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Growing Up in Banat Region. Childhood Memories in Life-Stories

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on grounded theory analysis of life-stories and semi-structured interviews with people who spent their childhood in Banat during various periods of the 20th century. It discusses the mechanisms of autobiographic memory correlated with social memory, the memories connected to the micro-universe of childhood, constructed around family and the impact of great events and historical changes of the 20th century on the interviewees' childhood.

KEYWORDS

life-story, childhood, memories, Banat, 20th Century.

Introduction

A life-story always starts with the story of one's childhood, which has a special charm, no matter which generation the teller might belong to. P. Bourdieu discusses the 'biographic illusion', i.e. the tendency of all people who narrate their lives to idealise their past. And the childhood story, as one of my interviewees wisely observed, is the one which is filled with most dreams and magic: "It was a beautiful time. Things had different dimensions. When you are little, the things that surround you seem to be bigger, so was the garden of the house and the trees and the flowers. They all have other dimensions and you perceive them differently. I also think this is one of the reasons why it was a happy time, because I always combined dreams and reality and they turned into a story" (A. R., b. 1953).

This paper is the outcome of extensive research which was conducted over several years, having as its topic childhood memory and the study of family educational models covering several generations who spent their childhood in Banat during various periods of the 20th century (see Branc 2008). From a psychological and sociological perspective, I will analyse, in the first part of my paper, the

mechanisms of autobiographic memory correlated with social memory, as well as the particularities of life-story narratives. The second part is dedicated to memories connected to the micro-universe of childhood, constructed around the family, the Significant Others who help to form the first character traits of the future adult. In the third part of my paper, my focus moves towards the impact of great events and historical changes in the 20th century on the interviewees' childhood.

As a research instrument, I used the grounded-theory analysis of life-story interviews belonging to the Oral History Archive of the "Third Europe Foundation" of Timișoara, an archive set up under the coordination of Smaranda Vultur. The interviews of the life-story type, which have as protagonists the people who spent their childhood during the inter-war period, were supplemented with 50 semi-directed interviews taken of people who spent their childhood in the 50's and 80's. The Oral History Archive, coordinated by Smaranda Vultur, contains over 400 life-story interviews, totalling over 1000 hours of recordings. All these interviews are transcribed, and detailed files of them, together with a thematic index, are available on-line on the websites www.memoriabanatului.ro and www.memoriatimisoarei.ro, administrated by the author of this paper.



Klein family in Timișoara, 1913-1914 (Renée Klein collection). (O.H.A.T.E.F.) (The Oral History Archive of the Third Europe Foundation).

All the ethnic groups that live in Banat have been interviewed: Romanians, Serbs, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Bulgarians, Czechs, Slovaks. This reflects the intercultural character of this region in the Western part of Romania, as the result of several centuries of peaceful cohabitation.

Cosmopolitanism, tolerance towards the Other, openness to alterity are mainly the outcome of important reforms initiated when Banat was integrated into the Habsburg Empire in 1718. Besides economical and administrative changes, these reforms also determined changes in the collective mentality of Banat's inhabitants. If until 1718 the Romanians and the Serbs were the majority (the later lived in the South-Western part of the province), the waves of colonization initiated by the Habsburg Empire would radically change the ethnical structure of the Banatian space. Moreover, the imperial authority also introduced a series of measures, regarding "a complex process of qualitative changes, of increasing the quality of life, education, work and production" (Bocșan 1986, 51)

The childhood in this intercultural environment left a mark on all the interviewees. In my previous work (Adam 2008), I have analysed the mechanisms that contributed, since childhood, to the construction of Banat regional identity and to the interiorisation of the well known stereotype: "Tot Banatu-i fruncea!" (Banat is the greatest!)

The idyllic atmosphere of a careless childhood, in good relationship with the Others,

was threatened, many times, by events or historical changes which, seen through a child's eyes, seem even more dramatic and absurd. In this paper I want to compare two worlds: a small world of the family and of the birth place, and a larger world, of the social institutions and of politics. Both worlds are reconstructed, retrospectively, in the narration of the childhood, from a series of images that link the individual memory with the collective memory of Banat's inhabitants.



Childhood memories and the life-story narrative

M. Halbwachs noticed that "we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as in a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated" (Halbwachs 1992, 47). Memory has different characteristics as one passes from one age to another. T. Constantin speaks about what psychologists call "childhood amnesia", a phenomenon manifested in adults by the presence of a very limited number of memories from the period of the first childhood. Psychoanalysts explain this phenomenon through the repression, at an unconscious level, of the memories perceived by the child as traumatic and their cover up with "screen-memories", which make access to traumatic memories impossible (Constantin 2004, 8). Cognitive psychologists explain childhood amnesia by using the "model of schematic change" (Constantin 2004, 8), according to which during the first years of his/her life, the child stores away information in an inconsistently schematised order, the change appearing after the age of 5-6, together when they commence school and the development of language use, that modifies one's way of organising information.

Already at a very early age, children gradually learn how to formulate and remember their own memories. Parents play a special part in the development of children's narrative abilities, being the ones who offer models and contexts of usage. As the child's narrative capacity

develops, s/he becomes capable of integrating more relevant information for himself/ herself in his/ her system of autobiographical memory (Constantin 2004, 133). Conversations with adults play the role of strengthening these childhood memories, as autobiographical memory mainly functions on the basis of memory sharing. Repeatedly refreshing memories and sharing them through the medium of language is an instrument of forming personal and social identity.

Autobiographical memory leaves its mark on the forming of an adult's personality, the most outstanding being "emotionally charged experiences, which provoke ruptures in the way a person understands the world or open new ways for the manner of defining or understanding life" (Constantin 2004, 7). In T. Constantin's opinion, there are several categories of marking memories:

- 1) negative, traumatic memories;
- 2) intensely positive or vivacious memories;
- 3) flash type memories – about the framework or context in which an event, having special individual or collective importance, was received.

During the narration of the life-story negative memories of traumatic events lived in childhood are intensively remembered, and the emotional charge of these memories influences the interview. There are many situations in which the interviewees burst into tears, this moment being very emotional for the interviewer, too. The remembering of a birthday celebration, which coincided with a German bombing of Belgrade, is particularly impressive: "I won't forget this: my birthday was on the 8th of April, and on the 6th of April the Germans bombed Belgrade. On 27th of March the population didn't agree with the signing of a protocol with Hitler. The Government agreed to surrender to the Nazis and the population was against it and started a rebellion. And on 6th April, without any notice, they started the bombing. The planes had left from Romania and were passing over our heads. And my mother was crying because my

brother was studying there, in Belgrade. And the tears were falling from her eyes while she was cooking my birthday cake. I won't forget this – 6th April was Sunday morning" (X.M., b. 1930).

In life stories both collective traumatic events (the second World War, Bărăgan deportation, the ex USSR, Auschwitz etc.), which had a negative impact on all the generations studied, as well as individual traumatic events, are remembered.

Positive memories are generally linked to the micro-universe of childhood, family group, playmates and the atmosphere of the natal place.

P. Iluț and T. Rotariu (2006, 152) identify several limits of human memory. Firstly, the greater the time interval between the development of an event and its interviewing, the greater the chance of more wrong information appearing; secondly, memory is selective, being influenced by the desirability degree (those actions and episodes, which place the individual in a favourable light, are remembered) and by the relevance of those events. Unusual events, different from daily ones, situations with great socio-economic implications and events which have common consequences in social life are better remembered and reproduced.

In specialised literature, the difference between individual and social memory is often made. If, in the former case, memories are linked to events or personal occurrences, social memory refers to moments or occurrences belonging to the social context in which that person lived. From a psycho-sociological perspective, social groups or collectives create social memory by constructing collective mental representations of their past. Social memory is constructed in connection to history, culture and social-political context. The comparative analyses of the interviews has shown the existence of similitude regarding the manner in which members of the same generation retrospectively construct collective memories in their life story, as well as also structuring individual discourses according to the same pat-

tern. Banat's interculturality is mentioned by almost every person interviewed, no matter their ethnicity, although, as I will show in this paper, there are many examples that show ethnic discrimination has functioned here, as well. During my previous research I have undertaken content analyses of the media in Timișoara during the electoral campaign in 2004. The result of this showed that in the political and media discourse mentions referring to Banat's interculturality and the Europeaness of this region were frequent. Therefore, many of the interviewed were influenced by this discourse which was used in the preceding years as well, this being the period in which most of the interviews were done.

The people who tell the story of their life do not only remember what they have been through, but also offer their own personal interpretation. Thus, we find information regarding "the values and beliefs that guided their actions, their silent ambitions, aspirations and strategies that influenced them" (Elliott 2005, 308).

The revealing of beliefs, values, customs or traditions through the meaning of life-stories leads to understanding cultural significations and the dynamics of cultural changes. The life-story is, therefore, a social construct. It presents the way that an individual understands events, social and political movements, as a member of a social group, a community or generation. Bruner said: 'A lived life is what really happens. Life experience consists of the images, the experiences, the feelings, the wishes and the thoughts known by the person who felt them... A narrated life-story, a history of a life is a narration influenced by the cultural conventions of the narration, the audience and the social context.' (quoted in Denzin 1989, 30).

A life-story is a narration of an entire life seen as a 'whole', emphasizing the most important experiences lived. The analysis of this narration allows us to make connections between two different periods of one's life, to tie childhood to maturity. Again, by 'telling' our life, we keep memories, experiences and collective val-

ues alive, as they will live this way more than ourselves. The ones who study life-stories have the chance to understand the way that the Self evolves in time and finds its way in society, culture and history.

The particularity of Oral History comes from the fact that the autobiographical discourse is a result of the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee, having the influence of the connection established between them, the researcher's abilities and the social context of the interview. In an interview of this type, the interviewee and the interviewer become partners, creating and building a story together. Most of those who have done interviews of the life-story type were young students, or graduates born between '75-'80. Therefore, while the interviewed belonged to their grandparents' generation, the interviewees belonged to the grandchildren's generation. This generational difference has influenced the interviewed discourse and enriched the content of the discourse related to childhood and youth with moral sayings, comparisons, sometimes advice given to the interviewed. The semi-structured interviews, of the '50s and '80s generations were all done by the author of this article. Having the experience of childhood in the '80s, as my interviewed in the third generation group, it was much easier to overcome the barriers that exist between the interviewer and interviewed and this was reflected in the content of the interview.



The small world of childhood – Images of Significant Others in Childhood Memories

The consistent integration of the individual into the setting of the objective world is the outcome of socialization in its two main stages: the primary and secondary socialization. Primary socialization, especially important for the individual, offers him an orientation towards the world, shaping the Self's basic structures. Secondary socialization is built on the struc-

tural foundation made during primary orientation, its success being determined by the continuity between the basic and the specialized knowledge (Adam 2009, 112).

P. Berger and T. Luckmann consider that people are not born, but they become members of the society by internalizing the social world. In Berger's and Luckmann's view, socialization is "a comprehensive and consistent introduction of an individual into the objective world of a society and a sector of it". (Berger and Luckmann 1999, 153) During the process of primary socialization, the individual sees the outside world through what certain people called "the significant others". These people select those aspects of the objective world which are in conformity with their social status. The Self is a reality which reflects the way the significant others behave with the individual.

In the complex process of socialization the individual does not only take upon himself the others' roles and the attitudes, but also their world. According to Berger and Luckmann, "gaining an identity means establishing your place in the world". In the conscience of the individual, during the primary socialization, there is a progressive withdrawal from the roles and attitudes set by the "others" and an undertaking of general roles and attitudes. Thus the "generalized other" represents not only an identity towards a certain other or a certain significant other, but also an identity in general (Berger and Luckmann 1999, 155). This very important step of socialization marks the internalization of the objective reality (of the actual society) and the subjective founding of an identity.

An essential characteristic of primary socialization is the fact that the choice of significant others does not exist. "You have to cope with the parents that chose the fate for you", according to Berger and Luckmann the result is an almost immediate identification of the child with his parents and an internalization of their world. For the child, the world of these



Classroom, Timișoara, the 1930s (Szklerek collection). O.H.A.T.E.F.

significant others is the only real or imaginary world, being more strongly implanted in his conscience than the worlds internalized during the secondary socialization (Berger and Luckmann 1999, 157).

According to the two authors, the childhood world is defined through the trust the child gives to significant others and the way they define his reality. Doubts regarding this first reality may appear, but this will happen much later. However, the childhood world remains "home" no matter how far off the individual may get along his life.

Since family is the group we spend most of our lives with, the way the family thinks influences our own way of thinking. "The Significant Others", as H. Mead calls them, tell us the first things about life and people. For a long time we have no knowledge of the outside world apart from what we learn from our close ones. There is nothing we can think about that is not a starting point for a discussion leading to our family. As long as we do not leave our family, we continue to have the same relationships with its members. We can change our profession or nationality, climb or descend on the social scale, but our position within our family remains the same.

Many subjects belonging to the first generation taken into the studio point out an authoritarian behaviour of their parents towards them. It was forbidden not to listen to one's parents. „And if we didn't do as the parents

said, then they would beat us. I tell you that.” (B.T., b. 1920).

Among Significant Others, the mother’s character occupies a central place within childhood memories. The mother is the one who sets the first rules of conduct: “Smile while you greet. It does not cost much. Be friendly. If you know the mother tongue of the person you meet, greet using that language. It will do him/her well.” (E. C., b. 1937).

The mother is the one who makes the first choices regarding the child’s educational projects and then, as the child progresses in his education, the father’s role becomes more and more important.

The mother is described as a model of survival in extreme situations, the one who succeeds, for example, in finding ways of facing the dramatic changes that affected many of the families in Banat associated with the setting up of communism.

Mothers and grandmothers would especially take care of the girls’ gender education: “... my grandmother told me: “You must learn to make bread, learn to make noodles, because you’ll get to the point when you get married and you won’t know how to make noodles and what would your husband say? – See, who I married?” And it’s true, the first thing I learnt was how to make bread. I was, I don’t exactly know in the 5th-8th grade.” (C. E., b. 1955).

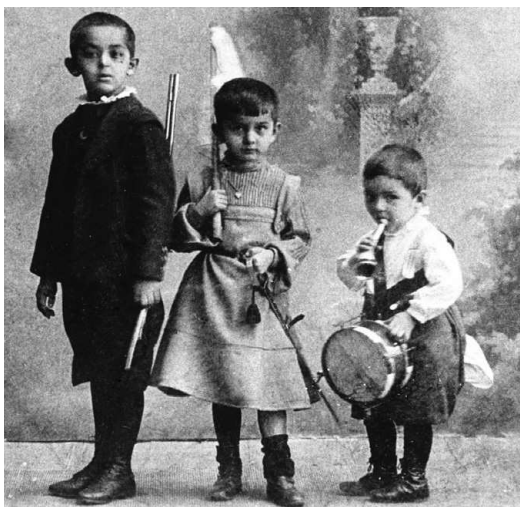
The father was the one who took over the boys’ education: “When I was a student, I spent

all my holidays with my father working as a carpenter, putting wood on the house, putting on tiles, repairing bricks, working by his side.” (I. M., b. 1947)

The father sometimes appears in the key moments of the child’s life, such as the discovery of some passions, or hobbies: “I was in the 4th grade, I think, and while going to the city, with my father, who was less present in my life, passing by a shop window, I told him: “Look how beautiful this guitar is, I would also like to play!” And we entered the shop and he bought me the guitar. Then he asked around where I could learn that. It was with my father that I was at... So, you see, he didn’t miss important events, but I also don’t feel that he was present all the time. During exam time, for example, he was with me... But he was not consistent in his efforts.” (R.B., b. 1975).

The interviews taken of the third generation reveal various ways in which a fraternal relation manifests itself. A first form which fraternal rivalry takes, which is especially present when siblings are of the same gender, is aggressiveness: “I hadn’t got along with my sister at all until we grew up a little. We would fight continuously; she was my greatest existing enemy. (A.K., b. 1980). “I would beat up my sister during childhood. Poor girl, the kicks she’d get!... Up to high school, I can say that I was the authoritarian one. I was the elder sister and I had to decide, to do things and she had to obey.” (R.B., b. 1975).

The same interviews also reveal another dimension of the relationship between siblings – that of the elder sibling perceived as a role model by the younger sibling: “...I wouldn’t take my father for a role model, but I perceived my sister in this way. My elder sister... How nice that she could do that, how nice that she knew how to do that... When it came to things like friendships, circles, to music, films. I didn’t really like reading and it was my sister who made me do this: she would give me books, she would push me into reading... I think she was the one who taught me how to socialise more, how to be more open. Anyway, I would follow her around the neighbourhood, she would go



„Correspondenz-Karte“
(sent in 1903 to
Budapest). O.H.A.T.E.F.

with friends, with her circle and I was very young and I would follow her around.” (A.K., b. 1980).

Relations between siblings change with age. Childhood rivalry changes later into friendship or partnership. This transformation is possible when the younger sibling is old enough to become individualised, to consolidate his/her group of friends or his/her set of interests: “After that, when we grew up, we both made a circle of friends and became individualised” (R.B., b. 1975).

The specific particularities of the relations between grandparents and grandchildren have also configured the value-normative system which was interiorised by the latter. Thus, in the educational model of the third generation, one can find many of the norms and values assimilated by the first generation: “How should I put it, I learnt a lot about life because I wasn’t spoiled by them. They couldn’t afford much, they weren’t rich so that they could pamper me. They started from scratch and they achieved a lot, but they taught me not to value money first. (What was more important, in their opinion?) I should know how to do various things, that is to know how to sweep, wash, clean... from cleaning, feeding the animals, to digging, going to the garden...” (V.M., b. 1976)

In other situations, grandparents have specific roles, different from those of their parents. Grandparents are often perceived as being more patient than parents, having more free time which they can use to do activities with their grandchildren: “...my grandfather took a lot of care of me. It was he who taught me that I should be meticulous in what I do. He was very patient. As I went to the High school of Fine Arts, I had something to manufacture, to do all the time. He always had his tools ready, the necessary patience to explain to me, to help me.” (A.K., b. 1980)

Grandfathers and grandmothers occupy different places in their grandchildren’s memory. Grandmothers are often situated on the intimate realm of family history, while grandfathers are often evoked in the context of their



family life, connected to social history. These representations are two different, but complementary dimensions of the way in which grandchildren’s identity is built.

Life stories reveal the manner in which diverse attitudes regarding the ethnic group or other ethnic groups were formed. Family had a very important role in developing tolerant attitudes towards the ethnical “Other”: “...the basis for me was this concept: to be tolerant, to love the other as much as you love yourself. [...] I had friends of all ethnic groups and we had these friendships at family level” (G.D., n. 1928).

Modalities of coming into contact with the ethnic Other” were described, as well. These meetings were sometimes facilitated by spatial proximity. Children living on the same street with other ethnic groups had more chances to establish relations with the others. The playground was an opportunity to meet the ethnic Other. “So it was, back in those times, no matter what child, coming from an intellectual / worker family, Hungarian or Romanian, whoever it was, we all went along. (M.G., Romanian). As a child, playing with children belonging to other ethnic groups, the Banat locals learnt the first words in a foreign language. “That’s how we grew up here, with neighbours. If one was Hungarian, he taught us Hungarian. He learnt Serbian by playing with us.” (S.T., Serb).

A walk on the Corso, Timișoara, aprox. 1919. (Dobrin family collection). O.H.A.T.E.F.

In spite of all these, there are many situations in which it can be observed that ethnic barriers clearly functioned when inter-ethnic marriages were in question: “The Germans did not want people with other languages to come live on their street. That’s how our Germans were. And for a Romanian to marry a German girl... Our parents wouldn’t agree. They wouldn’t.” (B.T., German).

One of the features often mentioned in interviews is the European dimension of the re-



Studio picture from 1912. O.H.A.T.E.F.

gion, the closeness to the values and way of life specific to the central-European space. Most of the times the emancipation and cosmopolitanism are evoked in comparison to other regions of the country. For example discourses linked to Timișoara are related, in many cases, to comparisons with the country’s capital, Bucharest, most of the times with arguments in favour of Timișoara: “This is how we lived in Timișoara, as people lived in the big cities of the world, Vienna or Budapest. Not as in Bucharest. Bucharest was completely different. There life was more mundane. in Timișoara life

was simpler, but with style. And “unimportant” people had style. (M.C.H., b. 1915).

This mentality was assimilated early by the inhabitants of Banat, family contributing to the formation of local identity and its valorization: “What my parents taught me was wonderful, that there, where you were born your country is and you should always say with dignity that you are from there and wherever you go take the fame of that place, because that’s how we, people from Timișoara are, just great.” (E.C., b. 1937).



Children’s lives under the pressure of macro historical events

Children are the most vulnerable social category during times of crisis or war. During the Second World War, thousands of children were killed in the military operations of the Balkan region or were deported to extermination camps. During times of war, children became the object of “ideological and national re-education”, of denationalisation, of violent changes of religion or other abuses that were justified in a variety of ways. Children were simultaneously victims and instruments of ideological propaganda. They suffered from hunger or epidemic diseases and more and more of them became orphans. Moreover, entire generations were deprived of childhood, education, being forced to grow up all too soon.

Most of the interviewees belonging to the first generations researched, lived during the Second World War. Most of them were already at school when the war broke out. The interviewees’ memories are linked to their fathers’ departures to war fronts and, consequently, to their absence for a period of several years, to the degradation of their living standards, their feelings of fear and terror. One of the interviewees tells his various memories linked to war: bombardment alarms – “during childhood one of my terrors was also this: gas masks and descents down shelters at night”; taking refuge away from the Germans’ path – “and then everybody ran away from the city, each taking

what s/he could. We ran as well, with my mother and my mother's sister. We started walking, terrorised that they would catch up with us or that they would machine-gun us, which they actually did. (...) Then, for the first time, we saw dead people because two German planes flew above us and machine-gunned us and everybody on the road.”; his father's death on the front and his burial – “when they let the coffin down in the pit, I started crying, I burst out into tears. I then realised, I guessed what really happened”. (R.C., b. 1936)

For the interviewed Jews, the war also meant their deportation or their families' deportation. One of the life-stories describes a 15-year old adolescent's survival in the Auschwitz camp: “But in Auschwitz hell broke on earth. (...) I noticed that most of those who had escaped were the young men of my age. (...) One of the explanations was that the youth had a different physical constitution than the elderly. We had a stronger will to live, more optimism than the adults” (Anonymous, in *Vultur* 2002, 275).

Another interviewee speaks about his whole family's deportation and the separation of his family members. His mother, together with other family members, were part of the group of those who were exterminated and he and his father were sent to a labour camp. The interviewee perceived the fact that he could stay with his father as an extraordinary chance: “... it was an enormous advantage, because we supported each other psychologically.” (Anonymous, quoted in *Vultur* 2002, 284). His father was the one who urged him to survive despite all difficulties: “my father told me, be nice and forget everything that had just happened because food is life. And then, we ate.” (Anonymous, quoted in *Vultur* 2002, 283)

Jews also offer examples of ethnic discrimination even from their childhood. One such example is that of a little girl whose mother did not allow her to play with Jewish children. Another interviewee speaks about having being beaten up during the war. “I was 15-16 years old during the war. German boys banged my

head against the wall and called me ‘Jewish trash’ and I don't know what.” (M. K., b. 1927).

If during the previous period, the relations between school friends had been very good, anti-Semitism led to a degradation of these relations: “In the Romanian high school, I didn't have any conflicts with my colleagues. Still, during the breaks, in the school yard, I was often pushed around. My class mates pretended not to see it, except for one who intervened in my favour.” (A. A., b. 1909).



Xenia Ciordas (1906 – 1986). O.H.A.T.E.F.

The interviewed Jews confess that they were persecuted by some teachers, threatened or had to repeat a class: “I had already very much felt the influence of Hitlerism, fascism in school. One of the teachers, for example the mathematics teacher, who was Romanian, when he came to class, he would take out his revolver, place it on the table and tell me: “Come, you Jewish trash, in front of the class to answer!”. I don't mean to say that all of them did this, that it was a generalised phenomenon, but there were these people who came with a legionary shirt and gun.” (T. N., b.

1920).

The end of the war also brought about a change of political regime. The setting up of communism meant a new restructuring of education. Some of the interviewees were at school during the education reform of 1948, which made them change their school options. "In '48 they already destroyed education by reforming it. I then passed the admission exam at faculty and there was a catastrophe then." (X. M., b. 1930).

Deep changes of the Romanian society determined by communism have left a mark upon all the aspects of the social life, including family life. Specialists talk about the intervention of the state in the children's education, through parents. The parents were supposed to pass on to their children the communist ideology.

The communist regime in Romania was mainly preoccupied with increasing the natality - this issue was regarded as being every citizen's "duty": "The highest patriotic duty, and the duty as a citizen of every family is to bear and raise children" (Ceaușescu, quoted in Stănculescu 2002, 147). In that context, controlling reproduction was an important tool in the big project of socialist transformation. Therefore, intimate aspects of life like sexuality and the socialization of children became political issues (Kligman 2000, 32).

As the socialist economy depended on the availability of manpower and on the control exerted over it, one of the means used was to directly control the life of the citizens. The short duration of the maternity leave (three months) and the high percentage of working women led to families that were deprived of the privilege of socializing their children. The paternalist state developed an institutional system which was meant to fulfil this task.

The political socialization was also accomplished through the communist youth organizations, like "the Country's Hawks", the pioneers, and the Union of the Communist Youth also known as the UTC. The state was investing in the new generations, thinking that these generations will later contribute to the

strengthening of the communist state.

The communist ideal, expressed also in the publications targeting the female population, was that of a woman who was successful with no great efforts in being an engineer, attractive wife, mother, fashionably dressed lady and activist in the political field all at the same time. The research on the second age group, comprising of subjects that were born around the year 1950, confirms these differences regarding the roles attributed depending on gender. In a comparative approach, the differences are less evident than in the inter-war period.

Without exception, the interviewed persons delimitate clearly the period of time before 1980 from the one after 1980. Regarding the time between the 60s and the 70s, the interviews build up a positive image of communism: "Until I got to faculty, things went very well. Even during faculty, I remember food stores were filled with products! There were seven types of cheese: smoked cheese, cheese... Till '77, when I graduated." (A.R., b. 1953).

The interviewed subjects consider themselves to be somewhat privileged as they lived their adolescence and youth during this period of liberalisation. "From the perspective offered by my existence, a special period, perhaps the most beautiful - I was young, an adolescent - was that of the liberalisation which started in '68 and in Timișoara extended after '71. A period in which, for an adolescent, to be able to wear blue-jeans, to be able to have records, foreign records especially with American music, to watch American films that invaded television, to find foreign products: Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola..." (A.R., b. 1954). It was easier not only from a material, but also from a cultural point of view. The years of studenthood were for most of the interviewees the years during which great Romanian writers were promoted and during which the access to culture was less restricted.

The official politics of the period 1975-1980 proclaimed a continuous rise of the people's living standard, a message reiterated by the papers on family and education sociology. E.

Bătrânu remarked: “Based on the growing and diversifying production, a greater quantity of merchandise will be delivered to the population, allowing the satisfaction of the people’s more varied and qualitatively superior needs” (Bătrânu 1980, 28).

In reality, things got worse and worse, the 80’s being considered the blackest period of Romanian communism: “But beginning approximately from ’79, the lack of electricity in houses, the electric power cuts, the decrease of heat started to be felt – 12, 14-16 degrees in houses, horrible! – in winter, no electricity, freezing... The little and low quality food, the enormous queues, with tickets... Problems of the type – what are you going to feed your child, dress your child in, because you wished for something more special, as it is normal... This dark area on an economic-social level, of censorship on a political level, on the level of personal expression, on a cultural level, was the toughest for me until ’89.” (A. R., b. 1954)

Reaching the period after 1980, a multitude of survival strategies come to light: the system of social relations; the advantages derived from having a political function; a job in a “key” field, etc. In many situations, the narrations reveal extreme aspects of the fight for survival. The profound economic crises of the centralized economies have generated a high tolerance of the state toward the development of the “secondary” economies – “private” or “familial”. The household became for the majority of the people the place where they were carrying out an intense and productive work.

Collectivisation had a great impact on the educational projects of the families in the rural area. “I feel guilty about this, because it was after all my generation which made our parents give the land to the collective property. We would have been expelled from schools and so our parents decided to give the land rather than make them expel us from school. This is how things were.” (I. M., b. 1947). Parents had to replace this material capital with the educational one. Schools were regarded as means that would give children a chance to a better or an easier life.



Photo made in the studio of Kossak photographer, Timișoara, 1901. O.H.A.T.E.F.

Associated with the rapid industrialisation, collectivisation generated a great exodus from village to the city. The generation of the ’50s was powerfully marked by this tendency. The traditional value models acquired during childhood were gradually substituted by the norms of behaviour characteristic to the urban environment. The behavioural transformation varied from changing some common rules of behaviour to more profound changes on the value-attitude level. The first contact with the city is a memorable event for one of the interviewees: “We were about 7-8 years old when we first came to Arad. It was an event for me. I was coming towards the centre of the town and my mother noticed I was greeting every person on the street. That was the habit in the country: if we met ten times we greeted ten times. So I did in the town, too.” (K.I., b. 1951). Going to school, the interviewees had to make serious efforts to integrate in the new environment: “We were not accepted that simply by our colleagues in the town. We noticed that in our first days, when teachers started asking us: [You, what school do you come from?] It was a handicap and I had to work a lot till I got

recognition at the level of my colleagues. It was very painful for a 14 year old. Fortunately, you have not done this exercise, to leave home at 14, have you? It is very painful because at 14 you live with a host, you see your parents only once a week and you have nobody to go back to, from school, where you notice some things that you have no one to tell them to and you struggle by yourself. It was not a very happy period for me and I think the teachers were wrong, too.” (K.I., b. 1951)

caused by the fact that she could not understand why they did not agree with the party politics: “We were pioneers, afterwards, we were members of the Communist Youth Union. (Did you consider it an honour to be a pioneer?) It was strange that in the beginning I thought so. I believe that up to the 10th, 11th form I really thought so. I believe I would also contradict the older ones who said that things were different. (Who told you this?) The elderly. (Were they also part of the family?) Yes, they were acquaintances and family. They told me that things were not as they were presented, that history was falsified. I didn’t believe it at first, but then I started analysing things and I opened my eyes.” (A.R., b. 1953)

The answers of the interviewees born in the 1970s mirror the existence of some predominantly positive memories connected to the ideological activities. “I suspect what they did with us in kindergarten and school affected us. I remember playing with my friend in my room, we would make a tent and we always felt the need of using communist adornments: the coat of arms, etc. I remember once having torn off the page of my sister’s reading book because there had to be the coat of arms, there had to be Ceaușescu’s portrait, so that it might be as in kindergarten.” (A.K., b. 1980).

The children of the ‘80s had not known another political reality so that there were no terms of comparison: “(How did you perceive the activities connected to country hawks and pioneers?) I don’t remember country hawks very well. What I remember was during general school, the 23rd of August, for which we had to practise with little flags. (How did you see those activities as a child?) As a game. I did not understand it in any other way. (V. M., b. 1976).

Among the negative representations linked to the last decade of the communist period the scarcity of food is mentioned. Compared to the second generation (of the parents), the interviewees do not present such a dramatic de-



Kindergarten performance, a group of ballerinas. Photo Corso, the 1930s, Timișoara. (Szklenarek collection. O.H.A.T.E.F.

The interviews with the subjects born between 1949 and 1954 point out a “double-faced” strategy adopted by the parents or the grandparents in transmitting the values and the behaviour guidelines to the children. Some of the interviewed persons state the fact that in their home they would listen to “Free Europe” radio station and opinions contrary to the official politics were being expressed, but, at the same time, children were taught to hide these things. On the other hand, on entering the educational world, the discrepancy between the family values and those promoted by school became greater. Several subjects declare that the activities that had an ideological nature (pioneer activities, Communist Youth Union activities, etc) were not perceived negatively by them during that time.

One of the women interviewed talks about a conflict she had with her parents which was

scription of the economic situation. Their young age exempted them from major responsibilities, the stress of everyday life was leaning on the parents' shoulders.

The memory of queuing is, still, very vivid, especially since it was, as other writers mention, a common practice to use children as a trump card in the competition for products: "(Did you feel anything missing during the communist period?) Yes, but they were part of the daily picture (laughing). What should I say? I had to queue to buy chicken, to buy eggs, to buy milk and bread according to the card... I know that my sister and I were supposed to stand in a row for meat... We had no term of comparison, so it seemed normal for us to stand in a row." (R.B., b. 1975).

A special impression of communism comes from an interviewee who spent his childhood in the rural environment. His childhood memories are linked to working in the fields and the breeding of animals. As he confesses, he was taught, as a child, to value property, and the state meddling with private property (through the quotas imposed, through the obligation of contracting animals) was perceived by him as a great injustice: "Being educated in this spirit of property, it was dramatic when we had to give away an animal to be butchered, when they took away our hay and divided it... It was painful. At a particular moment, out of twenty-four haystacks there were only six left... We would hate them then..." (N. H., b. 1975). In this situation, stealing from the collective property or hiding animals was considered a legitimate, natural action, without being contradictory to the moral code. This explanation was also given by other researchers, being frequently used before 1989: "It was normal. I did not feel I was stealing from anyone. It was my property." (N. H., b. 1975).

An interesting aspect is that of turning celebrations into political events. The question about Christmas, for example, asking the interviewees to say whether they knew about Jack Frost and the distinction between him and Father Christmas. If the subjects born at

the beginning of the '50s gave contradictory answers to the same question, those born during the '70s made the distinction between Father Christmas and Jack Frost, the latter coming, as they remembered, on New Year's Eve. One can notice how the attempt at replacing a religious with a lay symbol (Jack Frost comes from the Slavic tradition, being connected with the period of cold frost), ended in people's compromise of celebrating them both.

Other aspects related to the memories of the '80s are connected to the total state control of the means of communication, to the brutal intervention in the social relations. For one of the interviewed persons, this constitutes one of the saddest memories in the communist period.

For the third generation, the memory of communism is therefore built upon the memories from childhood and adolescence, influencing the way in which this generation relates itself to the past. From the perspective of Miller's classification (2005), this is a generation of transition. The life of those born in the 70s started under the communist regime, but their secondary education and their professional life is unfolding in the new regime. The change of the political regime in 1989 occurred when the subjects of the third generation were in the middle of their schooling years. Their educational projects was not affected right away, the choice of the high-schools usually had no correlation with the change of the socio-political regime. This influence was manifested though in their choice of the profession or the university specialization, in the case of the subjects who opted for the specializations that were not available before 1989 (those belonging to the socio – humanistic field, for example).



Conclusion

The memories connected to the family group, the first years of childhood, have a transgenerational character. The parents' image, for instance, is not influenced by the



Schoolgirls from
Carmen Sylva
Highschool, Timișoara,
wearing guard's uni-
form. 1925.
O.H.A.T.E.F.

generation to which a certain interviewee belongs. On the other hand, historic events or political changes are the subject of memories specific to each generation.

S. Vultur noticed the fact that “there is a tendency of individual memory to use the social frameworks of memory, as Maurice Halbwachs calls them, in order to make connections with the collective one and make events “memorable” (Vultur 2012, 174). The life-stories analysed in this paper illustrate the way in which individual biographies build a collective story and personal memories combine to form the memory of whole generations.

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