emilian Ghelase

Submitted to Central European University  
History Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Balazs Trencsenyi

Second reader: Professor Constantin Iordachi

Budapest, Hungary

2013

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I am analyzing the self-thematization of Transylvanian political figures in the context offered by the unification with Romania. My research follows the autobiographies of three Transylvanians – Sever Bocu, Onisifor Ghibu and Ion Flueraș – whose accounts are written in different contexts and from different standpoints. The first one is a newspaper owner from Banat who travels to Dobruja in the 1910s and afterwards to Russia to mobilize the Transylvanian volunteers against Austria-Hungary according to T. G. Masaryk's model; the second one is a prominent nationalist fighter and educator who goes from Transylvania to Bessarabia where he mobilizes the Moldovans to establish their own National Party after the Transylvanian model; the third one is a Social-Democrat leader coming from the working class who is one of the proponents of the creation of the Central Romanian National Council. Beyond their differences in terms of social status and political views, what they all share is a common drive to present themselves as the agents behind political unification through their autobiographical narratives. Written in the inter-war period the autobiographies analyzed here are seen as a vehicle for transferring the political language of the pre-war national activism to the politics of Greater Romania. The analytical framework of regionalism and autonomy is employed as a means to explain the public position of the three autobiographers in relation to the State.

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a thesis about autobiography. More specifically it is about the autobiography written in interwar Romania. To further narrow down my topic, this thesis plans to explore how Transylvanian public figures used the practice of autobiographical writing as a means of self-representation and exploration of the relation between past and present, state, nation and individual subject, and nonetheless that between the projection of the nationalist political thought of the past into the present, present that in the post-1918 Romanian context appears to be the coming to fruition of the “national idea”.

While the national idea of a Greater Romania is a consensus among all the agents involved in the process of state making, it is exactly the nature of the state that becomes problematic. The question of how this state should look like first and foremost on a political level is creating breaches into the monolithic narrative about the idea of all Romanians living together into one state. While on paper this would pass as a dream come true as often referred to at the time, a dream made possible by the joint effort of the Romanian blood and latent energies unleashed by the Great War, in fact the radicalization of politics specific to the decades before the war and the unification would backfire into a continuous questioning of state's centralizing and homogenizing authority and ultimately challenging the names of those who engineered the unification, or the *unifiers* to use the title of one of Nicolae Iorga's volumes in his massive History of Romanians.<sup>1</sup> The act of bringing all Romanians into one single state is therefore giving birth to regionalist tendencies, and challenges to the sources – historical processes and individual agents – of the unification. The blooming integral

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Romanilor. Unificatorii*, vol IX, (Bucuresti, 1938) The act of the Union is framed as a long duree project of modernity. It starts, and further down I will raise the point of Iorga's Transylvanian readership, as a project of the Old Kingdom in the beginning of the nineteenth century, under the Russian Organic Regulations.

nationalism would therefore be challenged first of all by its own by its own projection into reality.

Autobiography emerged as a privileged genre in nationalist culture at the same time as it became a favored form of self-definition in bourgeois culture. Whereas the autobiographies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are kindled around the process of modernization, telling the story of either the becoming of self-made-men, or a place for nostalgia of the aristocratic elites, the experience of the world conflagration marks a deep turning point. The readers were offered access to a common, directly experienced event. Creating the self is indissolubly tied to the creation of the nation. The study will focus on Transylvania, the largest province of Romania and also the province with strongest nationalist movement. Three significant case studies it will analyze the way in which the authors define the relation between the self and the “imagined community,” and their work for the unification of Romania.

The study will analyze the fascinating subject of autobiographical production in the context of Romanian unification. In the aftermath of the first world war, the Romanian literary market faces an overabundance of non-fiction narratives whose main subject is memory. Triggered by the process of nation-building assigning the state the role of a centralizing force in its attempt to integrate and homogenize the diverse cultural, social and political identities of the newly acquired provinces, the role of memory publicly exposed through writing becomes crucial in negotiating the relation between individual, state and past. In this context, identity becomes a moving target and a focal point for both professional and unprofessional writers.

In my view, these texts will account for intellectual auto-thematization and for the transfer as well as legitimating of the political thought of the Romanian nationalist movement in Transylvania into the turbulent context provided by the Greater Romania. More specifically the autobiographies are a rich source, and in some cases the only one available,

that offer access to an ultimately subjective negotiation between individual and state. And it is exactly this subjectivity that deserves special attention.

Recent literature has made prolific advancements into this issue, and I can mention here the work of Holly Case<sup>2</sup> for the Transylvanian context, while on a more general note, but still very instructive for my endeavor the microhistory and *Alltagsgeschichte* applied by Western scholars to Soviet Russia and especially to the October Revolution. It is worth noticing that Transylvanians were active observers and at points dedicated admirers of the anti-imperialist Revolution, although, strikingly enough their integral, radical nationalism appears to have nothing in common with the ideals of the Revolution. It will be another thread that this thesis will have to look for: the meaning of Revolution and its integration into the right-wing nationalism of the interwar. As far as I know, little literature is devoted to this topic, including the presence of the Transylvanian prisoners of war turned into Romanian volunteer soldiers after the Czech model of Druzina. Here, the work of Jochen Hellbeck and especially his critical approach regarding the by now classics of Soviet studies like Sheila Fitzpatrick will be further explored in the theoretical chapter.

Following these considerations, what comes to the fore is not particularly the *individual subject* or the *construction of the self* revealed through self-narratives, but exactly the middle-ground between history, politics and literature on the one hand, and individual and state on the other. At the same time, this immersion into the autobiographical production of the day will bring together both the official and personal narratives of the unification, state and subjects and the negotiations, common and divergent points between them. Unlike the everyday life history, this is a story of mid-level clerks-cum-politicians trying to “make it big” into the framework of the new state they themselves are trying to persuade their readership was created through their own forces. Individual and collective subject collide

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<sup>2</sup> Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II*, (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2009)

indistinguishable into what is designed to be an alternative, yet “truer” history of how this new state came into being and who is to take credit for that.

Following the Introduction, the Theoretical Chapter will examine the state of autobiographical studies and propose a way in which autobiography would be used as a historical source. I will survey the main definitions of autobiography and the main leads into the study of it with the purpose of narrowing down a series of working parameters for my thesis. Before bridging the gap between history and literature, I will therefore start approaching my subject from the perspective of literary theory and its “discovery” of autobiography in the 1970s. While literary studies discover this genre, history passes through a similar transformation. Historians discover their own narrative side. The names of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur would immediately pop out in everyone's mind, sometimes to the worrisome disapproval of more conservative historians that would label all this as post-modernist mambo-jumbo. More or less at the same time, both history and literature students stumble upon a terra incognita. I would argue that it is more a matter of an unwanted rediscovery of the pre-nineteenth century *mettier d'historien*.

Intuitively, autobiography can be placed at the juncture between these two. Neither literature proper, nor history for the very same reasons, either attempting to provide a factual/non-fictional account of one's life and being rendered below the genre's qualities of a novel or tragedy (See the Phillipe Lejeune – Paul de Man debate on the generic status of autobiography), or being too subjective for a proper historical account, autobiography appears to be a bastard of both parents. Yet sometimes production oversees planning, and that would be the case exemplified by Pierre Nora's *Essays d'ego-histoire*, and nicely framed by his other famous concept *lieux de memoire*. Historians have always been prime autobiographers, either that it is the case of Tacitus, Gibbon or Tony Judt. The work of



historian Jeremy D. Popkin<sup>3</sup> is exemplary in this way and has become a major contribution for bridging the gap between history and autobiography, starting from the actual production of autobiographies by historians themselves. One last aspect that both history and autobiography share is that of forgetting, and here I follow Benedict Anderson. In telling their stories, both nations and autobiographers forget. Understanding these narratives means paying attention to what falls through the cracks, what is left behind.

The second chapter brings forward another major point. Although the literary studies of the time show little interest into this genre, the production, publication and reception shows otherwise. Starting with an overview of the otherwise compelling bibliographic collections of Romanian literature, I will show that due to the hybrid nature of the genre and to the unstable criteria for judging autobiographies most of these texts are simply overlooked. Armed with the contemporary toolkit for reading these self-narratives the researcher can only be amazed by the size of the corpus of texts. The fascination exercised by this genre has captured I dare say all the strata of the society. Following Pascale Casanova's metaphor of the “world republic of letters” the interwar striving for meaning and for its own sense of presence would create something that can be called a kingdom of memory. The vast array of autobiographies form a protean mass, where the authors come from upper social classes (either aristocrats, or political key figures), or from peasantry<sup>4</sup>, clerks (mayors, high ranking military), politicians either to the right, (former members of the National Party in Transylvania some of them after the war migrating towards Averescu's People's Party or after 1926 continuing with the National Peasant Party, or slowly leaning towards Goga-Cuza), or

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Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, & Autobiography*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2005)

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A quite interesting project is that published in the early 1990s under the coordination of the Banat Archdiocese that republishes a series of testimonies (peasants, soldiers, mayors, police officers) taken immediately after the Alba Iulia celebration of the unification. The book is part of a whole series of prints that appeared after 1989 on the theme of “Our contribution to the Union” where “our” represents the region or town (e. g. Banat's contribution to the Unification, or Targu Mures' contribution to the... and so on) note that these “contribution” projects are in their vast majority coming from Transylvania.

from the leftist Transylvanian Social Democrats; simple soldiers or academic figures.<sup>5</sup>

The next three chapters will deal with three case studies. After presenting the general overview of autobiographical production after 1918, I will show how Transylvanian actors fit into this picture. These three cases are organized typologically, while trying to cover the spatial dimension of their journey. Closer to the *Bildungsroman* tradition, these three cases show the peregrination of three Romanians from Transylvania on the front and their political views on the nation and the state. They all show one common feature that will be a recurrent theme in the interwar: a genuine dissatisfaction with state institution, anti-parliamentarism and a somehow critical stance against democracy.

Sever Bocu (Chapter 3) represents the typological example of fin de siècle Transylvanian. Coming from Banat, he goes to Brasov to pursue a lucrative position in a Romanian bank, but under the thrill of the Memorandum affair he turns towards a career in journalism. His journey takes him forward to Arad, the new center of Romanian nationalism working for the *Tribuna* newspaper, from which he fled to Dobrogea and back to Banat via Russia and the Paris Conference where he tries to plead for his “fatherland” (Banat) where he radicalizes his regionalist and anti-centralizing position.

Chapter 4 deals with the autobiographies of Onisifor Ghibu. Although one of the heroes of Irina Livezeanu's *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, I think that his life-story has more to tell about nation-building. I will focus particularly on his activity in Bessarabia and on his side of the story, that being that he single handedly brought this province to Romania by transferring the Transylvanian nationalist know-how to a disorganized and inert mass of Romanians. This chapter will put a special emphasis on the moment of writing. Ghibu wrote one single autobiography that was published during his lifetime. The rest of his ambitious autobiographical project, which he started writing in 1960 was published only after

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<sup>5</sup> By far the most striking case is that of Vasile Mateescu's autobiography, discussed in chapter 2.

his death. I will look at his autobiographies and contrast them with the memoranda he wrote after 1945 in an attempt to rehabilitate himself. These memoranda also show how the author was representing himself also in an attempt to nationalize communism.

Chapter 5 looks into Social-Democrat Ion Flueraș' attempt to integrate into the Bucharest politics. Flueraș, one of the leaders of Transylvanian Social-Democrats offers a good example for the journey of a nationalist revolutionary in Greater Romania after the unification. While he continues his work with the labor union, and constantly argues in favor of Social-Democracy, his revolt against capitalism and Romanian politicianism ultimately led him to support King Carol II's Front of National Regeneration. These three life-stories show the trajectories of – in the end – three misfits. Their views on the state are rejected, and the answer is either a desire for regionalism or silence.

## II. Theoretical Considerations: Making selves & making countries

The *Introduction* announced the subject of this study to be, quite unproblematically, “autobiography.” To narrow down the subject, I have introduced a series of determinants that were intended to clarify what I am going to write about. While still being a study on autobiography, it is molded on the practice of this literary genre by Transylvanian autobiographers recounting the experience of their integration into the project of what was Greater Romania. More than a construction of the self, or a means of utilizing literary language to express the connection between individual and collective narratives, the autobiographies connected to the experience of unification shed light into the relation between individual and state, between non-writer memorists and the literary language – as well as the tradition of autobiography in Romania.

This chapter explores the theory behind these generic (i.e. autobiography as a genre), spatial and temporal dimensions I have announced. I will therefore divide the chapter in three parts. The first one deals with the definitions of autobiography and with its terminological mappings. The second part focuses on the possibility of autobiography to be considered as a historical source, with a special emphasis on the context-bound radicalization of the nationalist discourse in interwar Romania, while the last one would be largely concerned with reading and interpretation patterns, centered around the method provided by intellectual history.

### Slalom between definitions

Beginning with the 1970s the study of history and the study of literature are reunited

after the break of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that led to their professionalization.<sup>6</sup> History, literature, fiction, fact, narrative, literariness, language or referentiality are concepts that both the study of history and literature share. With that in mind, it can be observed that this chapter, like the subject itself, is deemed to have a somewhat eclectic character. Working toward a definition of autobiography, I have to start from the very beginning by admitting the hybridity and instability of this literary practice.

Postulating *instability* appears to be a comfortable locus, yet one need not ignore whether this instability is not in fact a reflection of a particular discourse concerning the subject itself. As Laura Marcus points out,

“autobiography is itself a major source of concern because of its very instability in terms of the postulated opposites between self and world, literature and history, fact and fiction, subject and object. In an intellectual context in which... these are seen as irreconcilably distinct, autobiography will appear either as a dangerous double agent, moving between these oppositions, or as a magical instrument of reconciliation.”<sup>7</sup>

More than a question of choice between the two facets of autobiography, and assuming with Popkin that “the wall between history and autobiography has been constructed largely from the historians' side”<sup>8</sup> it appears that the historians are put in the ingrate position of making the first step towards breaking away with seeing self and world, literature and history, fact and fiction, subject and object as ultimately distinct oppositions. Yet one cannot help but notice that the things are not going so smoothly when it comes to the study of literature as well.

The vast series of definitions of autobiography reveals the in-depth problematic status

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6 “Only in the first half of the nineteenth century – ironically, a period when the European public was inundated with memoirs about the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods – did the new definition of history as an academic discipline requiring specialized training and with the mission of creating a scholarly historical memory of the national collectivity force a clear separation between the two genres.” Popkin, *History, Historians, & Autobiography*, p. 15.

7 Laura Marcus, *Auto-biographical Discourses*, 7 apud. Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, & Autobiography*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 13.

8 Popkin, 15.

of these texts, first and foremost coming from the students of literature. In the early 1990s, Julia Watson opens her essay “Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography”<sup>9</sup> with a well grounded observation:

“It has become a critical topos to begin discussions of the theory of autobiography by rehearsing the changing positions assumed by critics throughout the last three decades.”<sup>10</sup>

The fact that the feminist critic acknowledged the annoying existence of the critical topos does not prevent her from using it. Watson too proceeds to rehearsing the “new model” – i.e. developed after 1970s – theories of autobiography. Through the “new model” she understands the theory that started to show a concerted interest towards autobiography and through theorists like Philippe Lejeune, Louis Renza or John Sturrock placed autobiography at the intersection between history and fiction. The main merit of the “new model” theory is that it rejected the factual exclusiveness employed in the study of autobiography prior to that. From the perspective offered by rehearsing the critical topos, in her turn Watson closes the circle and includes the theory that had been employing the same critical topos. The “new model” theory of autobiography is included into the same rehearsal, only this time it is rehearsed and no longer rehearsing. Her argument against “new model” theory is that despite the “post-structuralist dismantling of the metaphysics of subjectivity” and its negation of both the legitimacy of the canon and of what constitutes “life” in autobiography, the dominant critical theorizing of autobiography retains the “*bios-bias*” exposed by Gusdorf or Georg

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9 Coincidentally, while writing this chapter and writing about Julia Watson, I had the chance of taking part in her workshop on autobiography hosted by CEU's Gender Department. Although her most recent work – and I would say this is representative trend for the up-to-date research in the field of literary theory – deals with the alternative media and posthumanist theory, by far the most interesting part was her story on the state of affairs in the 1980s. Her insight shows that while the literary scholars rejected autobiography on the basis of it being “less literary” than say the novel, the historians distanced themselves from autobiography because it was “too subjective” to qualify as a historical source. Now, a couple of decades later, and rather problematically, the historian is still demonized for his sole, obtuse interest in “what really happened.” This position can only confirm the persistence of the “wall” between literature and history, a wall that shares the same comfortable locus with the generic instability of autobiography.

10 Julia Watson, “Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography”, in Robert Folkenflik (ed). *The Culture of Autobiography. Constructions of Self-Representations*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), 1993, p. 57.

Misch in the *Geistgeschichte* tradition.

The bias is defined as “the accumulated historical events that comprise the 'biography' of the writer”<sup>11</sup> and is viewed as limiting autobiography to the *bios*/life of “great men.” This limitation excluded texts that do not provide a historically meaningful writer's biography and the classical form of life-writing that constituted the autobiographical canon. Although Philippe Lejeune was one of the leading theorists who alongside James Olney started questioning the primacy of facts in the study of autobiography, his theory of the “autobiographical pact” is considered as a reflection of the inescapable *bios-bias*. Lejeune's autobiographical pact and the importance he gives to paratextual elements, including the appearance of author's legal name on the cover of the book establishing the identity between author, character and narrator, is regarded by Watson as an

implicit assumption [...] that autobiography is a First World genre of the dominant culture written by persons whose lives are culturally endorsed, that is, 'worth' writing.<sup>12</sup>

Watson further argues that “those who are not authorized with patronymic privilege” are excluded from the practice of autobiography. Ultimately, her rejection of Lejeune's legal view on autobiography communicates with the main critic of the French theorist. In a similar tone, rejecting the legal fiction of Lejeune's autobiographical pact, or contract between reader and author, Paul de Man argued that after all autobiography is just a figure of reading, on which the author of the text holds little if not no power whatsoever.<sup>13</sup>

Julia Watson's argument is more than an effort to redefine the theory of autobiography against the metaphysical subject and orient it towards the more concrete subject, the voiceless, lacking patronymic privileges or even the transhuman. Her argumentation exposes a certain “resistance to theory” specific to the study of literature, namely that “the main

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<sup>11</sup> Id.

<sup>12</sup> Watson, 60.

<sup>13</sup> Paul de Man, “Autobiography as Defacement,” *MLN*, 1979, Vol 94, No 5: 919-930.

theoretical interest of literary theory consists in the impossibility of its own definition.”<sup>14</sup>

I call into attention that, “rehearsing the changing positions,” can be viewed as an indicator for the conundrum of literary theory when faced with the challenge of having to offer its own definition of autobiography. The rejection of the metaphysical subject is designed to replace both the concepts of autobiography and genre; the former to be replaced by *life-writing*, a new concept that allows equal treatment to previously marginalized texts. Yet this also shows that a new critical topos is born. It has become a topos to rehearse definitions and challenge them in order to make room for other voices.

Twenty years after Watson's essay, it appears that the rehearsing critical topos is still a valid if not inescapable theoretical venture. More than showing the continuous fascination exercised by autobiography among theorists, this fascination also poses the question of language, showing that from the 1970s autobiography has been treated as a porous and malleable environment that works as a testing ground for theory's capacities.

It has become a norm that the act of rehearsing the changing position should take Georges Gusdorf's 1956 essay, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” as a bridge-head. Gusdorf also became an accessible target for criticism due to the fact that he located autobiography in the Western culture, as a late phenomenon. Philippe Lejeune would be the other mandatory target, more so since he was the first one to reevaluate his definition, in part rejecting or to put it mildly reconsidering his work. In what has become the most famous and also challenged definition of autobiography, Philippe Lejeune reaches the conclusion that autobiography is a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.”<sup>15</sup>

The remaining question is how to define and collate series of autobiographies so that

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<sup>14</sup> Paul de Man, “The Resistance to Theory”, *Yale French Studies*, 63 (1982), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Philippe Lejeune, ‘The Autobiographical Pact’, in Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, Paul John Eakin ed. Trans. Katherine Leary, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 1989, p. 3.



they find their way into a historical narrative. Contrasted to what one can find in the literary theory, autobiography joins history with more ease. Against the intricacies of the theory, the swiftness of Natalie Zemon Davis' explanation for how historians “discover such things [hopes and feelings] about anyone in the past” by looking at “letters and diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, family histories”<sup>16</sup> presents a version of working with autobiography that for a student of history is most of all reassuring.

### ***Historians Do it Too***

The study of autobiography is no longer limited to literature or history, no longer pertaining to the exclusiveness of literary theory and under the growth of interdisciplinary research. Diane P. Freedman and Olivia Frey's *Discipline-Autobiography: Autobiographical writing across the disciplines*, one of the most consistent projects on the relation between autobiography and academic disciplines collates, an impressive number of examples from literary studies, theater, ethnic studies, religious studies, history, philosophy, art history, music, film, anthropology, law, education, Africana studies, mathematics, research psychology, biology and medicine with the explicit agenda of exploring:

the search for knowledge [...] and the academic writer's own life. In other words, what are some of the ways self and discipline coalesce into and shape one another?<sup>17</sup>

History finds a somewhat more intimate touch with the practice of autobiography, either through Edward Gibbons' *Memoirs*, or *The Education of Henry Adams* or through the contemporary examples offered by Tony Judt (*The Chalet of Memory*, and *Rethinking the XXth Century*) or Timothy Garton Ash's *The File. A Personal History*.

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<sup>16</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Diane P. Freedman, Olivia Frey (eds.), *Discipline-Autobiography: Autobiographical Writing Across the Disciplines. A Reader*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 1-2.

Leaving aside the criticism and reconsiderations coming from literary camps, Lejeune's definition finds a fertile ground in history. The rediscovery of historians' autobiographies has become a proper topos in its own. Following the 'surprise' of discovery that historians do write autobiographies that “enjoy a dubious status in our profession”, and thanking Paul John Eakin and Philippe Lejeune “for encouraging a historian's venture into a terrain more often explored by members of their discipline”<sup>18</sup>, historian Jeremy D. Popkin proceeds to analyzing autobiographical records of historians by highlighting the similarities (against the dismissive attitude of scholarly journals in the field of history where “such publications are rarely reviewed”) between history and autobiography. At a first level and largely based on Lejeune's definition, both history and autobiography are brought together by their core feature, namely the reconstructions of the past usually in a chronological order.

Further on, this time drawing on Nora's ego-histoire, which, in connection with the *lieux de memoire*, project that examines “the way in which memory, the unreflective representation of the past, is transformed into the analytic construct we call history,”<sup>19</sup> Popkin attempts to connect autobiography's inherent subjectivity and historian's claim to objectivity<sup>20</sup>. For that, he brings together Lejeune and Nora, showing that, after all, both practices are part of the same story.

Nora's *lieux de memoire* also come at hand when discussing autobiography, as these texts become places of memory in themselves:

The memoir writer must be aware of other memoirs. He must be a man of the pen as well as a man of action. He must find a way to identify his individual story with a more general story. And he must somehow make his personal

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, “Historians on the Autobiographical Frontier”, *The American Historical Review*, 104:3 (1999), p. 725.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, “Ego-Histoire and Beyond: Contemporary French Historian-Autobiographers”, *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1141.

<sup>20</sup> “Having historians examine their own personal history was a way to make the profession come to terms with the “shaking of the classic foundations of historical objectivity,” which, as Nora claimed, required historians to abandon the tradition that had taught them to “let their work speak for them, to hide their personality behind their erudition... , to flee from themselves into another era, to express themselves only through others.” Popkin, *Historians on the autobiographical frontier*, 1731.

rationale consonant with public rationality. Taken together, these characteristics of the genre compel us to think of its exemplars as *lieux de memoire*.<sup>21</sup>

As lieux de memoire, they are symbolically reinterpreted, extracted from the original context and brought to a new light, thus showing the connection between author, the community he is part of and the way in which the community he project himself as being part of is in time taking property over the text itself and makes use of it in a somehow co-proprietary fashion.

Remembering, individuals and nations will lead us, closer to my study, to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Now, the “new nationalism” no longer imagines itself as “awakening from sleep”<sup>22</sup>. It is no longer the question of discovering the national origins, but the origins of nationalism as a full-fledged, self-aware and self-referential process.

In this phase of Romanian history of literature, the autobiographies which my study calls into attention perform this function. With the state being conceived as the product of nationalism, the autobiographer is retrospectively mapping the story of the very nationalism that led to the existence of the state 'as we know it'. This would open up a discussion (present in the following chapter) with the other cohort of autobiographies present in Romanian culture. These biographies of the nation spring from oblivion and amnesia brought about by profound changes in consciousness, and ultimately estrangement.

Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* which, because it can not be 'remembered,' must be narrated. Against biology's demonstration that every single cell in a human body is replaced over seven years, the narratives of autobiography and biography flood print-capitalism's markets year by year.<sup>23</sup>

Narration replaces remembering since, as Nora argues, the acceleration of history causes the *milieux* to be replaced by the *lieux de memoire*.<sup>24</sup>

21 Pierra Nora, *Realms of Memory. Vol I. Conflicts and Divisions* ( New York: Columbia University Press 1996), 17.

22 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism Revised Edition*, (London, New York: Verso, 1991), 195.

23 Id. 204.

24 “The 'acceleration of history' thus brings us face to face with the enormous distance that separates real memory – the kind of inviolate social memory that primitive and archaic societies embodied, and whose secret

Going back to the discussion on discipline that started this section, all these reinforce the 18th century rupture between history and literature on which Popkin insists in order to show the peculiarity of historian-autobiographers within their discipline. In a similar vein, James Olney defined autobiography as “a kind of stepchild of history and literature, with neither of those disciplines granting it full recognition.”<sup>25</sup> Considering that autobiography is the stepchild of history and literature – and here once more we can read Lejeune's massive influence – it has a twin brother in travel writing.

On a conceptual level it comes with similar difficulties: what is it, and how to use it, both questions coming both from students of literature and history. David Chirico's recent analysis of the travel narrative<sup>26</sup> is extremely useful for understanding the importance of genre in a borderline case such as that of travel-narratives, and in my case autobiography. Chirico proceeds at defining the travel literature according to Lejeune's definition of autobiographical pact and builds a framework that aims at “answering some questions about the significance of the formal, thematic and social/historical factors which unite these texts.”<sup>27</sup> More than reading individual works, the student of autobiography has to take into account the larger picture in which these texts appear. As seen before, the attempts of intellectuals coming from the literary field to find new voices that would challenge the monolithic presence of Western models of the self can only be an incomplete task unless it takes into account that these voices are inseparable from a tradition of writing and do not express themselves in a perfectly enclosed self-referentiality.

One has to note the importance of the question of genre in discussing autobiography.

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died with them – from history, which is how modern societies organize a past they are condemned to forget because they are driven by change.” Nora, 2.

25 James Olney, *Studies in Autobiography*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), XIII, apud Jennifer Jensen Wallach, “Building a Bridge of Words: The Literary Autobiography as Historical Source Material”, *Biography*, Volume 29, Number 3, Summer 2006, 446.

26 David Chirico, “Travel Narrative as a Literary Genre”, in Alex Drace-Francis & Wendy Bracewell (eds.) *Under Eastern Eyes. A comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing in Europe* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2008).

27 Chirico, 27-28.

In an attempt to reevaluate the notion of genre as to allow the integration of the travel narrative within its boundaries, David Chirico argues for a literary-theoretical approach to individual texts and to the functions of travel. In this sense, these narratives become a starting point for a historical analysis. Although leaving room for a contentious understanding of genre as a “relic from an era of prescriptive literary criticism”, Chirico argues that it can help locate travel writing texts “within their own national literary traditions, within literary movements and so on” and “also assist the historical, literary-historical, sociological or anthropological analysis of the functions and meanings of our texts and groups of texts.”<sup>28</sup>

What is a genre? David Chirico's definition starts from Tzvetan Todorov, according to whom genres are classes of texts, “but only classes of texts that have been historically perceived as such.” Based on Todorov's definition, the genre can be understood as a codification of discursive properties. However, the emphasis here is placed on “a given society.” Avoiding circularity, the genre provides information about the given society that institutionalizes individual texts which are produced and perceived “in relation to the norm constituted by that codification.”<sup>29</sup> Genres are historically determined according to the norm a given society codifies a discursive property. Todorov defines “discursive property” as follows: narratological (structuring the plot in a detective story), pragmatic (“such as claims of authenticity in an autobiography, as opposed to the convention of suspended disbelief which underlies the fictionality of the *Bildungsroman*”), thematic (distinguishing tragedy from comedy), phonological or metrical. The “discursive property” brings together the “historical reality” and “discursive reality”, in the absence of which we would deal with either general poetics, or literary history in the broad sense.

Autobiography, as a codification of a discursive property will therefore bring to the fore not only the making of the self under a specific social-cultural framework, but also has

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<sup>28</sup> Id.

<sup>29</sup> Id., 30.

the potential of showing how the autobiographer relates to both historical and discursive reality. Its insights are available by comparison of previous “life-writing booms”. As argued, autobiography as a historical source has the major advantage of bringing together the self (and how it is build, recognized) and the cultural and social environment. The “story of my life” is tightly connected to the social and cultural determinants. There are a series of minimal factual references in each autobiographical text: “I was born” and “I lived, experienced, came up to see and do this or that.” Outside the text we find the factual references that make the story “I lived and did this and that” recognizable to both author and his or her readers.

Paul John Eakin's introduction to *How our Lives Become Stories* introduces his research in a double-bind form:

my concerns are both literary and experiential, for the selves we display in autobiographies are doubly constructed, not only in the act of writing a life story but also in a lifelong process of identity formation of which the writing is usually a comparatively late phase.<sup>30</sup>

Yet this is a study about history. It is not only concerned with the literary or experiential dimension of the texts, but with the very same dimensions transferred to a whole new level. It is not only about independent projects of identity formation or creating selves. Since we are dealing with history, understood as more than literary history of a specific literary genre over a period of time, it is crucial to add that this period is concerned with creating a collective identity under a new state, and subsequently under what was understood as a new European/World order that the Great War has brought about. In my case, the experience of the past and its memory, leaves its individual character behind and enters a complex relation to: the other contemporary “making selves” projects, to the experience of the present, and ultimately with history. I read the autobiographies of interwar, first of all in connection to the norms of the genre and to the challenges they brought to it, the most important being that

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30 Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1999), IX.

these text are planned as political statements. As unofficial histories, the autobiographies are somehow placed at the edge of public and personal discourse, public and personal history.

In social-cultural history, autobiographies are generally read selectively. Selecting one text from the entire production, would tell you the personal story of for instance how an Irish woman perceives represents herself in Margaret Thatcher's Great Britain. It is just an hypothetical example. It can be expanded or narrowed down, it can deal with a woman, a man or a child, a worker or a housewife, a parent or a single person and so on. Here the literary critic is building his case on the specificity of his subject. Time, space and narrative are the main directions, conditions, limitations, brought together in the (re)search of individual lives, selves, exemplary lives. The search for the *exemplary* rather than for the complexities of the multitude can be read, interpreted, understood as a reflexion of the early phase of European autobiography, of the pre-Romantic religious autobiography where the *exemplary* is more of an *exemplum* of how to construct one's life in devotion for the faith.

Searching for the individual, the best exemplification of a collective trend of the whole community, either religious, economic or political self is an entity that can account in front of history and not a process informed by and informing history. Following John Paul Eakin, I propose that the self is not an entity that can be “dis-covered” – to use his construction – through language, but a process. Closer to my case, it is at all points, like the nation-state, in the making.

## II. The Canonical Moment. Limits and Conditions of Romanian Autobiography in the Interwar Period

In the Romanian literary tradition, autobiography passes as an ignored genre. The undervaluation is valid for both literary and historical studies, and when autobiography does appear, it is given a marginal position mainly as an auxiliary source of information. A general overview would show that the autobiography is closely intertwined with the political thought and tradition on the one hand of the time of writing, and on the other hand of the political environment in place at the time of republishing and recontextualizing of that work. All the critical attempts at delineating the genre, few as they are, were oriented towards establishing a canon paralleling the literary one. The two critical perspectives<sup>31</sup> are establishing the conditions and limitations of autobiography along the lines of French structuralism. With both books written in the 1980s, the theoretical apparatus is largely informed by narratology and stylistics, by Tzvetan Todorov, Georges Poulet or Gerard Genette. What I argue here is for a reevaluation of autobiography in the light of its contact with social and political thought.

In this light, a general context for the relation between autobiography and political thought would be that between the personal narrative and nationalism, integrated into the process of nation-building. “The symbolic refraction of the individual to nation and society (...) rooted in bourgeois nationalism's mobilisation of personal narratives for the project of nation-building”<sup>32</sup> is certainly valid in the Romanian case as well. But here attention has to be paid to the local context, as the Romanian bourgeoisie is not a uniform block, developing at different paces in the regions to be integrated into Greater Romania. Thus, the question of regions and regionalism is brought into the picture against the symbolic dominance of

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Mihai Zamfir, *Memorie vs. imaginație: un moment al prozei românești din secolul al XIX-lea* and Ioan Holban, *Literatura română subiectivă de la origini până la 1990: Jurnalul intim. Autobiografia literară*.

32 Liam Harte, *Introduction: Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment*, in Liam Harte (ed.) *Modern Irish Autobiography: Self Nation and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.



Bucharest or Iasi, centres of Romanian culture prior to the unification.

There are three grand moments for the Romanian autobiography. The first is the Romantic literature roughly around 1830-1880. The Romantic literary prose of this period is placed under the aegis of memory understood as “valorification of the precedent prose, life experience and documents”<sup>33</sup>, which came to a peak in the 1870s with Junimea and its journal *Convorbiri Literare*, when autobiography reached a phase of maturity through Ion Ghica, Gheorge Sion, Ion Creangă and Ioan Slavici.

The second moment would be occasioned by the fin de siècle radicalization of politics, and the last one would be the interwar period where the memory and identity are triggered by the 1918 unification and the experience of being a Romanian into an all-national Romanian state. From Heliade Rădulescu's *Souvenirs et impressions d'un proscrit* (1850), or *Memoires sur l'histoire de la regeneration roumaine* (1851), up to Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu's *Către legionary (To My Legionnaires)* – to pick the most extreme examples – the tradition of Romanian autobiography mirrors the evolution of the political thought and works as a medium for further transferring of political agendas and visions about the state. The autobiographical is never neutral and never concerned with its individual subject alone.

In between these temporal and ideological extremes, stretching across nearly a century and from romantic liberal nationalism to fascism, the student of autobiography will find a multifarious net of possible directions, yet all are connected by the aim to define the subject placed in the context of 'national development,' but the most flowering period for the genre remains the interwar. Historian Nicolae Iorga's connection to the autobiographical shows an unmatched monumentality and is built around three directions: biographies collected in the *Oameni cari au fost* series, the daily notes gathered in six thick volumes of *Memoirs* organized around the key moments in the contemporary history of Romanians, more

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33 Mihai Zamfir, *Cealaltă față a prozei* (București: Editura Eminescu, 1988).

of a chronicle than a journal, and finally his autobiography *Orizonturile mele. O viață de om așa cum a fost* (3 volumes, 1934)<sup>34</sup>. The last one is opened by an insightful reflection on the nature of autobiography:

To write an autobiography – and I often thought of that – seemed to me an embarrassing and moral thing. Under what law is one allowed to bring in people of whom he knew only in part, at a certain moment and whose memory, linked to many more, could have been deformed with time?<sup>35</sup>

which, when it comes to the nature of the narrated subject is: “A history of ideas, and ideas deserve to be known by their origin and their development”.<sup>36</sup>

Behind the history of ideas, their genesis and their evolution lies the cult of his mother, his Byzantine roots, a cult for learning, and ultimately the story of the decay of the small countryside boyar family.<sup>37</sup> On the basis of 'boyar self-narratives' a nice parallel could be drawn to Constantin Gane's *Pe aripa vremii*, who humorously traces the roots of his family either to Adam and Eve, or to “Goril and Simpanzeu.” All that, just to be sure since “better men like Moses or Darwin cannot agree upon this matter” hinting at Radu Rosetti's memoirs that start with seventeenth century's Vasile Lupu and end up with the Ad-Hoc Divan. This can be expanded as a comic rejection of a common feature in autobiographies, namely the obsession with tracing back one's origins.

In contrast to Iorga's vision of the present as an almost unbearable rupture with the matriarchal, Byzantine past, we find another autobiography published, edited and corrected by Iorga a decade before. Written in 1876 and published in 1916 at Iorga's Vălenii-de-Munte

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34 To all that I would add the entire series (huge as well) of travel literature. I find this literature (journal, travel literature, autobiography) as best organized around the concept of *nationalogue*, a newfound genre proposed by Technische Universität Chemnitz's Pavan Malreddy: “A ‘nationalogue’ is a semi-biographical text that combines life history, travel writing, and memoirs with those of ‘national narratives’.” Unfortunately so far I could not find a proper article on *nationalogue*, but only a seminar description (Logging the Nation: The Emergence of Postcolonial ‘Nationalogues’ Intercultural Competence) [http://www.tu-chemnitz.de/phil/english/chairs/englit/courses\\_ws12.php](http://www.tu-chemnitz.de/phil/english/chairs/englit/courses_ws12.php).

35 Nicolae Iorga, *O viață de om. I Copilărie și tinerețe* (București: Editura N. Stroilă, 1934), 1.

36 Id. 3.

37 Constantin Gane, *Pe aripa vremii* (București: 1923).

publishing house, Vasile Mateiescu's *Povestea unui băiat de la țară*<sup>38</sup> is the journey of a mid-nineteenth century orphan from Bukovina, a self-made-man who rose to the condition of owning property in the city of Iași, changing his name and ultimately writing his autobiography. An account of his life as a *picaro*, this autobiography was rediscovered by Iorga half a century later and reused as a historical ego-document about the life and times of Romanians in the middle of the nineteenth century. One has to note the similarity of this account with Teodor Vârnav's 1845 picaresque autobiography, in its turn discovered by Arthur Gorovei.

Another take on origins would be presented by Adolf Stern's two autobiographies<sup>39</sup>, narrating the life of a Romanian Jew, blending together the history of Romanian Jewry in the Old Kingdom, Transylvania and Bessarabia from the year of his birth (1848) to the Berlin Peace Conference.

My notes are not intended to be strictly autobiographical. (...) As part of a religious minority, against which for the last 40 years a blind and false nationalism is waging a fiery war, I lived the tragic life of the Romanian Jewish intellectual, *déclassé*, *struggling with the inner turmoil, wasting the most precious energies into a negative and sterile fight*.<sup>40</sup>

Translator of Shakespeare<sup>41</sup> and Schiller into Romanian and of Vasile Alecsandri into German, holding a doctorate in Germany (period in which he “appeared to live like a Wallachian Nabab”) in “Roman, Saxon and Romanian law” the self-thematization of the Romanian-Jewish intellectual is intertwined with the historical realities of religious intolerance, constitutional plans, naturalization, and ultimately offers the history of Romania's modernization from a minority's perspective. The Life of a Romanian-Jew is the exemplary

38 Vasile Mateiescu, *Povestea unui băiat de la țară (Biografia lui Vasile Mateiescu scrisă de el însuși. București 1876)*. (Vălenii-de-Munte: Neamul Românesc, 1916).

39 Adolf Stern, *Din viața unui evreu-român*, (București: Tip. Progresul, 1915); Adolf Stern, *Însemnări din viața mea* (București: Editura Cercului Libertatea, 1921). A second volume (third in the series) was announced to be published at Viața Românească, but it never appeared.

40 Adolf Stern, *Din viața unui evreu-român*, p. V.

41 Translations that would offer him the naturalization. Stern, *Însemnări din viața mea*, 5.

model of how the individual steps down as subject of autobiographical introspection and leaves room to the collective identity, projecting himself as diligent narrator of the life and times of biographical persona. Stern points at two main figures of the fin de siècle anti-Semitism. The first one is Eminescu, who is somewhat excused given his poetic talent and regarded only as a pen sold to the dominant politics, and the other one is Iorga – “the great Don Quixote of today's [1906] Romanian anti-Semitism” – whose anti-Semitism is viewed as a professional disqualification:

One is appalled at the thought that this fiery man, a fanatic, ill-hearted, passes as a savant meaning a researcher of truth, and at kind of history he can write and teach when precisely this branch of science deserves the highest objectivity and impartiality.<sup>42</sup>

All things considered, Stern is the exponent of something that can be called a civic understanding of patriotism directed towards the Romanian state and the Jewish community, as an integral part of the state. A leftist-liberal with progressive views, he offers an insightful understanding of *associationism* based on the Jewish historical communities and on American lawyer Benjamin Franklin Peixotto's failed attempt to organize the entire Jewish community into a Zionist movement to counterbalance “anti-Semitism as a state dogma.” For Stern, the collective action is displayed as something more than combining individual capacities – it is a creative force that answers to alienation: “We have the illusion that product of our collective action is alien to us; man disappears in his work, he is extra-territorialized.”<sup>43</sup> Also, it replaces the “Darwinian law of the survival of the fittest”, in a modern society replaced by the “higher law of social solidarity, through which we defeat the servitude to nature and the lives of the weakest/unfit can be preserved as well.”<sup>44</sup>

Characteristic to the modern society, the law of social solidarity left behind not only

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42 Id., 195.

43 Id. 143.

44 Id. 144.

Darwin, but also Nietzsche, whose philosophy – as Stern wishfully argues – failed, as the philosopher was not aware of this profound and apparently immutable change and “could get to 'superman'; to the 'blond beast' that defeats all the other human beings in that gruesome fight for survival.”<sup>45</sup>

### Periodization. Zigu Ornea and Irina Livezeanu

A general outlook on the interwar Romanian historiography would find an artificial caesura separating the 1920s from the 1930s. Two books are the most representative of this temporal separation, and I dare say they have become somewhat cult books. Not surprisingly, one of the most checked-out history books of the Central European University Library is Irina Livezeanu's *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*.<sup>46</sup> Starting with the context of the 1980's, Livezeanu explains how the 1920's were widely regarded as a “distant, completely closed historical period, a golden age of cultural flowering and freedom which shimmered all the brighter for the 'darkness' that had enveloped the country after 1947.”<sup>47</sup> This general view is connected to Kundera's rekindling of “Central Europe” and to Romanians' attempt to validate their belonging to the European center on the basis of the Europeanness of the interwar period and their belonging to the tragedy of a Europe that was crudely severed from the West (Europe as an object of desire is always projected as a monolithic West)<sup>48</sup> by the Red Army.

The second periodization of the interwar period puts a special emphasis on the 1930s and on the extreme right-wing politics, and it appears to be the subject of a more extensive

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45 Id. 144.

46 Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

47 Livezeanu, p. IX.

48 Cf. Todorova especially her note on the “implicitly accepted notion of a homogeneous Western Europe to which different Eastern European entities were juxtaposed” explained by “the West European syndrome 'to conceive of the entire Euro-Asian land mass as four Easts (Near, Middle, Far and Eastern Europe) and only one West, itself.’” Todorova, “Between Classification and Politics. The Balkans and the Myth of Central Europe”, in *Imagining the Balkans*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 141.

research, mainly due to the extreme-right wing politics, especially legionarism. Zigu Ornea's *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească* would be the other marking point.<sup>49</sup> Just as Irina Livezeanu opens her monograph of the 1920s by contextualizing the Central European frenzy of the 1980s – which, to be right, Romanian intellectuals join only in the 90s and especially through Timișoara-based “A treia Europă/The Third Europe” Group<sup>50</sup> – Zigu Ornea appeals to the same 1980s, yet the story is different. It is no longer the case of the influence of a group of dissidents from Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia over reevaluating East Europe's interwar complying with a Western model of Europeanness, but the Romanian 1980s. As Ornea observes, he abandoned the plans of writing the book precisely because figures like Cioran, Eliade or Noica would have fallen under the risk of being banned, once more:

It [the book] should not have been published because it unveiled the political and ideological credo of those who in the 30s were the prominent personalities of the new generation (Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, and others). It was inopportune because it would have brought arguments for interdicting their work.<sup>51</sup>

The very same names of the “new generation” appear in Livezeanu's argument for the study of the 1920s – years that “deserve attention both in their own right, and as a prelude to the 1930s, about which much is known and little is understood.”<sup>52</sup> Yet after 1989, these figures who previously had an ambiguous status were full fledged heroes of the pre- and anticommunist past.

Ornea's approach and agenda has to be dealt with some reserves. As he notes in the

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49 Armin Heinen would apply the same caesura between the 1920s and the 1930s, but the main factor of delimitation is the economic crisis and not exclusively the political dimension. “Whereas in 1918/1919 the territorial claims were satisfied, the other reasons for unsettledness and signals of crisis were left untouched, coming back to attention with the economic and social depression of the 1930s”. Heinen, *Legiunea “Arhanghelului Mihail” Mișcare Socială și Organizație politică, o contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*, the second edition. (București: Humanitas, 2006) 26.

50 Maciej Janowski, Constantin Iordachi, and Balazs Trencsenyi, “Why Bother About Historical Regions? Debates over Central Europe in Hungary, Poland and Romania”, *East Central Europe/ECE*, vol. 32, 2005, part 1-2, 5-58.

51 Zigu Ornea, *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Bucharest: EST-Samuel Taster Editeur, 2008) 23.

52 Livezeanu, XV.

preface, the new book had to be different from *Traditionalism and Modernity in the 1930s*. Ornea's caution towards not endangering the canonic positions of the intellectuals who were newly reintegrated into the national canon is not a unique picture in the context offered by the

independentist turn of the First Secretary Nicolae Ceaușescu [who] encouraged a number of previously marginalized intellectuals to come to the fore with their project of recovering the national tradition suppressed by the Stalinist regime.<sup>53</sup>

Romanian literary historian Iordan Chimet's "The Right to Memory" offers a similar story. Collected in the 1970s, Chimet's planned panorama of the identity discourses throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century had to wait two more decades before being published. As the regime sought to impose its ideological control over the re-narration of national identity, and since Chimet refused to eliminate the works of some of the émigré authors who were unacceptable to the regime, his work could not be published at that point.<sup>54</sup>

Ornea and Livezeanu's periodization is based on the valid assumption that the interwar period did not represent a "unitary bloc". As both Livezeanu and Ornea argue, the interwar years can indeed be divided along the two decades – 1918 to 1930 and 1930 to 1939. Separated along political lines, the two decades, although making room for continuities, mark a significant change of decorum. The first decade is politically dominated by Ion I. C. Brătianu's Liberal Party and the 1923 Constitution, while after 1928 the political scene is dominated by the newly founded National Peasantist Party, which was created in 1926 after the Peasantists and the National Party in Transylvania merged and by the fractures brought about by radical nationalism, extreme right-wing movements and by the Royal Dictatorship of King Carol II.

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53 *Inter-Texts of Identity* in Balazs Trencsenyi and Michal Kopecek (eds.), "Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)". Texts and Commentaries, Volume I, *Late Enlightenment – Emergence of the Modern 'National Idea'* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2006) p. 12. See also, Armin Heinen's introduction to *The Legion of Archangel Mihail*, especially pp. 19-22 (the shift from "the revolutionary proletarian internationalism" to "specifically national events" in Romanian historiography in the 1970s).

54 Id., 12-13.

Dealing with history from above and focusing on politics as the main drive of the interwar period confirms this separation between the two decades. On the other hand, an abrupt caesura between the two decades, although having its undeniable heuristic merits, may obstruct the overall picture. Although the two authors come from completely different intellectual backgrounds and agendas, they both agree that the interwar years can be divided into two decades that can be dealt with separately. On the one hand, Livezeanu looks at the 1920s as a counter-reaction against the myth of democracy and Europeanism that in the 1980s brought about a deeply emotionally-charged reevaluation of the interwar period in Eastern Europe, that aimed at integrating this region's past into the West along the lines set by “The Tragedy of Central Europe”. On the other hand, for Ornea, the second decade, that of the 1930s, was impossible to be dealt with in the context of Romanian political climate in the 1980s. What the context of the late 1980s and more preeminently of the 1990s brings about is a twofold reevaluation, of the past and of the national space. On the one hand, we find the emergence of the Central European idea with the attempt at exploring liberalism, the democratic and multicultural tradition as first and foremost crafted along regional lines; on the other hand, we witness the reemergence of the nationalist past and the importance regions had towards the 1918 Greater Romania (the same as in the case of Central Europeanists).

### **Space and the Autobiographical Narrative**

Reinhart Koselleck's observation that “the overwhelming majority of all historians, when confronted with the alternative of space or time, have opted for a theoretical dominance of time”<sup>55</sup> is most certainly true for the historical narrative of the interwar period in Romania. The majority of accounts on unification would value time over space, according to a shared

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55 Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten, Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt, 2002) 81.



version of the unification seen as the coming to fruition of a nation's long awaited ideal. Under the spell of national unification, and of a Europe that has entered a new era, previous projects aiming at a transnational and multi-ethnic reconstruction of East Central Europe come to a halt or get reconfigured along national lines. We can mention here Aurel C. Popovici's United States of Greater Austria, Christian Rakovski's Federal Balkan Republic, project proposed in Bucharest in 1915, or the less known Confederation of the United Eastern States (*Les Etats-Unis d'orient: une confédération des états de l'Europe orientale et de l'Asie-mineure*) proposed by Octavian Tăslăuanu in 1924.<sup>56</sup>

In between these transnational attempts and the all-national spatial experience, memory and identity come to play a crucial role. It would be no exaggeration to claim that immediately after the war, a new industry of memory was under its way. Building *lieux de memoire* and informing the readership about the daily life during the war, this booming literature included journals, memoirs, personal notes and autobiographies. All these narratives are brought together by the fact that they pass local and personal experiences as allegedly national ones.

Aptly analyzed by Maria Bucur under politics of remembrance<sup>57</sup>, I would add that these narratives enter an unexpected dialogue with the massive corpus of literature published starting with the 1980s, when the survivals of the 1918 unification at Alba Iulia gained a special place in Ceaușescu's nationalism. During the early 1990s, in parallel with the discussions over Central Europe, a new kind of nationalist politics of remembrance emerged, especially in Transylvania. With the aim of revisiting the national past and the struggle for national unification, these collections of documents were locally published, generally under the same title, “Our Contribution to Greater Romania”, informing about Arad, Timișoara,

56 Octavian Tăslăuanu, *Les Etats-Unis d'orient : une co mineure: proposition pour la petite entente*, (Bucharest: s. n., 1924).

*'Europe orientale et de l'Asie-*

57 Maria Bucur, “Remembering the Great War through Autobiographical Narratives”, in *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth Century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Târgu-Mureș, Banat, or Bihor's local “contribution” to the unification of all Romanians into a single country.<sup>58</sup>

Space does come into play after 1989, in a form of local/regional narratives, but even so, space is under the theoretical dominance of time. When it comes to life-writing and locating the places of remembrance, two shifts appear. In spatial terms, the place of remembrance is dislocated from the transnational or nationally neutral zone into passing a particular experience as national. At the same time, a temporal shift occurs. The autobiographical is no longer focused on childhood or the formative years, but rather on the political aspects and the author's contribution to the existence and first years of Greater Romania.

Peter Gay has argued that 'the nineteenth century was intensely preoccupied with self, to the point of neurosis.'<sup>59</sup> In other words, whereas the previous generation of intellectuals like Creangă, Slavici or Iorga would locate their memory in their childhood years and small community, emphasizing the formative years, the autobiographies centered around the birth of Greater Romania would cling to the collective experience. They are no longer exclusively preoccupied with the self, but with the way in which the self is part of a larger national frame.

### Time and Autobiographical Narratives

As the immediate post-1918 period offers a broad selection of memories of the Great

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58 We can name here Ioan Silviu Nistor, *Contribuții mureșene la Marea Unire*, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1981), Ioan Munteanu, Vasile Mircea Zaberca, *Banatul și Marea Unire: 1918*, (Timișoara: Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, 1992), Radu Paiusan, *Mișcarea Națională din Banat și Marea Unire*, (Timișoara: Editura de Vest, 1993), Mihai Racovițan, Pamfil Matei, *Sibiul și Marea Unire* (Sibiu: Cercul Militar, 1993), or the more recent *Aradul și Marea Unire*, (Arad: Vasile Goldiș University Press, 2008).

59 Peter Gay, “The Naked Heart: The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud”, Volume IV, (London: HarperCollins), p. 3 apud. Sean Ryder, “With a Heroic Life and a Governing Mind”: Nineteenth Century Irish Nationalist Autobiography, in Liam Harte (ed.) *Modern Irish Autobiography: Self Nation and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

War and of the unification, after 1989 a new sort of reevaluation of memory appears. Much scattered and published by local publishing houses, a new industry of remembrance emerges, one that values the local contributions to the national history. In the Romanian scene, the 1980s and 1990s bring more than the appetite for the Western or Central European idea, these decades also gave birth to a reemergence of the nationalist thought. In this context, the post-1989 industry of memory, albeit focused on a regional outlook, would look into the interwar period for the real figures of nationalism, as well as for heroes of pre- and anti-communist times. In my opinion, the local contributions to 1918 would have to be associated with the master narrative which presents the termination of the democratic tradition in Romania after 1947. It can be characterized as a politics of victimization. With the belief that the communists eliminated their adversaries be they socialists, social-democrats or “historical parties”, the author is ready to forget that the alleged democratic tradition of either the National Peasantist or the Social Democrats was not that democratic, and nonetheless not that unitary as the apologetic discourse would claim.

The rules of the autobiographical genre impose a different take on periodization. First and foremost, it has to do with the natural, as the subject constructed in the autobiographical narrative is in itself determined by the life of its author. While the beginning is given – I was born in *that* year, and read a classical approach to the autobiographical pact<sup>60</sup> – the end is as natural as birth, yet unpredictable and beyond narration. Therefore, the temporal limit, the time span is to a certain extent more malleable than an imposed delimitation offered by say politics, governments or wars. Following this, something like the interwar period loses its clear-cut understanding as something that happens between the two world wars. At the same time, due to the changes after 1947 and the ban imposed on certain public figures, autobiographical narratives on the interwar period will resurface either with the rehabilitation

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60 Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

of those writers during socialism, or after 1989.

The key moment ever present throughout autobiographical narratives on the interwar period is 1918. Of course, the narrative material spans both before and after this turning point. To this internal dynamic, one must add the external conditions that shaped the autobiographies of 1918. While autobiography is generally viewed as a literary practice of the old age, written by authors at the end of their lives as a reevaluation of the past and sometime as a will, it cannot be ignored that the events of history have their own say. Autobiographical texts sometimes had to wait until after the fall of communism, as their authors were banned, imprisoned or became *persona non grata* after 1947. It is therefore no exception to find autobiographies written in and about 1918 and the interwar period, but published only after 1989. This would be the case of Onisifor Ghibu's interwar autobiography that had to wait until the fall of the regime to be published, or the last two volumes of Sever Bocu's planned memoirs, which although announced in the first volume, were never written due to his death in prison in 1953. This editing policy is part of an attempt to recover a usable past which in the 1990s would account for a reevaluation of interwar nationalist figures.

At the same time, a similar effect is to be found on the spatial dimension. Time and space found a particular place in the narrative practice of autobiography. That people live in a certain day and age and that they move is an observation that requires no special philosophical insight. On a primary level, autobiography is the narrative concerned with mobility, telling the story of the self by focusing on his journey through space and time. The convulsive times brought about by the Great War forced individual actors to move between and within borders. Bearing in mind that their journey is closely connected with the process of centralization, it becomes clear that these narratives are intertwined with the realities of nation-building at a certain moment. Thus, autobiography becomes a vehicle for transferring knowledge about both space and time.

Following Livezeanu, who begins her monograph by making a direct reference to the concept of Central Europe, fashionable at that time but to which Romania was somehow lagging behind, I think that a discussion about space and symbolic geographies is in order when dealing with the way in which individual projects of subject-building enter a dialogue with regionalization and the homogenizing process of nation-building in interwar Romania. Therefore, the question of “who am I?”<sup>61</sup> that the students of autobiography generally label as the main thread of this narrative form, has to be coupled with “where am I, where have I been?”. The story of “my journey” is not only a temporal affair, but also and equally important, a question of space.

Seeing that time and space have to be contextualized and considered in their difference, the same is valid for nationalism, the core concept behind these narratives. I argue here against the view that interprets nationalism as a national consensus between mainstream and extreme right politics. At points, the views on nationalism and national politics shows deep clashes within the same party (most notably the National Peasantist Party), as it will be discussed especially in the chapter on Sever Bocu and his 1933 call for the National Peasantist Party to follow the tactics of the National Socialist Party. Nationalism is therefore not a monolithic substance calling for national consensus, and it has to be contextualized on the lines of the camps and individuals involved in the process.

### **Traditions of an Ignored Genre. Working towards a Canon of Romanian Autobiography**

The student of autobiographies finds himself facing a difficult reality: the overabundance of sources that would qualify as autobiographies is not doubled by a proper research or at least an acknowledgement of those narratives as belonging to this genre. The

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61 Lejeune, *The Autobiographical Pact*.

first attempts of working with the concept of Romanian autobiography are closely linked to the canon. Still in the early twentieth century, the 'white, bearded old men' were the only ones representing the genre. The 'liberalization' of the genre and the grand theoretical debates of the 1980s did not manage to change the fate of the Romanian autobiography too much.

The first project of bringing more autobiographies together had a heuristic agenda coupled with a canonical aim. Initiated in 1905 by Sextil Pușcariu, privatdozent at the University of Vienna, *Luceafărul* magazine, as an autobiographical project, aimed at making the Romanian novelists known to “the Romanian readership in Hungary, who first and foremost is missing the contact with the Romanian culture from the Old Kingdom.”<sup>62</sup>

Comparable to Luceafărul's collective autobiographical project is that of D. Caracostea, between 1932-1933 at the Bucharest Faculty of Letters, initiated under the influence of the International Congress of Literary History held in 1931 in Budapest. At that time, Caracostea was the head of the Modern Romanian Literature Department in Bucharest, and although he did not take part in the congress, his colleague Mihail Dragomirescu did. Thus, Caracostea's aim was double-folded. On the one hand, to adapt the state of art in Romanian literary history to the European developments, with a special emphasis on the genesis of the artistic work, the personality and character of the creator and his aesthetic work. On the other hand, the “literary confessions” were called to reinforce the literary canon, a canon that in the first place excluded the 'young generation'.<sup>63</sup>

The last approach to Romanian autobiography would include Ioan Holban's

62 Sextil Pușcariu, “Contemporary Novelists from the Regat”, *Luceafărul*, August 15, 1905, p. 295. Out of the 22 invitations sent, only 12 authors replied: Nicolae Gane, Iacob. C. Negruzzi, Ioan Slavici, Duiliu Zamfirescu, Al. Brătescu-Voinești, Ion Gorun, Constanța Hodos, Vasile Pop, Alexandru Basarabescu, Ion Ciocârlan, Ion Adam and Mihail Sadoveanu.

63 The names included in Caracostea's project are: Octavian Goga, Ioan Al. Brătescu-Voinești, Cincinat Pavelescu, Jean Bart, Gala Galaction, Tudor Arghezi, Mihail Sadoveanu, Ion Minulescu, Ion Agârbiceanu, Liviu Rebreanu, N. Davidescu, Ion Pillat and Ion Barbu.

“Literatura Subiectivă” (*Subjective Literature*)<sup>64</sup>, a concept taken from Tudor Vianu. Here too we find an attempt to build a canon of the “literary autobiography”. Arranged in a chronological order and analyzed from the stronghold of French structuralism (Georges Poulet, Gerard Genette), the canon of Romanian literary autobiography starts with Teodor Vârnav, who wrote his autobiography in 1845<sup>65</sup>, and continues with Ion Creangă, Garabet Ibrăileanu, Nicolae Iorga or Lucian Blaga.

### **Transylvania. Cultural Unification, *Poporal* Literature and German Law**

In this part of the paper I will discuss two paradigmatic models for the autobiography in Transylvania, that of Ioan Slavici and Lucian Blaga. I consider these two as the paradigmatic models for the Transylvanian autobiography for several reasons. The first one has to do with author's intention. Whereas Slavici aims at uncovering a truthful representation of himself as close as possible to the historical truth, leaving the past to explain the present, Blaga is engaging himself to a creative act. For him autobiography is not designed at uncovering the factual truth behind his actions, but it is more of a way to link the poetic persona of the time of writing with its past, family and childhood and youth experience that are seen from the prism of the mature poet.

Ioan Slavici is a realist autobiographer. His *Lumea prin care am trecut* is not that

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64 Ioan Holban, *Literatura română subiectivă de la origini până la 1990: Jurnalul intim: Autobiografia literară*, (Iași: Tipo Moldova, 2007).

65 I find it significantly under-researched. Not only that it is the first Romanian autobiography (1845), but the “juiciest” part of the narrative, namely the travel of the Moldovan boyar coming from a bankrupted family who basically abandoned him not being able to feed him, through the Romanian provinces (from his village near Tecuci in Southern Moldavia, through Bucharest's Lipscani Street (named after the German merchants from Leipzig) where he pursues the trade under a Greek merchant, and from then further to Sibiu where he is schooled a little all the way to Hotin (Bukovina) where he is appointed a public notary and becomes a well to be man) is absent. More than that, Vârnav's picaresque adventure is the journey of a self-made man, representative for a bankrupted petty boyardom turned bourgeois after 1830s.

different from his literature, or from his attempt to write history, for that matter.<sup>66</sup> The natural world with its topography is the opening scene in both his fiction and his autobiography. Onto the natural, immutable self-enclosed world, the world and the rules of men and society are patched. In there, the individual is cast into a democratic utopia in which he receives the full support of the society he was born into. This is the space in which the remembering takes place. His is the life of a free-floater between Șiria, his home village, Arad, Budapest, Vienna, Sibiu and Bucharest, in school, at work and in prison. The prison experience in more all less all these cities would make the subject of a separate autobiographical volume.<sup>67</sup>

From the maternal advice of being kind and rightful to the Hungarians and Germans “because it is not their fault they were not born Romanians”, Slavici goes on to nationalism and anti-Semitism in his later years. The old age becomes a melancholic reflection for the blessed childhood, and the insight into the personal life an attempt to explain his public positions overtime.

Recounting his friendship with Eminescu is an occasion for Slavici to also reflect on his own childhood, comparing Eminescu's troubled teenage years as a runaway with the closed world he lived in.

And I had been living in a narrow world and knew nothing. Now, at my age and after the disappointments that I faced, and under the circumstances that I live my life, my childhood seems frighteningly happy.<sup>68</sup>

The only boy in a well-to-do family, Slavici remembers growing up with a paternal grandfather who introduced him to reading both religious and literary texts,

a *carbonaro* of Bonaparte's times, who even after 1860, well into his seventies, was closely watching the fashion of his high days. Long, breaded hair tied in a comb, a pretty high hat, down to the knee olive-brown wool

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66 Ioan Slavici, *Ardealul. Studiu Istoric*, (Bucharest: Tipografia și Fonderia de Litere Thoma Basilescu, 1893).

67 Ioan Slavici, *Închisorile mele: scrisori adresate unui prieten din altă lume*, (București: Viața Românească, 1921).

68 Ioan Slavici, *Amintiri. Eminescu, Creangă, Caragiale, Coșbuc, Maiorescu* (București: Cultura Națională, 1924) 12.



jacket, long walking stick with a silver handle and shoes with a big buckle.<sup>69</sup>

Growing up under the close watch of an elder sister who valued “not science, but the good order of things (*buna rânduială*) in everything and the conduct towards doing things right”, Slavici looks back to the past with nostalgia. However, this does not exclude humor and self-irony. Studying in Pest at the university, he recounts having spent “four months, most of the time in and out coffee houses”. When he decided to continue his university studies in Vienna, he proudly exclaims: “I did it on Emperor's money!”. Unlike the tragedy of studying in the city and being away from the village – that one may read in Goga’s accounts for instance – for Slavici, the great city does not mean the loss of the connection with the village, but rather a kind of appendix of the well-established democratic order at home. After all, he was there on the Emperor's money, knew German a little and considered himself

the happiest man in the middle of the big city, where I saw such wonderful things and I did not feel a stranger at all.<sup>70</sup>

However, all that was about to change. For the first time, the introspective look was caused by the contact with Eminescu's nationalism:

I could neither understand nor admit the difference that he made between Romanians and other people. In my mind all people were good and deserving to be loved.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these differences, Slavici was fascinated by Eminescu's personality. The Romanian poet introduced him to Junimea's *Convorbiri Literare* and this is how they organized *Romania Jună* group. While the first part of Slavici’s autobiography is reserved to the happy times at home, the new world, somehow vitiated by maturity and the national activism, is dully narrated. To the safe environment of the childhood at the Arad Vineyard, the celebration at Putna is in sheer contrast and in it we can find the same vein as in the

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69 Id., 12.

70 Id. 14.

71 Id. 17.

autobiographies written by the Transylvanians narrating their experience on the front and on the road towards national unification. The parochial world of the safe familiar environment is replaced by political decision, including acts of anti-Semitism:

Bukovina was crammed with Jews and we decided that neither during the preparations, nor in the celebration day Jews to be aloud in Putna.<sup>72</sup>

This anti-Semitism is explained by the author through economic reasons – so that the Jews would not compete with Romanian entrepreneurs at the festivities. Yet, throughout the entire description of the Putna festivity, Slavici insists that it is not a territorial question, but rather a question of establishing “unity in the cultural life of the Romanian people.” The project of unification of all Romanians into one state is deemed impossible, without unifying all the Romanians within one culture, which would erase “the byzantine and Parisian influences that shatters the foundations of our social life.”<sup>73</sup>

The autobiographical connection is revealed in the Creangă episode. Dissatisfied with the quality of Slavici's writing, Creangă waged that he could write a better *Budulea Taichii*.

I insisted he do that and after two days he read me the first part of his *Amintiri*, which is nonetheless one of the most precious pieces of our “poporal”/folkish literature.<sup>74</sup>

Just like Eminescu, Creangă's literary talent is judged from the point of view of his capacity to truthfully reflect “the Romanian people's way of thinking and feeling.” A constant of Slavici's way of thinking is that the thought and feelings are best represented by the *poporal* (folkish, from the folk and for the folk) literature. From that standpoint, (also addressed in the autobiography sent to *Luceafărul* in 1905) Slavici would bring to the fore the regional identity in himself. Any attempt to unite Romanians into one single culture – not

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72 Id. 62.

73 Id. 115.

74 Id. 140.

necessarily one single state or, in any case, if the all-Romanian national state were to exist, the cultural unification had to be accomplished first<sup>75</sup> – had to start from the folk culture. With that stream of thought, Slavici would argue that any regeneration of the Romanian culture had to start from Transylvanians:

Following the advice from Bechnitz, Eminescu and from those coming from Romania to Putna I admitted that the forms of the Romanian cultural life in Romania will be decided, but I was afraid by the divergent streams in Romania, streams that could falsify the national life and I was concerned with the thought that a healthy cultural movement could only come from Transylvania.<sup>76</sup>

As Romanians living in the Habsburg monarchy, Transylvanians received the defining cultural characteristics “from the great German people, who is also their support when it comes to the political life”<sup>77</sup>, Slavici argued.

Like in the case of *poporal* literature, the autobiography aimed at connecting the individual to the public persona and showing that there was no shift in his political attitudes and no “selling to the Germans” during WWI. His views on cultural unification, with the Transylvanians continuing their allegiance to the Habsburg monarch, are therefore backed up by his autobiographies. Supporting the Germans during the war is not an act of politicianism – dreadful word for Transylvanians – but a commitment to the national project expressed as early as 1871 during the Putna meeting of all Romanians from the Habsburg monarchy, and from abroad initiated by himself and Eminescu under the aegis of the Social Literary Academic Society Romania Jună.

Whereas Slavici's autobiographical writings are deeply concerned with establishing the truth and proving to his contemporaries his moral integrity and the consistency of his

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<sup>75</sup> See also Ioan Slavici, *Politica Națională Română: Articoli scriși de la 1871 până la 1881*, (București: Editura Autorului, 1915).

<sup>76</sup> Ioan Slavici, *Lumea prin care am trecut*, 84.

<sup>77</sup> Ioan Slavici, *Politica Națională Română*, 5.

thought given his germanophilia<sup>78</sup> during the war, Lucian Blaga's *Hronicul și cântecul vârstelor* goes to the opposite. The poet wrote his autobiography between 1945-1946 and, as announced one year earlier in the volume *Discobolul* (1945), his understanding of the difference between biographies and autobiographies follows the division between romanced (*romanțate*) and non-romanced accounts:

Biographies are of two kinds: romanced and non-romanced. Autobiographies are always romanced and it could not be otherwise; *otherwise*, the authors would prefer suicide to writing.<sup>79</sup>

Written at the age of poetic maturity and after his philosophical trilogies, Blaga does not write his autobiography against the blueprint of history, but “according to the exigency of his own spirit.”

As a self-portrait, Blaga's retrospective look at his own life is closer to Iorga's. Also, Iorga and his journal *Sămănătorul* would play a part in the formative years of the future collaborator at Nechifor Crainic's *Gândirea*. Still a child Blaga would act as a mediator between his father's admiration for Iorga and the disagreeing older son Liviu. From the heated family debates on nationalist politics carried *en plein soleil* in the small backyard, under the mulberry tree,

I begun understanding bits and pieces of the discussions. In this way I was getting acquainted with the sound of the questions of those times, not from the books, but out of thin air. Under our mulberry, ample gestures were made, and the problems were coming to life.<sup>80</sup>

Whereas for a historian the autobiography is a history of ideas, for Blaga the autobiographical is a means of constructing the poetic subject. The lines of comparison go

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78 Lucian Boia, Germanofilii. *Elita intelectuală românească în anii primului război mondial*, (București: Humanitas, 2009).

79 Lucian Blaga, *Discobolul*, apud. George Gane, *Lucian Blaga Memorialist* in Lucian Blaga, *Opere* Vol. VI *Hronicul și cântecul vârstelor* (București: Minerva, 1997), p. VI.

80 Blaga, *Hronicul*, 48-49.

even further. The openings of both texts are memorable phrases. The poet, “silent as a swan”, born with a speech impediment that would hinder him from speaking for the first four years of his life, found the core of his later self-portrait in the impossibility of expressing himself as a child. A tragedy indeed for a poet, albeit for an admirer of German expressionism, but also a sign of “being chosen”:

My beginnings are under the mark of a fabulous absence of the word/logos. I fruitlessly search for the traces of that initial silence.<sup>81</sup>

The first phrase of Iorga's “history of ideas” locates the autobiographical pact with the reader in a bolder way, but otherwise characteristic for the ego of the polymath historian:

I did not learn to read and write: these things came naturally to me. I cannot remember any hour of ‘pedagogical’ training for discovering letters, combining them into syllables, which in the end would give me the word.<sup>82</sup>

For both the poet and the historian, the first contact with the world is through language, through the *word*, and reveals a certain kind of predestination of the prodigy that the life and times would prove them to be. Following that, Iorga and Blaga share another theme, that of intellectual formation and of leaving the blessed land of childhood and matriarchal tranquility. Whereas for Iorga his mother was the link to the Byzantine roots, for Blaga, Mother is “Eine Urmutter,” the link with the archaic roots, compensating for the limited knowledge with her intense way of feeling (*trăire*). Blaga would divide the cultural appetite along gender lines:

I inherited the passion for philosophy from my father. (...) The poetical inclinations, labor and productivity were inherited from my mother. She also gave me the sentiment (*trăirea*) as well as the profound sense of superstition, of storytelling, magic and religion. [...] Through her I feel connected to the earth.<sup>83</sup>

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81 Blaga, *Hronicul*, 3.

82 Iorga, *O viață de om*, 10.

83 Liviu Rusu, *De la Eminescu la Lucian Blaga*, (București: Cartea Românească, 1981) 227, apud Gane.

Like Slavici's Șirian democratic utopia, Lancrăm village is endowed with a sense of good order and stability. Unlike in the Moldavian's autobiographies – with the hero always on the run, always avoiding some kind of universal cataclysm, represented either by the Russians, the Turks or cholera, on the road to becoming a picaresque self-made man, where progress hits hard and sweeps away a shattered world – nothing actually happens, and the space is stuck in a timeless parenthesis. Progress always comes from the West, either from Vienna or Pest, and is not a destructive element. Blaga's father, a priest and part-time philosopher, is also a mechanical entrepreneur. In between reading Schiller, Kant or David Strauss, he goes to Pest and buys farming machines that are perfectly fitted into the courtyard, also introducing the “small innovations, affordable to the paucity of villagers resources.” This perception is bound to the greater question of self-image, where

the awakening of national consciousness will be considered only the first step towards the full shaping of a self-image and of a modern political and national mythology.<sup>84</sup>

The regional stereotypes in establishing the 'national specificity' would reach a bewildering peak with G. Călinescu's 1941 'National Specificity' (*Specificul național*)<sup>85</sup>, the standalone chapter and conclusion to his History of Romanian Literature. The specificity reveals itself on the sole condition of being “ethnically Romanian”; it is genetic and racial (Romanians are eugenists by birth, the literary historian would conclude), a characteristic opposed to “those highlighting the specificity (which) are rarely the specific ones, hiding behind a theory their complex of ethnic inferiority.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, Eminescu, Maiorescu, Creangă, Coșbuc, Goga, Rebreanu and Blaga, although being “undeniably pure Romanians” (the pure Romanians as Transylvanians and SubCarpathian inhabitants) come into play as

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84 Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2001) 3.

85 G. Călinescu, *Istoria Literaturii Române de la origini până în prezent*, (Craiova: Vlad & Vlad, 1993) 974-978.

86 Călinescu, 974.

“primordial” rather than specific, primordial in the sense of regressing to the “archaic civilization.”

The rupture from the “purely Romanian village”, going to school in the city of Sebeș, brings the first signs of estrangement, but also a sense of pride:

I was placed in the last place in the classroom. This belittling experience made me think. Surprisingly, even for myself, I got a sense of pride in all that. And I got one thing. I knew that real school has just begun.<sup>87</sup>

Under the banner of “Bildung is Freiheit” and of the common theme of “broadening my horizons”, exiting the small world provided by family, Blaga would discover that both the city and the German culture, but also the mountain – an unknown part of nature – are equally expanding his horizons. All these three environments, the house, the German school and the people in the mountains would offer three manifestations of Romanianness, which can also be traced in his philosophical works and in his theater plays, where the concept of mioritic space or the stylistic matrix play an important role.<sup>88</sup> As part of a turn towards metaphysical speculation represented by Blaga's 'sub-historical' or Mircea Eliade's 'atemporal' ontologies, the mioritic space and the stylistic matrix are part of the core of the new discourse on the constitutive features of the community.<sup>89</sup> In this sense, the community is no longer rooted in history, but in nature.

## Conclusions

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<sup>87</sup> Blaga, *Hronicul*, 26.

<sup>88</sup> His 1934 historical drama *Avram Iancu: drama într-un prolog și trei faze* (Sibiu: Dacia Traiana, 1934) would borrow from the Sebeș Mountain episode of his childhood, when he had a crush on a Hungarian girl, named Erji and Boji. The 1848 hero would fall in love with the same character, Erji/Boji, constructed on the memory of the mountain experience.

<sup>89</sup> Balazs Trencsenyi, “History and Character. Visions of National Peculiarity in the Romanian Political Discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”, *CAS Sofia Working Papers Series*, 3:2011, 33-34.

The high times of Romanian autobiography are represented by the interwar period. As I tried to show, the interwar period as a historical category is not easily translatable into the practice of autobiography or to the politics of memory and remembrance, for that matter. Adapting the microanalytic and macroanalytic levels of interpretation and providing a balance between a close reading of the texts and their integration into larger streams of thought aims at showing that the autobiographies of the interwar period can go beyond the limitations imposed by the literary studies clustered around the canonical status of the authors. At the same time, the autobiographies, more than mapping the life of sometimes obscure authors, would shed light into the relation between the 19<sup>th</sup> century obsession with the self and the individual's work towards defining the national community and its specificity.

Although I do not totally agree with Mihai Zamfir's use of the "memory-imagination" binomial relation, which persists in seeing autobiography as a sub-genre of the novel, viewed as the highest achievement in literary prose and a characteristic for the backwardness of the Romanian letters on their way to synchronizing with the European/Western norm, his periodization nevertheless deserves attention. Building on Miroslav Hroch's understanding of nation and especially on his argument that it is not a coincidence that the emergence of capitalist society and the emergence of nations occurred at the same time,<sup>90</sup> Keith Hitchins identifies three main stages in the evolution of the Romanian nation. The most consistent of the three is that between 1830-1880, following first scholarly inquiry into the "history, language, and customs of the community" and dissemination of a new sense of the community (1770s to the 1820s). This was preceded by the national movement reaching maturity and becoming a mass movement between 1890s and 1914.<sup>91</sup> With the relation

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90 Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 22-24, apud. Keith Hitchins, *Romanian Nation-formation in Transylvania*, in Sorin Mitu (ed.) *Re-Searching the Nation: the Romanian File* (Cluj-Napoca: International Book Access, 2008) 62.

91 Hitchins, *Romanian Nation-Formation in Transylvania*, 62.



between nationalism and print capitalism already identified by Benedict Anderson<sup>92</sup>, the importance of autobiographies in the construction of the imagined community is evident.

Another relation has to be highlighted here, that between the genre of autobiography and capitalism, where autobiography is seen as the bourgeoisie's preferred genre for the mobilization of personal narratives for the project of nation-building. Whereas the beginnings of the genre in Romania are fueled by the Romantic picaresque narratives (Vârnav, Mateiescu, Creangă or even Kogălniceanu<sup>93</sup>), born out of the transformations and the decay of “the old world” capitalism at the middle of the nineteenth century, the autobiographies of the interwar period preserve this sense of *bildung*, while being oriented towards the community, the state and the nation.

Transylvanians' rejection of Romanian politicianism is rooted in the belief in their moral superiority. The superiority is based on the positive influence of the German/Habsburg politics and culture (Slavici) or on qualities acquired during the national fight against Hungarians at the generation following him and preceding the 1914 threshold. Philosopher Constantin Rădulescu-Motru offers the most comprehensive definition of politicianism:

a kind of political activity, or better say the skilled practice of political rights, through which a handful of the citizens of a state tend and sometime succeed in transforming public institutions and services, from means of pursuing the public good, as they should, in means of pursuing the private interest.<sup>94</sup>

According to him, this can only work in the “states with a constitutional representative regime”, and this too will become a target of the argument of moral superiority constructed and reinforced through autobiographies. The other point in defining politicianism is capitalism, as its core trait. According to Rădulescu-Motru, politicianism is characteristic to both mature cultures (in crisis) and to new cultures (immature and inexperienced) connected

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92 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

93 Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Autobiografie* (București: Alcala, 1908).

94 Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Cultura Română și Politicianismul*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (București: Librăria Socec & Co., 1904) 3.

by “capitalists and influent industrialists.” Together with politicians, they represent a common feature of a surprisingly global world,

from the South American republics to Romania and the Balkan countries, in Transvaal and in almost all of the South African countries, in Japan and in many countries of the Far East.<sup>95</sup>

From Montesquieu's “du commerce” theory to the late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> century perception of capitalism along the lines of “decline and fall”, as presented by Jurgen Kocka in a recent lecture at CEU, the balance between private and common good is shattered. Politicianism describes this shift according to which private good is severed from the common good and ultimately acts only towards individual interests. The autobiographies analyzed in the next three chapters are developed along these lines. Politicians are seen as betraying the national ideal behind Greater Romania and acting according to private interests – their own, or even worse the foreigners', or of the Jews. Antisemitism, anti-parliamentarism, individual projects for the building of the national community defended by the appeal to their authors' moral superiority, blend in the autobiographers' somewhat priggish account of their own life and times.

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95 Id., 7.

#### IV. Sever Bocu. From Revolutionary Nationalism to Parliamentary Skepticism

*In politics, habit is stronger than reason*

Thomas Garrigues Masaryk, *The Making of a State*

*We demand a dictatorship in the name of three words: Christ! King! State!*

Sever Bocu, *Towards Organic Unity*

#### Romantic Nationalism and Organic Unity

In the last few years Sever Bocu has become one of the leading figures of Banat's history. Born in 1874 in Sistorovat village Bocu died in 1953 in Sighet prison under unknown conditions. A second-tier politician in the National Party his political career reached the highest point as ministerial of Banat<sup>96</sup>, while the year 1929 finds him in charge with the official celebration of the first ten years in the history of Greater Romania. As Bocu notes, the main task was to built this celebration on the “totality of the Nation, even if only for 24 hours.” In this case, as the organizer highlights, a majority based on a spiritual communion is not enough, what the 10 year anniversary needed was something erected on “the totality of the Nation.”

In contrast to his “regionalism” for which he is praised today, Bocu here praises the equilibrium characterizing “the most consolidated State of all the States that raised from the ashes of Old Europe.” In 1929, with the occasion of the May 10 celebration Romania becomes “a piece of Europe dreamed by pacifism.” Leaving aside the local echo, news about

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<sup>96</sup> In 1929, Regional Ministerial positions were held by Sever Bocu (Minister of Banat), Pantelimon Halippa (Minister for Bessarabia) Voicu Nitescu (Minister for Transylvania), Sauciuc Saveanu Minister for Bukovina.

the anniversary were published in *Volkermagazin*, *Prager Presse*, and Warsaw's *Epoka*. This marking point in the representations of symbolic geographies – what was the Old Europe and which are the states alike in the new continental display – are mirrored by the appeal to history as the committee decided to erect two statues, one for Balcescu in Transylvania and another one for Barnuti in Moldova. This only contributed to the making of the myths about the origins and the agents behind the unification. This genealogical line is completed (yet without statues) by Avram Iancu, Kogalniceanu, Rosetti and Bratianu – with the reserve that Bocu mentions Bratianu with a dose of precaution, warning that it is not the merit of the contemporaries for the love the people carry for “the great Ion Bratianu.” Another occasion for the National-Pasantist to besmirch his Liberal adversaries. The other major decision is that of starting the construction on the Church for the Salvation of the Nation and the plan for a monograph on Transylvania by a committee led by Dimitrie Gusti.

Completing the romantic nationalist myths of the continuity of the nation, the festivity was crowned with a parade of historical characters that are fundamental for the myths of Romanianness. Dacian oriflame bearers, King Decebal and the priests, a Dacian family (women in Dacian costumes doing household chores) and Dacian plowers. The Roman Legionnaires were followed in a chronological fashion by the founders of the Romanian states in the Middle Ages. Negru Voda's *descalecat* and an entire cohort of settlers (including a stock of sheep present for the more realistic image of the first settlers in Wallachia), walk side by side with Bogdan Voda, his Moldavian counterpart, followed by Mircea de Elder, Stephen the Great, Michael the Brave and the reenactment of his entry Alba Iulia alongside “the priests, the corporations” as well as the Napragyi, the Hungarian Catholic bishop. The last two tableaux of the Alba Iulia parade were Horia, Closca and Crisan and Avram Iancu. The public display of Romaniannes stopped at 1848 with the special thanks that the Patriarch Regent paid to the medieval voivods. For the events of after 1848, the state had at its disposal

the living.

Four years after the May 10 celebration, in Timisoara, Sever Bocu shows a new face of nationalism, one that goes from the Romanticist myths of nationhood to straightforward fascism. All that in the context in which the National Peasantist party is demanded to become a dictatorial party, following the influence of the “events happening in Nuremberg”.

“Towards Organic Unity” published in 1933, is in itself a short pamphlet on nature of the state, subtitled

From 30 little flags to a single one: the National one! From economic liberalism to mechanized, planned economy. Romanian Nation has to reach 40 million subjects in order to secure its national territory. Searching for new horizons!...<sup>97</sup>

Calling for a dictatorship without a dictator in the strict sense of a charismatic leader like Hitler or Mussolini – Bocu even advances the fantasist scenario according to which Romanian politicians should not seek a model in Hitler, but in A. C. Cuza who was *the* model for Hitler.

From a political point of view this pamphlet marks the ideological separation between Bocu and Ion Mihalache. Based on an ideological break, while Mihalache asks the PNT to avoid both extreme right and left and aim for the center of the political specter, Bocu argues that the National-Peasantist should make a step forward, from center to the right, lest they should have the fate of Kerensky who refused to destroy Lenin and “gave the masses the signal that he wants nothing.” Unless the PNT moves to the extreme right, transforming itself into an anti-liberal, anti-Semite, against “parliamentary control”, youth oriented dictatorship, the only outcome would be creating a new form of political hybrid. Hybrids as Europe had shown to the Banat politician is not the face of twentieth century Europe. Ultimately, the biggest merit of the pamphlet is that it defines two key concept of his political thought that are largely reflected in his autobiography: revolution (nationalist and fascist) and moral

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<sup>97</sup> Sever Bocu, *Spre Unitate Organica*. (Timisoara, Tipografia Romaneasca, 1933)

superiority (held by the heralds of New Europe's aforementioned revolutionary spirit). Yet there is another major aspect that the *Towards Organic Unity* accounts for: the argument of “moral superiority” that Bocu uses against politicianism of Greater Romanian politics, the same moral argument that he will use to link his activity and his life altogether to the Volunteers Legions in Russia and to the Masarykian model Bocu continuously claims to have followed in the creation of Greater Romania.

### The Memoir as Autobiography of the Nation

In his memoir *Zile Trăite (Days that I Lived)*, Roman Ciorogariu the mentor behind the redactors of Tribuna in Arad,<sup>98</sup> is straightforwardly assigning agency to the “steemed youth” of Arad: “The whole Transylvanian literary youth lead by Octavian Goga, effectively brought Transylvania and Romania together into a unified language and culture. The war was only left the task of sanctioning the territorial unification.”<sup>99</sup> Writing a decade after Ciorogariu – from a vantage point that allowed him to observe and criticize the leanings of the Transylvanian politicians in Romanian Parliament in the interwar period and especially in the mid-1930s – Sever Bocu follows the same lines, namely that the unification was not the result of the center imposing its will onto periphery, but the other way around. In Bocu's view, the national movement that led to the unification of Transylvania with Romania that only had to be sanctioned by the war was the *revolutionary nationalism* of the Tribuna in Arad. To that, during the war, Bocu adds *voluntarism*. Under the guise of what can be called Greater Romania-skepticism, Bocu comes to see the post-1918 state as completely disconnected, if not straightforward betraying exactly these two coordinates.

The matter at stake was to select and propose which camp of the nationalist

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98 Gh. Tulbure, *Roman Ciorogariu*, “Familia”, Seria III, Anul III, Nr. 1, 1936: 4. “Tribuna in Arad is closely connected to his name. That happens exactly during its heyday, when this newspaper was a real *revolution*. The *Revolution of the Transylvanian national idea*. (my highlight)

99 Roman Ciorogariu, *Zile Traite*, (Oradea: Tipografia Diecezana, 1926), 7.

movement in Transylvania mastered the unification. With the local market already having open an appetite for memoirs, the genre enjoys a distinct capacity in translating the personal experience on the “unification war” to the general public. Through that, the strategy of constructing the self is indissolubly tied to creating the nation, to the extent that, as we shall see in Sever Bocu's memoirs, the self is almost completely subdued by the nation. Following the general trend of producing “unofficial” histories that highlight the merit of individuals and camps into the making of the state in an attempt to be accepted by the community of readers as the official history of the unification, Sever Bocu uses the genre of memoir as a proxy for his view on the history of Banat – intermingled with Transylvania – up to and including the nineteenth century, and to reinterpret its transfer into the realities of the province newly incorporated into the new state. The memoirs work as the story of that transfer, but also as a means of preserving the local identity. The strong regionalist component of his discourse is therefore kindled by his interpretation of the history of Banat and is disseminated to the general public through memoirs, political articles, and public conferences, all of them telling the same story.

The criticism from the periphery, first of all a political periphery, since Sever Bocu was not among the prime figures of either the National Party or after 1926 of the National Peasant Party and hold only regional positions – of Greater Romania's realities comes along the lines of Transylvanians' rejection of the revolutionary character of their own history<sup>100</sup> coupled with the dissatisfaction that the new state failed to acknowledge the role of Transylvanian volunteers on the front. It is more to his approach than to the “official” criticism directed against Transylvanians becoming involved in Greater Romanian politics. As Irina Livezeanu shows, the accusations of *politicianism* coming from the leaders of the

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<sup>100</sup> “Here [Transylvania and Banat] evolution is revolution... The cyclical revolutions in Transylvania and Banat give their History its own character, the revolutionary character. One revolution prepares the next one, creates the revolutionary spirit, the red thread that links them together.” Sever Bocu, *Drumuri Si Rascruce*, *Memorii*, Vol I, (Timisoara, 1939), 47.

National Party “Iuliu Maniu, or Onisifor Ghibu, notable for their honesty and correctness” against the Balkan style of Romanian politics conveys a strong dose of regionalism.<sup>101</sup> But this position is largely employing stereotypes of a “national character” kind.<sup>102</sup> Ion Rusu Abrudeanu, Transylvanian member of the Liberal Party, pinpoints this opposition to the politics of the Old Kingdom not on regionalism, but on federalism<sup>103</sup> seen here as an “incurable disease” of the leaders of the national movement, and particularized through Vaida-Voevod's *Ardealul Ardelenilor* 1922 pamphlet. On the other hand, Bocu argument against the politicianism of post-1918 is not based on character, but on an opportunism of conjuncture that was largely directed against his own ideas of *revolutionarism and voluntarism*.

### Time, History and Family

Sever Bocu planned to publish four volumes under the title of *Roads and Crossroads (Drumuri si Rascruci)*: Vol I. *Memoirs*, Vol. II. *Discourses*, Vol. III *Evocations* and a fourth volume, *Beliefs*. It is an ambitious plan for designed around the genre of memoir, with the aim of informing the “future generations” about the past of the nation. By 1939 when he released the first volume *Memoirs (Memorii)*, Bocu sketched the plan of his memoirs. Announcing that he will stop the flow of events to the Peace Conference because “the time

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101 Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), 134.

102 For a counterbalanced version against Maniu and (this time) Al. Vaida-Voevod – who stand accused of pro-Habsburg and anti-Romanian feelings see. Ion Rusu Abrudeanu, *Pacatele Ardealului fata de sufletul Vechiului Regat. Fapte, Documente, Facsimile* (Transylvanian Sins Against the Soul of the Old Kingdom), (Bucuresti: Cartea Romaneasca, 1930). Rusu Abrudeanu, member of the Liberal Party, himself would qualify as one of the “balkanized” Transylvanians.

103 “I finally solved this ever consuming enigma: the real cause was *habsburgism* or *austrophilism*, introduced especially by *Alex. Vaida* engineer and tireless informer in archduke Franz Ferdinand's “laboratory.” Rusu Abrudeanu, p. 16. The question would be what the interwar “regionalism” inherits from the pre-war attempts of federalizing Austria-Hungary.



after the Conference, organically interwoven with the present, is still not ripe for history.” The *Memoirs* are dedicated to his grandson, Constantin “who will understand it later.” Beyond the sentimental value of this dedication in fact it represents a passing down of the Banat legacy to the next generation who will ultimately “with greater moral powers” bring to life the “other Banat, other Transylvania” and the rebirth of the “revolutionary spirit.” In this respect, Bocu's memoirs give to family a particular understanding that is ultimately telling about his understanding of the personal past. The particularity of Bocu's peculiar patriarchalism comes to the light if we compare his memoir to Petre Nemoianu's series of autobiographies. Nemoianu's *Memories (Amintiri)*<sup>104</sup> and *Memories from my Childhood (Amintiri din copilărie)* are the description of a personal, rather than historically collective Banat, and exposing the personal journey of a Romanian peasant child from his household, through school up to the political position of Deputy and Prefect of Lugoj. Although he himself a nationalist, volunteer and prisoner in Russia, Nemoianu chose to focus on the individual social mobility achieved through education, or as he puts it “from the ox-wagon to automobile.”

It was not until 1945 that the second and last volume appeared.<sup>105</sup> Edited by I. D. Suciu and combined the *Evocations* with *Discourses*, mainly by collecting materials already published in Sever Bocu's *Vestul* (The West) newspaper, or by bringing together the texts of various conferences that were published in independent volumes. The *Evocations*, public speeches at the commemoration of Banat's historical figures, eulogies held at the funerals of friends, members of the National Party or fellow volunteers on the Russian front reproduce

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<sup>104</sup> The first version was published by Octavian Goga's *Tara Noastra* magazine in 1928. The second version, *Amintiri din copilărie*, this time a more mature and rich (including quantitatively) is published in 1939. Expanding on the Banat patriarchalism and the memory, it is extremely interesting to see how especially after the 2000s in both Bocu and Nemoianu's cases their relatives, in this case grandsons or nephews (Peter Georgescu in Bocu's case, and Alexandru Nemoianu) get involved in the republishing of their grandfathers' memoirs.

<sup>105</sup> Incidentally, the volume I had in hands came with Sever Bocu's handwritten dedication to Petre Nemoianu: “To P. Nemoianu, my friend through the harsh roads of Russian exile that were leading us to Greater Romania, with brotherly love, Sever Bocu. Bucharest, 1945, March 22<sup>nd</sup>”

the same understanding of the national fight as presented in his own memoirs. I argue with Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir, that biography is a form of autobiography, – “Writing on one's family constitutes a part of the more general search for origin and identity present in autobiographical writing”<sup>106</sup> – and I try to expand his argument beyond contemporary practices. Building himself first and foremost as a political *agent* acting towards the unification of the entire Banat with Romania, Bocu is projecting himself as a continuation of a grander historical *family*. Going beyond social or biological ties, he proposes himself and offers as an argument for that his memoirs as one individual in a familiar series of individualities that are connected by the same goal, that of the national fight in the Banat. The nation is appropriated to the extent in which it becomes a larger family defined on ethnic and regional basis; acting as a family it has its own laws of inheritance: “From Iorgovici and Tichindeal, the National Flag is handed down from one pair of hands to another. For a while it is picked up by the archpriest of Lipova, Stoichescu Petrovici and in the end by Eftimie Murgu. From these hands it passes to Andrei Mocioni and Vichentie Babes, and further down in a somehow sovereign order to another Mocioni, to the Bredicens, to Aurel C. Popovici.”<sup>107</sup> In his case, writing about his kin as if a family is not as much a narrative means of self-discovery, but more of an attempt to overlap personal over national history. The story of the nation is interwoven with the story of his family, and the self is only an intermediary phase, a passage, that needs to account for itself.

### Telling the Story of the Nation

The first volume of Sever Bocu's political memoirs starts with his explanation of what

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<sup>106</sup> Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir, *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing*, (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003), p. 183.

<sup>107</sup> Sever Bocu, *Drumuri si Rascruci*, Vol. II. p. 51.

the Arad-based Tribuna newspaper was and the part it played in history of the Romanian National Party in Transylvania (PNR).<sup>108</sup> The roads of Sever Bocu start with his entry in the circle around the Tribuna newspaper, and as the title of his autobiography indicates the roads is a not straightforward path, but it is more of a crossroad. The fate of Tribuna newspaper is channeled around two main dimensions. The first one is the temporal, with the 1892 Memorandum playing the crucial part.<sup>109</sup> The second one has to do with the political strategy and organization of the National Party (PNR), in between *activism* and *pasivism*. In the aftermath of the Memorandum trial the quarrel between the leaders of the National Party and the leaders of Tribuna showed the deeper marks of the inherent conflict undermining the unity of the national project itself.<sup>110</sup> Going beyond the intricate plot underlain by the political organization of the Romanian nationalists reaching a peak in the 1910s when Sever Bocu is the director of the newspaper, the historical preamble opening the memoir is interesting from another point of view. It presents in a nutshell how politics interact with personal memory and the history of the imagined community.

More than telling the inside story of what the *tribunism* was and what side was in fact right, the introductory chapter aims at more than familiarizing the reader to events of the 1910s. Before plunging into a reflection of the self, Bocu appeals to history in order to cautionary place himself as character of his own story. Most certainly the historical overview introducing the proper memoir is written in the late 1930s, forming a separate body from the proper memoir. Constantly mingling the past and the present in order to account for the moral fiber of the present day political figures, from Vaida-Voevod's opportunism of the 1910s

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<sup>108</sup> Sever Bocu, "Revolutionary Spirit – Historical Oportunism. What was Tribuna at Arad?" in *Drumuri si Rascruci*, (Timisoara, 1939), pp. 45-167.

<sup>109</sup> In 1892, Sever Bocu was 18 and working for Banca Transilvania in Sibiu, when he joined Tribuna. "That moment is still alive. I was 18 and I was in Sibiu, with Banca Transilvania. The Tribunist and Memorandist current was an irresistible attraction so that I was forced, against my parents' will, – they were not opportunistic but worried about my future – to leave my job and join Tribuna's editorial board." Sever Bocu, *Drumuri si Rascruci*, Vol II, p. 301.

<sup>110</sup> Vlad Popovici, *Tribunismul 1884-1905*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008)

announcing the ambitions of the future prime minister, to Octavian Goga's "Hitlerization," Bocu integrates these examples in the larger framework of Transylvanian revolutionary history. Another contemporary intervention, this time more methodologically substantial is offered by Nicolae Iorga's nine-volume *Istoria Românilor* (published between 1913-1936). Whereas Bocu renders the history of Transylvania and Banat – "a history of revolutions, a history of masses" – in opposition to the history of the Principalities – "a history where the masses hide their aspirations behind personal rivalries,"<sup>111</sup> Iorga's *Istoria Românilor* is found methodologically weak since it is build on overarching temporal typologies.<sup>112</sup> What is proposed is a history of the Provinces. Of course, the one to offer a history of the Province is Bocu himself.

First and foremost it is a first-hand access to the meaning Bocu assigned to history. The crisis that struck Tribuna in the aftermath of the 1909 disastrous election results forced its director to defend himself. Bocu's defense is headed against what he identifies the impotence, and ultimately the opportunism of the members of the PNR and of the National Committee. On a general tone of the grand structures that account for the history of Transylvania, Bocu opposes the opportunism of age of parliamentary activism<sup>113</sup> to the representatives of the "historical Transylvania." The Arad tribunism enters in competition with the dominance of the official representatives of the Romanian cause, the PNR and the National Committee, and the conflict is not limited to the 1910s, but it is prolonged into the interwar period. It takes the form of attacks against the opportunism and lack of morality of

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111 Sever Bocu, "revolutionary Spirit – Historical Oportunism. What was Tribuna at Arad?" in *Drumuri si Rascruci*, vol I, p. 46.

112 "Every volume has a summarizing idea as generic title, "Reformers", "revolutionaries", "Nation-builders". Yet the distinction is voluntary, personal and disregarded by the other younger historians, his colleagues at the University." id.

113 Vasile Goldis, Teodor Mihali or Alexandru Vaida-Voevod are contraposed to Gheorghe Lazăr, Simion Bărnutiu, the Laurians, or the Papu Ilarians. "It would be a mistake to believe that because Vasile Goldis, Teodor Mihali, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod were opportunists on whom the people put their hopes in vain, the entire Transylvania is opportunistic. Alas, no, we still have not met the historical Transylvania (Ardeal)." Sever Bocu, "Revolutionary Spirit – Historical Oportunism What was Tribuna at Arad?" in *Drumuri si Rascruci*, vol I, p. 89.

the Transylvanian politicians – with the exception of the leader of the National-Peasantist Party Iuliu Maniu – once entered in the Romanian Parliament. In an attempt to offer consistency to his rejection of interwar Romanian Parliamentarism, the anti-parliamentarism is projected back to the opposition against the activist politics of the PNR, despite the fact that the Arad-based Tribuna (1903-1912) was in fact supporting the activist politics. Bocu's anti-Parliamentarism has to be separated from the anti-parliamentarism of the the extreme right-wing, since his opposition was not directed against the principles of parliamentarism, but rather against the nationalist consensus, “the nearly all-pervasive character of Greater Romania's nationalist discourse driven by the desire for rapid national consolidation and social and political mechanisms involved in realizing that goal.”<sup>114</sup>

The *Memoirs* are the story of a defeated man, his dissatisfaction with the outcome of Greater-Romania is not targeted against the state, the monarchy, the king or his own party, but seen as a betrayal of the “Transylvanian historical revolution.” Merging personal and national identity, Bocu's autobiographical writing does not borrow from literature, but from history, a version of history according to which the continuous historical revolution that characterizes the Romanian political struggle in Transylvania reached its last stage with the war. Transylvania gained its freedom and was part of the Greater Romania, but the most disturbing sight is to see the Transylvanian representatives in the Bucharest parliament rallying with Alexandru Marghiloman, accused of germanophilism and colaborationism with the Germans during the occupation of Bucharest, therefore acting against Transylvanians' interests.<sup>115</sup> *Roads and Crossroads* is ultimately the story of the dissatisfaction with the present, of the impossibility of adapting to the realities of the new state. Against the trend of taking his

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<sup>114</sup> Irina Livezeanu, p. 14.

<sup>115</sup> “The oportunism seeks justifications. And the ideas guided the representatives of the Transylvanian nationalism up to Marghiloman, a kind of Mangra of the Kingdom. I had no gloomier day than during the session when the Transylvanians were vigorously applauding Marghiloman in Parliament. Is this the Transylvania we fought for, is this the Transylvania of our dreams? I was touched by a vague sadness and my soul was bitter: our voluntarism was cornered, it fought in vain.” Drumuri si Rascruci, Vol I. p. 61.

regionalism for granted in a form of anachronism overlapping a contemporary regionalism drive for cultural identity<sup>116</sup> that portrays Bocu as the last leader of Banat, I believe that origins of Bocu's regionalism have to be looked at the incongruous transfer of knowledge from one political system to another and from the type of “regionalism” to that rekindled in the late 1930s around his redefinition of the *tribunism* of the 1910s as the version of one-true nationalism that the history proved right. Once the former leaders of the National Party enter the Romanian Parliament, the anti-centralist drive is mobilized against the present politics, but also projected back and directed against the same people who happen not to follow his path for the liberation of Transylvania.

The turmoil of the 1910-1912 at the Tribuna in Arad puts in motion the mechanism of defense that Bocu will employ constantly in the 1930s. History and memoir are kindled around several intertwined threads: the revolutionary character of Transylvanian history, passivism over activism, anti-Parliamentarism, regionalism and a revanchist attitude against the political spectrum. All these come together after 1918, coupled with a high sense of morality more likely leaning towards an original form of technocratic thinking in what concerns state administration, and in the bitter context in which the voluntarism of the Transylvanian Druzina on the Eastern Front is not recognized at the true value Bocu expected.<sup>117</sup> I will analyze this evolution and how these landmarks fuse with each other in

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<sup>116</sup> The memory of Sever Bocu resurfaced as main promoter of Banat regionalism in the works of Viorel Marineasa (whose publishing house published a second edition of Sever Bocu's *Drumuri si Rascruci, Vol I. Memorii*, with the preface of Marineasa where he makes a strong case for Bocu as a inventor and main supporter of Banat regionalism) or Vasile Bogdan, in film as well as in a book of essays released under the same title *Sever Bocu, a troubled life*. An interesting case is also that of the public conferences organized by local intellectuals from Banat “Sara Bănăţană”/Banat Evening where the regionalism is “depoliticized” and offered a cultural turn, under the main idea of a search for a regional cultural identity (We the Banatians forgot who we are) and the loss of representation on the central level, where the figure of Sever Bocu emerges as “our last leader.”

<sup>117</sup> As a Ministerial Director in Timisoara he issued an order for landing the volunteers. In the *Valor Noua* (New Values) article that he entirely quotes he opposes the new values represented by the voluntarism and their sacrifice “as a living protest against empty and soulless intellectualism”, against the state employees (lawyers, physicians, clerks, officers) they themselves opposed to the peasant “because the peasant is giving to the state more than it gets back.” In this framework the volunteers and the peasants are the main losers of the shift from “the grand and glorious assault, that in the end came with the liberation of Transylvania – through others” to “the assault to jobs and honors of the future Romanian state.” His decision was canceled

his memoirs. A special emphasis will be placed on the incongruous relation between his views on Greater-Romania (without the entire Banat, a loss that he will never forgive I. I. C. Brătianu) and the Masarykian model of state-building to which Bocu time and again returns.

### **The Blessed land of Dobrogea**

In 1912, with *Tribuna* coming to an end, Sever Bocu leaves his native Banat for Dobrogea, “my California.” He will spend there four years “the time between *Tribuna* and the war.”<sup>118</sup> During these four years Bocu is part of the Transylvanian wave of colonizing the Northern part of province. The integration of the multi-ethnic province of Dobrogea – divided at the Berlin Treaty (1878) between Romania (Northern Dobrogea) and Bulgaria (Southern Dobrogea, or the Quadrilateral)<sup>119</sup> – anticipates the complex process of administrative and cultural uniformization specific to post-1918 Romania.<sup>120</sup> A special case of threefold mechanism of incorporation – ethnic colonization, cultural homogenization, and economic modernization – proposed by Iordachi, is set by the peculiar model of inner colonization through Romanian non-nationals, namely the Transylvanians and especially after 1912 law that was more permissive with Romanian colonists who owned rural and urban property<sup>121</sup>. The road of the colonist from one Quadrilateral to another, “to the other end of the Romanian lands”, is seen as a repetition of Transylvanian shepherds' transhumance to “the rich, silky pastures of Dobrogea, the roads that we followed driven by Californian

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by the government “Iorga-Argetoianu (the technocratic government!) canceled it, out of lack of knowledge, malevolence, immorality or amorality whatsoever.” Sever Bocu, *Drumuri si Rascrucii* vol II, p. 115.

<sup>118</sup> Sever Bocu, *Drumuri si Rascrucii*. Memorii, Vol. I. p. 169.

<sup>119</sup> Constantin Iordachi, *Citizenship, Nation, and State Building: The Integration of Northern Dobrogea into Romania, 1878-1913*. Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> See Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995)

<sup>121</sup> Iordachi, p. 61.

impulses towards a no man's land where the traditions die out or live in a Babylonian eclecticism.”<sup>122</sup> In the Californian no man's land the former director of *Tribuna* is prone to a fresh start, abandoning the nationalist struggle for an economic civilizing mission. For a moment he found a comfort in the status of *heimatlos* enjoying economic prosperity offered by farming and hotel industry. Soon, as he so worrisomely notes, the news about the war will uproot him once more.

Seen in relation to the Center, Banat and Dobrogea share the same peripheral and multi-ethnic status. The question of citizenship in both provinces create a special connection where the *heimatlos* finds a second *patria*, a place where he was not offered Romanian citizenship,<sup>123</sup> but also a place for exercising and fostering national identity. The colonization does not work only one way according to which the civilized Habsburg subject is taming the virgin land of Dobrogea, transferring the civilization of Banat to the Babylonian eclecticism. Outside Banat, although in a province falling roughly under the same realities, and a future model for the cultural, political and economic homogenization of interwar Romania, Bocu's national struggle is downplayed in favor of the economic integration. Bocu rejects the appeal of the Romanian Liberal Party to join its ranks as deputy, proposal that came from the prefect of Constanța, Gheorghe Mumuianu, as well as the intention of I. I. C. Brătianu – expressed in Iași through Alexandru Lepădatu – to appoint him leader of the Liberal Party in Dobrogea, replacing Luca Oancea, also Transylvanian. The motivation behind colonist's resistance “political colonization” is one of principle: “I answered that this might happen but only in Greater Romania, because in Little Romania I am not a citizen, nor do I want to become one.”<sup>124</sup> Rejecting political integration in a state on which his *heimat* did not belong, Bocu builds his own capitalist-run version of Greater Romania. More than

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<sup>122</sup> Sever Bocu, *Drumuri și Răscruci*, Vol I. p. 169-170.

<sup>123</sup> “Laws on the political emancipation of Dobrogeans announced in article 4 were passed gradually only in 1908-1913. From 1878 to 1908, the inhabitants of Dobrogea thus enjoyed only a local type of citizenship.” Iordachi p. 24.

<sup>124</sup> Sever Bocu, *Drumuri și Răscruci*, Vol I. p. 170.



just a farmer, the hotel built by Bocu on the shore of Lake Tekirghiol, the future Eforie, as a meeting place, represents a scale version of the future state and of the powers involved in its creation. The Royal Family was a constant guest, but also Czernin, von der Busche, Ştirbey, Mavrocordat, Lahovary, Ghica and Sturdza families<sup>125</sup> were spending there the winter of 1915-1916.

Not only the Royal Family and the unwanted tourists chose Bocu's seaside hotel. In August 1916, when Romania joined the Entente against the Central Powers, Bocu had to leave behind his California for the Romanian army at Craiova and from then on marching to Iasi, and in the summer of 1917 he takes the road to Kiev with the mission to organize the Transylvanian volunteers in the fight against Austria-Hungary. Two years earlier, in August 1914, Sever Bocu was in the company of his mentor at the Tribuna, Roman Ciorogariu who recounts the episode in his own memoir.<sup>126</sup> The two representatives of the Arad tribunism write about two distinct moments of the war – the future bishop of Oradea (1920) goes back to Arad as soon as the war starts in 1914, while his former collaborator prolongs his stay in Dobrogea until “the start of the war” at the end of Romania's neutrality. Regardless of the two distinct moments when it started, the world conflagration ends for both of them with the revolution; yet here the main difference lies in the meaning assigned to the revolution. Whereas Ciorogariu understands the events of November 1918<sup>127</sup>, for Bocu the revolution is not limited to the particular event, but the final stage in the revolutionary character of Transylvanian history.

In the economy of the narrative, the Dobrogean experience is undermined by that of the War and the making of Greater-Romania. Four years spent in the new borderland province are dealt with in short. Although one gets the sense that exactly the experience of

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<sup>125</sup> “I had my strong reserves to these people. There was much to be forgiven, and they were insisting that we should stay together, but I did not show up among them.” Drumuri si Rascruce pp. 171-172.

<sup>126</sup> Roman Ciorogariu, *Zile trăite*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>127</sup> Vasile Bianu, *Insemnari din Rasboiul Romaniei Mari*, Vol II (Cluj: Institutul de Arte Grafice Ardealul, 1926), p. 90

the *heimatlos* leaving the multi-ethnic patria for a Babylonian no man's land would be the main narrative material, Bocu's memoir fails to observe the rich “life-material” provided by his stay in Dobrogea during the Balkan wars and Romania's neutrality. In turn it would make the main narrative material for Viorel Mândruleasa's postmodern, fictional rewriting of Bocu's memoir.<sup>128</sup> The economic integration of the *farmer* “living a life to which we could get used to” – Bocu borrows from English to complete the Californian image, but also because the Romanian equivalent would have been *peasant* – is preferred to the cultural and political integration into “Little Romania.” In between Banat and Dobrogea, the only transfer of knowledge develops on economic coordinates of bringing Banat civilization to the lands of Dobrogea.

### Masaryk and the Russian Revolution

In July 15, 1917 Bocu reaches Kiev “the mother of the Russian cities”, and five days later he starts publishing “România Mare”<sup>129</sup> newspaper that is distributed “to all the prisoner camps in Russia.” Beyond the historical contingency, Bocu tries to establish deep rooted historical and cultural connections between his presence in Kiev and the fate of the Romanian unity. “I was obsessively consumed by a question: through which mysterious connections the fate of our unity – treated as a chimera by all political thinkers, and let us admit it, by the majority of Romanian political figures – to this muscovite city, the mother of all Russian cities as it was called, due to the importance that it took after the fall of

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<sup>128</sup> Viorel Marineasa, In pasaj, (Bucuresti: Editura Militară, 1990)

<sup>129</sup> July, 20 to December, 22 1917 subtitled “newspaper of the Romanian Volunteers in Austria-Hungary. It reappears between January, 7 – April, 8 1919 subtitled “newspaper of Romanian volunteers and soldiers in France and Italy.”

Constantinople as the new Byzantium.”<sup>130</sup> The obsession takes the form of a search for correlations between the road to Union that passes through the orthodox Kiev and “these traditions that have definitively attached us to Orient of our faith.” All in the name of mystery, it is unthinkable for Bocu that the fate of the national fight in Transylvania will be solved on Russian lands. One way to appropriate this curious and mysterious development is through religion.<sup>131</sup>

The activity of the Transylvanian army in Russia is under the banner of curiosity and mystery, and is explained not in political or strategic terms but in terms of God's will, and it is justified by the existence of the Orthodox Church, the ultimate resort of Romanian life. Here too, Bocu's understanding of Romanianness is one of inbetweenness.<sup>132</sup> The faith is ultimately tying the Romanians to the East, while the language and culture is of Western origin. Ultimately, God as the mysterious force behind reality and the matrix of events decides over Transylvanians' works on the Russian plains. Here, fanaticism and idealism come together in the works of the “sămănători.<sup>133</sup>” While the will of God may explain the overall foundations of the realities behind the war and behind this path to Romania's unification, it falls short of accounting for the organization of the “Romanian Volunteers' Corps.” For that, Bocu finds a model in the Czech example set by Thomas Masaryk.

The future Czechoslovak president is not only a model of managing the human resources “found through God's will on the Russian steppe” but more than that, his *Světová revoluce za války a ve válce, 1914-1918* published in 1925 and with the French translation *La résurrection d'un état: Souvenirs et réflexions 1914-1918* (1930) is a model for how Sever

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130 Sever Bocu, “Opt luni in Kiev” in *Drumuri si Rascrucii*, Vol. II Discourses (Bucuresti: 1945), p. 97.

131 “When meditating and interpreting reality, it is impossible to not see that it is nothing more than the expression of the divine will which we are made aware of only posthumously to the event, through interpretation and revelation of the reality.” p. 97

132 Yet this inbetweenness is a contextual one, since the first revolution in the Transylvanian cycle of revolutions is started by crushing of the rebellion led Gheorghe Doja (György Dózsa) and the Reformation. “The Uniate church was our Reformation.” Sever Bocu, *Drumuri si Rascrucii*, Memorii, Vol I. p. 48.

133 “The Transylvanian officers were real Sowers (sămănători) of Romanian ideas and sentiments among the Bessarabian academics.” Sever Bocu, *Opt luni in Kiev*, p. 99.

Bocu organizes his war memoirs. We find in Masaryk's war memoir not only the leading concepts that organize Bocu's historiographical views but also a model to build the Transylvanian character along the lines of revolution, Reformation and History. Neither Bocu, nor Masaryk are historians, but both of them are preoccupied with giving a solution to the "national question."<sup>134</sup>

Looking at the shortcomings in translating the Czechoslovak model developed by Masaryk around the concept of "world-democracy<sup>135</sup>" sheds light on both Bocu's political mindset as well as on the political atmosphere of Greater Romania where Bocu imagines integrating a way of constructing nationalism that he himself improperly grasped. What falls through the cracks in this third-hand translation of the "making of a state" is a way of looking at what was already there and get a prime representation what did not work as well as what was the political environment. Both Bocu and Masaryk employ the same definition of the national character, starting from history and geographic position. Rooted in "the healthy germ in Kollar's doctrine of reciprocity [that] excludes only romantic Messianism and Chauvinism."<sup>136</sup> Despite the fact that the two seem to share their preference of historians, Bocu admiring Palacký, Kollár and Havlicek,<sup>137</sup> Bocu uses them exactly for proposing the model of the mid-nineteenth century political activist "aspiring to the crown of martyrs" instead of of the 1910s promoters of activism. Lacking Masaryk's philosophical conception of

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<sup>134</sup> For an insightful look into Masaryk's views on the "Czech Question", his relation to Goll's school of history and Pekar, see Milan Hauner, "The Meaning of Czech History: Masaryk versus Pekař," in: Harry Hanak, ed., T. G. Masaryk (1850-1937), vol. 3. Statesman and Cultural Force (New York, 1990), pp. 25-42.

<sup>135</sup> Where mankind is "rationally" defined "Mankind is for us a concrete, practical idea, an organization of nations, for there can be no internationalism without nationality. I repeat, the more national we are the more human we shall be, the more human the more national." where definition of love, falls closer to Comte's altruism "Humanity requires positive love of one's own people and the Fatherland, and repudiates hatred of other peoples." Tomas Masaryk, *The Making of a State : Memories and Observations, 1914-1918* (New York: H. Fertig Press, 1969) p. 409.

<sup>136</sup> Tomas Masaryk, *The Making of a State*, p. 381.

<sup>137</sup> "The grand theoreticians of mid-century nationalism, Palacký, Kollar, Hlavicek, the authors of the Kremsier Constitution were outdated, our Barnutiu was out of fashion, and all that when? - only five years before having it all, political and national freedom." Sever Bocu, *Ziaristica Ardeleana si Banateana dinainte de razboi*, in *Drumuri si rascruce* Vol II. Discursuri, p. 206.

realism inherited from the positivist turn against Romanticism<sup>138</sup>, Bocu turns the other way around, towards Romanticism and Messianism.

Masaryk defines the Czech identity in between East and West and against Spengler – his answer to “Ex oriente lux” is that “light comes likewise from the West” – and calls for a “synthesis of culture, to the influence of all nations, Slav and non-Slav, upon each other”, while for Bocu the main strive is not for a “synthesis of cultures” but for discovering the origins. Following Palacky, Masaryk projects the nation around Hussitism and “our Reformation” that is not limited to the Czechlands, but “sets up ideals which the West presently realized; for, as Palacky rightly observes, in our Reformation are to be found the germs of all the ideas and movements that developed afterwards in the West. Comenius was bound by spiritual ties to the West, and upon him, as upon Hus, English influence was beneficent.”<sup>139</sup> For Sever Bocu, “our reformation” is also identified with the birthmark of the national movement, but Rome did not offer the humanitarianism of the Hussites and its “germs of democracy”, but “two centuries of Roman discipline,” as he superciliously answers to the militant orthodoxism coming from the camp of integral nationalists. Inspired by Masaryk, but also finding a model in Palacky and Havlicek, Bocu's regionalist version of nationalism comes closer to the Czech Romantic thought of opposition to centralism and of territory as the basis for nationalism.<sup>140</sup>

Voluntarism comes closer to the framework set by revolutionarism and regionalism as a means through which the two were expressed during the war. It is also projected as the heir of the mid-nineteenth century Transylvanian *activism* and finally it is integrated into the centrifugal impulses of resisting the national homogenization, as an alternative model of self-

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138 Eva Schmidt-Hartmann, “The Fallacy of realism: some problems of Masaryk’s approach to Czech National Aspirations,” in: Stanley B. Winters, ed., T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937), vol. I., Thinker and Politician (London : Macmillan, 1990), p. 131-132.

139 Tomas Masaryk, *The Making of a State*, p. 378.

140 Jiri Koralka, *La Formation de la societe civile tcheque: Palacky, Havlicek-Borovsky, Rieger* in Chantal Delsol, Michel Maslowski (ed) “Histoire des idees politique latter s de l'Europe centrale” (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), p. 310.

identification.<sup>141</sup> Together with Masaryk and Ghita Pop they plan a congress in Stockholm with the participation of Czech, Slovak, Serb, Ruthene (financially coordinated by Masaryk) and Romanian nationalities. After the visit to Iasi, Masaryk and Bocu decide to change plans and organize a “meeting of all oppressed nations in Austria-Hungary in Kiev” that was held on November 29. Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainian, Serbian nations, without the Romanian representatives. While on the front the volunteer detachments were imagined as a final blow against the Austria-Hungary as the war came to a stall after Verdun, and in the turmoil of the Russian revolution, in the interwar period the voluntarism is renegotiated along the lines of regionalism. Voluntarism becomes “an admirable means of selection” and “the thermometer of our national consciousness.”<sup>142</sup> The Purpose of voluntarism is defeating the coalition of Central Powers and the territorial redistribution and organization around national borders according to the Wilsonian principle of nationalities that would offer Europe “a new international organization, based on the principles of liberty and democracy.” The aim of national borders does not overlook the grander aim of reshaping Europe around liberty and democracy. Although the politicians and the government did not give him credit (literally this time) Bocu shows how in fact history proved him right as the financial aid came too late for the Ukraine who was forced to close a military alliance with the Bolsheviks against Petrograd's centralism represented by Kerenski. The technocrat at work organizing not only the volunteers detachments but the future of Europe and Romania is always proven right by history and rejected by his contemporary politicians. Curiously we find the same rhetorics of defeat in unification is used by the other side as well, namely in I. G. Duca's short biography of Ion. I. C. Bratianu. His return from the Paris Peace Conference is the return of a defeated

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<sup>141</sup> Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer and Nicolae Harsanyi, *Literary Production in a Marginocentric Cultural Node: The Case of Timisoara*. In *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*. Vol. II (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006), p. 106.

<sup>142</sup> Sever Bocu, *Drumuri Si Rascruci*. *Memorii*, p. 112.

Whereas for Masaryk democracy is the result of the revolution, but a revolution that has to come to an end with mankind abandoning militarism, for Bocu the nation is the ultimate goal of the revolution. How does Bocu define the State? From a territorial point of view he is a strong supporter of the division along ethnic lines, and that ideal offers him another point of contention with the making of Greater Romania since his *patria*, Banat was not kept intact after the Paris Peace conference. From a political point of view, he follows loosely the coordinates of the National Peasant Party, an unquestionable support for the monarchy but dissatisfaction with the Parliamentary system. Bocu integrates the national struggle in a serial, stadial revolution, therefore integrating himself through his efforts on the Eastern front on the same at the same time cyclical and revolutionary. Its ultimate goal is democracy as a basis for inter-national cooperation and peace. The main issue yet, avoided or better say simply ignored by Bocu, is that whereas Masaryk theorizes the new European order around the concept of republicanism.<sup>144</sup> Why so? The dissatisfaction with the realities of the post-1918 “national life” (the redistribution of jobs, positions and honors, who's who in the making of the state) is not oriented against the monarchy, although crumbling and but against the parties and party leaders, against politicianism.

## Conclusions

The passing *d'une monarchie a l'autre* is therefore redefined as a passing from an

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<sup>143</sup> I. G. Duca, *Portrete si Amintiri*, (Bucuresti: Cartea Romaneasca, 1932), p. 49.

<sup>144</sup> Before the war, 83 per cent of mankind lived under monarchical and only 17 per cent under republican systems. To-day, the preponderant majority is republican; the minority, monarchist,” Masaryk, *The Making of a State*, p. 369.

oppressing empire to nation. What is left, the condition of local monarchy, its rights over Transylvania, is simply left out of question. The brief republican moments in the history of Banat is absent altogether. Yet Bocu's appeal to "our reformation" based on the same historiographical arguments as Masaryk's fell short of another determinant aspect: that of universality. Masaryk argues that being Czech has a meaning beyond particular nationalism.<sup>145</sup> What does it mean to be a Romanian from Banat or Transylvania other than Romanian? The fight for freedom and independence stops at this point. Recognition. In the technocratic era the nationalism in the name of democracy and humanity ignores the political organization of the state monarchy – the first article of the 1926 platform of the National Peasant Party - or republic. Whereas Masaryk projects the "republican democratic State is founded not upon Divine Right, nor upon the Church, but upon the people, upon humanity"<sup>146</sup> thus showing a mature version of nationalism one in which as he himself notes Messianism and Chauvinism are rendered useless, Bocu shows a view on nationalism deeply rooted in the history of the continuous national struggle. 1794, 1848, 1892 and 1918 resurface time and again as the high points of the continuous revolution, revolution that comes to fruition under his watch on the Russian steppe. The ideal of humanity and world democracy stops at the individual. Sever Bocu's entire activity in post-1918 Romania is a constant struggle for accepting a state that fails to accept his contribution to its creation. His political thinking is dominated by a constant endeavor to defend his activity on the battlefield as organizer of the Volunteers detachments that were in fact the major contribution to the creation of the Romanian state along the lines of internationalism theorized by Masaryk.

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<sup>145</sup> "Our policy must above all be Czech, truly Czech, that is to say, truly a world-policy and therefore also Slav." *ibid* p. 384.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*. p. 391.



## V. The Returns of Onisifor Ghibu. The Journey from *bildung* to nation-building

Onisifor Ghibu's autobiographies are a nut hard to crack indeed. He wrote thousands of pages about himself and his activity both as an educator and as a nation-builder, positions that, as his life-writing will inform, are synonymous. He was also a traveler, and his travels are a vivid portrait of his formative years. His life is nothing short of a life of a modern picaro.

Ghibu pursued a doctorate in Germany with a thesis on modern utraquism in popular schools,<sup>147</sup> and from there he went on the field in German ruled Alsace-Lorraine to directly experiencing the education system in an in-between land, “the least developed German province” as he would observe, a pluri-confessional and multi-ethnic province that he would tirelessly compare to his native Transylvania under Magyar rule. During WWI, he sought refuge in Bucharest, as he did not want to fight on the Austro-Hungarian side. After the Germans took the capital of Romania, he and his family moved to Iasi, and from there to Chişinău, where he persuaded the Moldovans to take political action and to found their own National Party based on the model of the Romanian National Party in Transylvania. Going back home to Transylvania, he served in the Directing Council as Secretary General of Education, position from which he would argue against the Liberals' project of centralization and homogenization of the Romanian education. He also played an important role in the

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147 Onisifor Ghibu, *Der Moderne Utraquismus. Eine Untersuchung im Lichte de Padagogik und der Schulpolitik, mit besonderer Rucksicht aud Ungarn*, published as *Der Moderne Utraquismus oder die Zweisprachigkeit in ther Volksschule* (Langensalza, Padagogisches Magazin, 1910).

transfer of the University of Cluj from Hungarian to the Romanian state, as Directing Council's Secretary General of Education.<sup>148</sup> After 1945 he was dismissed from the university and from then on he would seek rehabilitation. His life stories are designed as the tool for redemption.

More importantly, as his life-long life-writing suggests, the *bildung* is transformed, put at work toward the common good into building, that is nation-building. His contribution to the building of the nation is, as he himself announces, developed around two paths. The first one is education, and by reading his autobiographies we will learn that *he* is the one who brought the University in Cluj to the Romanian state from the hands of the Magyars. The other path is offered by his 1917 experience in Bessarabia, where *he* brought the province to the Romanian state. The shift from *bildung* to building is condensed in seven years, during 1910-1917, and in the passing from the German to the Russian empire.

### Printing, Reprinting. Shifting Contexts

The large collection of texts that were published before 1947 is doubled by an equally, if not larger series released after his death (in 1972) and with a significant boost in the 1990s. His sons Mihai and (especially) Octavian would continue their father's life work by reprinting and printing both the interwar materials as well as the papers (i.e. documents kept in family's archive) written during the socialist years. Despite this disunities and multiple contexts that breach Ghibu's life-long autobiographical strivings, reinterpretations and attempts at re-narrating his past experience in order to introduce them and through that himself to the

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148 Onisifor Ghibu, *Universitatea Daciei Superioare*, (București: Atelierele Grafice Cultura Națională, 1929).

nationalist thought of the day, his retrospective narrative is channeled by two main flows, both of them taking the readership back to the interwar period.

The first one is the pedagogical action coupled with militant nationalism, while the second one has to do with his activity in Bessarabia, during the Bolshevik Revolution, as a nation-builder and organizer of the Moldovan National Party molded after the experience of the National Party in Transylvania. At points, the two statuses – teacher and nation-builder – overlap under the aegis of a “serving the nation” ideology. At points, they disconnect, especially after his demise from the University of Cluj in 1945 and his fall into disgrace after the communist takeover. In the memoranda sent to Petru Groza, “Brother Petru”, he would then define himself as a “Bolshevik”, one of the first Romanians of this kind.

Chameleon-like, his autobiographies, memoirs and the memoranda addressed to the leaders of post-war Romania, from Petru Groza to Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu, are a fertile ground on which the former professor would seek rehabilitation and a deserved position as either Bolshevik and participant in the Revolution, or as an active force behind Bessarabia's unification with Romania, reproducing the shifts in the official view on recent history. Nonetheless, his autobiographies are documents that show from a marginal perspective the evolution of Romanian nationalism both before and especially after 1945.

The largest part of his autobiographical works will appear posthumously: “Amintiri despre oameni pe care i-am cunoscut” (Dacia, 1974), “Pe baricadele vieții. Anii mei de învățătură” (Dacia, 1981), “Oameni între oameni I” (Eminescu, 1990), “Ziar de lagăr. Caracal 1945” (Albatros, 1991), “Pe baricadele vieții. În Basarabia revoluționară 1917-1918” (Universitas Chișinău, 1992), “Chemare la judecata istoriei” (2 volumes – Albatros, 1992-1993), “În vârtoarea Revoluției rusești. Însemnări din Basarabia anului 1917” (FCR, 1993), “Pagini de jurnal” (3 volume – Albatros, 1996-2000). These autobiographical collections gathered by the author's sons are first and foremost informing not about the life and times of

the author, but more specifically about the nationalist turn of the 1970s and 1980s that made their appearance possible, and ultimately shows how the interwar years and authors were re-appropriated by the Romanian nationalism in the later stages of socialism.

The publishing of his autobiographies is channeled around three different historical contexts that also mark the return of our hero. Every time Ghibu appears as a changed man, yet continuing to be familiar. The first moment, also signaled by the only autobiography published during his lifetime is 1938, is the beginning of the King Carol II's royal dictatorship, and of the new constitution. The second one is almost half a century later, two years after his death and is occasioned by the release of *Amintiri despre oameni pe care i-am cunoscut*<sup>149</sup> (Cluj, 1974) and the first volume of *Pe Baricadele Vieții: Anii mei de învățătură* (Cluj, 1981), and the last moment is in the 1990s, with the appearance of another autobiographical volume bearing a similar title *Pe Baricadele Vieții: În Basarabia revoluționară*, this time published in Chișinău in 1992.

Whereas in the 1970s Ghibu is regarded primarily as an educator, in the 1990s he would triumphantly return as a militant nationalist. I argue here for a separation of the moments of his “returns”, as well as for a contextual reading of his autobiographies. In 1961, at the age of 78, Ghibu started writing *Pe baricadele vieții. Anii mei de învățătură*, narrating his life between 1889 and 1909, from the years spent in the primary school in Saliste up to the point when he earned his doctorate in Jena. This testimony should be considered along with a series of memoranda that Ghibu addressed to Petru Groza or Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. His story – and by that I do not mean exclusively the story that he himself narrated and collected in documents, but more importantly the story of how Onisifor Ghibu came to reconstruct his past – shares something of Martin Guerre’s account. A doppelganger is always

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<sup>149</sup> *Amintiri despre oameni pe care i-am cunoscut* (Memories of People I Once Knew) presenting Ghibu's recollection of George Coșbuc, Octavian Goga, Nicolae Iorga, Sextil Pușcariu, Vasile Pârvan and Lucian Blaga.

present, and the autobiographer tries to prove he is the *real* person. In the course of proving his identity as the *real* Onisifor Ghibu, he meets both detractors and supporters. One thing is certain though, with every autobiography that he writes, there is *another* Ghibu, similar to the real one, but not the same.

#### At the Crossroads. An Educator in the Service of the Nation

Ghibu is one of the central figures of the process of “acquisition of cultural and educational institutions by the Romanian state” as part of the local elite on the road to nation-building.<sup>150</sup> At the same time he is an emblematic figure for the transfer of nationalist know-how from one province to another, from Alsace-Lorraine to Transylvania, and from Transylvania to Bessarabia. Agreeing with Paul A. Shapiro that “the achievement of national territorial unity in the absence of national parties destabilized rather than stabilized Romania's political system”<sup>151</sup>, we must add the attempts at constructing national parties, but from the margins. In this case, the focus is on the transfer from Transylvania to Bessarabia, a transfer which by no means should be equated with a national party structure. Although bypassing the centre, it is quite impossible to assert that the peripheral national party structure was built with the explicit aim of creating a stable political system – note that the political centre (Bucharest) was occupied by the Germans, and the government was in exile in Iași. At the same time, I have to depart from Livezeanu's “nationalist consensus” thesis. Indeed, national integralism was the word of the day, but among the nationalists themselves, although they agree *in principle* with what the next man was saying, there were significant differences. The only consensus among nationalists was that their party had to turn into a mass party.

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<sup>150</sup> Livezeanu, p. 17

<sup>151</sup> Paul A. Shapiro, “Romania's Past as Challenge for the Future: A Developmental Approach to Interwar Politics” apud, Livezeanu, p. 21.

Moreover, the consensus was even more difficult to obtain within the parties themselves, as it was shown in Sever Bocu's case, who departed from Ion Mihalache's plan of maintaining the National Peasantist Party as close to the centre as possible, and who proposed an alternative, which he found in Germany's National Socialists.

In line with Constantin Rădulescu-Motru's definition of *politicianism* as a corruption of the political culture perpetrated by capitalists, the critique of capitalism is not the exclusive domain of the Marxist left. For the right, capitalism appears as the Western-born super-villain which destroyed the organically cohesive Romanian state. It did so in 1848, and in the 1930s it appeared to carry on its plans. Both Nae Ionescu and Nechifor Crainic pinned this down, exposing the disastrous relation between capitalism, democracy and modernity. Crainic would reject the 1848ers as a fall from paradise:

the '48ers brought the fall of Romanianism from the ecumenical spirituality. It is nationalist, but it is no longer orthodox. It brought us the capitalist egoism, the politicianism or the suffering of everyone in the interest of the oligarchy, pornography in art, simulacrum in political and social institutions.<sup>152</sup>

In a similar vein, Nae Ionescu, the right-wing philosopher and ideologue of the 1922 “young generation”, would reject the political parties. A supporter of King Carol II's return to the throne, in 1930 he wrote that

sometimes, the normal political life can lead us, at least in principle, to the rejection of political parties. These considerations are not only theoretical. Both Bolshevism in Russia and Fascism in Italy are nothing else than regimes instituted by the mechanism sketched above. We ourselves ought to have reached an analogous situation: if PNT were a real political party and Mr. Iuliu Maniu a political man. This is the historical sense of our action when we recommended PNT to transform itself into a mass organization and called for the dictatorship of the masses.<sup>153</sup>

In the same line, Ionescu would define the desired Romanian state that his journal *Cuvântul*

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<sup>152</sup> Nechifor Crainic, “Spiritualitate și românism”, in *Ortodoxie și etnocrație*, 1937, p. 143.

<sup>153</sup> Nae Ionescu, *Criza partidelor politice, I, Paradoxul dialecticii partidelor și partidul de masă*, “Cuvântul”, VI, July 30, 1930 cited by Zigu Ornea, *Anii 30*, p. 57-58.

advocated for as a “peasantist state” (*stat țăărănesc*, and using an antiquated form *stat rumânesc*), therefore “outside the individualist-democratic and capitalist-bourgeois order”; he would also argue for a separation of the state from the Europe's political and economic structure, “while the political world altogether believed that our path is that of joining the European order and solidarity.”<sup>154</sup>

In line with Ionescu's anti-parliamentarist attitude stands Mihail Manoilescu's projection of the national corporatist state. Yet Manoilescu, also a supporter of Carol II's return, would differ fundamentally in the nature of the state and its place in the European order. It is no longer a “Rumanian, peasant state”, but a modern one based on industry and ruled by engineers' technocracy; it is no longer separated from Europe, but in line with the post-war and post-revolutionary brave new world. A new world, a new century that gave birth to two intertwined core concepts: corporatism and the single-party state. It is a corporatist state after Mussolini's Italy, and the transformation of the multi-party parliamentary system into a structure based on a single party after the model offered by Russia, Italy, Germany or Turkey to Portugal, a reality of the new world that the Great War dawned upon Europe, as Manoilescu argues.<sup>155</sup> The country should not be ruled by politicians motivated by their own “capitalist egoistic” self-interest, but by technocrats. Himself an engineer and leading member of the General Association of Romanian Engineers (AGIR), Manoilescu argued for his own and his professional peers' cause: not politicians, but engineers. Naturally, his idea of government was that of an entirely Romanian technocracy. This is how the “*professeur d'economie politique a l'Ecole Polytechnique du Bucarest et ancien minister*”, as he is announced in the French editions, brings his own contribution to the discussions over the

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154 Nae Ionescu, *După plecarea experților*, “Cuvântul”, VII, September, 16, 1932, in Zigu Ornea, p. 59.

155 Especially in Mihail Manoilescu, *Le siècle du corporatisme* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1934) and *Le Parti unique* (Paris: Les Oeuvres Francaises, 1936); but also in *Ideia de Plan Economic Național* / (The Idea of National Economic Plan), (București: Monitorul Oficial și Imprimeriile Statului, 1938), *Profesiunile Libérale și Statul Corporativ* (Inginerii, Medicii, Avocații) / (Free Professions and the Corporative State), (București: Tipografia Ziarului Universul, 1934).

“Romanianization” of the local industry.

In this debate, another member of PNT will reach the most radical note. In 1935, the Rector of the Polytechnic School, N. Vasilescu-Karpen, opened AGIR's Congress through a veiled criticism against the state as the only employer for the engineers graduating from the Polytechnic School:

The industry is calling in vain for Romanian engineers, because even the new graduates opt for public positions. Under these circumstances, how can we Romanianize the enterprises and the industry of our country when the young engineers avoid the struggle and the risks inherent to any enterprise?<sup>156</sup>

That same year, PNT leader Alexandru Vaida-Voevod proposed the “Numerus Valahicus” bill that would force Romanian enterprises to a quota of 50% white collar, and 80% blue collar Romanian ethnics, in the name of “Romanian justice to the Romanian people.” Although having the support of patriarch Miron Cristea, the Parliament rejected the bill, and Vaida-Voevod was dismissed from the National-Peasantist Party.<sup>157</sup>

More than being political figures, both Sever Bocu and Onisifor Ghibu have to be understood closer to the sense of technocracy developing in the 1920s and 1930s. As intellectuals, they represent themselves in line with the specialized knowledge and activity in the field of nation-building. Their autobiography comes as a proof of knowledge and performance, and of moral superiority over politicians.<sup>158</sup> As Katherine Verdery observes, the bulk of definitions – and here she reviews Mannheim, Brym, Benda or Gella – see intellectuals “as persons playing a particular role in society, as advisers to or critics of power, shapers of value, legitimators of social order, guardians of morality, self-appointed defenders

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156 N. Vasilescu-Karpen, “Preface” in “Communications, Papers, Discussions” (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Scrisul Românesc, 1937), p. 3.

157 Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, *Cuvântare către națiune* (București: Editura Ofensiva Națională, 1937).

158 Here not only autobiography proper, but also the recollections of the “people that I've met” kind of memoirs work as a tool for carving out the social space, “accompanying anxiety about who is and is not an intellectual is to legitimate separate status for knowledge as a societal value, enthroning this central element of intellectual praxis at the heart of social superiority.” Bauman, *Intellectuals in East-Central Europe: Continuity and Change*, p. 18. in Verdery, p. 16.



of their nations.” In line with Bauman's identification of intellectuals by the claims to a monopoly of knowledge, competence, and truth, Verdery argues that the most important property is the “creation of in- and out-groups, a second space being implicitly created by the act of characterizing the space proper to intellectuals.”<sup>159</sup> Yet closer to my case, the question of who's who when it comes to being an intellectual is an issue secondary to that of the societal value of knowledge applied in the service of the nation.

As we saw in the second chapter, the autobiographical model revolves around the recollection of childhood years in the village, up to the moment of the autobiographer's validation as a member of the community, with the discovery of the vocation in the service of the greater, common good. Whereas Slavici concluded his autobiographical narrative with him becoming a teacher, Blaga stopped at his poetic debut. For Ghibu, the sole autobiography published before 1945 *La o răscruce a vieții mele, Un bilanț și o mărturisire*, marks the beginning of the “normality,” the moment when his work as an educator and nation-builder came to fruition. This moment coincides with the beginning of Carol II's royal dictatorship.

Printed in 305 copies, *La o răscruce a vieții mele* was directly distributed by the author to a selected group of readers and recounts Ghibu's journey in the nation's service. The Alsace-Lorraine experience would be transferred to his pedagogical journeys “among scattered Romanians in search of a common patria”<sup>160</sup>, briefly describing his activity in Transylvania during the “last years of Magyar era”, Bukovina “during the last years of Austrian era”, “Neutral Romania and Russian Bessarabia” and “to the Romanians from the other side of Dniester.” All that is dedicated to Carol II's 1938 Constitution, its strongest point being that it

emancipated itself from the vague and presumptuous slogans (...) talking only

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159 Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*, (Berkley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 15-16.

160 Ghibu, *La o Răscruce a vieții mele*, pp. 16-27.

about rights and liberties, – which after all only led to chaos and anarchy rather than progress in favor of the nation – the new Constitution speaks, from its very first chapter, about the obligations.<sup>161</sup>

As Ghibu highlights, the 1938 moment marks the end of one of the most troublesome parts of his life, and also the moment when his life-long national militantism came to fruition. Going hand in hand with the “fight” – “I have been fighting since 1907 on the field of education politics and Romanian church”<sup>162</sup> –, the story of his life is coupled with the definitions of Romanianness. Here, the main merit of the new constitution is seen in its illiberalism and in the exclusionary view on Romanian citizenship:

The Old Constitution was simply speaking of Romanians, under which it understood all the citizens, without distinguishing between ethnicity, language or religion (...) Nowhere did the Old Constitution speak of Romanian Nation, as a totality of Romanians of the same ethnic origin, same language and same religion, and which would be master over this country and this State.<sup>163</sup>

More than offering a chance to show his anti-liberal commitments, the 1938 Constitution is yet another opportunity for Ghibu to present a new self-narrative about his lifetime commitment to the ideas proposed by the new fundamental law. The beginning of his public activity is linked to the National Party's decision of turning “activist” and running to the Budapest Parliament elections. The first steps were made with Alexandru Vaida-Voevod's activist newspaper *Lupta*. Soon followed his German years, when during 1907-1909 he studied in Germany. The key point of interest was the bilingualism in public schooling (Volksschule)<sup>164</sup> which he exemplified through a study in Alsace-Lorraine.

The conception of *Volkish* nationalism built on ethnicity, language and religion therefore becomes inseparable from “militant pedagogy.” Whereas Alsace-Lorraine was the testing ground for his anti-bilingualism, the “successor states” by which Ghibu understands

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161 Ghibu, *La o Rascruce a vietii mele*. p. 3.

162 Ghibu, *La o Rascruce*, p. 15

163 id. 4.

164 In 1910 he would publish the thesis *Der Moderne Utraquismus oder die Zweisprachigkeit in ther Volksschule* (Langensalza, 1910) *Padagogisches Magazin*.

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia are the two models to be followed and to which Romania as “successor state” can be compared. From Ghibu's Transylvanian and anti-Magyar point of view, the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav states are to be followed in their success of “integrally bringing the Magyar Catholic secondary schools under State control (*statificare*).”<sup>165</sup> If the Romanian state, in this comparison, itself a successor of Austria-Hungary, failed to centralize the school system, the fault lies once more with Romanian *politicianism* of 1920-1938. This is a steep change from his views on the Liberals' unification policies in the 1920s. It turns out that at the end of the 1930s, the same Ghibu who a decade earlier was blaming the Liberals for their centralization policies turns to the extreme. Yet this time it is not about the uniformization of the system of education, but a uniformization on ethnic and religious grounds.

Twenty years before, the prominent Transylvanian nationalist educator served in the Directing Council as Secretary General of Education, and even after the dissolution of the Council he maintained an intense interest in educational policy. As Livezeanu points out,

In a paper on the education reform projects, he argued that the educational unification policies were unnatural, or “formal,” since they did not allow the desired fusion to happen gradually. As a result, the individual regions, all with their own particular defects, were not able to resolve these problems prior to centralization and ended up bringing them along into the Greater Romanian state.<sup>166</sup>

As an educator, Ghibu would argue against Liberals' “reform through the unification” of the educational system in all the provinces, arguing that “in the cultural realm Romanians also had unity after 1918 by virtue of their shared language and spirituality, trustworthy teaching staff, and leadership”, a type of unity which is superior to the unification of external forms proposed by the liberals.<sup>167</sup> This can be regarded as an attempt to save the confessional schools in Transylvania, which targeted by the Liberals' homogenization projects. Against

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<sup>165</sup> Ghibu, *La o Răscruce*, p. 27

<sup>166</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, p. 42.

<sup>167</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, p. 45.

Angelescu, the Liberal Minister of Education, Ghibu used the same argument of moral superiority, contrasting the Habsburg legacy that he represented to the “Byzantine” corruption and politicianism of the Liberals:

With parvenu ministers who know only how to blunder and to get rich, raising all the parvenus to undeserved positions, with all the teachers enmeshed in politics... with Byzantine ministers, you can keep making reforms on paper.<sup>168</sup>

### Writing my own Life. On the Barricades of Life

In the series of life-writing texts that Onisifor Ghibu tirelessly produced, one title stands up as the most consistent autobiographical record. It is *Pe Baricadele Vieții* (*On the Barricades of Life*) and it appeared as a double volume. The first part – *Anii mei de învățătură*/ (*My Years of Study*)<sup>169</sup> – was published in 1974 and is in line with the anti-Hungarian turn of Ceaușescu's nationalism. Ghibu was the man at hand for that. The second one – *Pe baricadele vieții. În Basarabia revoluționară* (*In Revolutionary Bessarabia*) appeared in Chișinău in 1992, edited by Octavian O. Ghibu, one of the author's sons. Although Onisifor Ghibu did not provide a final version of his *In Revolutionary Bessarabia*, his son and faithful editor assures the readership of the authenticity and scientific status of the text. The “archival material” compiled by Octavian Ghibu gains an almost mythical character, either in writing or recorded on tape by his father. A better place and moment for an autobiography about the unification of Bessarabia and Romania could not have been found. Support for the “brothers from the other side of the Pruth” and demands for the reunification of Bessarabia with Romania or the “return to the motherland” have never been stronger.

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168 Onisifor Ghibu, “Reforma învățământului? Document în formă de note”, 1925, Ms. p. 3. quoted by Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, p. 46.

169 Onisifor Ghibu, *Pe baricadele vieții. Anii mei de învățătură*, (Cluj: Dacia, 1974)

As Nadia Nicolescu, the editor of the 1981 *Pe baricadele vieții* observes in her generous introduction, Ghibu is an unknown figure who needs to be recovered. Selectively reading into his pedagogical works, but not into his nationalist writings, which are marginalized and regarded as “specific to the style of those times”<sup>170</sup>, Ghibu appears as the uttermost democratic figure of the interwar period, an admirer of Hungarian culture “revealing his preference for Petofi, Arany, Tompa, Vorosmarty and placing Liszt on the same place with Goethe and Schiller”, warning that Romanians must learn from the experience of the past and refuse retaliating against Hungarians, “as they did before”. It is not nationalism, the editor would conclude, but patriotism.

The *years of study* depart from the genre of autobiography, going closer to a rigorously documented ego-histoire. Quotations from the interwar Annals of the Romanian Academy, or indication for finding documents in the archives of the Romanian Socialist Republic's Academy, and a large body of footnotes peculiar as they may be when thinking of autobiography, are documenting his life as a student. Here, we have to ask ourselves once more whose life is it? *My years of study* share with the school experience of the other Transylvanians the trauma of leaving the “compact Romanian village” and entering the Magyar school system, but for Ghibu the trauma is not merely a personal one, as it is in line with his scientific, pedagogical work. By modern utraquism in pedagogy – a term he introduced in this field, after seeing it practiced in Alsace-Lorraine –, Ghibu understands not the nineteenth century classical training, but the acquisition of the language and culture of the state by the pupils of other nationalities during primary school training. He argues that this way children are uprooted, denationalized and that the teaching method is a purely political one, with unsatisfactory results: children cannot be bilingual, they will not acquire a proper

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170 “Let us ignore the excrescences, meaning the language that was in part explained by his style and personality, but also by the journalistic and pamphlet style of the time, and openly ask us the right question: where is the discrepancy between him and our ideology?” Lidia Niculescu, *Preface*, in Onisifor Ghibu, *Pe baricadele vieții. Anii mei de învățătură*, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1974), p. 12.

command of the foreign language and they will lose the linguistic competence of their mother tongue. His own experience as a student in a Hungarian school is designed to be a proof of his own theory.

The way out in the face of politically imposed bilingualism was found in the German and Romanian culture. As a teenager attending the theological seminary, he discovered Fichte and Schopenhauer, declaring his preference for the former: “What a difference between them, as between a true prophet and a fake one!”. The German philosopher provided him with a framework for reading other authors such as Eminescu, Schopenhauer, Herbart and Maiorescu. The years at the theological seminary in Sibiu resulted in his passion for Fichte and for national history,

Not with the purpose of becoming a historian, but with that of learning from history all that could help me in my career as a servant of my people, whatever that career may be.<sup>171</sup>

His interest in philosophy continued at the University in Bucharest as well, where he studied under Titu Maiorescu and Constantin Rădulescu-Motru. The latter, himself one of Maiorescu’s disciples, joined the triad of fundamental philosophers who influenced Ghibu, alongside Fichte and the Berlin philosopher F. Paulsen. Yet Fichte remains the point of reference that would allow Ghibu in the 1960s to conclude that:

Spiritualist or idealist philosophy did not succumbed in the battle with materialist philosophy and there are no signs showing that such a thing will happen at a point that the feeble human mind, so presumptuous and yet so powerless in relation to the infinity and the eternal can predict.<sup>172</sup>

This is yet another sign that indicates the designed audience. More than the rejection of materialist philosophy, Ghibu would engage in a recollection of the social-democratic

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171 Ghibu, *Anii mei de învățătură*, p. 117.

172 Ghibu, *Anii mei de învățătură*, p. 151.

movement of the time, integrating it into the 1907 moment when he was writing for *Lupta* in “Budapest, the capital of ultra-chauvinist and feudal Hungary.” His working class roots are highlighted here, his father a small rural craftsman reading the “Romanian Worker” and attempting to organize labor in their home village. In Bucharest, during Iorga's famous boycott of the National Theater – “a vaudeville play put in scene by Francophile boyars” –, noticing that the students lack organization, Ghibu asked for support from Socialists to rally them on Iorga's side. Nevertheless, he was rejected by the workers:

they answered that the workers could not care less about boyars' whimsical business. There you have it! They have more important business: the 8 hour labor day, higher wages, universal vote, etc.<sup>173</sup>

This rather funny business made Ghibu think that the proposed cooperation between the National Party and the Hungarian Social-Democrats was bound to fail (and so it did, as the following chapter will show) because the Social-Democrats were a national, not an international party, “no better than national-bourgeois Hungarian parties”, while

my evolution was on the line of national-socialism of a true democratic breed. I was not bourgeois either by birth or by formation and I had a pronounced acceptance for all the demands of the masses, always exploited, in all matters, by everyone.<sup>174</sup>

What does it mean to be in the service of the nation? A possible answer, devoid of all political implications and use of the dominant languages of the shifting contexts that Ghibu is constantly trying to master, may come from his open admiration for science put in the service of the community. The proper representation for this view is offered by the communion between industry and science as seen in Jena, “metropolis of applied experimental physics and of the grand modern social reforms”<sup>175</sup>, in the association between experimental physicist Ernst Abbe and Carl Zeiss. More than the admiration for the scientific progress, Ghibu would

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<sup>173</sup> id. p. 155.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ghibu, *Anii mei de învățătură*, p. 297

devote his admiration for the works of Zeiss Foundation and their Volkshaus, but also for Zeiss redistributing his profits to his employees as a model for how capital works in the service of the community.

### From Alsace-Lorraine to Bessarabia

The experience in Jena offered Ghibu the opportunity to see large-scale capitalism put to work in the service of the greater good and also offered him the example of Volkshaus which, as he acknowledges, served him as a model for “Casa Poporului” that he founded in Chişinău. His journey to Alsace-Lorraine worked as a test ground for his rejection of bilingualism in Transylvanian primary schools. From the historical description of the province, Alsace-Lorraine appears as a space of confrontation “between two of the most cultivated and uttermost enemy peoples”<sup>176</sup>. Here, Ghibu sets a parallel with Transylvania's history on ethnic, confessional and political grounds. The connection with the Frenchmen is not based on “latinity” or shared language, but on the shared status of oppressed nation that they have in common with Romanians in Transylvania, as well as with Romanians in Bessarabia. While taking the side of the French, out of sympathy for their national fight against the “fearsome brute force” of the Germans, and comparing their fate to that of post-1812 Bessarabia, Ghibu sees the schooling system as one of the “leading factors of the political and cultural life.”

The pedagogical travelogue is soon found under the auspices of national characterology. Germans are endowed with insistence and a strong patriotic feeling.

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<sup>176</sup> Ghibu, *O plimbare prin Alsacia-Lorena*, p. 3.



Proud of his great German name of today, he is ready to sacrifice anything for the glory of this name, associative spirit showing the world everything it has, he is totally different from the French.<sup>177</sup>

The French are, of course, sentimental by nature, and the Frenchman is “enjoying life for himself and respecting his country more out of ambition.” When it comes to language, the French love theirs not because it belongs to them, but “because it is beautiful and others love it.” *Magister elegantiarum*, the French, unlike the Germans, do not believe in unity and the power of association, but rather in the power of entrepreneurship and hasty, individual action.<sup>178</sup> To all this, young Ghibu adds the “social isolation” keeping the two peoples separated, and the main argument behind the impossibility of a complete Germanization of the 250,000 Frenchmen living in Alsace-Lorraine.

Retrospectively, the journey through Alsace-Lorraine also helped him connect the political and social situation of the Romanians in Transylvania with that of the Romanians in Bessarabia and bridge the gap between the educator and the nation-builder. The fact that the Moldovans were not animated by nationalist ideas is explained by the constant exodus of intellectuals to Romania. In this context, at a conference organized by ASTRA in Sibiu on the topic of the unification of Bessarabia with Romania, Ghibu exposed the agents behind the political act thus:

the Transylvanians on the Russian front, and Romanians from Bukovina, the Old Kingdom, Macedonia and Serbia initiated the whole political and cultural movement in Bessarabia at the beginning of the Russian Revolution.<sup>179</sup>

Ghibu rejected the claims according to which the act of unification was either a German gift to Romania, or the work of Constantin Stere, the latter being exposed as a pro-German and a war profiteer.<sup>180</sup> The same view, consolidating his position as the main force behind the

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<sup>177</sup> Ghibu, *O plimbare prin...*, p. 4

<sup>178</sup> id.

<sup>179</sup> Onisifor Ghibu, *Cum s-a făcut Unirea Basarabiei*, (Sibiu: Editura “Asociațiunii”, 1925), p. 7

<sup>180</sup> Ghibu, *Cum s-a făcut Unirea*, pp. 17-20.

unification of Bessarabia, is presented at length – over 600 pages – in the second and last volume of his *On the barricades of life*. The unification is seen as a *longue-durée* process first and foremost based on national culture.<sup>181</sup> The political act is traced back to the ideas of Petru Maior, G. Lazăr, S. Bănuțiu, I. Creangă, M. Eminescu or B. P. Hașdeu, in accordance with “Lenin's view on the nationality question”, but blemished by Stalin and his betrayal of the Leninist thought – the same Stalin from whom Ghibu expects the Third World War. In the middle of this bewildering historical series, Ghibu “modestly” places himself. The same self-perception in relation to power and history will be met in the series of memoranda addressed to the leaders of the country and to those of USSR for that matter, between 1945-1972, a period when he tries to push for a comeback.

#### “Brother Petre”, or How I Became a Bolshevik

In 1992, the foreword to the *Chemare la Judecata Istoriei* (*Call to the Judgment of History*) sets up a short biographical sketch built on the main directions that will from then on characterize Ghibu's life. Similar to the second volume of his autobiography published the same year, the attempt to introduce Ghibu to the post-1989 audience revolves around two main threads. The first one shows that Ghibu is an unknown figure, *persona non grata* after 1945 and a victim of communism, while the second one presents him as a “fighter on the barricades, alongside the living and the dead of his nation (neam).”<sup>182</sup> Whereas the

181 Ghibu would genuinely view the unification as a “culturally constructed act.” As he notes: “Regardless of the formal act of March 27, **the unification of Bessarabia is an event ever more sublime than the unification of Bukovina or Transylvania**, because the latter came as natural conclusions of the premises that had been in our people's hearts and in the international agenda for a long time. Contrary to that, the unification of Bessarabia came as **the result of a short-term and intense revolution initiated by the national culture.**” (*editor's highlight*) Ghibu, *Pe Baricadele Vieții*. In *Basarabia Revoluționară*, p. 43

182 Viorica Moisuc, “Bridge Between Generations”, foreword to *Chemare la judecata istoriei*, p. 5

reevaluation of Onisifor Ghibu's personality and work is meant to be a “bridge between generations”, the main task of the editors (his family) is to offer an explanation for what happened between 1945 and 1989 with the “nationalist fighter”.

His son, the editor of the collected manuscripts from the Ghibu archives, rejects the “dissident” paradigm, a concept with an “extremely poor content for what Onisifor Ghibu was and did.” Personality and actions, personal and collective past are merged into one single historical outlook; without being separated, the portrait of the nationalist educator is integrated into the portrait of the anti-communist fighter, which in the immediate post-1989 context became the norm of the day.

This collage of the two positions is largely informed by Ghibu's own self-narratives. Both the 1992 volume, containing memoranda written between 1946-1952, and the second volume, published the next year and containing memoranda written after Stalin's death, during 1953-1970, are meant to portray him as an anti-communist fighter. The bewildering series of memoranda addressed to a vast array of personalities and on arresting topics from personal housing to Bolshevism and real popular democracy, to Romanian contemporary music's disastrous state of art, are presented by the editor as not mainly personal documents, but as documents crucial for “uncovering some moments generally less known of this troubled times of our people”.

Secondly, this collection is intended to show the “principiality and linearity of Ghibu's thought.”<sup>183</sup> Indeed, from these articles written after his exclusion from public life, a sort of mixed-signal story that Ghibu time and again resends to Petru Groza, Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej and to the Government of USSR: that Bakunin had presented the right path, that Marx was a chauvinist German imperialist, that Stalin loved Romanians and offered them freedoms

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183 Octavian O. Ghibu, *Foreword* to Onisifor Ghibu, *Chemare la judecata istoriei*, Vol. II, (Bucharest: Albatros, 1993), p. 5.

that the Romanian Marxist shamefully betrayed. All things considered, if there is a fault in the development of the socialist state, Ghibu does not find it in internationalism or democracy, but in the Romanian Marxism and Romanian national democracy.

The collection of memoranda is published in close connection to Ghibu's autobiography. Not only that the arguments between the texts themselves are rooted in autobiography, but the entire collection is opened by Ghibu's 1960 Sibiu manifesto inaugurating his autobiographies. Yet maybe the most important role of these memoranda is that they offer a glimpse into the work of the autobiographer at the moment that he was writing his life, as the memoranda addressed to the Romanian leaders are written in parallel with his autobiographies.

The Sibiu Manifesto, motivating his decision to write his autobiography, is intended to place the narrative in the tradition of Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, followed by a group of letters – another consistent trend in Ghibu's writing career, that of collecting, archiving and preserving all written material especially letters – in which Ghibu's friends advise him to write his autobiography, arguing that his life is worthy of being recounted since he experienced things that no other man of his generation or of the following generations did.

The link to Goethe is doubled by another German reference. Ghibu explains his interest in his life and times through “one of my greatest teachers from the times of my studies at German universities”<sup>184</sup>, no other than Leopold von Ranke.

I did not have the chance to meet the late Berlin historian, yet I consider myself as one of his students, because he, more than any other, opened my eyes to the deeper understanding of universal history phenomena.

However, it was not only Ranke's view on universal history that determined Ghibu to start writing his autobiography as the act of uncovering the truth about the past, but also the fact that Ranke's major works were written in his later days. The fact that a historian in his 80s

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184 Ghibu, *Chemare la Judecare a Istoriei*, p. 16.

can write the way Ranke did had a major impact on Ghibu, who in his turn decided to follow the same example. As Ghibu comes to acknowledge, age does matter when it comes to writing:

the work of a lifetime, could be the mirror not necessarily of my life, which in itself might interest nobody, but a mirror of the turmoils of a man who lived one of the most interesting periods in history, holder of high offices, thinking, working, fighting, attacking and being attacked, suffering, prevailing and more often being defeated, fanatically believing in the triumph of good over evil, of truth over lie, love over hate and terror.<sup>185</sup>

Autobiography is not limited to “my narrow personal life”, but in a *wie es eigentlich gewesen* fashion, it aims to uncover a narrative on “the entire world of beings interwoven with my life.” Autobiography becomes a positivist narrative as the author takes all the precautions so that it could save it from the presumption of subjectivity. What follows is the expression of a deeply conservative position, as the autobiographer opposes his “utopias” to the projects of “the so called *realists*, *practical men* and *technicians*,” dominating the cultural and political life driven by politicianism and their private interest, to which he contrasts what he calls utopian thinking, the right way that the past so blindly refused to follow. Utopias and wonders of the past, that could inform the future, are seen not only as personal projects and projections, but as a deep mark of the Romanian popular character:

my people believe in wonders, which should not be mistaken for *primitivism* or *reactionary spirit*. More likely, their detractors can be found guilty of *national nihilism*.<sup>186</sup>

The self is not connected to the nation writ large, but with the conservative, Sowerist, peasant-oriented vision of the volkish nationalism. Borrowing from Sadoveanu, the peasant appears as the depositary of real history. Isolated from the “leading class”, the peasant preserved “the moral laws in a secular world”, yet, as Ghibu highlights, only Transylvania

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ghibu, *Chemare la Judecata*, 17. I cannot help but notice that here Ghibu uses the same language, if not the same words that G. Calinescu used to describe national specificity in the (in)famous last chapter of his *History of Romanian Literature*.

and Banat created the bridges that connect the isolated moral world of Romanian peasantry to the “other world.” This entire peasantist preamble is once again designed to reinforce and secure the autobiographer's objectivity. On the one hand this objectivity is attained by using Ranke's positivist historiography, on the other hand by appealing to the Transylvanian peasant origins.

I watch over the life problems of my kin and of the entire mankind from the pedestal of a superior peasantry, which is built not on the treacherousness and opportunism of the other classes, but on a *deep humanity and spiritual qualities*.<sup>187</sup>

The last part, highlighted in original by the author, comes from one of the discourses held by Mihail Sadoveanu in 1945.

Petru Groza appears as a quasi-positive character, although he did not follow Stalin's advice, advice that Ghibu obsessively repeats throughout the entire series of memoranda, from the 1950s to the 1970s. The alleged conversation between Stalin and Groza is a leitmotiv of the entire post-1945 work, and it can be found in more or less the same form repeated over and over again. Allegedly, Stalin told Groza that he was very fond of Romanians, and he would personally see that the country developed at its own pace and through its own means. It is therefore Petru Groza's fault that he betrayed both Stalin and the Romanian nation altogether.

Closer to Groza are Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej who are viewed – with oscillations – as somewhat positive characters. The main reason for this is that they are “Romanian elements” while the severely negative figures are Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca – “the former is Jewish and the latter Hungarian and both of them citizens of the Soviets”<sup>188</sup> – as well as Teohari Georgescu. “The Jew Mihail Roller” receives a similar if not

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187 Ibid.

188 Ghibu. *Chemare* Vol. II “Proiect de apel adresat întregii lumi în legătură cu situația României și a poporului Român. Memorandum adresat R. P. R. Guvernament, USSR Guvernament and to all peace and humanity lovers worldwide”, p. 71

harsher treatment, for he performed “the most repellent falsification of history.” The overall conclusion is that Stalin – at points criticized for his betrayal of Lenin and of Marxism in general, and for his “Russian Imperialism”<sup>189</sup> – nicely drew a future for Romania and especially in the case of Bessarabia's unification with Romania that was “approved and in line with” Lenin's opinions. Ghibu spares no effort to present the two “Russian” leaders as the positive heroes of 1918 and of the 1940s, while the “crisis” which struck Romania is only due to the non-Romanian elements and to the narrow understanding of democracy. This would change after 1953, when Stalin appears to have betrayed Lenin, although the story about his fondness of Romanians is still there.

In one of the memoranda addressed to Prime-Minister Dr. Petru Groza in October 10<sup>th</sup> 1946<sup>190</sup>, Ghibu defends his position as the “founder of the university” as a fight against three major foes: Hungarian revisionism, Greek-Catholic confesionalism and Romanian politicianism. These three lines organize not only his other works of pedagogy or militant nationalism, but his autobiography as well. In its turn, autobiography is used as a moral leverage. In another memorandum addressed to Petru Groza<sup>191</sup> written in March 1949 and subtitled “Petre Groza, Prime-Minister of the moribund Romania! The Romanian People Summon you to the Court of Justice through voice their son Onisifor Ghibu”, the son of the people harshly criticizes Groza's *Reconstructing Romania*, as well as his anti-nationalist political activity. The main target of his attack “in the name of my contemporaries, my entire nation and even in the name of the whole mankind” is Groza's understanding of democracy. The attack is not carried on from the nationalist positions, but rather from the position of

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189 Ghibu, *Chemare* Vol II. “Memoriu adresat conferintei de la Geneva, din 19-22 Iulie 1955, a reprezentantilor celor patru mari puteri” pp. 90-95.

190 Memoriu catre Primul-Ministru Dr. P. Groza, in legatura cu activitatea sa din perioada interbelica si cu ilegalitatea epurarii de la universitatea din Cluj, 10 octombrie 1946.

191 Memoriu catre Primul-Ministru Dr. P. Groza, cuprinzand analiza critica a gandirii acestuia si a realitatilor politice si sociale din Romania anilor 1945-1949.

“real democracy.”<sup>192</sup> From the position of straightforwardly nationalist “democracy”, Ghibu enters a critical dialogue not with the present or the political performance of the Prime-Minister, but with the past as narrated by Groza in *Reconstructing Romania*. The reader gets another significant clue of what Ghibu’s understanding of democracy was, when the author defines *Frontul Plugarilor*: “a peasant movement within the nation and towards the greater good of the whole nation, made out of plowers.”<sup>193</sup>

Over 125 points, Ghibu reevaluates Groza's entire political activity. Firstly, he argues that he is not a democrat, but rather more or less a nationalist who could not provide a proper definition of democracy – albeit “popular democracy” anticipated by Groza in 1945. Further on, Groza is criticized as allegedly being the promoter of Romanian national democracy rather than international democracy. In this light, Groza appears as nothing more than the sheer exponent of Romanian politicianism who uses *plowers* and their Front so he could win the elections, only to abandon them afterwards in favor of the intellectuals and the urban proletariat.

The same politicianism is seen as responsible for both the patriotic phase of the 1930s, and that of post-1944, when “blindly following Moscow.” The same line of reasoning applies to yet another memorandum, this time addressed to Patriarch Justinian<sup>194</sup>. In this document, Ghibu goes at length and dissects Marxism and Leninism, arguing that Marx was in fact the most representative authors for German imperialism, and Lenin was the biggest traitor of Marxism by turning it into an all-Russian nationalist project:

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192 “Regardless of the accusations of chauvinism and reactionarism brought to me by those who only superficially know my life, I am fully convinced that I always was a true democrat. My democratic attitude was ever so present that some spared nothing from characterizing me as “true Bolshevik” (see N. Iorga *Memorii*, vol I., p. 326) and from denouncing me as a dangerous follower of V. I. Lenin (*Viitorul* newspaper, Bucharest, 23. IX. 1923), qualification that not many democrats of today have on their accounts.” p. 43.

193 47.

194 Memoriu catre Patriarhul Justinian, in care, pornind de la aprecieri ale intemeietorilor Marxism-Leninismului ai ale Dr. P. Groza si Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej in legatura cu Biserica, cere o atitudine corespunzatoare pentru apararea fiintei Bisericii, 17 martie 1950.



the national program of Russian Marxists led and indoctrinated by Lenin, program that is not inspired by foreign (international) theory or example, but only from the concrete realities of his country.<sup>195</sup>

The only hero in this entire affair is generalissimo Stalin, in his turn betrayed by Petru Groza, who refused to follow Stalin's advice to “avoid imitation. Let the plowers and the villages build their own fate.”<sup>196</sup> Paradoxically, the critique of Marxism-Leninism is not made from a nationalist’s position, but rather from “a true Bolshevik’s” point of view, and here Ghibu once more and quite proudly quotes Iorga's *Memoirs*. Iorga considers himself a Bolshevik, since in 1917 he was fighting in Bessarabia. Half a century after the years spent in Bessarabia, Ghibu presents himself as a true Bolshevik, fighting not for the nationalist cause, but “for the highest revolutionary ideals, ideals that V. I. Lenin had written on his flag.”<sup>197</sup> More than that, in the same memorandum to Patriarch Justinian, Ghibu describes his autobiographical project. He hoped to publish his three-volume memoirs and give them the title “Confession of a True Bolshevik”, as a revenge for those who wronged him in the context of him not complying with the ideology of the day.

### Conclusions

The large body of text presented by Onisifor Ghibu as his autobiography and by his editors as the furthestmost expression of his objectivity, historical insight and linearity of thought and principles, is breached by the contexts in which it appeared and subsequently by the designed audience that the autobiographer is trying to convince of his side of the story. Whereas in 1938 he would see the end of his “troubled life” with the advent of the Royal Dictatorship and the coronation of his life-long fight for the national ideals seen in Carol II's

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195 Ghibu, *Chemare*, p. 157

196 Stalin-Groza private conversation quoted by the latter in *Reconstructing Romania*, p. 279, apud. Ghibu p. 159.

197 Ghibu, *Chemare* ..., p. 169.

Constitution, after 1945 he reconsiders his whole life in line with the official politics. When Stalin had to be right, Stalin was right; when Ghibu had to be Bolshevik and Leninist he was fighting for Lenin's cause and not for the national unification. Similarly, his posthumous rehabilitation will be breached by distinct contexts. The 1970s will recover Ghibu as a man of science, educator and fighter against Hungarian revisionism, while the 1990s will bring to the fore the nationalist fighter for the unification of Bessarabia with Romania.

In between these contexts that strive at presenting *the real* Onisifor Ghibu, what is perhaps ignored are exactly his travels between empires, nations and provinces between *bildung* and building years. With every return, either from Alsace-Lorraine, Jena, Bucharest, Budapest or Bessarabia, Ghibu is adding a new shade of meaning of being in the service of the nation, linking the formative years – *bildung* – to the building of the nation.

## V. Ion Flueraș. Social-Democracy, Eugenism and the Third International

*What did you do wrong, old Bebel, that the bourgeoisie is praising you?*

### The Life and Times of a Transylvanian Social-Democrat

Ion Flueraș was a Romanian Social-Democrat. Although he was a small player his activity leads us throughout the interwar years, from the national unification to the strenuous efforts of the working movement to reorganize itself. His relation to capitalism and the use of his autobiography will take a different turn compared to that of Bocu or Ghibu, although their personal life-stories will be considerably close. Born in a Greek-Catholic family near Arad he was prepared for a life of a wheelwright. In 1901, May 1<sup>st</sup>, after finishing his apprenticeship Flueraș joined the socialist movement. Unsatisfied with the labor conditions on the Pancota domain of “Prince Surkolski or something similar to that” as he would recount the name of the Sukowsky family, Flueraș organized the first strike “without even knowing what a strike was.”<sup>198</sup> He joins the syndicalist movement in Budapest, until 1906, when he was appointed member in the Central Committee of the Romanian section of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (MSZDP). Between 1903-1904 although he was borderline illiterate he is the librarian of Budapest's wheelwrights union, a year during which he reads

higgledy-piggledy, literature especially romanticism, then, besides the socialist literature, Flamarion, Darwin, Buchner, Bakunin, Voltaire, Thomas Morus, Jokai, Petofi and later on the History of the World.<sup>199</sup>

In 1905 crossed the border with the Old Kingdom with the purpose of learning proper Romanian to help him in the organization of the Romanian unions in Budapest, at the same

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<sup>198</sup> Ion Flueraș, “Amintiri, din tinerețe și din revoluție”, *Miscarea Socială*, No. 10-12: 1932, 1276.  
<sup>199</sup> Id., 1277

time, between 1906-1907 trying to organize the Bucharest workers into unions. Back in Hungary he starts working with *Adeverul* newspaper, the official journal of the Romanian socialist movement. In 1918, Flueraș and Iosif Jumanca contact the National Party proposing a joint action towards establishing the Central Romanian National Council (CNRC).<sup>200</sup> CNRC was founded in October 1918 in Arad. With the spontaneous strikes of October and November “reflecting war-weariness and social grievances of Transylvania's peasants, workers and soldiers” and profiting from the national cleavage between the representatives of state authority and the majority of poor peasantry and proletariat being generally Romanian, “the CNRC easily channeled the revolution in a national direction.”<sup>201</sup> At the Grand National Assembly of December 1<sup>st</sup> at Alba-Iulia Flueraș served as vice-president and in the Directing Council he was appointed the head of the Department of Social Protection and Hygiene (*Resortul Ocrotiri Sociale si Igiena*)<sup>202</sup> whose secretary general was Iuliu Moldovanu.<sup>203</sup>

After the war, he travels to Moscow and Petrograd to observe the works of the second conference of the Third International, representing the Romanian socialist parties. Bukharin calls for his exclusion from the party the reason being his collaboration with the National Party, thus betraying the socialist ideals to the national interests of the bourgeoisie.

Flueraș returns to the union work and between 1926 and 1939 he is the president of the General Confederation of Labor. In 1927 he is in the board of the newly reorganized Socialist Democratic Party (PSD)<sup>204</sup>, and two times deputy in the Romanian parliament between 1928 and 1932. In 1938, Flueraș and Gheorghe Grigorovici president of PDSR since

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200 Sorin Radu, Ion Flueraș (1882-1953) Social-democratie si sindicalism, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Targoviste: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), 8

201 Livezeanu, Cultural Politics in Greater Romania, 132

202 Radu, Ion Flueraș, 8

203 Iuliu Moldovan, *Amintiri si reflexiuni*, (Bucuresti: Editura universitara “Carol Davila”, 1996), 40-56

204 Constantin Titel Petrescu notes that the name of the party was the contribution of the regional branches.

“The regional factions from Banat, Bukovina and Ardeal – holding the majority in the congress –, under the influence of the German Social-Democracy imposed the title “Social Democrat”, against the will of the militants from the Old Kingdom who were supporting the name: Socialist.” *Istoria Socialismului in Romania*, p. 199.

1936, join the Carol II's Frontul Renasterii Nationale (Front of National Regeneration)<sup>205</sup> from 1940 “unique and totalitarian party, under the direct command of His Majesty, the King.” After August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944, Flueraș attempts to reorganize the Social Democratic Party, and after 1948 fusion between PSD and PCR he will be imprisoned, tried in 1952 and sentenced to 15 years of hard labor. Flueraș shared the same tragic fate with Bocu dying in the Gherla prison in 1953. Ioan Munteanu recounts in his prison testimony that the old social-democrat died following an interrogation.<sup>206</sup>

Although this kind of testimonies have to be taken with more than a grain of salt, Munteanu's version is representative for the way in which Flueraș came to be seen within the communist circles, namely “a socialist working for the bourgeoisie.” Whereas Sever Bocu reemerged, especially after the 2000s as a prominent figure of regionalism in Banat and is reinterpreted as the forbearer of the current agenda of cultural and economic autonomy and regionalization being presented as “our last leader to Bucharest”, Ion Flueraș especially through the work of Sorin Radu<sup>207</sup> reappears as one of the last leaders of anti-communist Romanian democracy, or as a marginalized political actor of the unification, alongside the contribution of the Social-Democrats altogether<sup>208</sup>, or “a saint of the prisons”<sup>209</sup> in the context of the “process of communism.”

This mixture of wishful thinking and strive to rehabilitate the Romanian democratic

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205 Radu, Ion Flueraș, 9

206 Ion Munteanu, *La pas prin reeducările de la Pitesti, Gherla și Aiud*, ms. Available at <http://www.procesulcomunismului.com/marturii/fonduri/pitesti/imunteanu/>. Munteanu's prison autobiography identifies Reck and Juberian as being the tortionaries following whose investigation Flueraș died. Allegedly they put him to work as prison janitor saying “Let him, his entire life he was a slave of the bourgeois, let him scrap their toilets now.” More than that, as Munteanu recounts following Flueraș' death a prison notebook circulated from hand to hand among those working in prison: “Executioners Reck and Juberian, Ion Flueraș' assassins will pay for their crime.”

207 See also Sorin Radu, “Ion Flueraș and the Affiliation to the Socialist Movement from Romania at the III-rd Communist International,” *Transylvania* 12:2009, 32-38. Continuing the line of the three-part article published in the same journal, the book

208 Sorin Radu, Ion Flueraș (1882-1953) *Social-democrație și sindicalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Targoviste: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012)

209 See the articles published by journalists Cezarina Barzoi and Ionut Baias for hotnews platform. <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-arhiva-1017022-serial-sfintii-inchisorilor-ion-flueras-drumul-unui-militant-stanga-catre-dumnezeu.htm>

tradition ignores the skeletons in the closet. While this attempt is designed to counterbalance the communist historiography that in line with the Communist International theses presented the Social-Democrat Flueraș as a bourgeois, anti-democratic element, it leaves behind some unresolved issues. Nationalism, eugenics and “positive healthcare,” or his support for Carol II's Front of National Regeneration. The last “deviation” is explained either by opportunism or pragmatic thinking<sup>210</sup> animated by the desire to offer a place for the workers movement within the royal dictatorship and to draw them away from the Iron Guard's growing influence over the workers.<sup>211</sup>

### **Social-Democracy and National Feelings**

Before 1900 there was no organized Romanian working-class movement in Hungary, and the Romanian socialist movement in Transylvania started under the banner of MDSZP.<sup>212</sup> The advent of the Romanian socialist movement illustrates the importance of the national question for the political leadership of the working-class people who have not achieved national emancipation. As Hitchins argues, Romanian socialists before the war – “largely a group without direction” – had to compete with the authority of the Church and with the National Party representing the middle-class. This competition did not take place exclusively in politics, as it also was a competition for winning the mobilization potential of the workers who chose to organize themselves in “reunions” which were patronized by the Romanian

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210 Constantin Titel Petrescu, *Socialismul in Romania*, (Bucuresti: Biblioteca Socialista, 1940), 457. “The leaders of the General Confederation of Labor (CGM) agreed out of opportunism and in order to save the working institution and laws – as the leaders of the unions explained their adherence to this “front.” The path was shown a couple of months before, when a part of CGM's leaders headed by I. I. Mirescu the secretary general, accepted – under the Goga government – to be part of the interim commissions, nationalist and antisemitic. (I. Flueraș in Cluj and I. I. Mirescu in Bucharest).

211 Sorin Radu, Ion Flueraș.

212 Keith Hitchins, *Rumanian Socialists and the Nationality Problem in Hungary*, in Hitchins, *Studies on Romanian National Consciousness* (Pelham, Montreal, Paris, Lugoj, Rome: Nagard Publisher, 1983), 187.

Orthodox Church, rather than associate themselves into socialist labor unions.<sup>213</sup>

The lack of socialist orientation is also caused by the leadership structure. With few exceptions the socialist leaders were workers, intellectuals not being that eager to join the movement. As a result their socialist ideology before the war was “a simplified form of Marxism liberally sprinkled with the ideas of Ferdinand Lassale, Christian socialism, trade unionism, and agrarian socialism.”<sup>214</sup> They generally agreed that capitalism is to blame for their condition, that capitalism will naturally give away to socialism and that the mankind was evolving toward “something better.” In the logic of the competition for supporters with the Church and the National Party, their political discourse was concentrated on national and territorial emancipation. Social emancipation of the Romanian workers and peasants became a secondary aim that had to follow for national freedom. In his memoirs, social-democrat leader Tiron Albani recounts what he sees as a false contradiction:

Before leaving for Alba Iulia, the Hungarian socialists subjected the Romanian socialists in Budapest to a harsh examination of their principles and consciousness. Tendentiously they were asking them if it is possible for a socialist to take his whole nation and leave a democratic and libertarian republic for a monarchy, although the kingdom is of a nation with a free and independent people (un neam cu popor dezrobit). (...) They had a single answer for that: Social freedom is impossible on strips of land. It is either general, or none at all.<sup>215</sup>

From this position the Romanian social democrats in Transylvania will collaborate with the National Party and work towards the unification of the province with Romania. National freedom took preeminence over the social issues. The same distrust for the Hungarians will manifest itself during Bela Kuhn's republic. Caught in between the options of national self-determination versus proletarian world revolution, revolutionary versus evolutionary social change the Social-Democrats will break into three factions: the Social-Democratic Party and from its ranks the Romanian International Socialist faction and the

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<sup>213</sup> Hitchins, 190.

<sup>214</sup> Id, 191.

<sup>215</sup> Tiron Albani, *Douazeci de ani de la Unire*, 165.

Romanian Communists who after a few months merged.<sup>216</sup> Dismissing the wishful thinking that Hungary would become the “Switzerland of the East” should they not secede, Ioan Flueraș and Iosef Jumanca, opposed any cooperation between the Socialists and the Hungarian bourgeois parties.<sup>217</sup> In turn, they voted for the unification with the Old Kingdom despite their strong reservations. One of the conditions imposed during the meetings with the National Party leaders preceding the Alba Iulia national assembly was autonomy until the new constitution will be promulgated. The autonomy was ensured by the Directing Council, who, according to Flueraș was a pure Social-Democratic project, whereas the Nationals, animated by volunteers coming from the Old Kingdom were ready to accept an unconditional unification.

We, the Social Democrats demanded that until the meeting of the national Constituent Assembly, Transylvania should be autonomously administrated. After a series of negotiations, the representatives of the National Party agreed with our demand and this is how the Directing Council took shape.<sup>218</sup>

### **Social Insurance and “Positive Healthcare”**

In the Directing Council, as head of Department of Social Protection and Hygiene, Flueraș offered his support for Iuliu Moldovan's views on medicine and hygiene, and appointed him secretary general of the Department in December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1918.<sup>219</sup> For Moldovan the fundamental purpose of medicine was creating a general environment, social, economic, sanitary and cultural that would create a “positive healthcare.” Moldovan's eugenic view on medicine and “social hygiene” worked hand in hand with Flueraș' efforts of providing better

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216 Hitchins, *The Romanian Socialists and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, 209.

217 id. 211.

218 Ion Flueraș, *Cum am ajuns la Alba Iulia*, in Tiron Albani, *Douazeci de ani dela Unire*, (Oradea: Institutul de Arte Grafice, 1938), 173.

219 Radu, Ion Flueraș, 61.



healthcare and life insurance for the working class.

Unfortunately, the collaboration between the Social-Democrat and the eugenicist is little researched, yet as Marius Turda aptly notes the Romanian case demonstrates the increasingly intertwined relation between the medical praxis and the political discourse,<sup>220</sup> yet in this case, I would add it is not the marriage between right-wing integral nationalism, but between eugenic thinking and the political thought coming from the left. In this phase, social hygiene was seen as a class-based project that would emancipate the workers. More than that, in contrast to integral nationalism, the marriage between eugenic and social-democracy has a regional outlook, nurtured by the autonomy guaranteed by the Directing Council.

Flueras' genuine interest in the health issues was in line with his socialist feelings and designed to emancipate and “illuminate” (through education) the working class and the peasantry. On the other hand, Iuliu Moldovan was straightforward eugenicist, and the author of the first treatise on eugenics published in Romania after 1918.<sup>221</sup> Through this work, Moldovan placed the eugenics and the protection of the nation under a sign of equality.<sup>222</sup>

This does not mean that Flueras was a racist or eugenicist himself or that he viewed the state as an “ethnic state” as Moldovan did<sup>223</sup>, but rather that eugenism and biopolitics found a place in the socialist thought, side by side with life insurances for the workers and their families, the eight-hour work day and other social securities. His understanding of social hygiene and “positive healthcare” was therefore closer to the Polish progressivism in eugenic thinking dominated by left-wing and liberal advocates of state welfare,<sup>224</sup> and similar to

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220 Marius Turda, “To End the Degeneration of a Nation”: Debates on Eugenic Sterilization in Interwar Romania, *Medical History*, 2009, 53(1): 77-104.

221 Iuliu Moldovan, *Igiena Națiunii. Eugenia*, (Cluj: Institutul de Igienă, 1925)

222 Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling, “Eugenics, Race and Nation in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940: A Historiographic Overview,” in Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling (eds.) “Blood and Homeland” Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940, (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2007), 8

223 Iuliu Moldovan, *Statul Etnic*. (Sibiu: Cartea Românească, 1943)

224 Magdalena Gawin, Progressivism and Eugenic Thinking in Poland, 1905-1939, in Turda & Weindling,

Hungary's Zsigmond Engel's notion of state intervention addressing the problems of degenerating family health and welfare.<sup>225</sup>

As the head of the department Flueraş worked on the improvement of medical conditions in the Transylvanian hospitals that were strongly affected by the war conditions and lack of funding. Under his directorate the Department of Social Protection and Hygiene supervised and controlled the workers' insurance houses and the insurance mechanisms that provided financial care for workers and their family in case of accident. Agreeing with Turda that “the health of the population and especially of the family became the central component of the new national welfare programs devised during the interwar period”<sup>226</sup> I have to add that in the case of Flueraş and the Department of Social Protection and Hygiene, the focus was not on the nation or on the state, but particularly on the province of Transylvania and on the working and peasant families. While Moldovan continued developing his eugenic theory towards the biological purity of the nation, Flueraş' hygienic adventure stopped at that point, the Social-Democrat continuing his work towards organizing the labor movement and the socialist party organization.

In 1920 not only the Directing Council is dissolved, but also the Social Insurance Houses (Case cercuale de asigurari sociale) in Banat and Transylvania.<sup>227</sup> The autonomy of the social security system thus broken adds another point to the dissatisfaction of the workers who called for the general strike that takes place on October 17<sup>th</sup>. Following the unsuccessful general strike, the Socialist movement lost its unity. A group of socialists led by the “Prahova Deputy Al. Dunăreanu and Gheorghe Grigorovici from Cernăuți, alongside Iosif Jumanca and a group of Transylvanian reformist militants put the basis of the Social-Democratic Party,

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Eugenics Race and Nation, 167.

225 Marius Turda, The First Debates on Eugenics in Hungary, 1910-1918, in Turda & Weindling, 195.

226 Marius Turda, Modernism and Eugenics, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 69.

227 Constantin Titel Petrescu, Socialismul In Romania, 353.

moderate.”<sup>228</sup> Meanwhile a delegation was sent to Russia “with the mandated of observing the situation in Russia and study the doctrinary theses of the Communist International.”<sup>229</sup> Out of the entire delegation (Constantin Popovici, Gheorghe Cristescu, Al. Dobrogeanu, and D. Fabian) Ion Flueraș is the only member that refuses to affiliate the Romanian Socialist Party to the International. After this visit another rupture takes place within the socialists, as the group of communists breaks away from the party. Following the tensions and ruptures within the Romanian socialist movement, Flueraș retreats to the syndicalist work, from 1926 to 1939 acting as head of the General Confederation of Labor, position from which he entered Carol II's Front of National Regeneration, yet another “deviation” from the socialists.

### **Social Movement and Autobiography**

Flueraș' life-long activity as a social-democrat became the subject of a short autobiographical narrative written in 1932 and published by Ilie Moscovici's *Miscarea Sociala*. Through that text the editor intended to present the socialist militant as role model, opposed to contemporary politics. As already shown, for this kind of autobiographical narrative functioning as an act of auto-thematization and passing personal experience as a national one, is dominated by the conclusion. The final point of the narrative shows how its author perceives himself as part of the society he built. In the case of Flueraș' autobiographical narrative this moment came in 1918, when the Social-Democrats, himself among their ranks brought the province to Romania.

Why would Flueraș write his own autobiography? It is not because he is an intellectual, he most certainly does not perceive himself like one, and most certainly he would

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<sup>228</sup> id. 358.  
<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

not be animated by the “anxiety” of carving himself a position in the social space. Compared to the other two autobiographers, his text is quite modest in length and insight, but its importance resides in the fact that it completes the political spectrum from which the Transylvanian intellectuals thematize the act of unification. Considering that the autobiography is the preferred genre bourgeoisie for national mobilization, Flueraș' short autobiographical narrative will nicely fit this picture, although the group asking for his autobiography were in fact looking for a life-story of a Romanian socialist to contrast it with the “chaos” on the current political scene dominated by politicianism and the preeminence of personal interest over the common good.

The narrative is published by Ilie Moscovici's *Miscarea Sociala/Social Movement* journal in 1932. The journal was edited by one of the most prominent leaders of Romanian socialism and leader of the 1927 reorganization of the socialist movement into the Socialist Democratic Party (PSD) alongside George Grigorovici, Constantin Titel Petrescu, Ilie Moscovici, Șerban Voinea, Iosif Jumanca, Ioan Flueraș, Ștefan Voitec, Lotar Radăceanu, Theodor Iordanescu, Ion Paș. *Miscarea Sociala* had a pronounced internationalist and anti-Bolshevik character. In its numbers the editors will publish extensively Karl Kautsky or Emil Vandervelde, the Austromarxism, with names like Otto Bauer, Friedrich and Max Adler, or socialists writing from the capitals of Europe, Theodor Dan (Berlin), M. Oberlander (Cernăuți), Oda Olberg (Rome). Of special interest are the local issues, either contemporary<sup>230</sup> or historical especially on the history of the strains of socialism before the unification.<sup>231</sup>

The publication of Ion Flueraș' autobiographical narrative in 1932 by *Miscarea Sociala* is integrated into the quest for uncovering the work of Romanian socialists, with a hint at a regionalist perspective, as we saw in the case of N. Deleanu's article on the history of

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230 Ilie Moscovici, “Haosul Național...”, *Miscarea Sociala*, 1932:4, 1041-1044.

231 N. Deleanu, “Schita istorică socialistă pentru Ardeal”, *Miscarea sociala*, 1932:4, 1073-1080.

the socialist movement in Transylvania. The moment is equally important. The specters of the Great Depression were haunting Europe, and especially Moscovici tries to give an answer to the question why is Romania hit by the same “chaos” when the country is far from the capitalist model of the “developed countries.”

Chaos is another word for economic crisis. In a very rich piece of cultural criticism, Moscovici contrasted the economic crisis of the developed countries

in the civilized countries the chaos is caused by a social form that has reached its maximum growing potential, followed by the incapacity of an economic system to further direct the world economy<sup>232</sup>

whereas the Romanian national chaos

like our entire modernization, our national chaos is caused by following the path of the developed countries adapted to our economic environment, our socio-political organization, to our mentalities.<sup>233</sup>

Despite the fact that “considering the capitalist development,” Romania is a backward country and was not confronted with industrial or agricultural overproduction, it too was hit by the world crisis, but not of the same crisis of the moribund capitalism in the West. Moscovici finds the cause for this paradox – economic crisis without capitalism – in politicianism and the corruption of local politicians. Moscovici identifies the responsible in the National Peasantist Party:

One leader isolates himself at Badacini (Iuliu Maniu, my note) sighing over the Constitution, while his “bravi” are sighing for adventure and Bolshevik dictatorship, and the other leader, equally prudent, commands to some to keep in touch with Mussolini and the others to salute the progresses accomplished by the Bolsheviks.<sup>234</sup>

As we can see “politicianism” entered the vocabulary of the Romanian interwar political language somewhat freely, indiscriminately addressed to whomever the political

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232 Moscovici, *Haosul National*, 1041

233 id.

234 id. 1043.

adversary may be. The Social-Democrats would find the National Peasantists guilty of “politicianism”<sup>235</sup> while the National Peasantist, especially the Transylvanians, would see the Romanian politics altogether as driven by corruption and politicianism. As an answer to the political crisis, and to politicianism *Miscarea Sociala* published Ion Flueraș' autobiographical narrative.

The text was published as an homage to the thirty years of socialist activity. Editor's introduction marks the anniversary moment, highlighting that

30 years of socialist allegiance, more than that, in the front lines – which means years and years of suffering and poverty, – is a proof of character in a country where neither the intellectuals, nor the workers know what character is.<sup>236</sup>

The intention of the editor is to present a role model for the Romanian socialist movement, as well as for the Romanian politics altogether. In line with editor's plan, Flueraș begins his life-story from the moment in which he joined the socialist movement. It was 1901, May 1<sup>st</sup>, in Arad. Freshly liberated from his apprenticeship, on the way back home the young man is intrigued by the manifestation and decides to join it. As a rite of passage Flueraș recounts his first contribution

That autumn (1901), for the first time I witnessed the socialist rally in Piața Unirii, Arad. I was there by chance, – and right then, on the spot I joined the party. I still remember that I paid my first annual contribution of 24 kreutzers.<sup>237</sup>

then he continues exploring his experience as syndicalist and working-class organizer, both in Budapest and in Bucharest. Rushed by the editor's demand to confess more about the unification moment and of his contribution as a Social-Democrat to the national cause,

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235 The same Moscovici would also give the most exquisite definition of the National Peasantists. “To be fair, with all their minuses, considering their sinful government, with their swinging between capitalism and peasantism, with all their anti-democratic methods of government and administration, with the dreadful mix of pure reactionaries, Takist zests, Jesuitism, anti-capitalist conservative Peasantism and extreme-left democracy, in most of the cases leaning towards Bolshevism – the National-Peasantists represent the only somewhat democratic force in Romania” Ilie Moscovici, “Alegeri nationale, - în criza,” *Miscarea Sociala*, 8-9:1932, 1196.

236 Ion Flueraș, *Amintiri, din tinerețe și din revoluție*, 1276.

237 Ibid.

Flueras devoted the rest of the autobiographical narrative to this concentrated series of events.

I will spare you the details about the strikes and day-to-day fights for universal vote and the freedom to organize ourselves, my activity in the villages, in the Apuseni Mountains, in Jiu Valley, my activity at the *Glasul Poporului* (The Voice of the People) and *Adeverul* (The Truth) in Budapest. It would take us more than a day. So I will go on to the period that I know you are most interested in, the times of the 1918 revolution.<sup>238</sup>

If what is left unsaid is sometimes more important than what is actually said, Ion Flueras autobiographical narrative is the best example for that. Flueras saw the fight for national self-determination started by his and Jumanca's efforts of bringing *Adeverul* newspaper back on the market. In 1917 when the war gave signs that it was close to its end, reediting *Adeverul* appeared to be the true way for mobilizing the workers. The targeted workers were especially the veterans coming back from the front and even more the miners who had been sent to battle in compact groups. In Flueras and Jumanca's view, the fraternal ties between workers returning from war – “compact militarized masses” – had to be channeled in favor of the socialist movement. This activity led to the socialists being the only properly organized Romanian political movement in Transylvania, as Flueras notes,

During the summer and autumn of 1918, when the power of the monarchy was crumbling, out of the whole Hungary we were the only Romanian organized force. The Romanian Nationals were barely moving.<sup>239</sup>

From that position and waiting for the revolution to happen, Flueras proposed the workers take action, destroy the railroads and even burn the fields “just like in the times of Gheorghe Doja, Horia, Closca and Avram Iancu.” The outcome of the medieval warfare revolutionary tactics led to Flueras' interrogation by the secret police, curious to know what was his connection to “Rakovschi, with... Take Ionescu and Ionel Bratianu.”

More than mobilizing the “militarized masses”, Flueras also presents that the joint action between Nationals and Social-Democrats came from the latter as well. Further on, the

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<sup>238</sup> Id. 1278.

<sup>239</sup> id. 1280.

CNRC is presented as a typical socialist construction: “on the principles of representing and defending the rights of the Romanian people, with self-determination and guaranteeing the liberties of the social classes.” The balance between Social-Democrats and Nationals will change, the latter came to the front. This shift was explained by Flueraș by the fact that although the Social-Democrats were behind the entire national-revolutionary activity, the Nationals were supported by the National Guards “entirely made up by men coming from the front, by that I mean peasant elements”<sup>240</sup> but also by the intellectuals returning home.

The cleavage between the Social-Democrats and the Nationals increased when the matter of autonomy was brought to the fore. While the Social-Democrats were calling for complete autonomy, they had to accept the compromise solution of the “provisional autonomy.” With the Nationals having the upper hand given that they were supported by both peasants and intellectuals and the Social-Democrats having the limited support of the workers they not so successfully mobilized, the latter were facing an identity conundrum. On the one hand there was the national feeling that they used in order to rally the workers and peasants on their side, on the other hand they had to concede to a compromise over their strong regionalism.<sup>241</sup> The regionalist outlook was strong among the Nationals as well, but a difference had to be made. The Social-Democrats were committed to defending the working class,

We were for the unification, but we wanted a strongly guaranteed autonomy in order to avoid freeing ourselves from the oppression of the magnates only to lose our freedom in the hands of the boyars.<sup>242</sup>

while the Nationals under the leadership of Iuliu Maniu were motivated by discourse emphasizing moral, economic and cultural superiority over the Old Kingdom.

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<sup>240</sup> id. p. 1283.

<sup>241</sup> For the Social-Democrat's Regionalism see Bogdan Dumitru, “Federalism and Regionalism in Romanian Political Thinking in the Interwar Period”, *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai*, 2012, March No. 1: 15-37.

Representative of the Social-Democrats in Bukovina, Grigorovici was a strong supporter of a federal project in Greater Romania, arguing that prior to the unification each region had its own constitutional tradition.

<sup>242</sup> Flueraș, *Amintiri din Tinerete*, 1283.



Contrasting “magnates” to “boyars” Flueraș uses a similar tone to describe the backwardness of the Old Kingdom, yet unlike the Nationals his regionalist discourse is not aimed at covering the entire Romanian community in Transylvania, but only a portion of it represented by the workers. The regional autonomy that the Social-Democrats were demanding was therefore not targeting their nationals, but it was designed to offer securities for the Transylvanian working class against what was perceived as feudal oppression. This view on autonomy and regionalism was best exemplified by his activity within Department of Social Protection and Hygiene. Alongside the measures taken for ensuring social protection through the regionally autonomous insurance houses that were forcefully dissolved at the same time with the Directing Council by General Averescu's government, and whose funds were centralized by the state, the social-democratic view on regionalism and autonomy manifested itself through “positive healthcare.” As a left-wing project of state welfare the eugenic movement in the Directing Council did not target the nation as a whole. It was rather seen as a means of educating the workers and peasants altogether, “illuminating” them to use the word employed by the medical and social workers. The movement was not therefore designed with the purpose of “regenerating the nation”, but with that of protecting the working classes from venereal diseases and alcoholism.

Paradoxically, the fervent defender of general autonomy, leftist state welfare and militant for democratic and parliamentary political life, found himself reunited with the discourse of integral nationalism in 1938, given his support for Carol II's Front of National Regeneration. In the twenty-years time that passed since the unification, Flueraș migrated from socialist position informed by autonomy and strong regionalism, to full support and mobilizing the Romanian workers for the single party that defeated parliamentarism and democracy and was built around a name that aimed at “regenerating the nation.”

## Conclusions

Like the case of Sever Bocu and Onisifor Ghibu, Flueraș's autobiographical narrative is the story of a failure. In 1929, addressing the Parliament Flueraș criticizes both the Liberals and the National-Peasantists for not respecting the Washington International Labor Convention which set the work day at eight hours. In this equation the working class appears as the only victim of the capitalist system and of the political class. In Flueraș' view, responsible for the high unemployment and taxation is shared by the socialists as well, due to their incapacity of influencing the Romanian politics.<sup>243</sup> Given that the capitalist system is seen as ultimately flawed and that the National-Peasantists are misrepresenting the masses that offered their support, Flueraș calls for the Social-Democrats to expand their position, proposing themselves as the only representatives of the working peasants, as well as intellectuals, brought together by the fact that they are all “working people.” For that he gave the example of Poland, where the peasants are organized in social-democratic unions “just like the French professors.” Flueraș' appeal was for the entire country to gather around a mass conception of social-democracy, “because it is not a shame that the intellectuals would belong to the masses, to the Social-Democratic Party, and that would not be called betraying the nation and the state, as Mr. Goga imagined when he described us as Maniu's invention.”<sup>244</sup> The democratic left as well was using the integralist discourse, yet by that it did not targeted the nation as a whole. In this light, the nationalist Social-Democrat designed the nation as one single social class. Workers, peasants and intellectuals alike, defined by their work and production are intended to join the Social-Democratic movement and transform its party into a mass organization. As it was proven, Flueraș' innocent plan could not take place. What it happen was that he joined the Front of National Regeneration.

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243 Ion Flueraș, *Discurs la mesaj*, (București: Editura Partidului Social Democrat, 1929)

244 Id., 6.

## VI. Conclusions

Autobiography works as the preferred genre of bourgeoisie for mobilizing personal narratives in the process of nation-building.<sup>245</sup> In the context of Transylvania's integration into Greater Romania, it works as moral leverage and as a proof of how a lifelong work of national activism is carried along the lines of pursuing the “common good,” up to the point that the individual self can no longer be separated from the collective identity of the nation. In this light, *bildung* – the years of education, of formative experiences – is translated into *building*, specifically nation building. At the same time, the autobiographical is not limited at constructing the individual subject, but it aims at designing the community to which the author addresses, community that he created both in the text as well as *in real life*.

Memory and political action come together with the aim of building a mass community that would represent the entire nation. These projects came from the left and from the right, as well as from an incipient form of technocracy. In this sense, Miller nicely highlights the paradox of “Americanism” in Eastern Europe. While the local “technocrats” were pursuing a society where progress and productivity were ordered according to principles of Fordism and Taylorism, concepts that dominated the conferences of the Romanian Engineers' Association from the 1920s up to 1947 when they were replaced by Stakhanovism, the end result contributed to the critical attitude towards parliamentary liberalism.<sup>246</sup> In the

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<sup>245</sup> Liam Harte, *Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment*, 3.

<sup>246</sup> Charles S. Maier “Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 2 (1970): 29.

race for becoming a mass, if not a single party, the politics from right to left employed their entire range of resources, past and present. The life and times of the political leaders are represented as a legitimization of their conception of the state.

The moral superiority of the Transylvanian political agent plays a crucial role in the construction of the individual working towards the common good of the Romanian nation after 1918. Coming from the Habsburg lands, and grown in the shadow of the German culture and politics, as Slavici would argue at the beginning of the war (1915), asserts the moral superiority of the Transylvanians contrasted to the Byzantine backwardness of the Old Kingdom. The same differential look was preserved after the war, with emphasis on the one hand on the pre-war national activism against the Hungarians' equivalent to the formative years, and on the other hand on the contributions towards the unification, the period when *bildung* is turned into *building*.

After the war, the same sense of moral superiority is translated into the politics of Greater Romania. The main target is the backwardness of the country. This claim would be supported both by the leader of the National Party, Iuliu Maniu (see Livezeanu), but also by the leader of the Social-Democrats, Ion Flueraş, who would argue in favor of the autonomy only to avoid exchanging the oppression of the magnates for the exploitation of the boyars. With Onisifor Ghibu, the attack against the immorality of politicianism is informed by the theory of politicianism developed by his Bucharest professor Constantin Rădulescu-Motru. Politicianism is not only the immoral counterpart of the Romanian politicians, (i.e. the Liberals) but a proof of the expected fall of capitalism (Flueraş) and of all social classes joining Social-Democracy, viewed as a mass movement.

The first accusations of politicianism after 1918 – of “playing the unsavory game of corrupt politics”, that is – came from the National Party's leaders and were addressed to the Transylvanians who, unsatisfied with the formula of provisional autonomy, deflected the

ranks of the Nationals and joined political parties based in the Old Kingdom: “They [Iuliu Maniu or Onisifor Ghibu] saw themselves as more skilled and morally superior, an outlook which made for a certain ideological compatibility between this group of Transylvanians and a younger generation of radical Romanian nationalists”. As Livezeanu argues, by politicianism, Iuliu Maniu and Onisifor Ghibu not only exposed a reflection of the moral superiority fathomed during the pre-union struggle; the critique of politicianism also revealed a regionalist standpoint on their part.<sup>247</sup>

In line with the rejection of politicianism on moral bases, there is another developing thread, that of rejecting political parties and parliamentarism altogether. Sever Bocu would militate for the reorganization of the PNT as a dictatorial party. At the same time, another solution for getting rid of politicians will come from the “technocratic” side, most notably from political economist, engineer and PNT member Mihail Manoilescu. The moment came with Carol II's 1938 Constitution and with his Front of National Regeneration. It was equally applauded by Manoilescu, Sever Bocu, Onisifor Ghibu, and Ion Flueraş. Corporatism, fascism, technocratism, syndicalism and socialism come together in their support of the Royal Dictatorship. The support for the personal dictatorship was not exclusively coming from the local players. The British Minister to Bucharest, Reginald Hoare, advised London that a government of technocrats under the command of the King could save the situation, and considered the royal dictatorship preferable to “the bastard one developed under the last government.”<sup>248</sup> Of course, in the “bastard” alternative he saw the threatening prospects of Romania being ruled by the Iron Guard.

The three autobiographers represent three separate cases. Their life-stories are united by a series of aspects. The first one is the way in which they employ the past experience for

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<sup>247</sup> Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, 134.

<sup>248</sup> Bela Vago, *Umbra svasticii, Naşterea fascismului şi antimsemitismului în Bazinul Dunării (1936-1939)* (Bucureşti, 2003) doc. 74 p. 52.

supporting their view on national unification. The crucial moment in the autobiographies of the three Transylvanians is the 1918 political unification. This moment is narrated as a personal achievement. Sever Bocu's narrative informs how he almost single-handedly organized the legions of Romanian volunteers caught in the Russian front during the Bolshevik Revolution. What follows from this account is that, thanks to his administrative skills coupled with his national feeling, Transylvania was brought to Romania. Onisifor Ghibu's self-narrative follows a similar thread, as it informs the readers that his political impetus and nationalist know-how transferred from Transylvania to Bessarabia brought the latter province to the Greater Romania. In the same line, Ion Flueraş presented himself as the modest promoter of the ideas behind the Central Romanian National Council (CNRC) and further on behind Transylvania joining Romania, albeit under the provisions of a strong autonomy. What follows from these is that autobiography is the proper environment for mobilizing public attention on its subject, viewed as a peculiar type of technocrat employing his nationalist technical skills towards the goal of political unification. This also challenges the narrative according to which the unification was the natural result of an already existing spiritual unity characterizing the Romanian nation. Ultimately, the act of unification is not presented as a metaphysical emanation of the nation that was positively sanctioned by history. Behind the acts of history stand men who can “make things work.”

Secondly, what unites these autobiographies is their use during the interwar period. They were a means of legitimizing, as well as supporting their authors' view on the realities of the Greater Romania. Flueraş's autobiography stands as a proof for the existence and determinant influence of the Social-Democratic tradition in pre-war Transylvania. Linked to the past, it becomes a manifesto for the righteousness of Social-Democracy in Greater Romania. Similarly, Ghibu used his autobiography to legitimize himself, as well as the 1938 Constitution. He concluded that this Constitution is the final moment ending the unification

process, also a moment that he fought for his entire life.

Thirdly, in the 1990s the three heroes of this study reemerge as the ultimate positive figures of the interwar period. They are the subject of scholarly interest and re-branded as the last representative of Romanian democracy (Flueraş), the last leader of Banat and the main proponent of regional autonomy (Sever Bocu) or the main figure of Romanian nationalist thought (Ghibu). In this context, their autobiographies become a main source of information. This is made possible by a mixture of lack of contextualization, wishful thinking and avoiding the skeletons in the closet.

Lastly, what is perhaps the strongest connection between the three is brought about by their view on capitalism and bourgeois society. Sever Bocu, as the third chapter showed, was trained to enter the ranks of Romanian bourgeoisie in Transylvania. The father-in-law of Standard Oil Ploieşti director, he started out by pursuing a banking career which he abandoned for journalism, a field in which he rose to the status of newspaper owner. He abandoned that as well and fled to Dobruđa – the California of Romanians – where he built the first hotel in Eforie. Minister for Banat at the time when he organized the 10-year celebration of the Great Unification, in 1938 he was the Governor of Timiş-Torontal county. Ghibu showed his uttermost fascination for the social work of Jena's Carl Zeiss, a fascination for grand-bourgeoisie putting its resources in the service of the common good, an idea that, as he confessed, he implemented in Chişinău. As a Social-Democrat, Ion Flueraş rejected the revolutionary ideas. For him, social progress ought to be reached by gradual evolution and cooperation between capitalism and socialist ideas, although he saw capitalism as ultimately flawed, incapable of providing social equality and a minimum of rights for the working class.

To the interwar capitalism seen as manifesting itself through politicianisms, promoting self-interest over the ideal of pursuing the common good, the three figures presented oppose the moral life of an old-time activist animated by nationalist feelings and preserving

something of an Enlightenment vision of capitalism.<sup>249</sup> What the three autobiographers retain from the Enlightenment's vision of capitalism, as a means of spreading civilization best exemplified by Montesquieu's theory of “du commerce”, is that it has to work towards the common good. This drive towards the common good, rejecting the pursuit of personal interest, is the main argument developed by their autobiography. On its basis, the autobiographers construct the community to which they address.

The national community is constructed through the autobiographical narrative as a projection of the individual engaged in narrating his own life. The formative years are translated into nation-building with the intention of legitimizing the political programs of the present in the light of the deeds of the past. In the end, what started out as individual work towards the unification of the nation and towards the common, greater good of the people, was transformed into allegiance for King Carol II's dictatorship, support for the Front of National Regeneration and illiberal anti-parliamentarism.

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<sup>249</sup> I am grateful for this observation to Jurgen Kocka and his thought-provoking lecture on the history of capitalism, at the CEU.



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