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Alexandra Minovici April 9, 2025

Sînge și Spaimă: The 1989 Revolution and the Politics of Violence in Socialist and Post-Socialist Romania

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a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
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Abstract

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This thesis examines how post-socialist Romanians engage with the collective trauma of the 1989 Revolution and the four decades of state violence that preceded it under socialism. Drawing on archival research and oral histories, it explores the afterlife of institutional violence through the tension between remembrance and forgetting, as collective memory is reshaped under a new democracy led by former members of the socialist nomenklatura who seized power following the rushed execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. To fully capture the scope of post-socialist trauma, this thesis provides historical context on the institutional violence characteristic of Romania's socialist regime, a detailed account of the Revolution, and an analysis of the immediate post-socialist political atmosphere marked by disillusionment. By tracing how violence is remembered, repressed, and reconfigured in public memory, this thesis argues that personal narratives play a critical role in resisting state-imposed silence and shaping more democratic forms of historical consciousness.

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Introduction

On Christmas Day in 1989, Romanian communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, were swiftly executed by their former allies following a popular nation-wide revolt. This fittingly religious day marked the birth of a new democracy in Eastern Europe. Ceaușescu's execution was the violent culmination of a regime that had long relied on violence and terror to enforce political order. Since the establishment of *Partidul Comunist Român* (PCR, the Romanian Communist Party) in 1947, suffering became an existential condition: it was not merely an outcome of state repression, but a fundamental feature of daily life that seeped into routines of existence. Surveillance networks blurred the line between public and private life, while arrests, forced confessions, and imprisonment instilled a constant sense of fear for oneself, family, and friends. No corner felt safe from the state's reach, and repercussions for straying too far from its vision of its people seemed insurmountable. Despite its pervasiveness, suffering remained impossible to normalize, and resentment piled up until the state met its own violent end: the Romanian Revolution.

Putting an end to a violent regime through impatient, retributive violence did not yield the clean break Romanian people longed for. In fact, the intensity of the violence that emerged from the regime's collapse in December 1989 served to mask the continuity of the old regime's most abhorred practices into the post-socialist era, as *Frontul Salvării Naționale* (FSN, the National Salvation Front) – composed largely of former members of the PCR[1] – established itself as the leader of a new, democratic Romania. Though the FSN claimed to be an agent of a free and reborn nation, its methods for consolidating power were drawn from the very structures that defined life under the Romanian socialist regime. In the immediate post-revolutionary period, the FSN sought to weaponize national memory, deciding what was worth remembering and what needed to be forgotten about the traumatic last four decades to legitimize its

[1] Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 137.

rule. Although the state sought to control memory, the pervasive and multifaceted nature of violence meant that individual experiences could never fully conform to the official narrative. As such, remembrance became a crucial act of resistance against the new regime's efforts to reassert control.

This thesis examines how violence functioned as a source of power for both the Romanian state and its people, ultimately arguing that its mechanisms found a post-socialist afterlife in the struggle over memory and forgetting. Under socialist rule, violence was a clear instrument of control used to shape socialist identity. This same violence was harnessed as a tool of rupture in 1989, wielded to dismantle a regime built upon decades of terror. Yet Ceaușescu's execution, while marking a symbolic end to his regime, did not eradicate its structures. It merely forced them to adapt to the realities of a post-revolutionary, post-socialist Romania, where the battle over history became the new arena for power.

The role of violence, repression, and contested memory has been studied extensively by scholars attempting to make sense of Romania's post-socialist trajectory. My thesis is in conversation with the works of Vladimir Tismăneanu, whose critical analyses of the Romanian socialist and post-socialist period has situated him as a key figure in understanding the political nuances of the Revolution as a pivotal transitional moment. Tismăneanu's direct involvement in Romanian politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century put him in a unique position to investigate the country's recent past and political struggles, and his experiences inform his scholarly thinking. I also frequently consulted Peter Siani-Davies's works, who researched the events of the Revolution in great detail, establishing himself as an encyclopedic resource for historians of modern Romania. While these scholars tend to focus on the main figures of the Romanian power structure and political transition, Lucian Vasile-Szabo's works supplemented my own interest in studying the lived experience of the Revolution, as his focus often lands on the actions and reactions of ordinary people navigating state-imposed violence. Likewise, Anca Pușca's book on post-socialist disillusionment has been crucial to my understanding of the emotional and symbolic afterlife of communism, namely in identifying the ways nostalgia, disillusionment, and the aesthetics of post-socialist decay shape people's memories and political identities. This thesis builds upon

these existing frameworks while emphasizing mechanisms of violence as a throughline from repression to revolt to remembrance. I have broken the thesis up into three chapters, each of them exploring a different phase in this continuum of violence as it evolved in Romanian society.

Chapter 1 focuses on the establishment and maintenance of institutionalized violence in the Romanian socialist regime under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1947-1965), the first Romanian communist leader, and Nicolae Ceaușescu (1967-1989). Under their control, violence was not merely a tool for repression, but the very foundation upon which the state was built. The *Securitate* (Secret Police), created soon after the PCR's rise to power, was modeled after the Soviet Union's *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (KGB)[2] and quickly became the regime's primary instrument of control. Like Peter Siani-Davies wrote in his comprehensive overview of the revolution, the Securitate harnessed a reputation for itself such that just mentioning its name was "almost a byword for tyranny of the worst kind,"[3] ruling through pure fear of what could happen as well as concrete actions inspiring terror among the Romanian people.

During the early years of the Romanian socialist regime, Gheorghiu-Dej used the Securitate to implement a Stalinist method of repression that relied heavily on mass incarceration through the Romanian GULag system. In this chapter, I specifically analyze the Pitești and Sighet Penitentiaries as case studies to understand how physical violence was employed to break and reshape bodies and minds. With Ceaușescu's political ascent, repression shifted in form while retaining tight control over the population. Surveillance and intrusion into the private life procured a psychological violence that nurtured the Securitate's image as an omnipresent, omnipotent force. Yet, as economic hardship deepened in the 1970s and 1980s, discontent crystallized publicly. Suffering, although an inescapable condition, became

[2] Bruce O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions: Infrastructural violence in Romania," *Special Issue on Infrastructural Violence* vol. 13, no. 4 (December 2012): 469, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43497509.469.
[3] Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 11.

increasingly untenable. Spontaneous strikes and demonstrations erupted, setting the stage for the nationwide revolt for that would erupt in December 1989.

Chapter 2 traces the Romanian Revolution as it unfolded, beginning with its outbreak in Timișoara and culminating with Ceaușescu's Christmas Day execution. The same violence that was monopolized by the state during the socialist period was reclaimed by the people as a tool of rupture, upsetting the illusory balance of the previous forty years. Unlike the largely peaceful transitions that other East European nations underwent in 1989, Romania's transition was steeped in blood. Extreme attempts to regain control saw the Army shooting at the very people it was tasked with defending, triggering a disorienting effect that only intensified with the belated, highly celebrated decision to switch sides and join the revolting people. Through an analysis of firsthand narratives, religious symbolism, and the liminality of revolutionary spaces, I explore how Romanians made sense of the violence they both endured and enabled. Personal accounts reveal the significance of reclaiming the streets through mere presence as death and injury transformed into martyrdom. Religion, as an institutional force and a lived practice, provided a framework with which people processed trauma while fueling resistance efforts against atheistic communism through public religious rituals.

The chapter concludes by examining the circumstances surrounding Ceaușescu's execution: a symbolic act of violence that simulated the feeling that the domineering political order had come to an end. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's distinction between mythic and divine violence,[4] I argue that his execution failed to expiate the trauma of communism; instead, it reinforced the very logic of state violence that the Revolution sought to overthrow. The chaos of the 1989 Revolution laid the groundwork for a new form of manipulation that would be mastered by the FSN: national memory. The malleability of the post-socialist political memory gave the FSN and its first leader, Ion Iliescu, the opportunity to curtail

[4] Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996).

the narrative of Romania's socialist history and the Revolution, selectively commemorating or erasing the past in ways that best served its political goals.

In Chapter 3, I argue that remembrance is a critical form of resistance against the post-socialist order that actively manipulated memory to consolidate its power. While forgetting is often perceived as a passive act, in post-socialist Romania, forgetting was a profoundly violent tool. By tailoring national memory to fit a narrative that took advantage of the people's desire for salvation, the FSN concealed its past complicity in violence to evade accountability and reassert patterns of totalitarian rule. The violent character of forgetting is most evident when studying the *Mineriadă* of June 1990,[5] during which Iliescu turned to extralegal violence to suppress demonstrations attempting to point out the immoral, and thus illegitimate character of the new regime. However, because personal memories of violence were so varied, widespread, and intimate, conforming to the FSN's inflexible narrative of commemoration was an impossibility that generated frequent clashes between the state and the people. Resistance is inherent to personal memory because of its natural non-compliance, and in the post-socialist period, it was rooted firmly in martyrdom. The sacrifices of those who lost their lives during the Revolution and the regime it toppled made remembrance a moral imperative; their deaths became a lasting demand that the nation remain accountable to its past, preserving ideals of justice and genuine democracy.

This thesis draws extensively on primary sources from the Lovinescu-Ierunca Collection in *Arhivele Naționale ale României* (the National Archives of Romania), interviews and correspondence from the Twentieth Century Historical Archive in *Biblioteca Naționala a României* (the National Library of Romania), manuscripts from *Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* (the National Council for Studying the Archives of the Securitate), and periodicals held at *Asociația Memorialul Revoluției* (the Revolution Memorial Association). I also include oral histories that I conducted with

[5] For a quick overview of the *Mineriada*, see Mihaela Iliescu, "Mineriada din iunie 1990 – o scurtă incursiune istorică," *Astra Salvensis – revistă de istorie și cultură* vol. 23 (2024): 77-82, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1247336.

author Costel Balint and priest Nicolae Clempus that were used in conjunction with the collection of oral histories organized by Vasile Bogdan and Titus Suciu in their compilation, *Candelă împotriva timpului: După 30 de ani*. All translations from Romanian are my own, and although nuances may not always carry from one language to another, I have aimed to preserve the essence of what was originally written or said as accurately as possible. This pool of primary source material allows me to engage in the act of resistance through memory, by centering of national voices depicting the hope, disillusionment, betrayal, and resistance that defined people's lives as they navigated the trauma of the past.

At a time when Eastern European nations are tensely asserting their distinct identities apart from the Soviet Union and Russia, historical scholarship should seek to highlight native voices to foster a tangible identity in an inherently disorienting and alienating time. Ultimately, this project seeks to prove that remembrance is inherently revolutionary, a crucial act of resistance capable of disrupting authoritarian legacies even when institutional violence seems unshakable. Through my analysis of the mechanism of violence and its afterlife, I hope to demonstrate how the Romanian experience can offer broader insights into the critical role that memory plays in shaping national identity, confronting historical injustice, and sustaining hope for genuine democratic renewal in Eastern Europe.

Chapter 1: Sînge și Spaimă

Chapter 1: Blood and Terror

Dacă vreți să știți da mi-e spaimă de noapte *dacă vreți să știți da mi-e spaimă de somn*	*If you want to know yes I am afraid of the night* *if you want to know yes I am afraid of sleep*
și de trezirea fără trezire...	*and of waking up without waking up...*
și de privighetoarea fără de cîntec mi-e spaimă *și de cîntecul slobod – in colivie...*	*and of the nightingale without a song I am afraid* *and of the free song – in a cage...*
da mi-e spaimă	*yes I am afraid*
și mi-e spaimă de spaimă *să știți!*	*and I am afraid of fear* *you should know!*

– TRAIAN DORGOȘAN, *Spaima* (*Terror*), 1974

Over the forty years of communist rule in Romania, one word defines the atmosphere of daily life: terror. This terror, cultivated by the PCR under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu, was upheld through mechanisms of institutionalized violence and intense surveillance. Inspired in many ways by the Soviet model of repression, which relied heavily on the GULag and secret police, Romanian authorities relied extensively on violence to subjugate and shape its population according to the Party line. Violence itself was multifaceted and unlimited, reserved not just for physical suffering but also the mental anguish that coupled it. Terror found a natural home in everyday spaces, public and private, but not as a mere side-effect of violence. It was the foundation of governance. As the socialist state reached into the most intimate corners of life, the human body became a political battleground for ideological coercion. The torture experienced in prison blurred the lines between victim and perpetrator, while outside of them,

neighbors and colleagues became potential informants, creating a society in which silence was the safest language. Even stillness seemed to fall under the regime's control. Under such intense pressure, it was only natural that the subtlest forms of dissent grew into larger fractures. When the pressure became too great, it ruptured spectacularly: the same system that had built itself on violence would find itself dismantled by it.

The PCR rose to power on 23 August 1944, following a coup orchestrated by Romanian Communists, which they framed intentionally and propagandistically to cater to the image of the Soviet victory post-WWII and their efforts to 'liberate' Central and Eastern Europe from fascism. The subsequent Soviet infiltration of Romanian institutions, like the military and the secret police, marked the beginning of Soviet influence over this communist takeover before the Red Army had even stepped foot in the country.[6] Before 1944, Romania had been operating as a monarchy under King Mihai I, who was forced to abdicate in 1947. Gheorghiu-Dej assumed leadership of the country as the president of what was then called the Romanian People's Republic.[7] The Securitate – the main medium through which terror was spread in socialist Romania – was established a year later, in August 1948. After its creation, the PCR used it for the entirety of its forty-year rule as its "edge of the sword,"[8] the "armed arm of the party"[9] for the sake of national security. Communist regimes almost always relied on secret police forces as a defining feature of their rule, but in Romania the Securitate had a remarkably large presence even when only considering numbers, with two million people on its payroll (roughly 10% of the population).[10]

[6] Cezar Stanciu, "Communist regimes and historical legitimacy: polemics regarding the role of the Red Army in Romania at the end of the Second World War," *European Review of History: Revue europeenne d'histoire* vol. 20, no. 3 (2013), 447.
[7] Arleen Ionescu, "Witnessing Horrorism: The Pitești Experiment," *SLOVO* vol 32, no. 4 (Spring 2019): 58, doi: 10.14324/111.0954-6839.086.
[8] O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions," 469.
[9] Cristina Petrescu, "The Afterlife of the Securitate," in *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe,* ed. Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, and Stefan Troebst (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 385.
[10] O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions," 469.

Its main targets were intellectuals, students, political opponents, and dissidents, policing thoughts that could destabilize the ideological foundation that held up the PCR.

From its inception, the Securitate employed repressive tactics that triggered an early wave of terror in newly socialist Romania. They focused most of their efforts on squashing popular partisan resistance groups that opposed the imposition of a Soviet-style regime, like the Arnăuțoiu-Arelenscus, the Șușumans, and the Gavrilă Group, often through carrying out executions after taking them into custody, imprisoning hundreds of people, and interrogating and torturing anybody involved with aiding these groups. The Securitate carried out these efforts slowly and meticulously well into the late 1950s.[11] Once they established their 1951 directives, their repressive tactics became more systematized as they started launching investigative processes to determine who could be considered a threat to the socialist state. These directives detailed the creation and maintenance of the personal file: folders that contained notes on individuals suspected of anti-state activity. The first would be the "registration file," which kept track of elements that could point towards people being part of blacklisted categories, as well as data that would allow the Securitate to identify this person in the future and bar them from receiving positions in important institutions. If the Securitate gathered enough suspect information, then a new file would be opened – the "verification file," giving agents free reign to use any means available to conduct a more thorough investigation, including the use of surveillance technology, trailing, and verifying correspondence. The final stage of the personal file was the creation of the "informal trailing file," which would document the suspects in the highest level of detail.[12] To quote the *Direcțiunea Generala a Siguranței Statului* (the General Directive for the Security of the State), "It will be insisted upon that we know in detail the past of the person in question, the actual way of life, the hopes for the immediate and long-term future, weaknesses and qualities, troubles and intimate difficulties."[13] The Securitate exercised

[11] Monica Ciobanu, "Reconstructing the History of Early Communism and Armed Resistance in Romania," *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 66, no. 9 (November 2014): 1468-1471, doi:10.1080/09668136.2014.956440.
[12] Cristina Vățulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 35.
[13] Ibid., 37.

an immense level of intrusion, feeding into a culture of suspicion and distrust that outlived the socialist regime.

In the first period of particularly intense activities, between 1948 and 1965, the Securitate implemented a Stalinist program of terror.[14] In the 1950s, the regime intensified its persecution of "kulaks." Like in the Soviet Union, the word kulak had a vague definition, and by using it people typically tried to claim that certain peasants were 'bourgeois,' by virtue of having more than other peasants. For instance, informers denounced a priest from Davidești village, S.B., as a kulak for owning 3.5 hectares of land, using a brewer's copper vat to make plum brandy, selling fruit, and having experience extracting manganese. Accusing someone of being a kulak was serious enough in this first period that it greatly impeded the children of those accused from professional and educational opportunities.[15] Furthermore, the Securitate closely monitored people's social and professional circles. Informers would penetrate and try to dissolve these circles when they believed that collaboration between the suspect and their friends could jeopardize national security.[16]

[14] O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions," 469-70.
[15] Smaranda Vultur, "Daily Life and Surveillance in the 1970s and 1980s," in *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe,* ed. Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, and Stefan Troebst (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 421.
[16] Ibid., 426.

During this early socialist period in Romania, in which the Securitate practiced and refined surveillance tactics, prisons became primary sites for the regime to detain so-called dangerous elements. There were over 100 GULags in Romania,[17] concentrated highly around its southern border and the Carpathian Mountains, as seen in the Figure 1.1:

Figure 1.1: A map of Romania titled "Romania – The Concentration System 1945-1989." The rectangles are penitentiaries, circles are forced labor camps, triangles are deportation centers, ovals are deposits, the letter A represents political psychiatric asylums, and the cross symbol is for mass graves. O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions," 474.

People who used to be members of the fascist Iron Guard were imprisoned at Aiud, workers, peasants, schoolteachers, and lawyers filled the cells of Gherla, members of the National Peasant Party faced detention in Galați, former police members were sent to Făgăraș, students were held at Pitești, and those who posed the biggest threat to the political regime were taken to Sighet.[18] The Pitești and Sighet

[17] O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions," 474.
[18] Ibid., 472

Penitentiaries are two of the most infamous detention centers, and they deserve a high level of attention and analysis when discussing this early period of repression.

The Pitești Penitentiary is best known for the gruesome re-education experiment that took place within its walls from 1949-1951. It is a potent marker for the way terror and horror were jointly weaponized. The socialist regime implemented re-education in Romanian prisons until 1964. Inspired by the theories put forth by A. S. Makarenko, who was a Soviet educational psychologist, the goal of re-education was to trigger a complete political realignment of individuals, reshaping them to align with the ideology of the society they would re-enter. Pitești was not the only sight of these kinds of experiments, and re-education efforts were carried out for years in Aiud, Gherla, Suceava, and the Danube-Black Sea Canal.[19] It does, however, mark a remarkably early instance of its implementation.

The Pitești Penitentiary's location was ideal for this experiment: it was on the outskirts of town and far from dwellings, obscuring the nature of the torture that would take place inside.[20] The Securitate arrested and sent around 780 students to Pitești because of "real or imaginary activities"[21] against the regime, failing to make a distinction between what constituted a valid threat and what did not. Like in the Soviet Union, the GULag system in Romania ran based off of quotas set by the Party preferences on accelerating or decelerating repression[22] to manipulate GULag productivity and profit, especially in the agricultural sector.[23] The regime viewed students as the hardest group to persuade to adhere to the new Party line, so the task was to reconstruct these individuals from the ground up through psychiatric abuse.[24] They were split into four groups: (1) students imprisoned without trial, who could serve up to six or seven

[19] Monica Ciobanu, "Reconstructing the History of Early Communism and Armed Resistance in Romania," 1459.
[20] Dennis Delentant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965*, (London: Hurst & Company, 1999), 200-201.
[21] Ionescu, "Witnessing Horrorism," 53.
[22] Paul R. Gregory, "Simplified Methods," in *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin (an Archival Study)*, (Yale University Press, 2009), 202-203.
[23] Andrei Claudiu Dipșe, "The Romanian Repression System between Randomness and Prophylactic Action," *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Historia*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2017): 193, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=702389.
[24] Ibid., 58.

years; (2) students convicted of minor offenses, serving three to five years; (3) students accused of "plotting against the social order" and serving eight to fifteen years; and (4) student leaders who were typically in charge of student associations, sentenced to ten to twenty-five years of hard labor.[25] These categories, in practice, were meant not to quantify levels of offense that each person had committed, but rather to encourage the separation of ideologically dangerous people from those whom they could contaminate.[26]

The Pitești experiment began when Eugen Țurcanu was transferred to the penitentiary in September 1949, after spending a year in a prison in Suceava. While at Suceava, Țurcanu led the Organization of Detainees with Communist Convictions – a group of prisoners who sympathized with the Communist regime and did not believe that the method of re-education being implemented at their prison, dependent on readings and discussions of Marxist-Leninist texts, was effective. Authorities dissolved his group because they objected to the way it was structured, but when he was transferred to Pitești, they encouraged him to draw on his previous experience to implement a new kind of re-education program with other regime collaborators that would "'[heal]' prisoners by removing the 'rot' inside them."[27] This is when Țurcanu came up with a re-education program based on torture.

His plan unfolded in four stages which he called "unmaskings." The process began with the "external unmasking," in which prisoners would demonstrate their loyalty to the Party by revealing supposedly hidden ties with people deemed 'enemies' of the state. The next stage, "internal unmasking," forced prisoners to divulge the names of 'enemies;' typically, the names of people who were less brutal to them inside the prison sufficed, and this was particularly relevant for the kind of brutality people were forced to exert on one another. The third stage was the "moral public unmasking," where prisoners would deny their families, closest friends, and religious convictions, peeling the individual from the prior life

[25] Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania*, 201.
[26] O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions," 473.
[27] Ionescu, "Witnessing Horrorism," 58.

they inhabited that landed them in prison in the first place. The final and fourth stage forced prisoners to re-educate their friends, swapping their victimhood for the role of the torturer. Failure at any stage forced prisoners to restart the process, beginning with the first unmasking, until they successfully completed the cycle.[28]

Room 4 Hospital served as the largest cell available in the Pitești prison to carry out the reeducation experiment. Țurcanu and his group would torture people with improvised weapons, like clubs, boards, and bats; they would hang forty-kilogram weights on the backs of students for hours on end; crushed people's fingers and toes; forced them to eat over-salted food with no water; and consume their own bodily waste. These methods of torture happened both during the day and at night, weaponizing sleeplessness as Țurcanu's assistants took turns distributing blows to relaxing bodies.[29] In his article about documenting and explaining the trauma from Pitești, Arleen Ionescu suggests that the uniqueness of this experience for prisoners was the biopolitical control Țurcanu and his associates held over them, maintaining ownership not just over their lives but their ability to choose their deaths. Physical death was not necessary and not even helpful for the reeducation experiment's success. What it needed was a spiritual death that would reform the very essence of the prisoner into a person that can be an instrument for the state.[30] As a result, opportunities for suicide were sparse, leading many prisoners to provoke beatings which would give them the best chance at fatality. But the architects of the experiment knew this, and so did the torturers who had been on the receiving end of the violence. Blows to vital areas on the body, that could lead to death, were not allowed.[31] Like Ionescu said, "At Pitești, death was forbidden."[32] Pitești thus demonstrates an early instance of psychological torment that took form even at the height of the brutal, Stalinist phase in Romania's system of repression.

[28] Ibid., 59-60.
[29] Ibid., 60.
[30] Ibid., 66.
[31] Ibid., 65.
[32] Ibid.

The torture inflicted on these students allowed for a kind of unspeakable terror. As Anne-Marie Roviello suggested, the final stage of psychological violence is the banning of speech – a physical and involuntary prohibition to recount first-hand accounts of violence, either because speaking about it beckons terror or because of an overwhelming sense of shame.[33] Dumitru Bacu, who wrote an account of the Pitești prison experiment, claimed in his book that "Pitești will never let itself be written. Because not everything about Pitești belongs to the realm of the possible."[34] What is now known as the Pitești phenomenon is part of a larger scheme of an unspeakable systematic violence that was inflicted by the repressive Communist state, fostering a large-spread silence about experiences in the GULag in Romania that lasted all the way up until the regime fell in December 1989. People could only grasp the GULag's existence through the sudden absence of family members and friends, or the malaise that followed those who returned.[35]

O'Neill's analysis of the Pitești experiment draws upon the Giorgio Agamben's conception of "the camp." In his political philosophy, the camp refers to a space where people are reduced to bare life: a state in which one is stripped of their citizenship, their rights, and any protections that the law offered. Any crimes committed within the camp are not truly crimes because there cannot be consequences for committing offenses against someone who essentially becomes a non-person. Whether or not torture is carried out, like in the case of Pitești, is completely outside of the law and completely within the rights of the police, the officials, Țurcanu and his men, to assume the role of a sovereign and dominate the very essence of human life.[36] However, O'Neill suggests that the experiment at Pitești goes beyond Agamben's camp in the way that the experiment's ultimate goal is not reducing people to bare life, but rather the complete restructuring of a person's identity in line with the Party's values after bare life is already achieved. To quote him, the experiment was aiming "not just [to] render lives bare for the

[33] Ionescu, "Witnessing Horrorism," 54.
[34] Dumitru Bacu quoted in Ionescu, "Witnessing Horrorism," 61.
[35] Petrescu, "The Afterlife of the Securitate," 396.
[36] O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions," 470-72.

purposes of breaking resistance but to support and regulate bodies before and afterwards."[37] This practice extended beyond Romanian communism and appeared extensively throughout the Soviet Union, as Nikita Khrushchev's GULag reforms included an emphasis on prisoner re-education.[38]

As with the Pitești Penitentiary, the abuses at the Sighet Penitentiary reveal the life-altering nature of the Romanian system of repression. The prison was built and functioning beginning 1897, designed in a T-shape with a ground floor and two additional floors that could fit around 120 people. The layout itself was particularly favorable towards separation and isolation, and for security reasons, the yard was enclosed by a 6-meter-tall brick wall that included spaces in corners for surveillance by the guards.[39] For most of its history, the penitentiary housed individuals serving sentences for breaking common law in Maramureș. Many were serving sentences of up to two years, and the prison also had space to hold individuals in preventative detention.[40]

During 1950 to 1955, officials radically changed the penitentiary to exclusively hold political prisoners. They called it the "Dunărea Work Colony," and those who were sentenced for threatening the security of the state were destined for harsh conditions and punishments at Sighet.[41] While it has not been officially confirmed by available sources, many scholars of the prison suggest credibly that officials selected to send political offenders to this location because of how close Sighet was to the Soviet border. In case of an anticommunist revolt, which was a danger when reserving a space for political prisoners, the existing lay-out of the prison that made efficient isolation easy would allow guards to transfer the prisoners to the USSR. Moreover, the prison's remote location, far from dense urban areas,[42] concealed the intentionally poor conditions prisoners endured. To quote historian Andrea Dobreș, "Survivors of

[37] Ibid., 473.
[38] Jeffrey S. Hardy, "OVERSIGHT AND ASSISTANCE: The Role of the Procuracy and Other Outside Agencies in Penal Operations," in *The Gulag after Stalin: Redefining Punishment in Khrushchev's Soviet Union, 1953-1964*, (Cornell University Press, 2019): 98, https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1mf6xzp.7.
[39] Andrea Dobreș, *Spații carcerale in România comunistă: Penitenciarul Sighet, 1950-1955*, vol. 1 (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2002), 160.
[40] Ibid., 163.
[41] Ibid., 167.
[42] Ibid., 169.

Sighet remember three essential elements that defined life in the prison: hunger, cold and isolation."[43] And to speak of survivors is essential, because these conditions led to the deaths of 53 of the 200 people (over 25%) imprisoned at Sighet over those five years.[44]

Gheorghe Brătianu, a Romanian historian, was among the intellectuals imprisoned at Sighet for his affiliation with *Partidul Național Liberal* (PNL, the National Liberal Party), a party founded by his family.[45] Authorities arrested Brătianu on May 5th 1950, around the same time as Constantin Dinu Brătianu – the last president of the PNL before the PCR took power. Dinu Brătianu was already in a frail condition at 84 years of age. Vasile Cioplan, the prison commander at Sighet, described what it was like when Dinu Brătianu arrived at the prison and was brought out of the van that transported him, detailing how "[he] was in a coma, that is what the doctor who accompanied him said. Then, I asked myself, "What am I going to do with this man?" I was told that if he dies tomorrow, I should take him to the cemetery."[46] The next day, Dinu Brătianu passed away.[47] Gheorghe Brătianu lived another three years before also dying at Sighet for reasons that remain obscure to this day. Both of their death certificates were issued retroactively in 1957.[48]

Some speculate that Gheorghe Brătianu was assassinated, got dangerously ill, or killed himself. Because of a lack of documentation, historians cannot confirm any of these hypotheses with certainty, but his family and several scholars agreed to rule out the possibility of suicide. His daughter, Ioana Illeana Brătianu, stated in an interview conducted after the Communist regime had fallen that eyewitness accounts described his bloodstained sheets the day of his death, suggesting that prison guards beat him to death in his own cell.[49] Information rarely ever went in and out of the Sighet Penitentiary, cutting families

[43] Ibid., 192.
[44] Ibid., 315.
[45] Andrea Dobreș, *Spații carcerale in România comunistă: Penitenciarul Sighet, 1950-1955*, vol. 2 (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2002), 416.
[46] Vasile Cioplan quoted in Dobreș, *Spații carcerale in România comunistă*, vol. 1, 183.
[47] Dobreș, *Spații carcerale in România comunistă*, vol. 2, 415.
[48] Ibid., 419.
[49] Interview with Ioana Brătianu, 403FIB102, f.23, Arhiva Istorică – Secolul XX, Central Deposit, Biblioteca Națională a României (BNaR), Bucharest, Romania.

off entirely from imprisoned loved ones. There was no possibility for verbal communication, nor sending packages or letters.[50] After Brătianu's arrest, his immediate family who lived abroad lost all contact with him in 1950.[51] Rumors were what initially spread word of his 1953 death, which authorities only confirmed years later. This information blackout intensified the psychological terror that the incarceration system used to instill fear in the Romanian population, giving credence to Cristina Petrescu's theory that "large-scale imprisonment in early Communist Romania was not intended to punish those in jail, but to frighten the ones outside."[52]

In the two remaining years of the Sighet Penitentiary's exclusive focus on political prisoners, conditions had suddenly improved. Following Stalin's death in March 1953, Soviet authorities eased some of their intense repressive measures.[53] In line with these changes, the government in Bucharest introduced new rules for running penitentiaries as well as pardoning large numbers of political prisoners. By doing this, Romania was optimistic that they could gain membership in the UN.[54] Iuliu Hossu, one of the priests who was imprisoned at Sighet, explained in his memoirs that beginning with 1 July 1953, people were served slightly sweetened black coffee, 500 as opposed to 250 grams of bread, occasional cups of milk, and meat twice a week. Even though starvation was not a leading cause of death in the prison, it is important to note that these changes reduced mortality rates between 1954 and 1955, particularly because healthier diets gave people with existing health problems a better chance at life.[55] These changes marked the end of Sighet as a political prison, with many either being pardoned or transferred to different locations after 1955. Only the memory of Sighet's brutality was left to "concentrically spread generalized, paralyzing fear in society,"[56] difficult to verbalize but real, nonetheless.

[50] Dobreș, *Spații carcerale in România comunistă*, vol. 1, 209.
[51] GHEORGHE BRATIANU (1898-1953), interview with Ioana Brătianu by Ion Mamina, 403FIB102, f. 22, BNaR.
[52] Petrescu, "The Afterlife of the Securitate," 399.
[53] Dobreș, *Spații carcerale in România comunistă*, vol. 1, 215.
[54] Ibid., 333.
[55] Ibid., 215.
[56] Ibid., 364.

In the later years of Romanian communism, repression changed in form, but not in intent. The second heightened period of repression led by the Securitate took place from 1978 to 1989 under Ceaușescu's rule.[57] Although the period between 1965 and 1978 was not necessarily less repressive, with terror remaining a daily occurrence, Ceaușescu shaped it through his public attempts to reform the Securitate after taking power from Gheorghiu-Dej. Like in the Soviet Union, when Nikita Khrushchev rose to power in the wake of Stalin's death and denounced the Stalinist regime, Ceaușescu sought to demonize Gheorghiu-Dej and concentrate the failures of the new socialist state under his name. Among these efforts, Ceaușescu highlighted the well-documented abuses the Securitate committed before his rule. In 1967, Ceaușescu held a meeting with the Central Committee to condemn these abuses, blaming Gheorghiu-Dej by asserting that he orchestrated these abuses himself.[58] A lot of cultural propaganda followed, specifically through the consumption of literature: the regime promoted spy novels that portrayed Securitate officers as charismatic and sympathetic, aiming to inspire young people to replace and weed out the older officers tainted by the previous regime. The question, "Why haven't I ever considered pursuing a career in the Securitate?", felt simultaneously more legitimate and less absurd.[59]

During this period of reshaping the Securitate into a tool Ceaușescu could still wield, officers arrested fewer people. However, the number of surveillance files increased dramatically. Rather than serving as evidence to justify sending politically dangerous individuals to the GULag, the Securitate kept these files open for entire lifetimes. Nicolae Steinhardt, who was amnestied from his 12-year sentence in 1964, had been surveilled by the Securitate until the day after his death, when a tapped phone conversation revealed that he had passed away. His file contained information about his life inside and outside of the prison with few interruptions.[60] The authorities who labeled Priest S.B. a kulak in the 1950s continued documenting details of his daily life well into the 1980s, including his thoughts on international

[57] O'Neill, "Of camps, gulags and extraordinary renditions," 470.
[58] Petrescu, "The Afterlife of the Securitate," 389.
[59] Ibid., 391.
[60] Vățulescu, *Police Aesthetics,* 46.

politics, his spa treatments for rheumatism, and the fact that he believed the accident that happened at the petrochemical works in Pitești near Easter was divine retribution.[61]

In its forty years of operation, the Securitate adapted to maintain similar levels of intrusion while nurturing more sophisticated forms of trauma. The poet Petru Ilieșu noted in an interview that the Securitate's reputation in the late socialist period encouraged people to always imagine the worst outcome for any expression of discomfort. It acted more like a "scarecrow," where the fear instilled by the Securitate transformed into a pervasive paranoia.[62] Every detail of people's lives was being watched and recorded as agents waited for the opportunity to pounce, and it was never clear who was doing the watching. To quote Priest Nicolae Clempus, who grew up in Maramureș in the late 1970s and early 1980s: "[P]eople were very afraid. So, you were afraid by your own neighbor. You're afraid that somebody is gonna rat you out even though he's your friend. Nobody was sharing what they believe or what they think."[63]

Under Ceaușescu's regime, the state's intrusion into private life, particularly in the everyday lives of women, took active forms. Abortion, while banned between 1948 and 1957, was not strictly regulated by the state and had minimal impact on birthrates. As part of a propaganda campaign aimed at projecting an image of gender equality, the state legalized abortion from 1957 to 1966 – but with birthrates continuing to drop, Ceaușescu reversed the legislation that briefly allowed for this freedom. This decision aligned with his efforts in the late 1960s to distinguish himself from his predecessors and other socialist leaders. Central to his image was the cultivation of a cult of personality, where he positioned himself as the singular father of his nation, whereas in other states this metaphor was taken up by the communist

[61] Vultur, "Daily Life and Surveillance in the 1970s and 1980s," 429.
[62] Titus Suciu and Vasile Bogdan, *Candelă împotriva timpului: După 30 de ani*, (Timișoara: Asociația Memorialul Revoluției, 2019), 30.
[63] Nicolae Clempus, interview by Alexandra Minovici, March 27, 2023, St. Mary Romanian Orthodox Church, Dacula, Georgia. Appendix A, p. 84.

parties themselves. Ceaușescu's paternalistic rhetoric justified greater control over women's bodies, embedding state repression as a defining feature of his rule.

The most well-documented policy that Ceaușescu passed to regulate women's reproductive rights was Decree 770. In 1966, this decree criminalized abortions for women under 40 with fewer than four children. Exceptions were only granted to women who were over the age of 45 and women who had more than five children. The decree came with additional measures mandating biannual gynecological exams for employed women and embedding Securitate agents in hospitals to enforce further compliance. The state also severely restricted birth control supplies, further limiting reproductive autonomy. As a result, many women sought illegal, improvised abortions, often at the hands of untrained strangers in unsanitary conditions. The data shows that in 1965, only 47 out of 237 maternity deaths came from abortion-related complications, whereas in 1989, that number rose to 545 out of 627. Between 1966 and 1989, approximately 500 women died annually for the same reason – and this data does not account for the health problems that plagued women who survived illegal abortions, including permanent damage to the cervix and chronic infections. By 1988, abortion became the leading cause of death among fertile women in Ceaușescu's regime: a stark indicator of the regime's devastating impact on women's lives. By forcing women into humiliating and dangerous conditions, stripping them of their bodily autonomy, anti-abortion legislation fundamentally violated their sense of self.[64] Though less overt than other forms of repression, this policy is integral to Ceaușescu's methodical violence and is responsible for a lot of generational trauma and resentment in Romania.

In this period of the socialist regime, surveillance and control extended beyond reproductive rights, with the Securitate still conducting arrests into the late 1970s and 1980s. One of the most famous cases is that of Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, a dissident priest who openly opposed atheism and the regime. In his writings, Calciu portrays the Securitate as an entity with unlimited power, fearing nothing

[64] Alina Hailiuc, "Who Is a Victim of Communism?: Gender and Public Memory in the Sighet Museum, Romania," *Aspasia*, no. 7 (2013): 113, https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2013.070107.

and never withdrawing from abusive methods of control. To him, the Securitate's sentencing practices remained unchanged, prosecuting even the most innocent – a pattern consistent since Gheorghiu-Dej's time. Calciu felt that throughout his detention, no law could shield him from the system's inherent violence. While at Aiud, he recounted how two prosecutors had come from Bucharest following a ten-day prisoners' strike. The next day after Calciu detailed the torture, the hunger, and the psychological terror that guards inflicted upon prisoners, the beatings and the screams became louder. He was later transferred to Jilava, where he spent time in the penitentiary's 'hospital' (a misnomer that he puts in quotation marks) only to suffer through beatings with a rubber bat for praying.[65]

While the number of prisoners declined under Ceaușescu, abuse persisted in prisons and expanded to psychiatric institutions. These facilities became tools for re-educating political dissidents, with "prisoners of opinion" detained under pretexts of mental illness using Decree Law 12, "On the Medical Treatment of the Dangerously Mentally Ill."[66] Amnesty International printed pamphlets intended to inform people abroad about the backdoors towards abuse in Romania, detailing how in conjunction with the decree, Article 114 from the penal code stated that anybody who perpetrated a crime who is also suffering from a mental illness or is considered to be a danger to society should be interned in a psychiatric hospital until their recovery, despite having no history of violence. The state thus charged many with crimes like anti-state propaganda or attempted emigration.[67] It follows that the lower rate of incarceration may have resulted from the state increasing the internment of political prisoners in psychiatric institutions to carry out the same goal: reshaping dissenters such that their whole self can be reconstructed to align with state ideology. And this realignment of the self is an effect not just of the penitentiaries, or the hospitals that isolated people. Rather, it comes from every element and instance of

[65] APEL CĂTRE SUFLETUL CREȘTIN by Gheorghe Calciu,14 October 1984, 3380, 4.5.1, f. 40-43. Lovinescu-Ierunca, Central Deposit, Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Bucharest, Romania.
[66] Jolan Bogdan, *Performative Contradicton and the Romanian Revolution*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 91.
[67] Campagne pour la libération des prisonniers d'opinion en ROUMANIE by AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 3380, 4.2.1, f. 62-93, ANR.

repression in the Romanian socialist regime. To quote Calciu in an interview he did in 1985, "No one can pass through the duplicity of the past 40 years without their soul being altered. Our Romanian souls are altered. Truly."[68]

As a dissident, Calciu's statement resonates with the very core of growing discontent in socialist Romania. His dissent is part of a larger catalogue of public forms of resistance that surfaced in the late 1970s, offering some of the first signs that a major revolt was lying in wait. Gheorghe Secheșan, a historian based in Timișoara, recalled in his book how the domestic and political situation of the 1970s gave rise to *găști* (gangs) – tight-knit groups of friends who gathered to discuss politics amongst themselves. He wrote, "We played canasta until dawn, smoked a ton, drank wine… and… we gossiped about the regime."[69] And there was a lot to discuss in the late 1970s: The USSR invaded Afghanistan, the Solidarity movement in Poland was gaining a lot of momentum, and Ceaușescu's policies were worsening daily life for the entire population.

In 1977, Bucharest experienced extensive structural damage from the *Vrâncea* earthquake, which displaced around 40,000 people and caused damage of up to 7.25 billion lei.[70] Instead of using the state's resources to repair the damage and relocate those left newly homeless, Ceaușescu launched the *Centru Civic* project that would completely restructure Bucharest's center. This remarkably expensive endeavor encouraged the demolition of 5 square kilometers,[71] enabling a kind of cultural genocide[72] to make space for *Casa Poporului*: a completely disproportionate and excessive building whose name ironically translates to House of the People. It was symbolic of Ceaușescu's cult of personality, prioritizing state

[68] Interview: Rev. G. Calciu-Dumitreasa-Dr. Vlad Georgescu, DOMESTIC BLOC No. 685, 28 August 1985, 3380, 4.5.1, f. 72, AMR.
[69] Gheorghe Sechesan, *17 după 16*, (Timișoara: Editura Artpress, 2006), 11.
[70] Emil-Sever Georgescu and Antonios Pomonis, "The Romanian Earthquake of March 4, 1977 Revisited: New Insights Into Its Territorial, Economic and Social Impacts and Their Bearing on the Preparedness for the Future," *The 14th World Conference on Earthquake Engineering* in Beijing, (October 12-17, 2008): 1.
[71] Duncan Light and Craig Young, "Urban Space, Political Identity and the Unwanted Legacies of State Socialism: Bucharest's Problematic Centru Civic in the Post-Socialist Era," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (2013): 10, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2012.743512.
[72] "Roumanie: ON DEMENAGE de force tout un people," fond. 3380, 4.4.1, f. 1-11, ANR.

iconography while replacing civic infrastructure. This building epitomizes Ceaușescu's disregard for the hardships caused by the 1977 earthquake, as governmental spending blatantly went towards a building and a space that was never completed instead of rehoming the people who needed it the most.[73] The wishes of an entire population faced with emergent financial stress were completely incongruent with the state's goals as it gained from the suffering of its people.

Economic hardship fueled widespread discontent in 1970s Romania, like other socialist nations across East Europe at the time. The year 1977 also saw the launching of a massive strike by miners at Valea Jiului, driven by the poverty that plagued them and their families. Because of Ceaușescu's insistence on paying off all of Romania's foreign debt at the beginning of the decade, Romania fell into a deep economic recession that had extreme repercussions for the miners and the conditions they lived in. This strike emerged from Ceaușescu's announcement that the retirement age for miners would be pushed back, a decision that severely threatened their health due to the harsh working conditions of the coal mine.[74] Ceaușescu personally came to Valea Jiului to address the demands of the miners, albeit this was more of a performative move than a substantial promise to effect change. This was not lost on the Romanian people who, despite an extensive news blackout, still found ways to access leaked information.[75] Ion Alexandru Robert Dâmbovițeanu wrote a satirical manuscript under the pseudonym Badea Grind in which he built on the irony of Ceaușescu's response to the strike. Impersonating him, Dâmbovițeanu wrote out the speech that he imagined was given, mimicking his mannerisms with Ceaușescu mumbling about how much he cared for the miners; how he felt so safe among them. Dâmbovițeanu included parenthetical descriptions of the miner's reactions: "powerful applause, cheers, people are chanting" while the chants themselves subverted the delusion that Ceaușescu fed himself as a beloved leader: "Ceaușescu and the people; the gun, the club, and the axe!", "Ceaușescu gave us a feast,

[73] Light and Young, "Urban Space, Political Identity and the Unwanted Legacies of State Socialism," 9-16
[74] Anca Pușca, *Revolution, Democratic Transition and Disillusionment*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 91-92.
[75] Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of 1989: Myth and Reality – Myth or Reality?*, (PhD diss., University of London School of Slavonic and East European Studies, September 1955), 15.

and he put us in the ground," and "Ceaușescu, PCR, the benefits are no longer there."[76] His writing serves as evidence that the state's powerful hold on propaganda – especially as it related to conditions of suffering in Romania – began to erode. Ceaușescu's popularity was in jeopardy, and his people would make it known through more instances of public unrest.

In November 1987, ten years after the strike at Valea Jiului, demonstrations by Red Flag lorry factory workers in Brașov culminated in a bonfire fueled by ransacked communist paraphernalia from the local Party headquarters.[77] They were protesting the regime's insistence that thirty percent of their salary would be cut amidst continued economic hardship. The regime responded with brutal force – a method of control that it was well-acquainted with after decades of enforcing it.[78] Control needed to be reasserted urgently; this protest signaled the collapse Ceaușescu's and the PCR's promised communist utopia.

The regime's violent response to the uprising in Brașov reflected the only language it had left, which also happened to be its mother tongue: control through fear and violence. Even though it was one of several spontaneous and uncoordinated protest efforts, it was monumental for reaching the tipping point that came to be December 1989, as people grew accustomed to the agency they truly had over their futures. Across state borders, people were already dissolving socialist governments and their power structures throughout the rest of Eastern Europe: the Berlin Wall fell, Hungary opened its borders, and Bulgarians ousted their socialist leader.[79] This wave of international change emboldened Romanians, making them believe that their own liberation was imminent. With this, the illusion of a communist utopia began to shatter, and people started to understand their power – not just to resist, but to overthrow. The Revolution was no longer a question of *if*, but *when*.

[76] Alexandru Ion Robert Dâmbovițeanu, *Manuscript*, f. 23DAC, Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (CNSAS), Bucharest, Romania.
[77] Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of 1989: Myth and Reality – Myth or Reality?*, 16.
[78] Pușca, *Revolution, Democratic Transition and Disillusionment,* 93-94.
[79] Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 46.

Chapter 2: Revoluție

Chapter 2: Revolution

A ajutat Bunul Dumnezeu ca la Crăciunul anului 1989 să sărbătorim nu numai Nașterea Domnului, ci și renașterea noastră națională, după atîta amar de ani de teroare și dictatura și tot El ne învrednicește acum să sărbătorim nu numai Învierea Domnului, ci și reînvierea la o nouă viață liberă și demnă, temeluită pe jertfa de sînge a tinerilor martiri din Timișoara și din toată țara.	*The Good Lord helped us celebrate, on the Christmas of the year 1989, not only the Birth of the Lord, but also our own national rebirth, after so many years of terror and dictatorship, and still He makes us worthy of celebrating not only His Rebirth, but also our rebirth towards a new free and dignified life, built on the bloody sacrifice of the young martyrs from Timișoara and the whole nation.*

– IONEL POPESCU, *Renașterea Bănățeană*, "Învierea Domnului, învierea noastră" (The Lord's Rebirth, Our Rebirth), April 14, 1990.

On December 25th 1989, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, were executed in Târgoviște after a trial that lasted just under an hour. Bearing an uncontested guilty verdict, soldiers dragged them outside where they met the bullets of a firing squad. Their executioners set their machine guns to automatic fire, ensuring no shots missed.[80] The people's contempt for their rule had swelled to this moment of symbolic violence: the impatient killing of the fountainheads of Romanian suffering became a visceral translation of daily terror fused with the contagious revolt that began in Timișoara nine days before. December 16th marked the beginning of the Romanian Revolution, a series of protests met with violent suppression by the socialist state. This state-sanctioned violence reflected quickly back unto its leaders, unfolding in chaotic plain sight. The expression and experience of violence in this short window is the focus of this chapter. As Peter Siani-Davis explains, "The violence that shook Romania during these days can only be understood if it is firmly placed within the context of the prevailing heady atmosphere of elation, tinged

[80] "Nicolae Elena Ceausescu executed," *YouTube video,* 3:58, uploaded by Tran Chi Le, January 31, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3Y1dmq2Hmk&rco=1.

with fear, suspicion, and rumor, and a total breakdown of political and social control, which saw the effective erosion of all constraints on behavior."[81]

To give a broad overview of the timeline of events in December 1989, the Romanian Revolution began on December 16th in Timișoara – a city in the northwestern part of the country, close to the Hungarian border. Protesters initially gathered to prevent the state-sanctioned eviction of László Tőkés, a Hungarian pastor, but the demonstration quickly escalated into a widespread critique of Ceaușescu and his regime before being violently suppressed by the state apparatus. News of the crackdown spread, fueling uprisings in other cities, including Bucharest. On December 21st, Ceaușescu attempted to frame the uprising as a foreign attack on national security. He was met with extreme public outrage, causing him and his wife, Elena Ceaușescu, to flee via helicopter the next day. In the days leading up to the Ceaușescus' execution, violence engulfed the streets of Romania, tumultuous and disorganized. The fighting only began to subside when their deaths were confirmed, building a path to post-socialist restructuring.

The convergence of poor living conditions, surreptitious news of protest, and undisturbed terror gnawed at the very essence of humanity for the Romanian people. Gheorghe Secheșan wrote about his experience as December came closer. He frequently wondered about what he could do, as a citizen, to change the fate of his country.[82] When asked concisely by his close friend, Sammy, whether he was willing to join a group plotting against the regime, he reacted in two stages: First, fear gripped him – the same fear that conquered many, forcing them to believe that non-compliance would endanger not just themselves, but their family. How could he look his children in the eyes, knowing that he jeopardized their safety? How would he react when he is inevitably threatened with their lives?

But then, he said yes – how could he say no?

[81] Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989,* 119.
[82] Secheșan, *17 după 16*, 12.

In his words, “Our children’s futures depend exactly on what we choose to do, every one of us, at this moment.”[83]

Figure 2.1: Octavian Fărcășanu (left) and Bogdan Chiru (right), holding a sign that says “Copiii noștri vor fi liberi,” written by Oana Fărcășanu (who would marry Chiru later) on December 23, 1989. Agerpres, *HotNews.ro*, November 27, 2024, https://hotnews.ro/impresionant-atunci-si-acum-la-protestul-de-la-universitate-o-pancarta-simbol-din-1989-care-spune-copiii-nostri-vor-fi-liberi-a-devenit-copiii-vostri-sunt-liberi-1847046.

This sentiment fueled a lot of resistance efforts in Romania, with one of the most famous images from the revolution showing a man and his friend holding a sign that read “Copiii noștri vor fi liberi” – “Our children will be free” (Fig. 2.1). The emphasis on children was deliberate. Under Ceaușescu’s regime, children were subject to particularly harsh conditions, especially following the introduction of Decree 770. The ban on abortion led to a surge in births, pressuring the state into placing over 150,000 children in orphanages that were grossly underfunded and ill-equipped to provide adequate care. Many of these children suffered neglect and abuse; some died from malnutrition or disease.[84] For a nation that

[83] Ibid., 13.
[84] Peter J Gloviczki, “Ceausescu’s Children: The Process of Democratization and the Plight of Romania’s Orphans,” *Critique: A Worldwide Journal of Politics*, (Fall 2004): 117, https://bpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/about.illinoisstate.edu/dist/e/34/files/2019/09/Peter_Gloviczki.pdf.

placed deep cultural value on family, these failures struck a powerful moral chord. Social psychologist Sidonia Grama Nedeianu recorded a conversation with a participant in the Revolution who suggested that these very children, nicknamed *Decreței*, were the ones who ultimately made the Revolution: "The children did it; the million of children from '68."[85]

That same sense of moral violation appeared in the persecution of faith. In Timișoara,[86] on December 15th, the Hungarian pastor László Tőkés told the people of his church, "Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I have been issued with a summons of eviction. I will not accept it, so I will be taken from you by force next Friday."[87] For months, the Securitate placed Tőkés and his family under heavy surveillance, even detailing the activities of anybody who had contact with them. The week before he received his eviction notice, they broke the windows of his apartment[88] – an aggressive reminder of the control they held over people's safe spaces, their homes.

Tőkés posed an ideological threat to the regime. As the head of a church, he nurtured religiosity under the politically atheistic specter of communism that loomed over the entire country, even though church activities were not entirely banned when the PCR came to power. In 1948, the Greek Catholic Church was forcibly merged with the Romanian Orthodox Church despite being active and operating independently for 250 years.[89] Instead of banning the church, the PCR paid priests salaries in exchange for collaborating with its goals. While the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the PRC seems mutually beneficial, with its 1948 expansion and monetary compensation, Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu prefer to describe churches as "privileged servant[s],"[90] defined by primarily by the terms and conditions dictated by the regime. As Tőkés' explained, "The church has always been under

[85] Sidonia Grama Nedianu, "The Catharsis of Going out into the Street: Experiencing the 1989 Romanian Revolution," *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities* (2007-2008): 270, https://www.philobiblon.ro/sites/default/files/public/imce/doc/2007/philobiblon_2007_12_16.pdf.
[86] The Hungarian minority in Romania, including Tőkés, calls the city Temesvar.
[87] László Tőkés, with David Porter, *With God, for the People*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 3.
[88] Ibid., 1.
[89] Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 65.
[90] Giuseppe Tateo, *Under the Sign of the Cross: The People's Salvation Cathedral and the Church-Building Industry in Postsocialist Romania,* (New York: Berghan Books, 2020), 30.

siege. (…) All our churches in Romania have been encircled by Communism, by the Dictator's power." No church was safe from scrutiny – especially not the church headed by a politically contentious priest.

Tőkés was a dissident who frequently spoke on television and the radio about the crushing limitations that restricted religious and civilian life,[91] wrote pieces critiquing the standards Romania set for human rights in the samizdat *Ellenpoktok*, and spent a lot of his energy protecting Hungarian culture in Timișoara, teaching its literature and history.[92] Timișoara is one of the most dense and highly developed cities in the Romanian Transylvanian region – land that Romania and Hungary repeatedly contested in the first half of the twentieth century, and thus housed a significant Hungarian minority.[93] Ceausescu viewed the Hungarian minority groups with heavy suspicion, and him and his regime did not shy away from using hostile terms, such as "reactionary," "imperialist," or "irredentist," when reporting on their activities. He saw disturbances in Hungarian-majority regions as foreign attempts to jeopardize Romanian security and territorial control.[94] Indeed, his first instinct when news of the revolt reached Bucharest was to appeal to the patriotism of the Romanian people and inspire them to rise to his defense against foreign intervention.

Tőkés, however, was not alone. Several of his friends and supporters gathered outside of his home that Friday, keeping watch and building solidarity through occupying public space while the Securitate responded in kind. Occasionally, Tőkés would appear at the window facing the street to address the crowd and accept community donations and help (Fig. 2.2).

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[91] Lucian-Vasile Szabo, *Imaginea militarilor și a victimelor în revoluția de la Timișoara: Aspecte controversate cu privire la implicarea Armatei în reprimarea mișcării de protest*, (Timișoara: Asociația Memorialul Revoluției, 2015), 55.
[92] Martyn Rady, *Romania in Turmoil: A contemporary history*, (London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 1992), 85.
[93] Timișoara is located on the perimeter of Hungarian Transylvnia. When Tőkés and his family arrived, he claimed that there were only 10,000 Hungarian Protestants in a population of 400,000. Tőkés with Porter, *With God, for the People,* 84.
[94] Rady, *Romania in Turmoil*, 83.

Figure 2.2: Lajos Varga (Tőkés' close friend) pictured at the window from which Tokes would speak. Tőkés with Porter*, With God, for the People*, between pages 130 and 131.

By 10 p.m., around thirty to forty people had spontaneously gathered outside of his home, and the collective anger of the crowd drove the Securitate officers away, who just minutes before were preoccupied with dispersing them. This was a remarkable act of resistance, since at the time even holding a birthday party with ten guests needed approval from the Securitate.[95] And yet, this illegal gathering was in many ways the genesis for the Revolution. Tőkés' close friend, Lajos Varga, described how the next step forward was "the realization that we had power. We were able to control what was happening…It was like living a wild dream, a forbidden fantasy."[96] As time progressed, the crowd grew larger; once it numbered over a thousand people, Romanians outnumbered Hungarians, as those who frequented Pastor Petru Dugulescu's church nearby joined the demonstration. The plight of one outspoken pastor, a member

[95] Tőkés with Porter, *With God, for the People*, 10.
[96] Ibid.

of an ethnic minority, resonated with grievances accumulated over forty years, threatening to spill overnight.

The next day – December 16th – saw an increasingly agitated crowd. Tőkés was visited several times by the mayor, demanding that he calm the people outside of his home while making promises to address specific ailments, including a reassurance that he would not be evicted. But the crowd had no faith in their officials, not anymore. They explicitly warned Tőkés that the mayor came to deceive him, and pleaded with him not to believe him.[97] Reflecting on this situation, he claimed,

> I was torn between two desires: as a Christian pastor I wanted to protect them from the violence which I was sure was inevitable, and at the same time I wanted to stand with them in their protests against the regime's illegality. Like Moses who accepted the role given him by God to stand up against an oppressive regime, I believed it was my duty to stand with the crowd.[98]

Tőkés saw himself as a prophetic figure, with a teleological duty that expanded beyond the grim reality people in Romania became accustomed to. He stood at the beginning of the rift in how people perceived their reality, ushering a retreat to religion as an anchor in a turbulent political and social landscape.

That evening, the crowd grew large enough to stretch several blocks down to Piața Operei, where people gathered on the steps of an Orthodox church. This moment marked the unison of two crowds, and simultaneously two churches of different Christian denominations. Unrest spread contagiously across social categories, planted in the urban fabric of Timișoara. When the crowd divided determinately towards the city center, energized and motivated to fight back, violence filled the air, with police turning to water cannons after protesters had broken the

[97] Ibid., 150.
[98] Ibid., 155.

windows at the party headquarters. The protest outside of Tőkés' home transformed into a revolution.

What set the Romanian Revolution apart from other anti-communist movements in the former Soviet Sphere in 1989 was the shared experience of violence that blanketed the country. Violence in it many forms was a tool intrinsic to the socialist regime to enforce uniform subordination. It is only fitting that its demise in Romania was brought about by the same force. Lujos described the moment when ordinary people realized they had power beneath the suppression they were accustomed to. That power manifested easily through acts of violence. These acts at first targeted socialist property: the buildings that housed the party headquarters, shop windows, Ceausescu's books.[99] The reassertion of control through violence by the state is what created the Revolution's first victim: Rozalia Irma Popescu, who was run over by an armored personnel carrier at 2:30 pm on Sunday, December 17th.[100] Until 11 a.m. on December 20th in Timișoara, the Romanian Army was responsible for the violent repression of the Revolution; in Bucharest, they would continue their efforts until 10 a.m. on the 22nd of December. *Ministerul Apărării Naționale* (MApN, the Ministry of National Defense) thus held a principal role in the bloodshed that characterized the Revolution.[101]

Roughly 70-80% of the victims of the Revolution, before and after Ceaușescu's flight, were caused by the MApN. When Ceaușescu ordered the Army into Timișoara on December 16th,[102] their role was purely to psychologically cripple demonstrators and return order through the terror brought on by their mere presence.[103] They occupied the streets, armed with pistols and bayonets but without any ammunition.[104] Intimidation tactics failed, however, giving the people

[99] Ibid., 159.
[100] Szabo, *Imaginea militarilor și a victimelor în revoluția de la Timișoara*, 12.
[101] Ibid., 8.
[102] Ibid., 9.
[103] Ibid., 26.
[104] Ibid., 10.

of Timișoara reasons to indignantly criticize the actions of the army, whose role they felt was primarily to protect the interests of its people. Not even twenty-four hours after the Army came to Timișoara, the shooting began. Between 4:15 p.m. and 4:30 p.m., troops opened fire in Piața Libertății,[105] ordered first shoot into the sky, before aiming for knees, and finally resorting to deadly force in the face of undeterred masses.[106] Only after the firing began did Ceaușescu issue the *Radu Cel Frumos* order, a procedure calling for partial military mobilization for war.[107] The order legitimized further military violence throughout the entire country.

Witnessing the Army as it shot at its own people proved to be extremely traumatic. In an interview I conducted with writer Costel Balint, he claimed with clear intensity, "For that, I have never forgiven [the Army]…I hated them so much, because I've seen so many cases [of this kind of violence]…My God, to shoot… Innocent people, who literally went out for freedom. How can you shoot them? Their hands, empty…It's sad, sad. It's so sad!"[108] He recalled how his father, whose love for the military shaped much of his life, cried when he found out what happened. To see the Army, charged with protecting the nation, turn its weapons on its people fractured any remaining sense of order or logic. It was a rupture in reality; a betrayal not just of political trust but of the foundational contract between the state and its people.

That night, the Army also opened fire in front of the Metropolitan Cathedral, further deepening this sense of existential disorientation by violating the boundary between right and wrong, staining a sacred site of spiritual refuge with blood. Like many churches in Romania throughout the revolutionary period, locations with religious affiliations became safe spaces where people gathered before springing into action. Cornel Moldovan recounted, in *Renașterea*

[105] Ibid., 13.
[106] "Amintiri din '89. Sute de militari au primit alarma ‚Radu cel Frumos'," *Digi24*, December 22, 2016, https://www.digi24.ro/fara-categorie/amintiri-din-decembrie-89-sute-de-militari-au-primit-alarma-radu-cel-frumos-636955.
[107] Szabo, *Imaginea militarilor și a victimelor în revoluția de la Timișoara*, 14.
[108] Costel Balint, interview with Alexandra Minovici, June 17, 2024, Asociația Memorialul Revoluției, Timișoara, Romania. Appendix B, p. 121-123.

Bănățeană, the events that took place in front of the Cathedral on that day. He had joined the group of demonstrators once it grew a little bigger, quietly observing the way one of the women who was with them marched towards the officers in uniform with a candle lighting her face, chanting phrases like "Don't shoot," "You also have parents; we also have children," and "Who are you defending?" The joyful atmosphere that comforted the demonstrators on these sacred steps was disrupted by the approach of five or six people with arms – the prelude to one of the bloodiest episodes of the Revolution.[109] He felt particularly struck by the images of young people dead or injured, including a fifteen year-old girl wiping the blood out of her hair while fighting back tears. After taking shelter in the Cathedral, he quickly took the tram in Piața Maria[110] where the topics of conversation that he overheard felt otherworldly in their normalcy, avoiding any mention of the violence unfolding within earshot. The tacit silence on his trip made him conclude that "the truth still needs more time" before it can surface.[111]

Some truths from the Revolution remain hidden, and the notion that any such truth existed was heavily manipulated in the chaos that followed. Rumors circulated, especially after Ceaușescu's flight, that shadowy figures loyal to him infiltrated the demonstrators to sabotage the uprising from within: "terrorists." The meaning of the word itself was stretched and difficult to pinpoint; a blanket term for unidentifiable perpetrators of violence affecting both the civilians and the armed forces. Writer Ivan Evseev suggested that the word "was not employed in its original

[109] Szabo, *Imaginea militarilor și a victimelor în revoluția de la Timișoara*, 15.

[110] The square's name holds deep religious significance, as it directly references the Virgin Mary. An altar within the square is dedicated to her worship, reinforcing its spiritual importance. Although its full name is St. Mary Square, it was commonly referred to as Mary Square or simply Mary, often omitting the "Saint" designation. Despite this simplification, devotion to Mary remained profound, especially during the period of religious persecution under the communist regime. Beyond its religious symbolism, the square also became a historical landmark, serving as the site where the first major protests of the Revolution took shape. Szabo, *Imaginea militarilor și a victimelor în revoluția de la Timișoara*, 62.

[111] Cornel Moldovan, "CLIPE DRAMATICE CARE NU SE UITĂ," *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 124, June 22, 1990, 4.

sense or with the purpose to depict reality; rather, it was used to allude to a moral trait."[112] These rumors fed on the general uncertainty that descended on Romania in those days, as no one could tell for certain who was on whose side, only that the bloodshed continued, even after the dictator fled.[113]

Amid this uncertainty, religious practice in protest spaces was a source of comfort and stability. The lighting of candles shaped the atmosphere in the square, a symbolic gesture often performed in Orthodox services to dedicate a prayer. Dănuț Gaura, who was badly injured during the Revolution to the point where his leg needed to be amputated, told Mihail Ecoviu Doru when he visited him in the hospital that he felt grateful that demonstrators followed his lead when he brought candles to the square. The gesture touched Pastor Petru Dugulescu,[114] who helped distribute them with Gaura. He lit the first candle, and the fire spread throughout the crowd,[115] symbolic of the hope that spread through mere solidarity in Timișoara and the rest of the country.

Protestors in Timișoara also used church bells, as recounted in Vasile Jolonca's memories – a local mason. He spent the several nights, beginning with December 20th, journeying from church to church around Opera Square with his friends and several people, determined to ring the bells for the people who lost their lives in the violent altercations. The churches that honored their requests and rang the bells attracted large crowds, many of them young people who lit candles that burned everywhere – in their hands, on the stairs, and even on the fences. Jolonca believed

[112] Ivan Evseev quoted in Ruxandra Cesereanu, "The Romanian Anticommunist Revolution and the 'Terrorists' of December 1989," *Echinox Journal* vol. 19 (2010): 316, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=15744.
[113] Cesereanu, "The Romanian Anticommunist Revolution and the 'Terrorists' of December 1989," 315-317.
[114] Petru Dugulescu played a key role as a leader during the Revolution, mobilizing support for Tőkés when he was threatened with eviction, organizing demonstrations, and giving speeches to galvanize and comfort the people of Timișoara.
[115] Mihail Ecoviu Doru, "Tinerii care au dat lumină," *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 124, June 22, 1990, 4.

that the sound of the church bells emboldened the crowd in the face of all the despair that gripped them[116] as Timișoara was baptized "the martyr town."[117]

Affirming religious beliefs through public practices became one of the most potent forms of protest against communism, extending beyond lighting candles and ringing church bells. One of the most striking manifestations of this defiance was through public, communal prayer – a deeply meaningful ritual to religious tradition across many faiths. To quote English poet and priest, George Herbert, "Though private prayer be a brave design, / Yet public hath more promises, more love: (…) / Pray with the most: for where most pray, is heaven."[118] On December 22nd, protestors in Opera Square engaged in one of the most emotionally powerful displays of public prayer during the Revolution by doing a public recitation of *Tatăl Nostru* (Our Father). Petru Dugulescu was speaking on the Opera's balcony[119] after news reached Timișoara about the Ceaușescu's flight from Bucharest, where ten thousand people had gathered to hear him speak. When he suggested that they all pray in unison, the crowd knelt together, facing the Cathedral and repeating the prayer in a call-

Figure 2.3: People kneeling while facing the Metropolitan Cathedral on December 22, 1989. Smaranda Vultur, "Memoria în criză. Studiu de caz: Revoluția din 1989 ca fractură temporală și producere de memorie," *Memoria Timișoarei*, accessed March 18, 2025, https://memoriatimisoarei.ro/locuri-de-memorie/smaranda-vultur-memoria-in-criza-studiu-de-caz-revolutia-din-1989-ca-fractura-temporala-si-producere-de-memorie/.3

[116] Vasile Jolonca, "Să bată clopotele!...," *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 124, June 22, 1990, 5.
[117] *Renașterea Bănățeană* calls Timișoara the "first martyr town of Romania" on the front page of no. 79, April 14, 1990.
[118] George Herbert, Perirrhanterium, stanza 67, accessed March 18, 2025, https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/perirrhanterium.
[119] The balcony of the Opera House in Timișoara was central to the Revolution. Protesters gathered in Opera Square, and from this balcony, revolutionary figures, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens addressed the crowds, calling for resistance against Ceaușescu's regime.

and-response style (Fig. 2.3),[120] with Dugulescu reciting one line into the microphone and the crowd shouting it back.[121] It was a potent rejection of the regime, representing the catharsis that freedom from a tyrant collectively inspired. Ceaușescu's self-imposed image as a beloved 'father'[122] figure for the Romanian people was erased and replaced with *Our Father, Who art in Heaven* (*Tatăl nostru, care Ești în ceruri*).

Religious practice during the Revolution was important not just for as a tool for resistance, but also as a method of coping with the all-encompassing violence. Liminality, as defined by Sidonia Grama Nedeianu, is "a dramatically intense period with benign and malign potential as well: a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise"[123] – a term she uses to describe the revolutionary experience. The trauma caused by violence altered the very essence of human identity, reconfiguring the way people conceived of their own lives and those of the people around them. While the revolution reached Bucharest a few days later, the violence was the same: Ilie Năstase described his own experience in the newspaper, writing, "I saw with my own eyes how Securitate officers shot at people, in plain sight. I ran with the crowd and they shot at us even out of the helicopters, the injured and dead falling around us."[124] Intercepted conversations between officers in charge of the suppressive forces in Bucharest's University Square discovered how dead Romanians were dehumanizingly referred to as "parcels" and "packages."[125] They also reveal that once a demonstrator's identity was found out, the goal was to annihilate them.[126] Years of surveillance and repression followed

[120] Mark Elliott, "László Tőkés, Timisoara, and the Romanian Revolution," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe,* vol. 10, iss. 4, art. 5 (1990): 27, https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol10/iss5/4.
[121] "Tatal nostru - Revolutia de la Timisoara din 1989," *Facebook* video, posted May 1, 2019, accessed March 18, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2413940341972080. The recording is also featured at Asociația Memorialul Revoluției in Timișoara, where it is used as part of their exhibit on the Revolution.
[122] Nedianu, "The Catharsis of Going out into the Street," 270.
[123] Ibid., 258.
[124] G. B., "AM VAZUT MOARTEA CU OCHII," *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 84, April 24, 1990, 2.
[125] Romulus Cristea, *Mărturii de la baricadă*, (București: România Pur și Simplu, 2007), 13.
[126] Ibid., 19.

by public insubordination continued to silence people, especially those who were arrested during the Revolution – afraid to speak their own names out loud.[127]

In this way, resistance became existential for Romanians in December 1989, and simply being in the streets was enough to move the soul. Nedeianu wrote that despite differing motivations, people felt compelled to be "in the middle of the world, where violent death had transformed the ordinary space of the city into a sacred space."[128] For many, staying home felt unimaginable at a time when the pavement itself seemed to promise that its transitory nature would lead them to freedom.[129] This stood in stark contrast to the regime's decades of control, which taught people to hide themselves in daily life. Public presence in the face of all the violence itself meant conquering what was once an unmovable, persistent fear. People chanted, "We are not afraid anymore!"[130] It was a liberating and excessively joyful feeling. Adrian Kali, who was a working-class rugby player in December 1989, recalled how it felt like a weight had lifted from their shoulders, making reality appear rose-colored: "We became other people, almost as if we were better, taller, more beautiful."[131] Already, the Revolution had begun fulfilling a fantasy of regeneration for Kali.

This sense of rebirth was steeped in the bloodshed that preceded it. News of Timișoara's suffering traveled down to Bucharest, fueling resistance efforts country-wide through the concept of martyrdom. Resistance efforts in other cities included the simple chant, "Timișoara!" – a call charged with indignation towards the perpetrators of state-sanctioned bloodshed. People across Romania easily empathized with the suffering that the people of Timișoara endured in kickstarting the Revolution. Sacred religious rituals (kneeling, lighting candles, praying) in

[127] Ibid., 154.
[128] Nedianu, "The Catharsis of Going out into the Street," 267.
[129] Ibid., 267.
[130] Ibid., 268.
[131] Suciu and Bogdan, *Candelă împotriva timpului*, 37.

Bucharest often centered around communal mourning for Timișoara's dead.[132] Many popular protest chants also invoked the victims of the Revolution; for instance, "Ceaușescu must be judged for the dead in Banat,"[133] in which Banat refers to a broader geographic region that includes Timișoara.

Their death is what birthed the "heroes" of the revolution, still revered for their sacrifice to this day in Romania. Compiling their comprehensive collection of oral history interviews, *Candelă împotriva timpului: După 30 de ani,* Titus Suciu and Vasile Bogdan open their volume with a transcript of a conversation they held amongst themselves, where Suciu exclaimed, "Do you see, Vasi? Do you see? These are the heroes…whom, whenever I speak, I dress with the garments of my entire consideration. They are not idols, I never wanted to be in their place – they are heroes."[134] Suciu goes on to explain how the result of studying the Revolution was an exercise in admiration that generated an eternal feeling of indebtedness for the people who suffered and died in 1989.[135] The senseless violence imposed on the Romanian people during the Revolution was rationalized through martyrdom and the iconification of the dead as heroes. What this analysis has yet to address is the sacrificial dimension of violence and death – the need for expiation through violence imposed by the people upon the perpetrating state.

Walter Benjamin,[136] in his *Critique of Violence*, distinguishes between different types of violence that exist outside of a means-ends relationship as defined within law: mythic and divine violence. While mythic violence seeks to preserve and create law through retribution, divine violence annihilates the status quo and the guilt of the human conscience along with it; it is expiatory. When Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were executed on December 25th, 1989, they were met with an expression of violence proportional to the suffering the socialist regime caused in

[132] Nedianu, "The Catharsis of Going out into the Street," 261.
[133] Simion Dima, "VISAM ȘI VISUL SE-MPLINEA," *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 124, June 22, 1990, 4.
[134] Suciu and Bogdan, *Candelă împotriva timpului*, 16.
[135] Ibid., 21.
[136] Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 248-252.

December, and since 1947. They were given a quick trial, decided informally on vastly unsubstantiated claims.[137] *Monitorul Oficial* (The Official Monitor), a newspaper specialized in publishing Romania's legal proceedings, printed the five formal charges against the Ceaușescus the next day:

1. Genocide – over 60,000 victims
2. Undermining the power of the state by organizing armed actions against the people and the power of the state
3. The infraction of destroying obtained goods, through destroying and damaging certain buildings, explosions in the city etc.
4. Undermining the national economy
5. Attempting to flee the country using over one million dollars held in foreign banks.[138]

The language with which these charges were presented was intentionally vague. Invoking a massively disproportionate figure of over 60,000 with no supporting evidence to convict the Ceaușescus of genocide was a tactic that Raluca Grosescu and Raluca Ursachi, in their analysis of these legal proceedings, claimed was distinctly abusive. It was a figure cited by the judge to encompass the tens of thousands of people who were dead and wounded as a result of the repression that took place between December 16th and December 22nd, drawn from rumors.[139] The genocide charge was legally interpreted to have emerged not just from this claim, but also the civilians lost to the starvation triggered by collectivization, the destruction of villages and national culture, and embezzling funds – evidence of a slow, premeditated genocide. Grosescu and Ursachi commented critically that, "Irrespective of the brutality of the Ceaușescu regime, it

[137] Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989,* 138-139.
[138] "Comunicat," Monitorul Oficial al României, no. 3, December 26, 1989. Translated by the author. Accessed March 18, 2025. https://www.scribd.com/document/441218953/Monitorul-Oficial-nr-3-1989-Executia-lui-Nicolae-si-Elena-Ceausescu.
[139] Raluca Grosescu and Raluca Ursachi, "The Romanian Revolution in Court: What Narratives about 1989?" in *Remembrance, History, and Justice,* ed. Vladimir Tismăneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob, (Central European University Press, 2015): 264-265, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctt19z399m.13.

was historically inappropriate and legally impossible to prove that the dictator intended to destroy the Romanian people."[140]

The seemingly careless nature in which their trial was conducted, combined with the brutal killing of the leaders of the regime leaves much to be desired in terms of pure expiation. When Ceaușescu was executed, people sought a divine rebirth, free of the communist past; an annihilation characteristic of Benjamin's divine violence. Instead of being an act of pure justice, it reinforced the violent logic of mythic law, relying on the structures of state violence to carry it out instead of dissolving them completely. Rather than erasing the old order, it legitimized those who orchestrated it: the FSN, who would emerge as an anti-communist governing body comprised of old members of the PCR's nomenclature, equating the death of Ceaușescu with the total defeat of communism. Paul Goma, the renowned dissident, claimed that the execution "stole Ceaușescu from those who suffered because of him,"[141] by allowing him to escape full responsibility for his actions. He further asserted that the brutality of the execution left room for rehabilitating his image. Their murder "accomplished the extraordinary, the unheard and undeserved feat of turning the Ceaușescus into human beings."[142]

The Revolution thus ended not with a clean break from communism, but with a violent spectacle that preserved the very structures it sought to overturn. The execution of Ceaușescu, while symbolically potent, failed to expiate the moral debt of the communist past; instead, it provided the FSN with the political capital to establish continuity under the guise of rupture. The lingering ambiguity of this transition would haunt Romania in the years that followed, as people began to process the trauma of the Revolution and the decades of abuse preceding it. As the state sought to construct a coherent post-socialist identity from the legacy of the Revolution, forgetting and remembering would become the new

[140] Ibid., 265.
[141] Paul Goma quoted in Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989,* 142.
[142] Ibid.

means for both the state to assert control and the people to resist it. The struggle to memorialize violence, death, and suffering would define the political and cultural memory of post-socialist Romania.

Chapter 3: Amnezie și Amintire

Chapter 3: Amnesia and Memory

Întreaga istorie a României se înfățișează înaintea lumii ca un șir nesfârșit de eroi care au luptat și au murit pentru libertatea țării… Ne întrebăm dacă ziua de 20 mai 1990 nu va consfinți verbul „a muri" drept singura formă a libertății din România?	*The entire history of Romania appears before the world as an endless string of heroes who fought and died for the country's freedom... We wonder if May 20, 1990 will not ordain the verb "to die" as the only form of freedom in Romania?*

– MARIANA BRANDL-GHERGA, *Timișoara*, "20 mai – Legalizarea unei duble trădări" (May 20th – Legalizing a Double Betrayal), May 10, 1990.

After Ceaușescu's execution, not one second was wasted in redefining Romania's national identity. Three days before that historic Christmas day, a new provisional government had already been established, led by the FSN – a party made up overwhelmingly by former members of PCR that emerged directly from the anti-communist Revolution, presenting itself as a populist political option, prioritizing the aspirations of a people who sentenced authoritarian socialism to its death.[143] But the Revolution was not just about political succession. It was also a reckoning with memory. As the FSN consolidated its power, the post-socialist struggle over what to remember and what to forget exposed the new leadership's lingering want for power. In the years immediately following the Revolution, the FSN weaponized forgetting to obscure its complicity in socialist-era repression while perpetrating and reinforcing the same mechanisms of violence authored by the PCR. By evading responsibility for their past crimes, Romania's self-appointed leaders turned amnesia into a political strategy. Against this state-sanctioned forgetting, remembrance emerged as an act of defiance by those who felt that the Revolution did not, in fact, end on December 25th, 1989. Because the violence of the past had woven itself so deeply in the fabric of Romanian society, it could not be erased or easily manipulated by official narratives. Remembering violence was meant to keep the Revolution alive and hold the post-socialist state accountable for promises

[143] Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989,* 191.

left unfulfilled; its martyrs a constant reminder that the future had been paid for in blood and could not be wasted.

In 1990, Ovidiu Costici was a fourth-year high school student at Ion Vidu National College of Art. He wrote the following poem, published in the *Renașterea Bănățeană* issue from April 12th:

Long live the parents	*Trăiască părinții*
Who fought.	*Care au luptat.*
They are like saints,	*Ei sunt ca și sfinții,*
They defended us.	*Ei ne-au apărat.*
So that we can know liberty;	*Să știm ce-i libertatea;*
So that we can know righteousness.	*Să știm ce e dreptatea.*
The sacrifice they made as brave heroes –	*Jertfa lor de bravi eroi –*
We will keep it holy within us.	*Să o ținem sfînta-n noi.*[144]

His writing gels intimately with the spiritual momentum of the Revolution, framing it as an act of parental sacrifice for future generations. Like the wish expressed in Octavian Fărcășanu and Bogdan Chiru's protest sign,[145] or Gheorghe Secheșan's internal dilemma pushing him to fight for his children's futures,[146] Romanians grasped at the democratic values they longed for their children after over forty years of repressive rule. What came next was reckoning with the 1,033[147] lives lost in the process. Costici's poem urges people to remember the "holy" sacrifice that produced Romania's "heroes" – people, both known and unidentifiable, who became instruments of the violence used to free the nation from misery. His choice to specifically honor the martyred parents parallels the killing of Ceaușescu the Patriarch, survived by his failed image as a loving father of socialist Romania and omitted entirely from

[144] "Dialog despre poezie," *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 77, April 12, 1990, 3.
[145] See discussion on the "Our children will be free" protest sign from Chapter 2.
[146] See Secheșan's description the pressure he felt to join the revolutionary struggle in order to secure a future for his children from Chapter 2.
[147] Holly Cartner, *Since the Revolution: Human Rights in Romania*, (New York: Helsinki Watch, March 1991), 1.

this poem. Ceaușescu was not a parent who made a sacrifice; rather, he was the parent sacrificed by his own circle – a loss celebrated by his children, many of whom were left to mourn their real parents. This poem uses the Revolution to deconstruct the socialist family tree characteristic of international socialist regimes defining an entire people as abstract children of a regime, funneling power back to the private, traditional family structures preceding socialism. But more than that, it urges its readers to remember those who died in the Revolution, to keep them close as they move forward in their daily lives, framing Romania's path towards a better future as a moral imperative.

The betrayal of this sacrifice was a great source of disillusionment for post-socialist society. These sacrifices were meant to purify Romania, ushering in a new political order that broke completely from the past before 1989. The desire to view the past as an entirely different country was hard to resist, and the FSN actively sought to define the newly democratic, anti-communist Romania as such.[148] Their motivations to do so, however, were drawn from a desire to absolve themselves of any responsibility for the terror preceding them, presenting themselves as a force of renewal while preserving much of the structure and personnel of the previous regime, repackaged under the guise of democracy. Many of the people who came to power after the Revolution had played significant roles in upholding the operations of the Romanian Communist Party, the most notable of whom was the president of the FSN, Ion Iliescu – a former member of Ceaușescu's Central Committee. Several former communists were even proud of their past, and unwilling to be held accountable.[149] Vladimir Tismăneanu, a renowned historian of Romanian communism, refers to their presence in the post-socialist political power structure as the myth of decommunization, in which the same political elites managed to slip back into power without ever facing consequences for their actions.[150] The FSN's self-awareness in this aspect drove them to expend a lot of energy erasing its ties to the old regime to protect its revolutionary legitimacy by maintaining a tight

[148] Marius Stan and Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Coming to Terms with the Communist Past: Democracy and Memory in Romania," in *Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five,* ed. Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 26.
[149] Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation,* 137.
[150] Ibid., 138-140.

hold on what could and could not be remembered in Romania. In this way, the FSN presented itself as a body capable of providing 'salvation' for the ailing Romanian people, with Iliescu as its harbinger.

Salvation is a central theme in Vladimir Tismăneanu's work. In the immediate post-1989 atmosphere, people collectively began to feel the cathartic high that came from the Revolution crumbling uncomfortably into a sense of fatigue.[151] The new political situation, although welcome, was unfamiliar and people began to grapple with a personal emptiness left by the dissolution of a regime so intimately involved with daily life. Tismăneanu referenced a "sense of loss," claiming that "even if they hated their cage [communism], it offered the advantage of stability and predictability."[152] The new regime felt unpredictable, democracy was uncharted territory. Uncertainty over how democracies functioned fed into political anxiety, and even this anxiety itself was questioned as an element inherent to the looseness of a democratic system.[153] With this, the conditions for growing political myths pertaining to national salvation had been met: a magnetic pull to imagine and confirm for oneself a reality where their interests are fully met.[154] People longed for a path of least resistance, where they could be guided by some figure or body into a bright and abundant future having laid the misfortunes of the past to rest. But, as Tismăneanu cleverly pointed out, "Democracies are not prepared to provide fantasies of ultimate regeneration."[155]

Iliescu believed that he could fulfil the political mythology borne of the early 1990s, but consolidating his power proved to be more complex than anticipated. When Ceaușescu was executed, he took credit for the decision, asserting that it prevented greater bloodshed by slowing the violence that contaminated the entire country.[156] While this helped legitimize him at the time, Iliescu's shaky hold on

[151] Ibid., 14.
[152] Ibid., 30.
[153] Viorel Marineasa, "Comunismul proteic," *Timișoara*, no. 39, April 19, 1990, 1.
[154] Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation*, 9.
[155] Ibid., 48.
[156] Marina Rotaru, "The Image of King Mihai in Post-1989 Romanian Society: The Survival of Communist Ideology," *Word and Text, A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* vol 2, iss. 1 (June 2012): 163, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=188030.

power was clear even in the first few months of his interim Presidency, demonstrated particularly in the way he refused to allow King Mihai I, Romania's former monarch, to return to the country. During the forty years in which King Mihai lived in exile, the regime ensured that his image was either tarnished as a sympathizer of the bourgeois[157] or completely erased from consciousness. By 1990, when he wished to make his first return since his abdication, not many Romanians were aware of who he was or the circumstances of his exile.[158] But to Iliescu, King Mihai was a living reminder that Romania's political order could have taken a different path.[159] The ire that the general population regarded the communist regime with encouraged some outrage for his forced abdication, and his return was likely to garner support for the reinstatement of monarchical rule. In barring his entry to Romania, Iliescu sought to manipulate national memory by shackling King Mihai to a past in which his image and power was already absent.

In a letter to Ion Cepoi,[160] a Romanian-American political advocate who had an established relationship with King Mihai's family, Princess Margareta wrote elatedly about her father's role in helping Romanians come to terms with the new regime. She reported that several Romanians had come to visit their home abroad as if on a "pilgrimage," arriving with an overwhelming need to know and confide in King Mihai. If they could not come in person, people sent flowers, wrote letters, and called their home.

[157] Rotaru, "The Image of King Mihai in Post-1989 Romanian Society," 159.
[158] Ibid., 155.
[159] Ibid., 163.
[160] Ion Cepoi is best known for his leadership of the "Viitorul Român" Cultural Aid Society based in Los Angeles. He and his wife, Stela, advocated for Romania-U.S. relations, particularly in campaigning for Romanian ascension to NATO.

She concluded, "In view of the present situation in the country, he appears as an element of stability and hope."[161] While these people represented a minority in Romania, her letter serves as evidence that King Mihai's budding popularity could jeopardize Iliescu's position, as he imagined. His extraordinary caution guided his decision to ensure that King Mihai's visa would be refused (Fig. 3.1), implementing decree-law no. 10, which claimed that the stateless residing abroad would be considered foreign citizens, leaving any official approval of his entry to the Romanian State.[162] In barring his entry to Romania, Iliescu sought to sever the thread between Romania's pre-socialist past and its post-socialist future, ensuring that the memory of the Revolution remained under their exclusive domain.

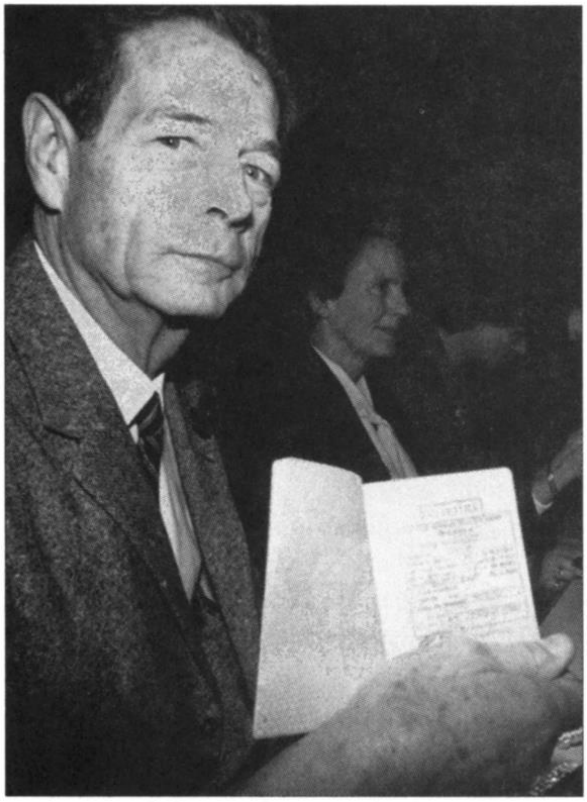

Figure 3.1: King Mihai pictured with his rejected visa. McPherson, "A Balkan Comedy," 52.

Lucian-Vasile Szabo commented on this decision made by the FSN in the *Timişoara* periodicals, in the first installment of his "Pessimistic Letters" series that would appear in several more issues. Refusing King Mihai's entry raised a red flag about the new regime, and he cautioned against the danger of "moving towards a different kind of communism" after its old familiar form had succumbed. When referencing a new kind of communism, he was referring more to the dictatorial character of the previous regime than the ideological foundations of communism. He believed that the FSN was overstepping in harnessing their power to prevent King Mihai's visit, especially recalling their forgotten promise that a referendum would be held for the people to choose their own form of government, which could have

[161] Margareta, letter to Ion Cepoi, August 15, 1990, 183FIO1, f. 20-22, BNaR.
[162] Rotaru, "The Image of King Mihai in Post-1989 Romanian Society," 166.

exposed monarchical rule as popular preference.[163] In the same newspaper issue, poet and journalist Ioan Crăciun wrote his own critical piece on the situation, condemning the decision to bar entry to a man who had not been able to visit his own country for forty-three years, and who was intent on seeing the graves of his family members and participating in the upcoming Easter service.[164]

Cracks began to form upon the new veneer of democracy the FSN set up for post-socialist Romania. Even though Ceaușescu's regime had come crumbling down dramatically, punctuated by his execution, one could not shake the feeling that the Revolution had been little more than a spectacle – dressing the old regime in new clothes and giving it a new name while parading its same essence. Much of the change was focused on image and presentation rather than addressing the root problems that would be required to truly classify the events of December 1989 as revolutionary. László Tőkés described at the end of his autobiography how the FSN's decision to invite famous dissidents, including himself, to join its council revealed the new regime's complacency. Rather than engaging with their perspectives on the country's problems, the FSN used them as decorative statements to further legitimize its rule. He wrote, "the Front seemed to be saying to the world…Romania is set on a good path."[165] In reality, meaningful transformation was not in the regime's interest.

The true extent of the new regime's political betrayal was somewhat masked by symbolic victories as people embraced newfound freedoms, supplementing an illusion of progress in the aftermath of the liminal, cathartic Revolution. Religious freedom, in particular, emerged as a popular form of post-socialist comfort. In the Helsinki Watch Report from 1991 on human rights in Romania, Holly Cartner wrote that "The packed churches on Sunday mornings and the posters announcing evangelical revival services that were to be seen throughout Romania are but two signs that real progress has been made."[166]

[163] Lucian-Vasile Szabo, "SCRISORI PESIMISTE (I)," *Timișoara*, no. 38, April 19, 1990, 1.
[164] Ioan Crăciun, "Despre unele magarii ‚democratice'," *Timișoara*, no. 38, April 19, 1990, 3.
[165] Tőkés with Porter, *With God, for the People*, 197.
[166] Cartner, *Since the Revolution*, 57.

Despite her open-ended language, this is the only instant in the report where the author is confidently optimistic about the new political situation.

Of course, increased religious activity was met with excitement by many Romanian people. *Renașterea Bănățeană*'s April 14th issue celebrated the first free, post-socialist Easter. In big, bold letters accompanied with a graphic, the front page declared, "Christ is risen! Truly he is risen!" Journalist Lia Lucia Epure shared her thoughts about the occasion, calling on the people of Timișoara to do something special reflecting the beauty of its people and the occasion. She evoked the sounds of the tolling bells, and the candles and flowers that were reminiscent of the childhood of a shared generation who knew a pre-socialist Romania, rejoicing in the knowledge that one no longer had to whisper "Christ is risen" or trap this communal holiday within their homes. In her words, "We are free…to no longer hide our colorful hands, stained by the dye used for eggs."[167]

The front page also announced that *Televiziunea Română Liberă* (the Free Romanian Television) would broadcast the Easter service live at the Metropolitan Cathedral, as well as part of the Holy Liturgy on Easter Day for the entire nation. Choosing this Cathedral as a site of national coverage to celebrate the first free Easter cemented it as a symbolic space for post-Revolution Timișoara. The newspaper's editors acknowledged the gesture, calling it a sign of appreciation for the "first martyr town of Romania" and the contribution of Timișoara natives to the beginning and end of the Romanian Revolution.[168] But in terms of authenticity, this short, televised instance of commemoration exposed the rift between the official state narrative and the efforts made by the people to remember and retell the Revolution.

In the next newspaper issue, which came out on April 18th, writer Radu Ciobotea commented on the purely symbolic nature of the televised service, and how it interacted with the experience of locals still in mourning. He described the atmosphere of the service, with spotlights shining all too brightly,

[167] Lia Lucia Epure, "ÎNAINTE DE MAREA BUCURIE!", *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 79, April 14, 1990, 1.
[168] Front page, *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 79, April 14, 1990, 1.

television cars surrounding it and armed forces watching onwards, indifferently. To him, it felt exploitative and distinctly unholy. He interpreted the televised service in two ways: First, as a spectacle that only arrived in Timișoara after the height of the suffering had ended, focused on presenting itself beautifully through moving images of the present day. The second, he claimed, was "the truth of the rebirth of our dead"[169] – an untouchable thing that could not be paraded, displayed, or shined onto by spotlights, characterized by an empathy unique to the people who were on the streets during the Revolution. He wrote that those who were present that night "officiated a reliving of the incredible, they bled the blood of the victims of the Revolution, and they left, with the dignity of silence and tears, from the night."[170] In the morning, they sat by their graves, and he ends his piece by critiquing the "sensationalists," who stood on the outside of this realm of understanding. His account reveals how the media manipulated the memory of the Revolution to give much-wanted significance to the lives lost to it in line with the new regime's goals, consolidating its revolutionary legitimacy. At the same time, Ciobotea shows how the people who could fully empathize with the revolutionary struggle made a space for themselves to express and experience their mourning in a meaningful way.

While the state sought to direct the memory of the Revolution through more performative acts of commemoration, the people's more personal, quiet forms of mourning resisted this top-down narrative. This can be demonstrated when analyzing the role that memorial projects played in the 1990s. *Asociația Memorialul Revoluției* (AMR, the Revolution Memorial Association) was founded in 1990 in Timișoara to protect the memory of the Revolution and promote scholarship on it.[171] One of the first projects they completed was the Memorial Complex of the Heroes of the Revolution, at the entrance of Timișoara's Heroes' Cemetery (Fig. 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5).

[169] Radu Ciobotea, "BINECUVÎNTEAZĂ DOAMNE, TIMIȘOARA," *Renașterea Bănățeană*, no. 80, April 18, 1990, 1.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Matthew Signer, "The Funeral Rites of the Martyrs," *Memorialul Revoluției 16-22 Decembrie 1989,* no. 2 (2024): 25.

Figure 3.2: The black, pyramid-shaped gravestones for the heroes of the Revolution in the Memorial Complex. Abstract and plain, they take up a lot of space on a relatively small plot, reminding onlookers that the gravestones are purely symbolic and no bodies could truly be buried here. Photo by author.

Figure 3.3: Plant growing near one of the gravestones, likely planted by friends or family. The memorial invites personal and long-lasting contributions to keep peoples' memories alive. Photo by author.

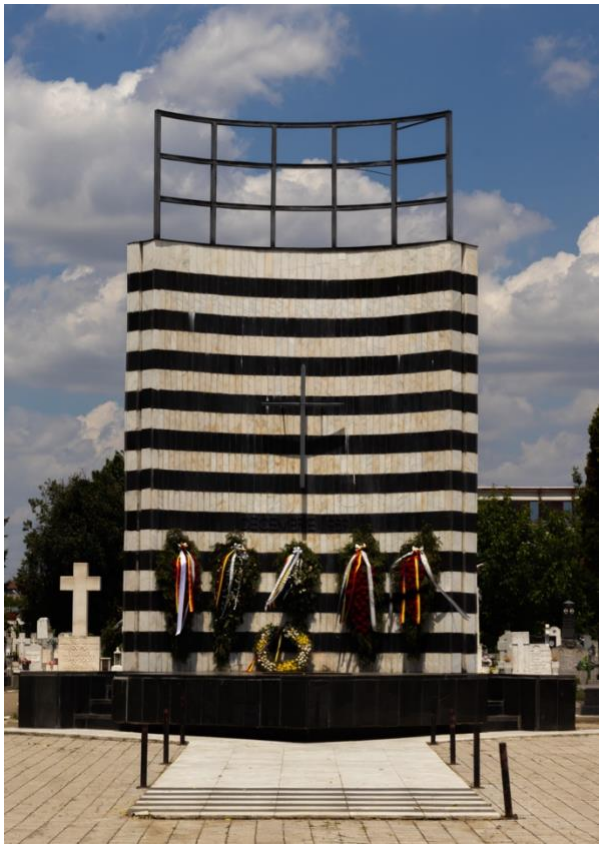

Figure 3.4: The black-and-white structure accompanying the grave memorial for the heroes at the Memorial Complex, adorned with a simple cross. The eternal flame burns in the center of the platform before it. Photo by author.

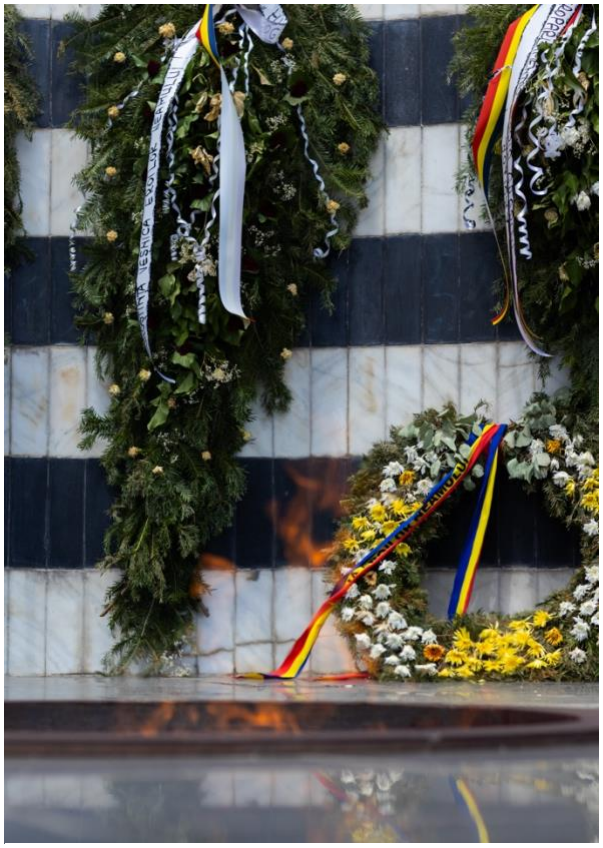

Figure 3.5: The eternal flame – the focus of the black-and-white structure in Figure 3.4. It symbolizes undying recognition for the sacrifice Timișoara's martyrs made during the Revolution. Photo by author.

While this memorial serves both as a commemorative piece and resting place for Timișoara's heroes at a cemetery, there are no graves or bodies buried within it.[172] Recovering bodies and burying them properly was especially difficult when it came to those who lost their lives during the Revolution. Anybody who was able to recover bodies during the heightened periods of violence in December 1989 buried them in the Heroes' Cemetery as quickly and surreptitiously as they could, lest they were pulled into the violence themselves. Many victims remained missing or unidentifiable.[173] These gravestones, none of which are directly representative of a proper grave, are meant to bring the victims of the Revolution together under one form, in one symbolic space. Traian Orban, the president of the AMR at the time, claimed in a 2004 interview that these victims "were together, they died together, we honor them together."[174]

To commemorate Timișoara's heroes, black pyramid-shaped tombstones were placed in grids to the right of the entrance (Fig. 3.2), with plots of grass next to them inviting families and friends to plant flowers and trees (Fig. 3.3). The interactive component of the memorial speaks to the way it exists as both a symbol for the state and as a site for personal memory formation. Most people's memories of the Revolution form during individual, day-to-day interactions with the people and space that surrounds them.[175] This makes them fluid, as well as difficult to manipulate on a larger scale. The more iconographic parts of the Memorial Complex seem to be part of the broader narrative that fit with the new regime's commemoration efforts: namely, commemorating the Revolution as the end of communism in Romania. Accompanying the gravestones is the eternal flame (Fig. 3.5), set against a tall and curved black-and-white backdrop ornated with a simple Christian cross (Fig. 3.4). The Christian symbolism in

[172] Signer, "The Funeral Rites of the Martyrs," 29-30.
[173] On December 18-19, 1989, authorities secretly transported 43 bodies of those killed in Timișoara to Bucharest, where they were cremated in order to cover up the scale of the violent repression. For an in-depth analysis of this, see Marius Rotaru, "The mask of the red death: The evil politics of cremation in Romania in December 1989," *Mortality*, vol. 15, iss. 1 (March 2010): 1-17, https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270903537716.
[174] Traian Orban quoted in Signer, "The Funeral Rites of the Martyrs," 30.
[175] Craig Young and Duncan Light, "Multiple and contested geographies of memory: Remembering the 1989 Romanian 'revolution'," in *Memories, Place, and Identity: Commemoration and Remembrance of War and Conflict,* ed. Danielle Drozdzewski, Sarah De Nardi, and Emma Waterton (London: Routledge, 2016), PDF p. 10, https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/23759/1/Multiple%20and%20contested%20geographies%20of%20memory.pdf.

the memorial recalls the significance of religious expression as resisting atheistic communism. Thus, the memorial served a dual purpose: for the state, it solidified the Revolution as a founding myth of the new regime; for the people, it created a sacred space where they could mourn without state interference.[176]

This tension between state and personal memory also shaped how martyrdom was understood in the aftermath of the Revolution. The state's claim to legitimacy rested on a narrative of sacrifice, framing the Revolution as a violent struggle against communism that justified the emergence of a completely new regime. This narrative hinged on the Revolution's death toll, which was central to the image of the FSN as a savior. Despite no viable proof of it, media channels claimed that 40,000 to 60,000 people were massacred in Timișoara by Ceaușescu's security forces – an extremely inflated number, accompanied by footage of dead bodies that were later revealed, by a French journalist, to be the bodies of 64 people who had died prior to the Revolution, exhumed from the Paupers' Cemetery. When the real numbers were revealed through official investigations, they suggested that the massacre was not as severe as initially reported, undermining the narrative of monumental sacrifice that the new regime was built on while fueling domestic suspicions that the Revolution was not an organic uprising, but more of a coup d'etat. The manipulated death toll that served as the legal foundation for Ceaușescu's hasty execution while elevating the new regime was critical to growing distrust in post-socialist society.[177]

However, in her analysis of this event, political theorist Jolan Bogdan rejects the notion that this was simply a manipulation tactic, suggesting instead that the exhumation and display of these bodies is a form of commemoration: not for the victims of the Revolution, but for the victims of the massacre that took place "during the course of the mundane, normalized brutalities of everyday life under the Ceaușescu regime."[178] She continued, "Perhaps the revolution itself was an act of mourning for all of those bodies, accumulated under Ceaușescu, who met their end under brutal and secretive circumstances, who could not

[176] Ibid.
[177] Bogdan, *Performative Contradicton and the Romanian Revolution*, 47-50.
[178] Ibid., 59.

be adequately mourned and who, like the ghost of King Hamlet, kept returning to demand justice, disconcerting everyone who saw them and throwing the nation into chaos."[179] It was even more powerful for her to imagine that these bodies had seemingly come back from the dead to join the people of the Revolution, photographed as evidence of their participation.[180] Bogdan views this situation as a form of art revealing the truth about the suffering that characterized the previous regime.[181]

Bogdan's analysis highlights importantly that trauma extends before 1989, and the broader legacy of suffering under communism must also be commemorated. In Chapter 1, I discussed how Ioana Brătianu remembered her own father, who died while imprisoned at Sighet Penitentiary. In the 1990s, she was an active political figure campaigning for political change in Romania's transition to democracy. In 1993, she wrote a piece for the newspaper, *Dilema*, titled "National moment of collectedness," where she discussed exactly how and why the dead must be kept close to the hearts of people navigating this post-socialist society. She imagined how, "In the 'Paupers' Cemetery,'[182] where the earth is sanctified by the blood of those buried, is where I would see a tall wooden cross upon which only the following would be written: 'THEY ARE WATCHING: the country, history, the border, democracy!'" For her, these victims are sacred and moral mediums: Christianity itself lives through the witnesses who refuse to forget the people dearest to them, and in this article, she insists that Romania is a country with luck because it is a country with religion.[183] Belief in an afterlife, where loved ones are set to watch how the future will unfold, is meant to hold the broader post-socialist society accountable through shame that would come with disappointing them and reorchestrating the conditions that caused their suffering. The revolution not only had to be remembered, but it had to be continued.

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[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Bogdan's conclusion stems from the famous Picasso quote, "Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth." See page 46 of *Performative Contradicton and the Romanian Revolution*.
[182] When Brătianu writes about the Paupers' Cemetery, she is referring to the one in Sighet, where political prisoners who perished under the socialist regime are buried. The Paupers' Cemetery in Timișoara, mentioned previously, was historically used as a final resting place for individuals who could not afford private burials: the impoverished and the unclaimed diseased.
[183] Ioana Illeana Brătianu, "Moment național de reculegere," *Dilema*, June 11-17, 1993, 403FIB102, f. 3, BNaR.

In 2019, the two co-authors of *Candelă împotriva timpului,* Vasile Bogdan and Titus Suciu, ended the introduction to their temporally reflective book by claiming that "The Revolution continues. As long as abuses exist, vigilance is mandatory, when lawlessness appears, REVOLUTION is the only modality through which to reinstate a STATE OF NORMALCY!"[184] This call to action thirty years from the fall of the socialist regime spoils the perhaps naïve hope that swift change had come with Ceaușescu's execution. But even by the time Brătianu published this article, disillusionment with the post-socialist era had comfortably set in. Like Bogdan and Suciu, her piece was a reaction to growing resentment against new political realities brought on by the new political order. The truth is that even as early as 1990, growing disillusionment threatened to harden into resentment and direct confrontation as the FSN's leadership confirmed, over and over, that the hopes generated by the Revolution had been compromised from the start.

The Proclamation from Timișoara, published on March 11th 1990, grew out of this atmosphere of quiet betrayal as a pivotal moment of political hope. George Șerban was the man responsible for it – a renowned journalist and a quick-thinker, he was integral to the movement surrounding the Revolution,[185] and many consider him to embody "the spirit of Timișoara."[186] The Proclamation was a direct response to the anti-democratic actions taken by the FSN, determined to give language to the Revolution's ideals and encourage those in charge of the new political system to salvage the purity of its original hopes:

> On December 21, in Piața Operei, over a hundred thousand voices chanted: "We are ready to die!" A series of events that occurred in Romania, especially after January 28, 1990, contradict the ideals of the Revolution from Timișoara. These ideals were not even brought to the attention of the Romanian public opinion by the central mass media, except partially and confusedly. In such conditions, we, the

[184] Suciu and Bogdan, *Candelă împotriva timpului*, 11.
[185] Lucian-Vasile Szabo, "Nu se intimida și nu-i era frică de nimic," introduction to *Panică la Cotroceni,* ed. Gino Rado, by George Șerban (Timișoara: Editura Partoș, 2010), 5-9.
[186] Ibid., 11.

> direct participants in all the events between December 16 and 22, 1989, find ourselves forced to explain to the entire nation what the people of Timişoara started the Revolution for, what they fought for and what many sacrificed their lives for, what we are still determined to fight at any cost and against anyone for, until complete victory.[187]

The above introduction emotionally sets up the thirteen points of the Proclamation, the most galvanizing of which was the Eighth Point. It called for lustration – a term meaning "purification through sacrifice,"[188] used in several post-socialist East European countries to discuss the purging of former communist elements and prevent them from taking up new positions of power.[189] In the Proclamation, the Eighth Point directly calls for the banning of former members of the communist apparatus and the Securitate from campaigning for political positions for the next three legislative cycles, including a request not to allow former communist activists to run for presidency. This was not only a call for accountability but also an acknowledgment that true democracy could not emerge while the same people responsible for past oppression remained in charge.

Upon reading the Proclamation, Dr. Doru Nach wrote a piece in the *Timișoara* periodicals expressing his support for it. He warned the FSN that the Romanian people were getting ready to judge them; that they are close to sharing the same fate as the Ceaușescus. He wrote, "To the communist gentlemen from the FSN, do you really not realize that the people have condemned communism to death in Romania and that they are no longer afraid of you?"[190] He was one of many voices. People felt agitated by the blatant realization that the Revolution was bearing rotten fruits, spurred to action by the

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[187] Proclamația de la Timișoara, March 11, 1990, *Enciclopedia României*, accessed March 18, 2025, https://enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Proclama%C5%A3ia_de_la_Timi%C5%9Foara.
[188] Iskra Baeva, "How Post-1989 Bulgarian Society Perceives the Role of the State Security Service," in *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe,* ed. Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, and Stefan Troebst (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 368.
[189] The term "lustration" was first applied politically in Czechoslovakia with the 1991 Lustration Law, setting a precedent for several other East European nations to follow foot. For a broader overview, see Baeva, "How Post-1989 Bulgarian Society Perceives the Role of the State Security Service," 368-369.
[190] Doru Nach, "AȘA ESTE!", *Timișoara*, no. 38, April 19, 1990, 1.

Proclamation. At the time the Proclamation was written, Iliescu still held a provisional role as the president of the new government, with elections scheduled for May 20th as an official and public opportunity to consolidate his power. Thus, Iliescu's precarious political position fell in the hands of the people, still adjusting to democracy but understanding its mechanism as a dialogue between them and the FSN. The Proclamation told Iliescu that if his party did not make changes in accordance with the ideals of the Revolution, he would be powerless come May.

Protests emerged in support of the Proclamation, weaponizing it to place pressure on the new leadership as its makers intended it to be used. One of the most dedicated protests supporting it came from a group of eight people, led by artist Mihai Olteanu, who made a journey on-foot from Timișoara to Bucharest.[191] On their journey, they chanted phrases including, "Timișoara – Bucharest, Iliescu, you have it coming," "Iliescu for us is Ceaușescu Two," and "Do not be afraid, Iliescu will fall" – some of which make direct references to popular slogans during the Revolution itself, signaling the continuity of the struggle that began in Timișoara, in December 1989. They arrived in Bucharest on April 22nd 1990, where they then joined a protest of ten thousand people in Bucharest, who went out in solidarity with the Proclamation. In Piața Romana and Piața Universității, they knelt and prayed *Tatăl Nostru*. Even after the group from Timișoara left, plans were made to hold a vigil in Bucharest following in their footsteps, continuing the Revolution on the same axis it was triggered.[192]

Their arrival in Bucharest marked the beginning of what was dubbed *Golaniada*:[193] a seven-week-long protest against Iliescu and the FSN, joined by actors, students, academics, artists, activists, and former political prisoners. Despite being entirely peaceful in nature, it presented a challenge to the new

[191] Lucian-Vasile Szabo, "The Proclamation of Timisoara: from Reform Proposals to the Civic and Media Confrontation," *Cross-Cultural Management Journal* vol 17, iss. 2 (2015): 89-90, https://seaopenresearch.eu/Journals/articles/CMJ2015_I2_1.pdf.
[192] Florian Mihalcea, "SINGURA SOLUȚIE, ÎNCĂ O REVOLUȚIE," *Timișoara,* no. 40, April 24, 1990, 3.
[193] The word is derived from "golan," which translates to "hoodlum" – an insult that Iliescu had publicly used for people to discredit the demonstrations in Bucharest.

regime by publicly undermining its popularity for weeks on end.[194] Piața Universității was declared the first zone free of neo-communism, critiquing the present reality in which the people in power desecrated the Revolution by failing to create real change. Iliescu believed that consolidating his power through the May 20th election would end the protest.[195] This was clear from the speech he gave after the FSN's sweeping electoral victory, condemning the protest and the people perpetrating it as anti-democratic troublemakers.[196] The protest, however, did not end; it intensified. People claimed that the election was manipulated, and to a certain extent, it was: it is well-documented that the FSN used its majority in the interim national assembly to prevent any kind of lustration from being implemented in electoral law before the election.[197] Yet, emboldened by his political victory, Iliescu was ready to forcibly quell unrest in the capital with the most violent confirmation that the FSN's rule a continuation of the repressive past, hostile to revolutionary memory.[198]

On June 13th 1990, Piața Universității became the stage upon which Romania's post-socialist Ministry of the Interior (police) and Ministry of National Defense (military) would fight for dominance while simultaneously legitimizing Iliescu's regime. Iliescu authorized Mihai Chițac, the head of the Interior, to remove protesters from Piața Universității. In response, he called in a disproportionate amount of police troops and encouraged them to use force on the protesters – agitating the public as riots erupted. The Army had to step in to re-establish order that night, violently suppressing the protest not unlike they had done during the initial stages of the Revolution itself. Despite achieving a state of relative equilibrium that night, Iliescu made the unexpected decision to call civilian miners to Bucharest to physically defend his regime and electoral victory. This call, John Gledhill claims, "actively dissolved the rule of law in the

[194] John Gledhill, "Three Days in Bucharest: Making Sense of Romania's Transitional Violence, 20 Years On," *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 63, no. 9 (November 2011): 1646-7, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41302187.
[195] Grigore Pop-Eleches, "Romania Twenty Years after 1989: The Bizarre Echoes of a Contested Revolution," in *Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 90.
[196] Maria-Manuela Stoicescu, "Humor, Language, and Protests in Romania," (M.A. Thesis, National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2018), 16.
[197] Pop-Eleches, "Romania Twenty Years after 1989," 90.
[198] Mihaela Iliescu, "Mineriada din iunie 1990," 78.

capital."[199] On June 14th, over ten thousand miners arrived – the total number being close to twenty thousand by the time the repression was over on the 15th. Seven people were killed and 46 injured, while 1,030 were detained, with 165 officially arrested.[200] The new regime martyred more Romanian people, barely half a year from the Revolution.

Iliescu's decision to unleash state-sanctioned, extralegal violence against civilians was not a desperate response. It was a deliberate strategy to consolidate his power by demonstrating the state's monopoly on violence. His actions were met with intense dismay by those who were able to gain access to accurate reporting on what is now dubbed *Mineriada*,[201] given that several local, pro-FSN newspapers focused on tailoring a narrative avoiding mentions of the violence imposed by the miners and absolving Iliescu by condemning the 'anti-democratic threat' that the protest posed.[202] George Șerban, in an open letter to prime minister Petre Roman, painfully described the discrepancy between the actions of 13-15 June in Bucharest and the positive path Roman seemed to pe pursuing, in line with the Proclamation. He criticized his plans for a government made up of the new, younger generation, suggesting that the young people who did not already flee Ceaușescu's regime have just found a new reason to move to a country where clubs and pickaxes are not violently sovereign over their bodies. He concluded his letter, "The 'Timișoara' Society is ready to give the government and its program credit, having retrieved many of the Proclamation's ideals for itself. Unfortunately, however, under the above-mentioned conditions, not even God would guarantee a chance of success."[203]

Despite the brutality of the *Mineriadă*, Iliescu's consolidation of power rested on the same foundational myth that had justified their ascent to power: that Ceaușescu was the true enemy and the source of all political ailments. This became clear in the trials that followed in the early 1990s,

[199] Gledhill "Three Days in Bucharest," 1640.
[200] Iliescu, "Mineriada din iunie 1990," 79.
[201] The word "Mineriada" comes from "miner," combined with the "-iada" suffix, meant to ironically invoke Ceaușescu-era events that used similar endings to make them feel more grandiose.
[202] Gledhill "Three Days in Bucharest," 1665.
[203] George Șerban, "Scrisoare deschisă domnului Petre Roman," in *Panică la Cotroceni*, 34.

representative of a kind of legal and institutional forgetting that reinforced a sanitized narrative of the Army's role in the Revolution. In their analysis of the legal proceedings pertaining to the Revolution and transition, Raluca Grosescu and Raluca Ursachi claimed that the Ceaușescu's quick and imprecise trial "missed the opportunity to clarify the chain of command of the repression, sweeping under the rug the responsibility of the upper Party hierarchy, as well as that of the Army and the Securitate."[204] The fact that Ceaușescu's trial hinged excessively on the false claim of genocide having occurred served doubly to demonize the previous regime and elevate the image of Iliescu and the FSN, who encouraged his quick execution after declaring a national state of emergency.[205] The Ceaușescus' trial was the prelude to the legal proceedings that would follow, as half-hearted attempts to hold people accountable peppered the first half of the 1990s.

Other than Ceaușescu, six other Party officials were convicted for "genocide."[206] As a legal tactic, these kinds of accusations and convictions were criticized in Holly Cartner's Helsinki Watch Report. The severity of these charges overshadowed other crimes from the socialist era that needed to be investigated, but these convictions prevented further action from being taken. Cartner mentioned how the Helsinki Watch had contacted Iliescu with concerns about the delays with the trial of Iulian Vlad, the former head of the Securitate, who was only charged for complicity to Ceaușescu's genocide, leaving much to be desired in terms of accountability for the terror he oversaw in the years before the Revolution.[207]

Accountability for the crimes committed during the Revolution was similarly slippery. In attempting to prosecute the Army for the violence it perpetrated during the Revolution, the courts instead exonerated its members, opting to place much of the blame for the casualties on the Ministry of the Interior. Between 1991 and 1994, trials focused on members of the Political Executive Committee as well as Party members, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Defense. Despite investigations by the

[204] Grosescu and Ursachi, "The Romanian Revolution in Court," 266.
[205] Ibid., 271.
[206] Ibid., 263.
[207] Cartner, *Since the Revolution*, 11.

Military Prosecutor offices showing that the Army was responsible for a much greater number of dead and wounded people than the Ministry of the Interior, they were prosecuted at much lower numbers: While the Interior Ministry was responsible for 63 dead and 46 wounded people and the Defense Ministry was respectively responsible for 333 dead and 648 wounded, 92 officers from the Interior were prosecuted while only 19 officers from the Defense Ministry were prosecuted, alongside 26 conscripts.[208]

Of the Army officers who were prosecuted, none were convicted. These trials thus procured an image that would scapegoat the bodies making up the Ministry of the Interior – the Securitate demonized as effectively as Ceaușescu had been. Grosescu and Ursachi suggested that these proceedings managed to "sweep [the Army's] repressive role under the rug" largely due to the "'act of salvation'…the Army had done in fraternizing with the people."[209] Sidonia Grama made a similar observation when analyzing the testimonies people had given in 1990 about the violent repression from the Revolution, explaining that they "systematically avoid the identification of those military forces involved."[210] People often resorted to calling them '*ăia*' (them), a term in Romanian that invites dissociation and clouds solid identification. The Army's fraternization with the people was a memory that people held onto so dearly that convicting them threatened to shatter the joyous relief brought on by this memory immediately after the Revolution.[211] The Army's decision to switch allegiances during the Revolution earned it a place in the national memory as a liberating force, even as it continued the state's tradition of repression – sometimes, in plain sight. By embedding this tendency to forget into its legal framework, the state thus worked towards legitimizing violence as part of its post-socialist order.

The lack of legal accountability for the Army's role in the Revolution was not just a failure of justice; it was a symptom of the violence that would persist as a political tool in post-socialist Romania. It confirmed that violence could continue to secure power without consequence, as it did during the

[208] Grosescu and Ursachi, "The Romanian Revolution in Court," 278.
[209] Ibid
[210] Nedianu, "The Catharsis of Going out into the Street," 263.
[211] Ibid.

Mineriadă. By shielding structures of repression from meaningful reform, the new regime chose forgetting over reckoning with the past, prioritizing the illusion of political stability over justice. However, as Tismăneanu and Stan noted, "No viable democracy can afford to accept amnesia, forgetting, and the truncation of memory."[212] Amnesia surrounding a contested and violent past invites a dangerous kind of nostalgia – one that distorts memory and undermines political progress.

Anca Pușca's work on post-socialist disillusionment in Romania reflects this tension. She notes that nostalgia for communist times remains difficult to escape because socialism was more than just a political system – it was a way of life that intruded upon both public and private spheres for decades. This tendency to forget, fortified by the actions of the new regime in the 1990s, deepened the disorientation of the transition period.[213] Iliescu's FSN understood the political utility of traumatic memory, deciding what was worth remembering and forgetting according to the new regime's political goals. The most potent form of resistance, then, is an authentic act of remembering: one that resists state manipulation while restoring agency to the people who fought and died for the Revolution's ideals. To refuse forgetting is not just to honor the past. It is to reclaim the political power that the Revolution sought to create.

[212] Stan and Tismăneanu, "Coming to Terms with the Communist Past," 24.
[213] Pușca, *Revolution, Democratic Transition and Disillusionment*, 19-20.

Epilogue: Revoluția Continuă

Epilogue: The Revolution Continues

Să-ți vină să plîngi atunci cînd te gîndești la oameni, să iubești totul, într-un sentiment de supremă responsabilitate, să te apuce o învăluitoare melancolie cînd te gîndești și la lacrimile ce încă nu le-ai vărsat pentru oameni, iată ce înseamnă a te salva prin iubire, singurul izvor al speranțelor.	*To feel like crying when you think of people, to love everything, in a feeling of supreme responsibility, to be seized by an enveloping melancholy when you think of the tears you have not yet shed for people, this is what it means to save yourself through love, the only source of hope.*

– EMIL CIORAN, *Pe culmile disperării* (On the Heights of Despair), 1934

In 2019, Romania celebrated "Thirty Years of Freedom," marking three decades since the collapse of socialist authoritarianism. Appropriately, this anniversary coincided with an election year, inviting reflection on the meaning and responsibilities of democracy itself. In this spirit, the British Council and the British Embassy in Romania organized a conference to encourage thoughtful reflection on Romania's democratic journey. My high school history and literature teachers recruited me and three classmates to create a multimedia project commemorating this milestone, ultimately presented at the *Carol I Biblioteca Centrală Universitară* on December 18th. The result was a short, documentary-style oral history film that emphasized not only the historical importance of our right to vote, but also the continued urgency of maintaining democratic freedoms in the present.[214] While we tried to stay optimistic, one thing was clear from our on-the-ground research: there was still a lot of work that needed to be done in Romania to confidently say that the hopes of the Revolution were fulfilled, thirty years onwards.

In many ways, my Thirty Years of Freedom project inspired this thesis, borne from repeated attempts to process the disillusionment that I grew up surrounded by. Titus Suciu and Vasile Bogdan's

[214] "Our 30 Years So Far," YouTube video, 5:00, uploaded by Cambridge School of Bucharest (CSBucharest), December 20, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdJc_WuW6BY&t=179s.

Candelă împotriva timpului, published the same year, became an essential companion to my research, featuring interviews with sixty-three people recorded immediately after the Revolution, as well as twenty and thirty years later. In one of these interviews from 2009, Petru Ilieșu, whom I cited in Chapter 1, recognized the clear gains made in freedom of expression since 1989, yet he also acknowledged that many revolutionary aspirations had gone unrealized. By 2019, his reflections had turned to resigned frustration, stating, "out of a dark age we have passed into a gray age."[215] Similarly, Adrian Kali, whose experiences I featured in Chapter 2, expressed concern in 2009 over the Revolution's diminishing presence in public discourse. Kali had been shot during the violence on December 17th and spent the remainder of that month hospitalized. In 2019, recalling the moment he felt Romanian ingratitude for his sacrifice, he described how, upon leaving the hospital on December 28th, 1989, a woman carrying large grocery bags aggressively pushed past him to exit the bus first. Rather than confronting her, Kali simply thought to himself: "Do you see whom you've been shot for?"[216] Thirty years after the Revolution, he instinctively recalled a slight inconvenience that carried deep implications for processing his post-socialist experience.

While researching at *Biblioteca Națională a României*, I came across a newspaper article in *Dilema* from 1993 by Ioana Illeana Brătianu, titled "The savagery of man by man," in which she discussed at-length the expression of hate in post-revolutionary politics:

> Hate could be a driving force in politics, but not here, where it is an expression of hopelessness. Absurd and negative. We have become a sad people who complain, and complaining in turn becomes a reason for hatred. We have so little time for so much to do that I see no point in spending our lives tormented by hatred, a feeling so exalted today. This irrational state, which I fear is also very Romanian, hurts me. I cannot say that I do not understand it, nor can I say that I judge it, I would not allow myself to do so. But the world should finally understand that this

[215] Suciu and Bogdan, *Candelă împotriva timpului*, 35.
[216] Ibid.

> unquenchable hatred becomes the hatred of each person towards themselves, towards the country, actually; a huge, insurmountable obstacle in the transformation of Romania into a democratic state, a normal country.[217]

Brătianu identifies hatred as fundamentally linked to hopelessness, rooted in the disappointment that is essential not just to post-socialist disillusionment, but being Romanian in 1993. She cautions against allowing memories to turn bitter, lest they stagnate progress. Yet, my thesis argues precisely the opposite: that memory, despite the despair it can evoke, remains an essential force for resisting political hopelessness.[218] Through remembrance, individuals and communities are able to reclaim their agency in confronting the injustices of the past and present that were out of their control. Memory, by virtue of its existence, demands accountability and inspires continued action towards realizing the ideals that brought Romanians to the streets in December 1989.

In this regard, efforts to publicly confront the past have provided critical opportunities for Romania to move forward. In 2006, the president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, launched the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship of Romania and asked Vladimir Tismăneanu to chair its official investigation into the crimes of the socialist regime. In an article co-written by Tismăneanu and Marius Stan, they claimed that this was "the first time" in which the state "rejected outright the practices of institutionalized forgetfulness,"[219] reviving conversation on Romania's contentious past. The final report produced an incredibly comprehensive study on the PCR's mechanism of repression, culminating in Băsescu's public denunciation of the regime as "criminal and illegitimate."[220]

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[217] Ioana Illeana Brătianu, "Salbaticirea omului de catre om," *Dilema*, June 25-July 1, 1993, 403FIB102, f. 2, BNaR.
[218] This Romanian insistence on memory remains an essential force for resisting political hopelessness. In this sense, it echoes the Greek concept of *Aletheia*, often translated as "truth" but more literally meaning "unforgetting" or "unconcealing." The term stems from *Lethe*, one of the rivers of Hades, whose waters causes souls to forget. To remember, then, is to resist erasure; to insist on *Aletheia* is to reject the epistemic violence of forgetting and assert a revolutionary claim to the truth.
[219] Stan and Tismăneanu, "Coming to Terms with the Communist Past," 25.
[220] Traian Băsescu quoted in Stan and Tismăneanu, "Coming to Terms with the Communist Past," 25.

While the state took official steps to recognize and condemn Romania's communist past, ordinary Romanians have continually honored the Revolution and its martyrs through acts of everyday remembrance. The country's urban landscape remains deeply imprinted by the Revolution, as many spaces pivotal in 1989 still serve as symbolic gathering sites for post-socialist dissent. Recent anti-corruption protests, particularly those sparked by the aftermath of the Colectiv nightclub fire in 2015, naturally converged upon locations historically associated with resistance against authoritarianism.[221] Similarly, ongoing pro-European protests in 2024 and 2025, sparked by electoral tensions and a resurgence of right-wing nationalism threatening renewed Russian influence, have actively invoked the Revolution's martyrs as symbols of democratic vigilance.[222]

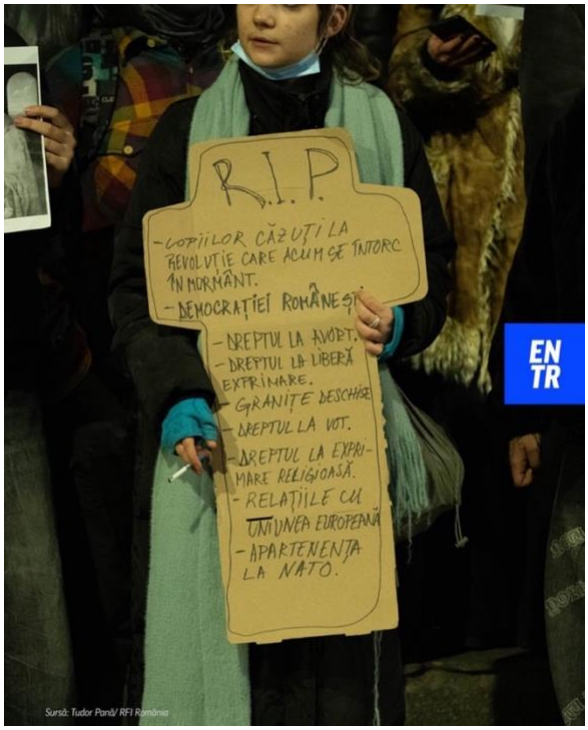

Figure E.1: Young person pictured with a cardboard, cross-shaped sign at a protest in Bucharest on November 25, 2024, protesting presidential election results that pushed pro-Russian candidate Călin Georgescu to the front. Alongside the martyrs of the Revolution, the sign is grieving the potential loss of the right to abortion, the right to free expression, open borders, the right to vote, the right to religious expression, relations with the European Union, and participation in NATO. Photograph by Tudor Pană.

[221] Remus Creţan & Thomas O'Brien, "Corruption and conflagration: (in)justice and protest in Bucharest after the Colectiv fire," *Urban Geography* vol. 41, no. 3 (2020): 373, https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2019.1664252.
[222] David Leonard Bularca, "Sute de tineri au protestat în Piața Universității împotriva lui Călin Georgescu: „Vă paște revoluția!" / Manifestanții își dau întâlnire și serile următoare: „Aici și mâine seară, să nu plecăm afară" – VIDEO," *HotNews.ro*, November 25, 2024, https://hotnews.ro/un-indemn-la-protest-impotriva-lui-calin-georgescu-pentru-luni-seara-la-universitate-circula-pe-whatsapp-romania-e-amenintata-de-o-dictatura-legionara-1845134.

Figure E.1 depicts a young protester holding a cross-shaped cardboard sign resembling a gravestone, bearing the message: “R.I.P. to the children who fell at the Revolution, who are now rolling in their graves.” Such imagery underscores how revolutionary martyrdom continues to shape the moral discourse of protest, bridging historical memory with contemporary political struggle.

The frequent resurgence of the memory of the Revolution and the enduring trauma of the socialist regime inspired me to investigate violence not merely as a historical event, but as a mechanism continually shaping Romania's political identity. Understanding violence in this way reveals how profoundly memory defines both individual lives and collective futures. While official condemnation is essential, true accountability and progress depends on the willingness of ordinary people to keep difficult memories alive, confronting disillusionment through committed acts of remembrance. At the end of Kali’s 2019 interview, he said: “Look, after 30 years, I’m no longer young, but I still have hopes that the Revolution will ultimately be respected and studied. Paraphrasing Martin Luther King: *I have a dream,* I’d like to add that I wish for my dream to become reality…If not, the Revolution will live until every last one of us becomes a memory.”[223] In researching and writing this thesis, I have sought precisely to fulfill Kali’s hope: to respect and study the Revolution in a way that ensured the stories of people like him are told, and to honor the memory of those who transformed suffering into the possibility of freedom.

[223] Suciu and Bogdan, *Candelă împotriva timpului*, 54.

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Clempus, Nicolae. 2023. Interview by Alexandra Minovici. March 27. St. Mary Romanian Orthodox Church. Dacula, Georgia. See Appendix A for transcript.

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Appendix A: Oral History Interview with Nicolae Clempus

Oral History Interview of Nicolae Clempus (NC) , Alexandra Minovici interviewer (AM), March 27, 2023. St. Mary Romanian Orthodox Church, Dacula, Georgia.

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AM: So, just to test the audio, can you please tell me, uh, your full name, your birthplace, uh, and the day you were born - your birthday?

NC: Okay, my name is Nicolae Clempus, I was born in Sighet, in Maramureș Romania, on December 16th 1976.

AM: Perfect, it's all working correctly!

NC: Good.

AM: So, let's begin with the interview.

NC: Yes.

AM: Um, so, as you know I grew up in Romania, but I don't know so much about Maramures. So, I really wanted to hear about your experience growing up there in the 70s and the 80s, if you can tell me some more about that.

NC: Sure. Um, you know I, uh, I grew up in a very, very traditional and very beautiful place, nature-wise. I was born in the mountains of northern Romania at the border between Romania and Ukraine, and also, there are two nice rivers that are going to that village: Tisa and Vișeu. So, when I grew up as a child and I was enjoying all the, you know, the people can enjoy the mountains and agriculture and having a small farm with the family, I didn't appreciate it that much. I was helping with, you know, my parents' work in the farm and doing all kinds of stuff, going to the local school... But when I moved from there, then I started to appreciate it more. And now, if I look back, of course, I think I had a very good and a very nice, you know, childhood, with a lot of hands-on experience; very open in nature, playing and discovering everything that you could discover in a nature environment. So, that place become very important for me. It was, before - I didn't realize it that much - it was, before very important, but now it's even more important. So, I was born in Sighet, which is the closest city. It's a small, but very nice, you know, very

beautiful, small, mountain city, and I grew up on a village site in Valea Vișeului, which is, like I said, in a corner of Romania close to the Ukrainian border. I went to school in Valea Vișeului, until I finished 8th grade, and I went to high school, I basically moved from Valea Vișeului to Bucharest. So I was 14 when I moved away from home. It was a big change, so, um.

I was in - one of the important things I grew up with in the village was my grandfather. He was a poet, he was writing poems. He had one of his collections of poems already edited in Bucharest, and he was also a very good and very attached chantor in the church, so he was going and chanting in the church with the choir, with the priest, so he was very attached to his faith and to the church. I grew up with him bringing me to the church and getting me involved in the religious activities of our community. That's how he inspired me, the idea of becoming a priest or the idea of following this path. I was not sure yet, you know, I was young; I said, I don't know if I wanna go that path, if I wanna be... You know, I'm not gonna have fun, I'm not gonna have enough to live my life, or maybe not enough money because it's not... I mean this is something, it's a mission, it's not a job basically. But eventually, I end up there. His words and his inspiration guided me. I said I'm gonna go to the seminary, which is a high school, I'm gonna start studying and then I'll see. If I like it and if something that I feel, you know, the calling, then I'm gonna continue. If not, I'm gonna switch - you know, you can switch to other, you can be... you have a lot of knowledge about history when you study theological high school in Romania. You have a lot of history: history of Romania, history of Byzantium, history of Romanian church, a lot of things. So, you have a basic: you can switch to a History major, you can switch to other stuff.

Eventually, after I finished high school, I went to college and so on and so forth. Maybe you want to get to that too...

AM: Yeah, sure [laughing].

NC: [laughing] So this question was only regarding how I grew up in the 70s and, you know, early 80s. Yeah. So I end up in the high school, basically in 1990. That was immediately after the Romanian, you know, communist collapse, so I was still home when the 89th revolution, or whatever it was, in December started. It actually started on my birthday, on December 16th, and immediately after that I went to Bucharest to school. So it was a big change for everybody: not only for me switching from northern Romania to Bucharest, but also for the people from Bucharest switching from Communism to democracy. So a lot of changes... I grew up with these changes in the capital of Romania, being exposed to everything there. You know, changes were good, but also a lot of challenges, cause people were not used to the new democracy. They were not behaving like... they didn't know how to approach it. So it was a whole process.

AM: Okay. Thank you. Um, so do you remember anything about your experience living under the communist, uh, dictatorship versus, like, living in a democratic country? Like, how do those experiences contrast for you?

NC: Oh, yeah, I have a lot that I can talk a lot of things about that.

AM: Please, please go ahead!

NC: Because in my 8th grade, when communism collapsed and everything changed, but before that I may still remember lots of stuff in my middle school and even my elementary. So, um, one important thing in

Maramureș was in the village where I grew up is that the communist party didn't started... they had this, they were confiscating land from people or confiscating even animals and, you know, farms, and transforming everything into the government farms, like, it was called CAP. The Communist Party... whatever that means, I don't know. Anyway, in our village it was not that profitable, so they didn't do that. They usually did that when, you know, you had a lot of land and it's very productive land and you can do a lot of agriculture, then they confiscated people's lands. But we had - all our lands were on the mountains, so it was not that productive; I mean, you had animals that are, you know, you have pasture and that's not... So, what they did was, they implemented - they collected animals products. So, from sheep, they collected the wool. So you had, I don't know how many sheep, they said 10% or 15% goes to the state. From cows, they collected milk, and um, so on and so forth. They even collect the home-made brandy, like palincă. So they said if you; they had this, this centralized unit that you go there and you basically do the moonshine. You boil and things, so there was a guy there, if you do that 10 liters of moonshine for yourself, one or two remains for the government. Anyway... that was what was really surprising for me, that you basically need to give it away your own thing.

Second was, uh, what shocked me when I was a child that you couldn't butcher your own calf, or your own, um, animal in the farm, okay? The only animal you could have used for your own consumption was the pig. But you couldn't do it with cows, or you know calves. You couldn't do it with any other animal, so. It was called recensământ, which means it was like a census of all the animals you have in your house and you were not supposed to do anything with those animals only with the approval of the party. But the party was not approving for you to do it, so my father, when we had a lot of, uh, animals in the farm and he wanted to, uh, sacrifice some of them for our consumption, cause you didn't have money or you know you didn't have stores - meat in the stores - you couldn't buy it. And you had it in your farm and you couldn't use it! So, he was sending us away from home; he said, go and play with the neighbors or go... and then he was doing that, and he was burying all the remains from the animal after they took the meat and everything, he was burying everything in the backyard. We had like a grave of, graves of all the animals that he used because so he would not be caught. Your own animal, I mean your own product. And that was what shocked me when I was growing up. We knew - I only have one brother, so both us were playing around and it was like... we don't go to the graveyard, graveyard of all the dead animals, you know, the stuff he buried there. And then, I remember eventually one day we had like an inspection from the party, communist party, they came to us and they found in our attic, they found the skin, or how do you say, the skin of a cow. Usually people were saving those skins and they were going to special processing centers and they were making, you know, people were doing coats; very nice coats. So my father was saving those so we can do it under the, you know, this was all underground. It was not open. And they arrested my father because of that, the skins of the cow that they found in the attic. So, he was arrested, and then the best part was that you could solve some things by knowing people. So he knew some guy, that other guy knew another guy, so he was like let him go, it's fine. So the party was working to a certain extent, but then you have people; you have “cunoștințe.”

AM: Mhm...

NC: [laughing].

AM: [laughing].

NC: And you saw the things, you know, by talking to one.. and so my father was... But then, from time to time Ceaușescu, which was the main, you know, president and dictator, from time to time he was giving these pardons. Like, if people were arrested for this proper reason in the whole country, they're all pardoned from that; everybody can go home from the jail. So these resets and pardons were sometimes released and, I remember my father caught one of those and he was released, and nothing was... he was not charged with anything. So, these things as a child kind of, I grew up with those but I didn't consider them to be something normal. I felt that something is very, way off. And you didn't have access, so imagine now, a world there's no internet, you cannot go anywhere to search something. There is, uh, you have a phone and you have a TV, but on TV there is nothing else except the communist propaganda, and not all the time - only a few hours a day - you have journal, you have news, and then you have a little bit of desene animate, which is cartoons - all those, also communist, usually from Russia, you know from USSR. So, they, people were living in that bubble; I was living in that bubble, and that was life before.

Then, the most, another thing that shocked me was, you know, people were very afraid. So, you were afraid by your own neighbor. You're afraid that somebody is gonna rat you out even though he's your friend. Nobody was sharing what they believe or what they think. So, you were afraid to talk to somebody about, against the system because people can, you know, write a letter and they're gonna come and pick you up. So, in the 80s, towards the end, things become very strange. Everybody that was talking against the system kind of... was in danger to be arrested. And arrest means, towards the end, arrest means all our elites in Romanian university professors and intellectuals, they were all arrested and then sent to work in a very physical labor: canal, was building, and of course jails were packed with people, intellectuals. So, um, this fear that you cannot talk to anybody, and as a child, sometimes you just talk, you don't care. You don't realize the danger. So, I remember my father telling us, you know, be careful who you talk to, what you say to people from what's happening in our farm and house. We're very scared to talk, even. And it's very hard, cause talking and communicating is a very social, you know, having social skills it's important to talk sincerely, not pretend. Everything was messed up. You need to pretend to everywhere and to everybody. And then, what shocked me when the Communists fell, was how people switched to one, you know, not, being afraid to talk to how people were relieved when they started to talk about Ceaușescu and everything he did. And from one extreme that you are not to talk anything, you end up in another extreme that they were inventing all kinds of stories, that he was... demagogue, and he - what kind of houses he had, I mean, a lot of that was a fiction, it was a mythology already. And people were so excited, and everything - oh, we're free, we're free, we're free-! And then, okay, what are we gonna do now? It's like that moment, you know, we are free but what are we gonna do now? We don't have any infrastructure of like democratic countries, we don't have any economy, it's all centralized, everything was going to the Party, everything... I mean, it was a disaster. Currency fell, economy fell... it was... And then, we had these fights for power. You know, people that were part of the old system came in power; they grabbed the power. And other people that wanted to were real democratic ideas and how to move forward, they stayed behind, and they were beaten by the, you know... anyway. It was disaster, and for us as children or, you know, young - the teenager, started to be a teenager - we just enjoyed whatever the society brought, you know, like everything was open. you had power all the time, you had, you could go to the movies. Everything that was coming from western Europe, or America, or those American movies and step by step, step by step, was lining up to that. But, on the other hand, I was, that time I entered the seminary, and I was living in a dorm, and the dorm was very strict. It was like an army. We had very strict schedule: wake up, you have inspections in your room, you go to eat, you go to prayer, and

then you go to classes, and then so on and so forth, so. It was like five years of army, in the seminary, so... but that basically is, that's what gave me structure, so I can later on, you know, I later on and right now also appreciate that structure that I received because a lot of young people in that period of time in society was very unpredictable; a lot of things happening. A lot of young people ended up, you know, bad. Not having any values, any moral values, or any social... I don't know, ethical, ethic values, so they end up bad. But, in my case, I, you know. Cause I went to this very, uh, structured institution, gave me structure, and I think it was important for me for the future. So those two worlds that I crossed over: from one to another.

AM: Okay, thank you so much!

NC: Sure.

[Break to plug microphone into wall outlet]

AM: Okay. So, um, we were talking about how, essentially, Bucharest - or, not Bucharest, but like Romania - after Communism, was in a state of disarray, and all that. So, I know that lots of families felt disillusioned with Romania after communism fell, even though that's what they wanted. But, because, like you said, the infrastructure wasn't there for democracy, it was hard to have a life that you wanted to live there, so people started to move, and people are still moving from Romania today; sort of still disillusioned with the power of the government, and the people in power today. So, I was wondering if you related to this sentiment when you decided to move to Georgia - uh, to the U.S.

NC: Yes, a little bit of introduction. People were so excited that they're free, at having free of speech, free of you know all the liberties that they received, they were so excited and happy that at first moments, maybe first year, they forgot that, you know, everything - also financially, and you know - they need to live with this. The problems appeared when everything, like economy, collapsed, and people started not to have money. So, from going from in the middle of communist times, Ceaușescu, people had money, but they didn't have anything to buy with money cause everything was rationed. They end up with having everything they want on the shelves; people were, all the big companies came and opened stores, but people didn't have enough money. But they were so little, and you know, the companies and the businesses paid little to people because everybody was struggling. So, the people started to be shocked that, how are we gonna buy these things that we see? So when they realized that, initially, we needed to have in everywhere you go, except Eastern Europe, you needed to have a visa - travelling visa. And Western Europe was not giving people visas that easy, because it was a big wave. Not only Romania... Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungaria... all the Eastern European countries that basically were relieved from the communism, they all wanted to go to a better life. So, it was very hard to get it, you know, very long lines to receive a visa. People rejected. So, that's how the immigration started, you know, illegal immigration started. A lot of people risking their lives, going through trains in attics of the train wagons. They were travelling incognito and things like that, so a lot of them died. So, first wave was illegal immigration; people just running illegally, finding a way to go to Western Europe. If some of them had a longer vision just to get in the United States, those were only the people that were, you know, very strong to do that. I'm talking about the first, immediately after communism collapsed.

Later on, things changed, of course. People realized that, you know, we had some agreements with the western countries, European countries, to bring people to work, and all kinds of stuff, so things

evolved. And you could have gone, you know, go to Europe more legally this time. And when that happened, a lot of people started to go.

First, the first thing very important, in communist times - but not only communist - pre-communist times, Romanians are very hard-working people, okay? We all know that. Europe knows that already now. And States, you know, in the States we all know that. So there, they're working very hard, they have very good work ethic. So when they went to Western Europe to work, everybody was starting to appreciate this. They saw, you know, all the companies in the West of Europe - I'm talking about mainly agriculture: farms, big farms that, you know, were using people for labor. They realized that whatever they can do with Romanians they cannot do with other people, or, not only Romanians maybe; maybe also let's say Eastern Europeans. But Romanians were, you know, probably comparing to Hungary or other small countries, Romanians were a bigger country. So, they started to be appreciated, so the people started to bring each other. I mean, family, let's go and work and do some money. That's what created a big exodus, a big exit of Romanians towards Western Europe. Some of them came in the United States. So, the United States was too far away, it was too much... a lot of things unknown what's going on in the States. Everybody was dreaming about States, only what they saw in the movies, like, it's a country... it's heaven on earth. So, they didn't know the reality of States. When people started to come here, realized that in United States you need to work even harder than in Europe, and different work hours and things like that, so they realized it's not really that great. But still, it was another wave of people from Romania that came to States.

Now, coming to United States, the main break was visa also. And which is still now. So, you need to apply for a visa, you need to be approved. And because of the high demand for visas, they keep the visa problem on. Even though our neighbor country, like Hungaria, they don't have any more visas for United States. You can come to States to visit without any visas, but you can stay three months, whatever is the rule. Romanians, no, because we still have a high demand of American visas. So, it was very hard. It was like a dream come true for a lot of people to come here. So, it created also some professionals that came here to work, officially, some students that came to study, especially in the medical field. And then, it created also a little bit of illegal immigration through tourist visas, so people came just to visit, and then they didn't leave. They just stayed here.

If you're asking me, my, you know, path to States... for me was kind of simple, because I was not the one that make the decision to come here, even though I agreed to it. But, I married a doctor, a medical doctor. My wife did her medical school in Romania. She finished her school, I finished my college. I got the bachelor in Orthodox Pastoral Theology in arts, and she got the degree in, you know, being a medical doctor, so... In Romania, my last year of college, I became a chaplain. That means I was a priest in hospital. And I was taking care of the patients in the hospital by, you know, meeting with them, having also discussions, social things, praying... what a chaplain is doing in the hospital. My wife, who was also in the medical field, so we decided after we finish our colleges, and we started to work, we realized that it's very hard and tough. We, from our wedding, money - you know, in Romania, people give presents at the wedding like... they help the young couple to get started. So, from our wedding money, we bought ourselves a, I think it's called studio in English; in Romanian “garsonieră.” We bought a studio in Bucharest: that was the place we stayed. And I was, like I said, chaplain to hospital; she was doing her stage rotations for two different hospitals. But before my wife finished, before her finishing her college, she already had two brothers in United States that came here to study. There was this exam that you can

take. It's like residency U.S. exam in medical field, you can take that exam, and then you apply: it's a special exam for the foreign students, and you can apply for residency United States. So, her brothers did that. They basically took the exam. That time, you were not, you didn't have a chance to take it in Bucharest, but you could take it in Budapest. So they went, took the exams, they applied for different residency programs in States, and they were accepted. So her older brother came to [?] in New York, her other brother came also in a different hospital in New York, they did their residency. And then, the older brother moved here to Emory. So, he started to do Emory basic research in medical field at Woodruff Building, right there in main campus. So, um, when my wife finished school and I finished mine, he asked her, you know, you wanna come here? If you want to come here, I'm leaving - he was leaving the basic research, and he was going to clinical. He was going, you know, he wanted to become a doctor to work with patients, not research. He said, if you wanna come, I'm moving anyway to the hospital. You can come in my lab, with, you know, he had a lady that was a boss, and I can talk to her and if she agrees I can, you know, you can continue my research here. So that's how she, he talked to Kathy Greenling, I think her name was, and she came to work. I mean, she received a contract to work in, like, contract at home in Romania, she signed all the papers, sent it back, and when she came here she started to work immediately.

AM: Wow.

NC: Yeah, so it was big difference and big change if you compare this experience with the experience of people that were telling me in 80s, when they went to these camps in Yugoslavia, and they, the Americans were coming to those camps; political refugees were coming to these camps and they were picking up people who wants to work in United States. They looked at you if you're very well built, if you can do physical work, it was like they were selecting certain people to go to work in United States. And then, you know, people were all, it's like somebody is choosing you. You come, you don't, you do, you do, you don't. I mean, it's like, you're feeling if you're not selected, you feel terrible. Nobody wants you. Anyway, so comparing to that experience to the experience we had that we came officially, my wife signed a contract, she came, she started to work... Now, she came three months before me, and she came to very secure job, she rented an apartment, and then I finished all my stuff in Romania, you know, with my employment and everything, so I came with her here. When I came here with her, basically, I didn't have anything. So, I said, you know what, there are - everywhere, there are Romanians that needed a church or a community. Even if I'm not gonna be a priest for a certain period of time, I can still come to the church, get involved in the community, see what I can do, and then we go from there. So that's how we came. And then, you know, there's another story that I don't know what's the next question, but I can continue with my story.

AM: Yeah, yeah, yeah! Keep going.

NC: Okay. So, when I came, there was already another Romanian church here. Community. There was, they started it in 1993. We came in United States in 2001. I came on September the 5th 2001. So, um, that was like, six days before the 9/11 happened. Okay, so I came here, I was started to enjoy, you know, the first shock - different country, different style - and then, in 6 days, boom. And everything started to, you know... people started to panic; it was a big, big, big change. And, very surprising for me to see this kind happening. I was not used to this kind of thing. Anyway, I felt like it was a very important point in our lives. And then, there was another Romanian community - I went there first. I met the priest, people from

the church, and then I went there two times, two Sundays. And then the third Sunday, a group of Romanians came to me and they said, you know, we, we moved a little bit farther from that community, so this community was in Lilborn in the entrail, that area, and they said that we moved a little bit north because the city is progressing, the city is coming up, metro Atlanta, and people are running away from the traffic, all kind of stuff. So people are moving north and north and north to have quiet residence and things like that. So, a group of people moved from that church, further north. They also had some conflicts, of course, as always is happening all the time. Like, differences in opinion, ideas, anyway... So, um, they basically were not going to that church anymore. But they, when they moved, they got together at somebody's house, they sat at the table, and said let's start a new church. But they didn't do it the proper way. What they did was they got together, they said okay, we're gonna name the church St. Mary, we're gonna go to state of Georgia, we're gonna register this as a non-profit organization. They did everything, and then at the end, they were like, okay... well who's gonna be the priest of the church, cause there is no church without a priest in our faith. And, then, they went and they sent a message to the archdiocese and they said, you know, send us a priest. And, of course, here it's not that easy. It's not like, in Romania, you have priests everywhere. Here, no. So, they were waiting a little bit, and then one priest came, but they didn't work out with him; something was not, you know... they couldn't, he was asking for a salary, they didn't have money to give him because it's a beginning, you know, you don't... it was just a few families. So in this situation, these people waiting for priests for one year, not having anything, no activities, and everything was only on paper in state of Georgia, registered, I came. And they, somebody heard, oh there is a new priest that came from Romania. He is going to Saint Constantin and Helen Sundays, let's go and talk to him. So, they came, they talked to me, and they said well yeah, let's meet, and let's talk. Let's see what we can do. Now, initially there were eleven families; eleven families and they got together when I was, you know, when they moved, they got together, they put all a thousand dollars each - so they had eleven thousand dollars - they opened a bank account, and they put this money in a bank account for this mission. It's called mission when you start the church. So, um, after one year and a half, when they, when people saw that nothing's happening, and there was no activities, they didn't have a priest, only four of them kept the money in. The rest of them took the money out. They said, nothing's gonna happen, so I don't wanna keep my money there if nothing's happening, so I met with four families that were still dreaming [laughing]. And, with four thousand dollars in the bank. So, with those four families, I had a few meetings with my wife; we talked how we should proceed. I told them my vision, how I would like to see it. They agreed. So we went to the Greek metropolis of Atlanta, which is also Orthodox as we are, and I went to the metropolis and I asked for a meeting with him and I said, okay, we have a community - small - but we wanna start new community. There's potential. We have a lot of Romanians that moved here. Basically, going to a small, like parenthesis: In 1996, when Atlanta had Olympics here, that's when the, you know, the big wave of Romanian immigration came in here. So, at least three or four dancing ensembles came to dance, different events for Olympics. But they came here, a lot of them forgot to go back [laughing].

AM: [laughing] Yeah...

NC: So they stayed here. Then, all the Romanian delegation that came to the Olympics were big; a lot of people didn't wanna go back really. Even some of the people that competed in the Olympics didn't leave. Like, we have here Daniela Silivaș. She's a golden medalist in gymnastics; she lives in Roxwell. I mean, I don't know if she came with the Olympics - I think so - and she didn't leave. Anyway, so, the potential was big. We had a lot of people, not affiliated to any churches, to any communities, they were all spread

around. Nobody was taking care of any, organizing anything. This church was still doing it, struggling with different things, they were having a lot of priests coming and going, coming and going. So they changed like seven or eight priests in a very short period of time. So, the vision that we created was, I went to the metropolis, he said, you know what, I have our first Greek church in Atlanta area, was built in 1917; we still have that chapel: it's in the middle of a cemetery. You can go use it if you want it. But, it's far away, its in I-20 West, it's on southwest of Atlanta, it's... the neighborhood is not that good anymore, you know, I mean the neighborhood was... how can I express this... you know what I'm saying, I mean, it was very poor; a lot of poor people lived there, social houses and things like that. So, neighborhood was not what people expected, and also it's in the middle of a cemetery... you know how people feel about graves and death. And, the worst part is, the chapel doesn't have any power!

AM: Umm [laughing].

NC: [Laughing] Okay?

AM: Okay...

NC: So, you go there, you do everything at the candle light, you don't go there in the night - it's a cemetery, nobody wants to go there in the night. And, restrooms. The restrooms, if you don't have power, you don't have restrooms. The restrooms were at the office of the cemetery, that you need to go a lot, walk to the restrooms. Otherwise, you go to the woods. And that was a big challenge. But we stayed there for three years. We accepted the offer, we went there, and we; I told them I'm gonna serve this parish we're gonna organize, and for three years I don't want any salary. Well, I could afford that because my wife was having a good money being in, you know, research. Comparing to Romania, it was heaven, okay? So, we were used to have a little. And we didn't have any kids, of course, were only two of us. So I am... for three years I didn't take any salary from the church from our group. Now, for you to understand, in the United States, you don't receive any salaries, any financial compensations from government or from any government institution. The church is, you're free to express, you're free to practice your faith, your religion, whatever you are; you're free to congregate, to, you know, everything, you have all the freedoms. But financially, you need to organize yourself. Romanian church, which we belong like, you know, we have a hierarchy, so we belong to Romanian church through hierarchy, like symbolic. But they don't help you with any finances, so they have their own. We are independent financially, and we don't want anything to do with the finances of Romanian churches. For this reason, every parish, every church is self-governing, financially-wise. I mean, you raise your own money, you use that money, you have a budget, you use that money for community, for projects, for plans, things like that. So, um, that's why I said for three years we need to brace some money, pull something aside so we can plan ahead. And it was important, because we could, you know, make some money. Long story short, after three years staying in that chapel, we said it's time to move a little bit closer to the Romanian community which was starting in the entrail and up. So we moved, we rented another space from St. Patrick Catholic Church. It was a school, small school, and this building, they were renting us that building for our Sunday services. We stayed there another three years. But in the meantime, we were raising money. And then, towards the end of those three years, there was a guy, his name is Mihai Câmpeanu; he basically decided to donate this land. It was two acres of land. He decided to donate that land for the church. He was one of the founding members of the church. So, he called me, he said father let's go, I'm gonna show you where is going to be our future Romanian church. We came here, everything was woods. Everything was green. You couldn't

see anything. So he said it's gonna be right here! In my mind I was like.... I don't think so. But his vision kind of gave me hope, and then when we started to develop, we, you know, that's where we are right now!

So, he gave us two acres of land donation. With the money we had, we started to develop and started to build new, I mean, going through all the process, it's a long story: approving the plans, engineers, the whole schbang. I was managing all these things. Not only serving the altar and being the priest, I was also project manager [laughing], I was going... The way the church is led here, it's not only the priest. The priest has a parish counsel. Members of the parish counsel, they are basically executive board of the church, so they make decisions there with the priest what to do. The parish counsel members are elected by the general assembly of the church, so the whole members of the church, once a year, they get together and they elect ten or twelve parish counsel members. Those people are leading the church basically with the parish priest. But everybody was busy, so I got involved a little bit... I mean, I got involved the full thing. And, so we finished this church, and then we didn't have enough space for parking. So the community grew, people started to come a lot of Romanians... it was still a big wave of Romanians coming from Romania. Everything was changing all the time. You could see every Sunday new people. Every Sunday, new families coming from Romania, from different areas. Everything was so dynamic, We couldn't keep up with our book-keeping, like a list of members... So, it was very challenging. But it was also progressing. It was very good. Now, we didn't have enough parking; the next important step was how are we gonna do with the parking? Because, was only this parking. So, we then decided, we said well let's buy some land. The land was very expensive that time. I mean, this was before 2008 when, you know, when the collapse came, but before that, the land was very expensive, so this property right here on this side was six hundred thousand dollars; another one was five hundred thousand dollars, so we didn't have that money. But then, as we do in the church, we started to pray and look for solutions, so the guy who was selling that land where the social hall is right now; the 2008 crisis came, he almost lost his house, so he said in order to sell his house he's gonna sell us the land with the exact same amount he bought it. So, we paid for that land, 8 acres of land, we paid two hundred thousand dollars. We raised seventy thousand in two weeks from the church people, so now we have ten acres. And I can continue, but maybe we should go to next question, [laughing]. Cause this is a long story, like twenty years of history here, and all the details, you know, and it's... I mean, I can talk a lot about this. But maybe we should focus on what's your purpose here.

AM: Okay, then, is there anything that surprised you especially while building this Romanian community over the past few years?

NC: Oh, yeah, a lot of things surprised me [laughing]!

AM: Please, enlighten me [laughing]!

NC: Well, let's start with this. A lot of things I already knew. What I'm saying, a lot of things about our Romanian ways, okay? So I already knew that people are very suspicious. This we carry from communist times. People are very suspicious. It's very hard to gain their trust. I knew that, you know, it's very, very hard work to make people feel comfortable, to get involved in a community. We were so much; people were so afraid of communities that they didn't get involved back in Romania, that everybody was running from each other. So, we had, basically the church in Romania - church communities were not allowed to; they were only allowed to do the liturgical part, like the service, and after service everybody runs home. No social; nothing social. You're not allowed to do anything social, and people got used to that for forty-

five years, or fifty years, not doing it. Generations of people were not used to that, so people were coming for service or something and then go home. But, the most important part, I mean, service and worship is important, but when you plan stuff and when you talk stuff and when you do stuff, it's when we have a social hour afterwards, after the service worship. And when you basically start to plan. So first challenge was to get people to trust us, and to get involved. Then, another very strange thing with Romanians is that in Romania, we have churches, 13, 14, 12th century old churches. Buildings built in the old times by our, you know, history. Our people through the history. So, people were not that used to the idea that you need, if you wanna have something here as a community, a building, you need to contribute. You need to financially donate to the church. Everybody expected to have something, but they didn't wanna give. Because somehow, in some people's minds, it was: church has money, they have money... They have money from where? [Laughter] You know? Who's gonna give you that money? So convincing people, a lot of fundraisings, to build something. So the way we did it, only certain people can be motivated by, you know, by faith or by their belief. With Romanians I realized, uhhh, it's very hard to motivate them to put their, you know, hand in their pocket through the faith, through belief. So, let's motivate them socially, or, you know, culturally. Bringing people from Romania, that, you know, people that they, those times at the beginning, we didn't have so many TV stations and YouTubes, and people were still craving, still wanting to have some very good Romanian music; authentic Romanian music from different regions. Now they can go on YouTube and see; still it's not the same thing as live, but still at the beginning we were paying hard money to bring famous singers from Romania, folk singers, to have at our festivals. But we did that, and it was a big... twice a year, we had a spring festival, a fall festival, having Romanian food; people were very busy with their jobs, nobody had time to cook. Mititei, sarmale... So we did all this industry of fundraising through festivals and cultural events. And that was a success and still is. It's going for twenty years.

And then, of course, different other fundraisings; then we got involved the youth group in the church; we had a very strong youth presence and I organized the ladies, you know, ladies were very important for the community. So, if you ask me what surprised me the most, is how people can change and adapt from the prejudice that they had, or you know, the ideas that they grew up with. If you show them that it's, you know, there's another way, and if you want to be part of a community you can be part of a community by getting involved. I am very surprised by the main core of the church, of the community, and that group of people, how they evolved in this area, and how they right now are basically attracting other people. They are like engine that is always refreshing with new people, because we... Imagine, there are some people that are doing this for twenty years in this church, so we need new families, young families to come to join us. And it's a whole process.

But what happened eventually, at a certain point, the dynamic of immigration from Romania changed. People were started... they're not moving anymore here from Romania. The whole emigration wave from Romania basically ended. And, um, if we had newcomers, we had only people moving from different parts of the United States, from Canada, already on the continent, moving from north to south. That immigration is still happening a lot. People are coming to a more quiet life; I don't know, they're moving from big cities to the country sides, or to the metro area, so this kind of moving is still happening, but that's on a very lower level. Imagine there were times when, at the beginning, when we had a lot of young families, that were having a lot of kids, there were times that we had like 100 baptisms a year. Now, we are at fifteen or twenty. What that means is that our community is getting older, that older

families are not having kids anymore, the kids already grew up... The first child I baptized when I came here now is twenty years old.

AM: Wow [laughing]!

NC: Okay? So, um, that's how we evolved. But I'm still very surprised at how, at all this evolution, and how people can change and adapt; and very proud of how, you know, all we accomplished. Cause you couldn't accomplish this only if people changed their mentality or the way they contribute, the way they get involved, things like that. And if, it's very hard to convince them to get into both, and very easy for them to jump the boat, you know, when at the first shake. So, we had some people that, you know, basically are not involved anymore. And the idea is that somehow it's not that much related to the church or to the faith, and it's related to the culture; to the... some Romanians are like, you know what, I don't want to have anything to do with Romanians anymore. I'm just gonna go stay by myself; I'm having a community, but not a Romanian community. I wanna be in the American community. And they decided to raise their children not speaking Romanian, getting, you know, more and more effort to integrate into the American society... they have nothing to do with Romania. Those are negative sides of the... you know, if people decide to do that, basically they are - uh, this is an English word, "se-înstrainează" - they are becoming strangers to the Romanian community, but more friendly to American society. And in the future generations that they are raising, they don't realize it that they are basically going to be assimilated into American melting pot, and your Romanian roots are going to disappear eventually. I mean, you're gonna be maybe some of the future generation will know somewhere in the past there was Romanian, but I'm not anymore. Well, that's a risk we took when we came, right? We all took this risk. But some people are still want to be connect to both cultures, and make an effort, you know, to do that. Some people don't. But, we're free, right? [laughing]. Alright. Do you have another question?

AM: Yeah, we can go to one last question.

NC: Oh, last already? Okay, then I can talk more.

AM: Yeah, you can go ahead! But I'm curious if you've been back to Romania since you moved here to the U.S.

NC: Oh, definitely.

AM: And how do you feel about the country now that you've moved, like, just going back to visit instead of living there?

NC: Mhm. Okay, well. Let me put this in another perspective. When I was coming here, my parents were very disappointed, because we are only two boys, and I was going away for a lot... I mean, they were not used to that. So, I told them, I'm sorry I'm a priest, and I needed to lie, but maybe it was not a full lie. I told them, you know what, mama, I'm gonna go stay there three years, we're gonna see how it is, and then we're gonna come back. Maybe in my mind, I had that plan too. I was not 100% sure what's gonna happen. You never know. So, of course, we never go back. I mean, we never went back permanently. We went back to visit. So, we're going probably once in two years, we're going back to visit. Especially when kids are in vacation and in summertime. Um, it's... I don't know what to say. It's a mixed feeling when you go back, you know. My first, I mean, you're so glad and happy to see everything; you're enjoying every moment, you see everything different, through different eyes, because of the experience you lived here.

Of course, you also compare and you see things that are positive and negative. But, um, one of the biggest kind of, not disappointments, but like sadness is that when we go there, you know, my kids... When I go there, I feel like I'm going home. My kids, if they go there, they feel like they're going to visit and their home is here. Because they were born here. So, and then we go there and we are so sensitive to everything that's happening. We visit sites, and we are all absorbing everything, even though we already know a lot of stuff. But, my kids, they are just tourists. They go there, they look... ahh, nice, beautiful, take a picture! They don't have this meaningful connection to things. Now, we, as they grow up, like my older one that, she's gonna be twenty this year, so she's in college, now she of course she's maturing and she can understand different what's going on. But I'm talking about the, you know, this immediate, you know... my little kids, that uh, and when she was little, had the same attitude. They like to see their grandparents, they like to spend time with them, but comparing to how we absorb things culturally, they don't do that. That's one of the things.

On the other hand, we have, I mean, the country is very beautiful. You have a lot of things to see, a lot of things to experience, to... We started to discover more Romania from here, like we saw a lot of things all the time new things in Romania after we moved here. When we stayed there, we didn't have time to go and visit. Of course, we were young, but anyway. I think it's the same thing that you can apply this with all the Romanians that are living in Romania. Some of them never been to see Cimitirul Vesel, some of them never been to see Delta Dunării, or things like that, even though they live in Romania, but they are so busy with life that they don't have time to go. If they wanna go on a vacation, they go to Turkish, Bulgaria, to other shores - not Romanian, you know? But we, from here, when we go there, we absorb everything. We go to every Romanian site, so... One of the reasons that Romanian tourism kind of flourished at a certain point, to a certain extent, is that all the people from outside - Romanians - came to visit and they give it importance. Like, there was the Bigăr Waterfall. Okay? It's a simple waterfall that somebody discovered, made a nice picture of it, everybody saw it - oh, this is beautiful, we didn't see something like that! Then, all the Romanians: oh, we're gonna go to see Bigăr...Bigăr...!... that was there for I don't know how many years, okay? Nobody wanted, was interested in it. So, having all these social media and everything exploded, now I see very good things in Romania, like very... very, uh, like visiting prospectives, and we feel very nice when we go there. Like I said, we go often, I mean not that often, but still. And, uh, even though my wife's family, all of them are here, my family all of them are there. So, I'm glad, I'm very happy when I go to visit. We're gonna go this summer too. But there are a lot of challenges: plane tickets very expensive, life in Romania is very expensive. It's lined up to European standards, even though people don't make that much money. So, even for us, when we go from here, I mean... it's... Everything's... I mean, we go to stay at my parents', but still, if you wanna go to visit, if you wanna go and rent a motel, an inn, or something and you know, “pensiune” like we say, you need to have a lot of dough! Yes.

We try always to make our visits to Romania educational for the kids. To discover. Even though we, at here, home, my kids they all speak Romanian, write Romanian, and they know a little bit of Romanian history and geography. And when we go there, we just apply all our knowledge to the reality, so this time when we're gonna go, we're gonna go to Alba Iulia, and then we're gonna go to Cluj. We already have some cities that they need to see cause they didn't see them. Before, only in books. And, you know, we're trying to make it educational for them. And I hope they're gonna give this back to their future generation, kind of, I feel like is our duty and also our kind of responsibility to pass it on to them. And, there's nothing wrong with it, to be part of different, you know, two cultures. To be knowledgeable about

your past, your ancestry, and things like that. I think it's nothing wrong with that. I think you can learn a lot by basically recognizing your own roots, so you can apply for your future, you know, career, whatever you wanna do. Because we carry with us a lot of things that are coming from, you know, from the past. That's my opinion. That's what we're trying to do. Even though here, in this corner of Dacula, everybody that's coming here from our events and everything we do, they're like, “Oh, we feel here like in Romania!” Yeah, that's the idea. We create a small Romania here so people can feel like home, they can have access to and come here and feel comfortable that they're in their own skin, their own environment. On the other hand, we cannot substitute the real Romania that we have there, so we go there. We also have relationships with different people from Romania more and more now. On a charity level, we do a lot of charities and help a lot of people in orphanages in Romania, people with medical problems. We have, at the level of archdiocese we also have a charitable foundation that is helping like next Sunday one of the ladies is gonna come here to talk about that. Projects, specific projects in Romania that we sponsor, or people from there sponsoring building social buildings, social houses for people, struggle so. Also, I think Romania has a lot of things, good things happen in Romania, when people went outside they saw how real democratic societies working, and then they came back with some good ideas. Not only to invest and build houses and build infrastructure, but also changing a little bit of mentality. And that's... I see an evolution in that. Going through all these years, every time I go, I see a change in mentality. Now, recently I'm very impressed about everything, also the financial system, people start to use more credit cards, have, you know, you can... important thing to have it, then you can spend it everywhere. So that's kind of Romania lining up to the European Union standards, but also standards of the European Union are very lined up to standards of the United States, I mean, as a big capitalist power. So, I see good stuff happening. Of course, a long way to go to basically be a very high-developed country, but I don't know if we're ever gonna get there. Maybe we have our specific, own democracy, you know that’s [laughing], that's applied to Romanian style.

AM: So true!

NC: Yes, just to be optimistic.

AM: Mhm!

NC: And that's, that's pretty much it.

AM: Okay, perfect.

NC: Alright, it was a pleasure talking to you!

AM: Yeah, thank you so much. It was a pleasure!

NC: I am, uh... yeah, I can talk a lot...

AM: [laughing]

Appendix B: Oral History Interview with Costel Balint

Oral History Interview of Costel Balint (CB), Alexandra Minovici interviewer (AM), June 17, 2024. Revolution Memorial Association, Timișoara, Romania.

Excerpts from the Original Romanian Transcript

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AM: Totul e în regulă. Bine. Păi, numele, data nașterii, unde v-ați născut? Așa, introducere!

CB: 1953, s-a născut Costel Balint la București. Tata era militar. Înainte de a mă naște, a venit la Lugoj. Mama era lugojeană și la un bal, la Lugoj, lângă Timișoara, la un bal tata a văzut-o pe mama, tânăr locotenent, a luat-o, a plecat la București, unde a făcut academia, și am apărut eu ca un gând voluptiv în 1953, septembrie 20, pe zona Uranus, unde este acuma Casa Poporului. Ne-am plimbat până la zece ani, în vreo cinci orașe. Vaslui, Huși, Sibiu, Craiova, Sfântu Gheorghe. La Sibiu încep grădinița, un an de zile, grădiniță Germană. De acolo ne mutăm la Sfântu Gheorghe, unde tata a fost maior, într-o unitate militară. Chiar acolo am început practic să merg la școală din unitatea militară. Am stat până la zece ani, când ne-am venit în orașul mamei mele, Lugoj. După zece ani ne-am plimbat în vreo cinci orașe, ghilimele.

La Lugoj a fost o copilărie extraordinară. Am început cu liceul Hasdeu, unde am făcut clasă la 1-8. O copilărie extraordinară. Lugoj este ceva aparte, o capitală cu durarea, aș spune, mai mare decât Timișoara și iubesc Timișoara. Deci o copilărie extraordinară. Am început să fac și sport. Am un frate care făcea gimnastică. Eu am fost întâi, prima dată am făcut fotbal, iar antrenorul meu a plecat în Canada exact în anul când Nadia a luat nota 10. Din partea comitetului de organizare a fost și antrenorul meu de fotbal, cu soția care era antrenor de gimnastică. Era un lucru extraordinar. Plecând antrenorului de fotbal afară, m-au văzut cei de la atletism și am rămas cu atletismul. Făcut liceul Trăian Vuia la Făget, secția umană și am absolvit liceul. Am vrut să dau la istorie. M-am răzgândit. Am vrut să mă fac parașutist, tata n-a vrut. Și am făcut educație fizică și sport, la Timișoara am început. Am fost 60 de candidați și erau șapte locuri. Am și intrat. Am intrat, am terminat. Am iubit foarte mult meseria asta de dascăl de sport. Nu știu ce, dar era un farmec pentru mine. Am făcut o repartiție guvernamentală în Timiș. La Len, într-o comună germană, Lenauheim, o comună extraordinară. Puteam să iau și Lugojul, dar un coleg de-al meu mi-a luat postul de la Lugoj, deși aveam prioritate. Asta e altă problemă. Dar am terminat cu bine. Repartiția, am făcut naveta. Până secția germană, nemții au plecat foarte mulți afară. Germana a plecat din Germania și cumpărau, practic, se cumpăra. Au avut reduceri la activitate la secție germană de la Lenauheim și m-am mutat la Liebling, altă comună germană. O comună extraordinară. Țin minte, o comună n-ai mai pomenit. Tabără, excursii, primarul te încuraja, școală. Mergeam la mare în tabăra de la

Năvodari. Și pentru că suntem în tabăra de la Năvodari, acolo la Năvodari, ministra, să zicem, tineretului, era nevasta lui Nicu Ceaușescu, Poliana Cristescu. Am cunoscut-o. Încă din primele zile la Năvodari, în tabără, m-a văzut domnul Cotuna, care era șef din partea ministerului, îl spunea de tabără și mi-a spus, de mâine, lași detașamentul și tu conduci, iei subordine pe profesorii de sport. Erau vreo 40, eu trebuia să răspund de ei. Adică, să organizăm activitățile. Năvodari a fost una din cele mai mari tabere de copii din lume, după socii Rusia, URSSul pe atuncea, pe seri erau în jur de șapte mii de copii. Eu aveam trei tabere, unde erau cinci mii de copii, de care…

AM: Vai!

CB: Te rog să mă crezi că nu s-a întâmplat, niciun copil nu s-a înecat. Era ceva extraordinar. Tabăra la Năvodari era un furnicar. De dimineața până seara, activități sportive, era teatru de vară, erau spectacole, deci era activitate. Nu mai spun la plajă, era un furnicar. Cel mai interesant era alegerea nisc. Când era nisc, era ceva nemaipomenit. Deci am vreo șapte ani, aproape opt, spun eu. Stăteam o lună de zi la acea tabără. Bun, cu responsabilitate, dar era o tabără extraordinară. Veneau și copii din, cum era pe vremuri, lagărul socialist, să-i spunem. S-a văzut imediat diferența. Mă refer la libertate. Acolo nu că mai dădeau o pipă, deci, dar nu aveau stingerea la ora 11. Dar bine, erau copii extraordinari, dar se vedea totuși o diferență.

De la Liebling, vrând nevrând, ajungem și la anul 1989. Eram la Liebling, o școală - repet - o școală extraordinară, colegi nemaipomeniți. Colega de engleză, de exemplu, tatăl ei era procuror, a fost coleg cu Regele Mihai, coleg de bancă cu Regele Mihai. Și țin minte și acuma, între clase, unde noi eram, diriginții, era o trecere, deci, era un caiet cu ce notă ai luat, nota la purtare se vedea. Și ca diriginte, normal, țineam enorm de mult. Clasa mea era la parter și era ca o grădină botanică, era obligatorie, erau florile în spate, nu intra femeia de serviciu. Țineam la acest lucru enorm de mult. Copiii de la țară, erau și foarte mulți și nemți acolo. Dar părinții erau receptivi și doreau copiilor să facă ceva, în viață, deci să ajungă ceva. Doamne, și o meserie. Nu toți erau poate, să fie profesori, medici, ingineri, dar și o meserie.

Era respectul ăla pentru, în primul rând, pentru dans, că îl prețuiau dansul, îl apreciau. Și primăria te ajuta, pentru că erau muncile alea agricoli. Și alea începeau din 15-16 septembrie până aproape de 1 noiembrie. Deci erau la sfeclă de zahăr, la porumb, dar treceai și peste asta. Dar școala rămânea, era așa o echipă extraordinară.

AM: Super!

CB: Asta a fost până în 1989.

AM: Păi, perfect. Dacă putem, începe... Mă rog, deja am început puțin înaintea anului 1989, dar voiam să știu cum a fost experiența voastră trăind în perioada asta ceaușistă, sub comunism, și cum înțelegeți dumneavoastră ideologia asta comunistă?

CB: Deci am trăit, haide să o luăm invers, prima dată cravată de pionier. Eram încă la Sfântul Gheorghe, a venit învățătoarea, și ca să te facă pionier, mi-aduc aminte și acuma, trebuia să faci un desen. La desene, eram desene animate. Deci, hands, nici o inclinație, în fine. Noroc cu fratele meu, care a un talent fantastic, deci mi-a făcut el un desen, și în clasa a treia m-a făcut pionier. Ah, cravată, cred că în prima zi am și dormit cu cravată. Se făceau pe grupă, m-au făcut prin trei, patru, trebuia să spui un angajament.

Dar, ce să spun, deci, ce era ceva emoționant, pionier, steagul ăla, șef de grupă, la vârsta aia! Dar era și o parte bună. Am avut o învățătoare nemaipomenită, care încă din clasa a treia, când mai stăpâneai cititul, deci a început să ne abonăm, nu era obligatoriu, la Traista cu povești. Primele cărți, Traista cu povești. Deci, minte, și acum, 60 de bani era o carte, pe ajuns la un leu. Prima întâlnire, așa că, elev să-i spunem, și pionier. Nu era excesul de zel acolo. Dar, deja mie îmi plăcea, deja am început clasa a patra, istoria României, geografie. Geografia m-a pasionat. Geografia m-a pasionat, botanica, în clasa a cincea. Sărim, și când am ajuns în clasa a opta, am fost, noi am fost ultima generație, în clasa a 11, se termina liceul cu unși pe clasă…Și mi-a pus o întrebare, eu le-am spus, știam tot comitetul central! Pe tot, îl știam pe rost [râzând]. Nu îi venea să creadă domnișoarei din clasa a 11, acolo, era o vecină de-a mea din blocul ăla unde stăteam, pe malul Timișului. Dar nu comitetul în sine, dar mă pasiona încă de mic, istoria. Deci, ne jucam de a nemții, bine, partizani, aveam noi chestiile astea de copilărie, dar mă pasiona, mă pasiona istoria.

Deja, prin clasa a șaptea, citisem, deja…Cum era pasionat, pentru că noi ne pasam cărțile, poate nu le aveai pe toate, nici nu puteai. Începe după aceea colecțiile, încet, încet. Și biblioteca de arte era ceva extraordinar. Noi am și trăit într-un oraș cultural, cum era Lugojul, pictori renumiți… Ai rămas cu ceva, dar veneai tu de acasă, cu un bagaj. Europa Liberă o ascultam, culmea, nu numai eu, deja din clasa a șasea eram cu Europa Liberă, vocea Americii, dar culmea, și tatăl meu asculta. Când ne mai certam, ce îi ascultați? Dar tu de ce o asculți? Deși nu aveam, cu toate era o rație extraordinară, dar asculta și el, domnul maior era atunci, încă nu era colonel, deci era legătura și cu Europa Liberă, adică știrile circulau…Nu, adică nu mi s-a părut ceva extraordinar, dar mi-aduc aminte că era războiul din Vietnam. Nu știu cum a ajuns la mine și o insignă, una mare, când a văzut profesorul de filosofie, că am insigna aia, foarte supărat, m-a scos la tablă, mi-a pus niște întrebări și era piața comună atunci. Și i-am spus, tovarășul profesor, o să mai adere trei țări. Uau, a întrebat profesorul, de unde știu? Păi, am ascultat la Europa Liberă.

Dumnezeule, mi-a cerut carnetul, mi-a dat trei și mi-a aruncat carnetul pe jos. Pentru mine a fost așa o revoltă, plete până aici aveam. Și a zis, ridică-l. Zic, ridică-l - am fost obraznic - ridică-l tu, că tu mi l-ai aruncat. Uau! Am chemat pe colonelul la școală. Vai de… a fost o palmă. Cum să cheme pe el la școală? Și băgat mâna în buzunar, m-a scos de la oră, mi-a dat o sută de lei și m-a trimis unde? La frizer, normal, nu? Trebuie să-l tunzi. Nu m-am tuns chiar. Mi-a dat o sută de lei și m-a trimis la celălalt frizer. Atunci m-am tuns…Și am exmatriculat trei zile. Trei zile, cum e acum afară, arest, zicem…Deci am fost revoltat. M-a revoltat chestia asta.

AM: Păi și atunci cum ați devenit revoluționari în 89? Cum s-a întâmplat?

CB: Cuvântul revoluționar nu... Suntem în 1989. Eu ce vroiam? Aveam niște ani de navetă…Aveam un copil de cinci ani. Când m-am mutat la Liebling, soția era medic primar, era primar, era medic la Hunedoara. Deci două săptămâni, stătea acolo, veneam eu, venea ea, concedie medicală. Duceam la părinți, pe copil. Părinții erau pensionari. Deci nu a fost ușor. Și mi-am dorit să ajung și eu la Timișoara. Erau două modalități. Bineînțeles, prin inspector general, taică-miu colonel: nu faci așa ceva! Tu ți-ai ales, mi-a zis, nu te duci la post. Șantiere națională, te duci băiatul! M-am conformat. Dar mi-am dorit să ajung în Timișoara. În 6 decembrie am ținut o lecție deschisă. Era a treia din cariera mea de dascăl. Lecția deschisă ca profesor de sport. Adică 60 de profesori din Timișoara și zonele învecinate au venit la lecția

mea deschisă. Element de dans popular în lecția de educație fizică. Țin minte și acuma. Ținut lecția și niște dansuri populare; m-a ajutat colega de română…Și atuncea inspectorul mi-a spus, i-a plăcut lecția, deși a fost puțin supărat că... Bă, puteai Balint și... bă Balint, puteai să bagi... El era din Carași. Puteai să bagi un dans din Carași, știai că-s din Carași! Da, asta e. Sărit și peste asta. Le-a plăcut lecția. S-a lăsat cu o masă festivă, în plină. M-a ajutat primarul Ceapeu. Dacă mi-e cu durare. Unu și-a rupt piciorul. S-a venit acolo, în fine. Glumesc acum. Și mi-a spus că, uite, din ianuarie, trimestrul 2, este un post la general șapte în Timișoara. Nu mi-e secret. Nu mi-a venit să cred.

Lecția a fost în 6 decembrie. În 14 decembrie era într-o vineri, se termina școala în 16. Și am venit cu colegii alea, noi cu Doina și cu Delea Vulpe. Soțul era pe cadrul facultății de muzică. Nu, era... La conservator. Da, la conservator era șeful, să-i spunem, domnul Vulpe. Era profesor de muzică. Și am venit pe jos de la gara, în 14, pentru că noi în 16, terminându-se în școala, noi întotdeauna făceam câte o reuniune, cum se făcea pe vremuri proprii. Cu sandviciuri, cu dans. Chiar primit în de-afară, era Lambada la modă, caseta aia cu Lambada. Foarte fain, cu sucuri, da. Fiecare cu clasa lui. Am stat… până la... După masă și seara, cu trenul ne-am întors acasă. Dar în data de 14…am văzut că la tărcași acolo erau niște oameni. Bă, ăștia, zic eu, zic, băi, domniță ăștia, nu-s sănătoși; pe ăștia îi arestează, mă, îți spun eu că-i arestează. Când s-a terminat reuniunea, vin acasă. Seara am ajuns pe șoaptă. Soacra mea, era în sâmbătă, soacra mea a fost la o nuntă. Deci, la o nuntă, în centru, la Lloyd, de acolo, în centru, aproape de catedrală. Și, la un moment dat, a venit un tip în civil și -ia spus să plece acasă că nu se mai ține. Păi lumea a revoltat. A venit soacra mea și mi-a povestit. Eu, când am auzit, zic, bă, ăia care erau acolo, i-au arestat precis. M-am îmbrăcat rapid de tot. Și, din fața mea, a plecat firul. N-a oprit. Nu, nu, n-a oprit. Eu am stat în Modern. Din Modern până în centru, m-am dus. Și mă mâna ceva în luptă, dar nu știu ce, în ghilimele. Și la Maria, și-am prins evenimentele.

Cea mai interesantă, interesant, prea interesant, a fost lupta - bătaia cu scutierii. Deci, era ceva extraordinar. Prima dată văzusem, veneau scutierii și băteau parcă erau romani. De undeva te marca. Bine, asta s-a cam terminat. Bine, la început, era o alimentară, în partea dreaptă, și erau sticlele de lapte. Început, așa, au ieșit să se arunce cu aceste sticle în scutieri….Pe mine mă uimea chestia asta, când au venit pompierii, s-au urcat pe mașina de pompieri, l-au bătut bine și pe acela care conducea. Nu am fost de acord cu acest lucru. Eu am stat lângă un semafor și, la un moment dat, a venit un individ cu un par mare în mâna și când a apărut culoarea roșu, zdrang! în culoare cu parul ăla…Ei, când am luat și eu prima cu apă, jetul ăla de apă, aveam un ceas din Germania, cu, foarte fain, cu cadranul negru era ceva, în fine, highlight. Dar, na, aveam, aveam într-un parker de culoare a petrolului, pantaloni de piele, că eram cu piele, eram cu pantaloni de piele, cu haine de piele, în fine. Deci nu realizam ce se întâmplă. Nu, nu era multă lume, dar parcă lumea se aduna, erau oprite și tramvaiele. Nu prea realizam eu ce se întâmplă…

…Ce era interesant, că pe drum opreau mașini, tinerii, luau benzină și aruncau pe asfalt. Era ceva extrem. Erai, nu știu, în transă, nu spun, dar ceva nemaipomenit. Erau două categorii. Oameni care erau în coloane, nu erau mulți. Și oameni privitori. Nu, nu se striga. M-am dus în complexul studențesc, țin minte că minus șapte-l făcea acum. S-a urcat un tânăr pe umărul meu. Îi dau numele acuma, Sorin Oprea. Dupăia am aflat, nu știam cine era Sorin Oprea. Puteam vorbi mult despre acest caz. A ținut un mic discurs. Îi ziceam, de unde sunt studenții? Mi-am pus o întrebare. Cămina era închisă și am vorbit cu un arab. E palestinian, era. Și el mi-a spus, el e bursier și nu poate să vină. Zice, băi, dacă ne vinde țigări și asta, atunci suntem buni. Hai, veniți cu noi…Nu, studenții nu au venit. Nu au venit. Am venit cu coloana înapoi și am ajuns aproape de catedrală. În stânga era primăria. Era un cordon și lumea, revoltată, să se

bată cu ăia, niște soldați care păzeau. Zic, bă, băieți, lăsați-mă că ăștia sunt puși să-și apere instituția, ce treabă avem noi cu ei? Deci lumea era pusă pe revoltă, să spun.

La catedrală a fost problema cu Sorin Oprea, că ajungem la el, că pe ulteriori am aflat numele. Era cu bicicletă. I-am pus întrebarea asta, ce faci tu cu bicicleta asta? Păi, bine, nu era niciun lider, nu era lider. Dar ei voiau neapărat să meargă la mitropolie, era foarte aproape, să ia cheile, să deschide catedrala, să tragă clopotele alea. Să spun așa. Deci, bineînțeles, mitropolitul nu era, era la Constantinopol, știu și cine răspundea…mai era Dorobanțu, Părintele Dorobanțu. S-a stat puțin la catedrală, acolo, pe trepte…Am lăsat coloana să meargă și am ajuns în dreptul Facultății de Construcție…Eu am rămas în fața, singur, am în fața Facultății de Construcție. Mi-e îmi vine să râd acuma. Am luat-o instantaneu, o piatră în buzunar, da, nu știu de ce. Am luat-o în buzunar, o piatră. Coloana a trecut. A produs un mic incident. După ce a trecut, a căzut pancarta aia de sus. În timp ce ea cădea, ăștia dădeau cu pietre. După ce a plecat, coloana aia m-a dus și eu. Dar când am ajuns, erau două camioane militară DAC de Securitate Intervenție. Doi de sus, doi sau trei, nu știu, aruncau cu pietre acolo. Eu am trecut pe lângă camioanele alea, așa îmi curgea transpirația. Deci, gata, zic, am văzut filmul vieții, mi l-am trăit. Da, iată, cu pietre totuși eu. Dar cred că salvarea mea a fost hainea de parcuri de piele și pantaloni de piele, au crezut că-s securist. Am scăpat de aceasta, am prins coloana din urma, piața Dacia. Domn, un individ, un inginer, după am aflat. Dan Sobol, l-am revăzut anul trecut, după 33-34 de ani. Dan Sobol a ținut un discurs pe o masă care e în piață. A spus câteva cuvinte. Dar între timp, era un cordon de militari, tot de la Securitate, și cu bâte. Nu eram cu arme, cu bâte. Au venit spre coloana. Cei din coloana, cu pietre, cu crengi, cu ce au apucat și acolo a fost împrăștiată coloana. Bine, băieții, majoritatea erau din Moldova, deci mai dădeau și niște înjurături. Dădeau ei doi cu pietre și cu crengi. Eu nu, recunosc. Dacă n-am dat, nu eram chiar așa de... N-am dat, e clar, nu? Dar părea așa ceva de film așa. În fine, s-a dispersat coloana. Nu erau mulți. Ideea era să scoatem oamenii să vină. Nu stați în balcoane, vedeți că muriți de foame…Vrem saloanele de Crăciun. De ce? Încă nu s-a stricat nici Jos Ceaușescu, nu s-a strigat asta, clar, dar lumea încă era reticentă.

Bun, s-a dispersat coloana, eu stau în Modern, am trecut de Piața Dacia. Bă, mă duc acasă, nu? Fluieram, cred că și sigur fluieram. Pe partea stângă, înainte de clinici, de asta sunt clinicii noi, dintr-un bloc au coborât doi tipi, fiecare cu o sticlă în mână și au întrebat, ce s-a întâmplat. Zic, cum nu știți ce s-a întâmplat?! eu chiar revoltat. A, când i-am povestit - du-te mă că ești beat, îmi spuneau ei. În fine, ei erau ăia cu sticla, eu eram beat; în fine… Au apărut un ARO…doi indivizi, cerut buletinul. L-aveam aici, instantaneu, duci mâna. Mi-a croit o palmă în rinichi, am căzut ca un bolovan. Era așa o domnișoară, pe ea au luat-o și i-au dat pe cap. Nu-i de râs, e de plâns. Și ne-au băgat în mașina aia, în ARO și ne-au dus la miliție, la Securitate. Acolo, foarte interesant, nici n-am ajuns bine, se formase două rânduri și când treceam printre ei dădea la greu, parcă eram ca balene, încă nu realizam ce se-întâmplă. Plecat într-o celulă. Și dacă la un moment dat te puteai mișca cât de cât, ziceam cam jumătate când suntem aici, s-a umplut această celulă de nu mai putea să stai jos, decât în picioare, era groaznic.

Culmea că era și un copil care era cu tatăl lui, era un elev de clasă a șaptea la școală…Și tatăl său, bătut bine, el a lucrat la fabrica de bere. M-a cam impresionat chestia asta. Eu, revoltat, deci eram revoltat, putut în viziera aia să vină că de ce m-au arestat că eu n-am făcut nimic. Eu chiar n-am făcut nimic. Mamă, că mi-a scos un pumn așa, dar direct a dat în bărbie. Bun, e ok, aia a fost. Împreună ne-au luat niște date, până dimineață. Dimineața ne-au scos în curtea instituției. Eram tot pe jos și acum vorcăiam. Deci, niște scene din astea grotești. De la un moment dat, un individ spune, ia cinciu, lua

cinciu. Păi, ce-i asta? Că am sărit peste armată, că n-au vrut să o fac. Cinciu. Era în linie pe cinci rânduri, dar n-am înțeles. Bineînțeles că... Nu știu, mă nimeream tot în față, am mai luat o ploaie de... Am văzut ce și ce. Luam cinciu, l-am luat, repede. Cinciu era notă de trecere, totuși, nu? [amândoi râzând] Da. A venit duba, ne-a băgat într-o dubă. Nu mai sunt primul, sunt ultimul, urc. Și grotesc, că de-abia stăteam eu pe picioarele mele după ce am primit destule. Mi-a dat să țin în brațe un tip care nu avea două. Tăia de la genunchi picioarele lui, era în cărucior. Să-l țin și pe ăla. M-am procopsit. Dus la penitenciar. De acolo, un trial. Eram într-o sală. De lectură să-i spunem, sau cămin, ce era, în fine. Și acolo am început să trebuiască să meargă în față. În primul rând, dezbrăca tot omul domn. Toată lumea și copii, băieții. Erau și copii. Și să pui tot pe masă ce ai. Lănțișor. În dimineața, când m-am dus de la școală, în 16, am găsit o monetă de 25 de bani. Am luat-o, na, și… semnul ăla de... Nu știu cum să-i spun. N-am... Nu știu cum mi-a căzut din buzunar, că uitasem, și domnul care mi-a scuturat pantaloni… Dumnezeule… Iar am furat-o. Iar am furat-o. De atunci, când se cață... De aur se fie. Nu mai mă ridic. Nu mai trebuie.

Da, a fost grotesc. Și de acolo m-a adus într-o celulă. Destul de mare. Culmea că erau pregătiți. Era pregătită celula. Celula cu trei rânduri de paturi. Și țin minte, dacă la început eram unul într-un pat, tot aduceau, tot aduceau. Am ajuns la trei într-un pat. Deci, interesant. A venit și mâncare…Și era fain că era o toaletă și apă rece. Era foarte fain. Foarte fain. Dar veneau studenți. Veneau oameni bătuți. Eu îmi aduc aminte. L-a adus pe un bătrân în pijama a doua zi. Era în pijama. Omul a coborât să vadă ce-i cu mașina. L-au băgat. În dubă l-au dus. Era în pijama și bă, ăștia ne dau zeghea. Când l-am văzut, părerea zi, îmi dau și noua hainele astea. Că nu erau hainele noastre. N-a fost așa. Seara, în 17... Da, în 17. L-au dus pe un tânăr. Nu l-au adus... M-am dus la baie. Cu mine în pat, au venit doi studenți. Lugojeni de-ai mei aici, ăla și copilul era. Era la medicină. Duții și Bibi, așa, poreclele lor. Mama lui... Tatăl lui era profesor de limba română, din Marga. A lui Bibi, maică-sa era medic psihiatru, la Lugoj. Speriați amândoi. Ei-au venit să dea la un chef. Era o distracție și i-au băgat în dubă. Dar erau disperați. Au stat cu mine. Trei am stat în patul ăla, Lugojenii mei! Dar am văzut studenți din Baia Mare, erau îngroziți. Adică, primul de ce? Să fi student la medicină, știm cum se intra înainte la medicină. Eu știu soția mea, deci. Era ceva, era ceva extraordinar, te pregăteai, dar era... Păi pierdeai automat. Ce o să spun? M-am dus o dată să-mi beau niște apă, rece că era ok, stăteam, și unul se tot pansa, măi, când l-am văzut, era împușcat în umăr. Îmi scapă numele acum. Și atunci i-am chemat pe doctorașii mei, prietenii mei, și au zis, nu, este glonțul, dar nu e perforat, osul nu e... E acolo osul, dar nu e spart osul…Mi-am rupt cămașa și-am făcut niște bandaje, am făcut strâns bine, da.

Dar pe mine m-a emoționat, m-a marcat chestia cu elevii. Da, elevii l-au dat în data de 18 aia, au venit directorii de școală și i-au scos. Toți am pregătit bilete să trimitem acasă. Dar lumea era disperată, era în panică, așa… Da, deci a fost o atmosferă din aia. Plus că o mașină mergea toată noaptea. Se auzea cum se trage afară. Era ceva groaznic.

…Țin minte că, înainte de interogatoriu, îmi făcusem eu un plan. Ce să spun? Cum m-au luat? Am inventat eu o poveste frumoasă. Că eu, de fapt, am venit, am fost la Lugoj și am cumpărat un brad, și l-am adus acasă, la Timișoara…Deci îi dădeam cu bradul. Că așa m-au arestat pe mine. Dar care era povestea? În timp ce eu spuneam povestea asta frumos, individul care îmi lua m-a întrebat: De ce ai dat foc la mașină? Ce mașină? Unde am stat eu, acolo unde era semaforul la spart, vis-a-vis era regional de căi ferate. Și acel ARO a luat foc. Dar foc i-a dat șoferul. Văd și acuma cum ducea, cu o găleata, cu motorină și i-a dat foc. Dar cel care a filmat, unul Ștef de la Securitate a filmat cum eu apăream în chestia aia acolo. Dar eu zic, în primul rând, că nu fumezi. Eu nu i-am dat foc, eu nu fumez. Deci... Bineînțeles că

am luat. Să-mi schimb declarația. Ce am strigat? De ce am ieșit? În fine, după câteva corecturi, eu am ținut-o pe-a mea și e pe-a lor. Am scăpat de interogatoriu cred că destul de lejer, spun eu. Dar mă punea pe gândul.

…Cu o seară înainte în 19 a venit cineva și a zis să se bagă o listă cu nume, prenume, loc de muncă, strada unde locuiești…Dimineață, în jur de 9, au scos trei afară din celulă. Aia nu au mai venit. Mamă, ce tensiune ai! Ce groaznic era! Că seara, până seara îngrozitor. Ieșiți, din celulă că vă dăm drumul. Studenții n-au vrut să iasă. Le-a fost frică. Ce poate să facă? Am ieșit. Deprimat…În curte. Și am stat lângă unul…Din vorbă în vorbă, zic mă, cred că a fost o revoluție, mă. Pe ăla l-a dus împușcat. Unul ne povestea, cum a văzut el, cum punea omul și punea intestinele cum l-a împușcat în abdomen. Auzeam cum se trage. Era vuietul nemaipomenit. Băi, a fost o revoluție. E revoluție!…Și la un moment dat vine cineva și-mi dă un steag, un individ. Îmi dă un steag alb. Profesor? Nu m-am profesat, că-s profesor. Prea interesant. Îmi dă. Îți dau steagul ăsta. Vă predăm mulțimii. Tu ții steagul. Nu știu ce mi-a venit. Știți ce? Dacă-mi dați steagul ăsta, eu vă rog ceva. Eu am venit cu buletinul. Vă rog să-mi dați buletinul. S-a dus și mi-a dus buletinul. Uite, lângă mine au paralizat. Bă, ce tupeu au! Eu am băgat buletinul, Balint, ai, mândruț de mine. Și am stat cu steagul ăla, în mașină. Și au vrut să închidă ușa. Nu, nu! Dacă ați spus că ne dați drumul, lăsați ușa deschisă. Am dus până în centru la Consiliul, în seară, coborând din mașină, chiar ceva lume, nu mai țin minte ora, cred că era în jurul de 8. Și vine un tânăr, să-i spunem, îmi dă un steag găurit. Apoi ziceam, eu vreau un steag cu stemă. Ce să fac cu un steag găurit? Bine, după am aflat că steagul găurit, înseamnă în fine, din modelul revoluției maghiare din 1956. Era modelul ăla, steagul găurit. Era și la catedrală, pe aia, prin 18 era steagul ăla.

Dar nu știam ce să fac. Nu prea aveam eu, nu curaj… Păi, hai să spun și eu, să mă duc acasă. Păi ăștia, precis, m-așteaptă…Apoi sunt acasă. Mamă, pe scară, când m-au văzut. Era corul bocitoarelor. Primul lucru, m-am dus să-mi văd puștea. N-avea cinci ani încă, în ianuarie, făcea cinci ani. L-am pupat, l-am văzut, dormind. Ah, ok. Da, n-am povestit nimic. Cred că am și dormit puțin, dar visam urât. Dimineața, mi-am luat trupa, pe Gabi (soția lui), pe-l mic, cinci ani, față la Operă, 21 decembrie. Striga lumea acolo, diverse lozinci. Toată lumea spunea ceva…Eu n-am auzit asta cu pluralism. Zic, nu striga nimeni. Lângă mine era un inginer, dupaia am aflat, de la PNL, Leonte Munteanu a murit, și striga despre pluralism. Mica mea, copilul de cinci ani n-avea. Impresionant așa, nu? Ea mi-a zis, așa tineră, de asta avea nevoie de pluralism. M-a marcat chestia asta. Nu, n-am urcat în balcon, deși puteam să urc. Pentru că eu venind cu pușiu și cu... pe drum pe Alba Iulia, un coleg de-al meu, fost rugbist, mă, Pichii… Porecla mea din copilărie e Pichii și toți Lugojenii știu de Pichii. Mă, a vorbit din balconul Operei: o să mă aresteze! Era terminat. Purice-l chema. Da, profesor de sport. Rugbist. A vorbit din balconul Operei. E, poveste întreagă și cu balconul Operă. Da, și cam asta a fost. Până în 21, m-am implicat și eu și Gabi fiind medic la Spitalul de Copii, deși era la țară încă medic.

Deci, eu când am văzut soldații, la prima fază trăgeau, dar nu știam ce tragi. Zic, mă omule, în ce tragi? Deci nebunia, panica, deși eu stai niște zile la popă așa, că nu mi-am pus azi. Mi-am vizitat colega de engleză, Doinița, care mai stă în Germania. Și nu-i venea să creadă, taică-su am spus că a fost coleg cu Regele Mihai. Și nu-i vrea să creadă. Eu am curajul să merg în continuu…Dar, m-am implicat. Deci, țin minte, la bloc, foarte mulți militari stăteau în zona…Pe mine m-a enervat că ăștia nu ies, nu fac nimic. Stăteau în casă. Culmea, că la bloc, încă erau studenții în 16, încă își legau. Deci, chestia asta mă deranja. În 22-23, când a fost nebunia cu teroriștii, nebunia lansată de București, țin minte și acum, am venit din centru, eram cu Gabi, parcă am cărat-o pe fata asta, nici nu-mi vine să cred. Deși aveam un copil acasă,

stăteam cu soacra mea. Stăteam patru persoane în două cameră, deci nu era, în fine, altă poveste. Dar, stat și, cât să fie, era trecut, cred că, de 12 până o coloană, s-auzea un biruit, un... Deci, venea coloana de tancuri, începea psihoza aia cu teroriștii. Băi, am găsit-o, m-am aflat. Și am stat și, la sfârșit, dintr-o... dintr-un...dintr-un tanc, cu mitraliera, deschis. Eu aveam o bandă tricolor. Nu știu cum am ajuns la acea bandă tricolor. Era Gabi și mai erau încă trei indivizi…Am văzut, cum, în dreapta, era un răpăit de mitralieră. A căzut unul lângă mine. Gabi a fugit imediat, am plecat și eu. Dar ăsta, țipa ăla, care a fost împușcat, ne-am întors înapoi. Dar acel om, care venise la o nuntă, l-am cărat cu Gabi. Gabi a dat primul ajutor, că era medic. Până la Babeș, n-a vrut nimeni nici să coboare, să mergem. Era ceva până la Babeș. Acolo, doctorul era un medic extraordinar. L-a operat, nu știu câte ore. Dar l-a scăpat. Că dacă îl lăsam acolo… da, zic, uite, mă, iar am scăpat, mă, ce noroc, zic, că puteam să iei oricare. Răpăit de mitraliera.

Pentru asta, nu i-am iertat niciodată. Iertat în sensul că, pentru ce? Că eram cu un tricolor, că doar nu eram terorist. Început psihoza aia cu teroriștii. Dar, atunci mi-am propus, măi. Eu când m-am dus acasă, povestesc o fază din 18, Gabi m-a căutat pe mine la spital. A venit tatăl meu de la Lugoj. Gabi s-a dus la județean…Și Gabi, când a venit la județean, s-a pus automat un piept. Aici nu este. A trecut granița. Culmea că și tatăl meu prin telefon a prins la Lugoj că am trecut granița, că nu mai sunt. Deci era omul, dacă eu nu existam, că s-a întâmplat ceva. Adică am murit, că am trecut granița. Nu era interesant…S-a întors înapoi la catedrală cu taică-miu, nu? Asta era în 18, când era Chițac, au venit cu trupa aia și au deschis focul spre catedrală. Dar tatăl meu, cum era cu Gabi, zicea: stai, Gabi, liniștită că eu îl cunosc pe Chițac. Am fost în aplicație cu el și-l cunosc. Nu o să tragă. Și n-au trecut câteva minute și a început răpăitul ăla. Dacă taică-miu n-a rămas acolo, Gabi a fugit. În fine, a fost o chestie care...

Da, aici am vrut să ajung. Eu când am ajuns acasă, nu mai știu în ce zi exact, când m-am întâlnit cu tata, i-am zis primul lucru desființați armata, că au fost niște criminali. Deci asta... Deci așa o ură! Deci eu nu am făcut armata, pentru că nu am vrut. Culmea, că-s copil de militar, deci nu… Deci n-am vrut. Nici de-a dracu n-am vrut să o fac. Nu știu dacă a fost bine sau rău, nu e o chestie de bărbăție. Că oricum am făcut sport, nu mi-era... Dar așa de mult i-am urât, pentru că cunosc atâtea faze, încât iau cazul cu rușii. Doamne, deci împușcat... Deci niște oameni nevinovați, care efectiv au ieșit pentru libertate. Cum să-l împuști? Și el cu mâinile goale, cum se spune. Nu mai vreau să discut cazul Otopeni... Lui taică-miu i-au curs lacrimile. Taică-miu care a iubit așa de mult armata. Deci un om care a fost în Transfăgărășan, a făcut Transfăgărășanul…Deci tata a fost... Iar din 5 în 5 ani, când se făcea parada militară, tata era adjunctul comandantului de paradă. Un tip integru, taică-miu, un tip profesionist. Era un tip profesionist, o matematică. Jucam eu cu fratele, noi doi, și taică-miu singur, fără regină jucam șah - ne mânca. Deci el a iubit enorm de mulți soldații. Lui i-a plăcut cariera asta, deci de militar. I-au dat lacrimile, când am zis să desființăm armata. Asta este, na, atunci așa o gândeam eu. Deși eu i-am apărat… Ulterior, după Revoluție, toată lumea era... Dumnezeu era o ură din asta, așa, și… E cam asta a fost.

CB: Decembrie 1989, la Timișoara, mulțimea a dat, reușită. Mă întorc la Iași. De ce vreau să spun Iași? Pentru că era pregătită chestia asta la Iași. Acolo avem pe Dan Petrescu, Ana Maria Spiridon. Dan Petrescu, care în Franța, a făcut o declarație. Deci cu chestia asta, era clar că a fost urmărit. I-au pregătit manifeste. Aveau două tipuri de manifeste. Tot cu frontul, era aceeași poveste. Timișoara, frontul democratic. Deci vrem, nu vrem. Deci Iașiul a picat din start. I-au arestat rapid de tot. Ei erau foarte supărați pe mine. Unul, chiar când eu am intrat, eram scriitor, prima dată, înainte de a intra, m-am crezut la trierea dosarului. Și l-am întrebat de ce. Pentru că ce am eu de luat cu dosarele lor? Eu am fost corect.

Ori o spuneam pe-a dreapta, că m-am supărat de cum mi-a picat mie dosarul de scriitor, că eu lucrurile scriam în continuare. A, am intrat după aia. Am intrat pe bune pe munca mea, nu pe alte lucruri. Deci, Timișoara, șansa Timișoara a fost nu târcâș. A avut probleme cu Securitatea. Asta să fie foarte clar.

…Dar acolo a fost scânteia. Pentru că dacă... Hai să ne gândim la Brașov. Uite, oamenii au ieșit în stradă, la revedere. Aici au apărut morții. Au apărut arestații. Deci, au fost peste 800 de arestați... Deci, dacă în Timișoara nu ieșeau oameni în stradă, bine, acuma, în timp derulând, după niște ani, au fost două categorii. A fost categoria, să zicem, celor politici. Că primii în stradă au ieșit cei de la gărzile patriotice. Securitatea și miliția au scos rapid în stradă. Pe cine au scos? Pe informatori. Da, țin minte, i-am văzut, îi știu. Frizer, schimbător de valută…Ăștia au fost scoși primii. Culmea că primii bătuți bine au fost milițienii. Au luat-o cu lanțul…Dar asta a fost greșeala cea mai mare: a fost că armata a tras. Dacă armata nu trăgea, asta a fost. Acum e trist că după niște ani, majoritatea nu recunosc chestiile astea. Ce apreciez eu acuma la data respectivă, această dată, este că premierul, domnul general Ciucă și-a cerut scuze. Pentru mine a fost un lucru extraordinar. Și am admirat chestia asta. Armata a fost o greșeală. Și numai în Timișoara. Numai în Timișoara; numai în Timișoara. De vedere cu cazul Milea, l-am studiat acum de mult. Cazul Milea. Când el s-a împușcat. S-a împușcat de sus, povești cu pistoale. Nu, el s-a împușcat. De ce? Hai să o luăm logic. A contribuit. Deși prima dată s-a opus și a spus nu găsesc în regulamentul militar, îi spunea lui Ceaușescu că armata se trage în popor. Deși armata a mai tras și în 1907, sărim peste asta. Dar el a văzut ce s-a întâmplat în Timișoara. Păi când personal era în zona baricadelor București din 21, ne-au trecut cu tancurile peste oameni. Despre ce vorbim? Procesul de conștiință. Clar. Clar! Și atunci să nu uităm că el apoi și când a fost colectivizarea, a fost un activist puternic acolo militar. Așa că degeaba încearcă, încearcă unii. Unii cum încearcă, apropos de istorie acel Dogar. Mă ia cu râs puternic, acel Dogar. Cazul Otopeni. Păi nenea Dogar, militar istoric, îmi povestește ea că în pădure s-au ascuns teroriștii. Eu am descris fenomenul Otopeni, dumnezeu. Eu am vorbit cu supraviețuitorii. M-am marcat…Am văzut dosarul militar. Eu l-am căzut rapid. Cazul Trosca, am scris. Deci chestii serioase, nu povești. Deci Dogaru îi dă cu poveștile lui. Deci jenant ca un militar după niște ani să vină cu povestea asta. E un singur adevăr. Nu sunt mai multe adevăruri.

Pe mine m-a marcat chestia asta: mâna-i ridicată, da… să te împuște? Te-a împușcat. Dar să-i ții două zile acolo. Este trist, trist. Este foarte trist! Fenomenul terorist care a apărut. Asta e aripa politică. Începând cu televiziunea, automat suntem la Operă la Timișoara. Când l-am pușcat pe acela care l-am dus noi la spital, în Operă, s-a stins lumina. Trăgeau, dar nu știm în ce trăgeau. Ei aveau arme. Armele le-au dus cei de la TF. Apropo, discutăm și de jurnale militare s-au redeschis, le-au început procesele. Singurul jurnal ca nu există, cel de la TF. Râd și acuma, cunosc ce a făcut TF-ul. Dar fenomenul terorist s-a extins și cu ajutorul televiziunii. Pentru că aveau două comandamente, politic-militar…Dar fenomenul acesta s-a extins în toată țara, asta cu teroriștii, povești cu 40.000 de morți inclusiv și în presa americană se scrie, am avut mașina de scris, cartea, unde am toată presa americană ce a scris în anul 1990. Și inclusiv Europa Liberă, încă o dezinformare crasă, crasă, crasă. Adică tancurile și alea mergeau spre aeroport, că vin teroriștii. Care teroriști? Care teroriști?

AM: Mai am aici câteva întrebări.

CB: Da, te rog.

AM: Voiam să știu, că am vorbit așa puțin despre biserici și despre religie.

CB: Au jucat un rol extraordinar.

AM: Voiam să știu ce rol au jucat la Revoluție.

CB: Avem o singură chestie. Avem o singură chestie. Și ti-am găsit una. Hai să revenim la Dugulescu, dacă vrei. Deci să fie să fie foarte... Lăsăm aia pastorului…Dugulescu a venit cu copiii la catedrală. A fost acolo. El a fost și vecin cu mine, Dugulescu. Dar, din păcate, să spun direct, a fost colaborator al Securității. Pare rău, a fost colaborator al Securității. Copiii nu au venit niciodată. Eu n-aș fi făcut chestia asta. Să nu uităm că la catedrală s-a tras. Acum, de ce a dus acolo pe acei copii? Dar... Religia, copiii... De eu am avut la școală, repet…

Erau niște copii extraordinari. Dar erau puțin stresați. Că asta a fost chestia regiunii. Pentru că era dreptul lor, repet. Tatăl meu e Greco-Catolic, de exemplu. Și acolo a fost o luptă Greco-Catolică. Deci, mergeam la înviere cu tatăl meu. Țin minte și acum, știu, eram copii, nu? Dar și e respectat chestia. Religia trebuie respectată. Deci, nu, nu facem... Păi... Eu văd ce se întâmplă în Gaza, acolo. Doamne, ce vină au? Că unii sunt teroriști. Dom'ne, au murit 13.000 de copii acolo. Pentru ce? Pentru ce au murit copiii acolo? Nu, nu, este o tragedie, degeaba. Nu, religia... Nu, nu... Dau un exemplu. Copiii de... Cum zic, pocăiți, da? Au un profesor, da? Îi văd liniștiți. Altă educație este. Sincer. Altă educație.

...Nu, eu i-am apreciat. Nu, sincer, extraordinar i-am apreciat. Pentru că era altă educație. Eu văd și la mine, am întâlnit cu cei care sunt în acest domeniu, doamne, este un cult, cult, oameni culți, eleganți. Deci, nu mergem pe mine cu religia, o frază de deși inventată, cu puterea...E un câștig, să-i spunem, dar unii sunt profitori. Unii sunt profitori. Din păcate, unii sunt profitori. Nu accept chestia astea. Profitori. Acum, ca peste tot, frunze, pădure și uscători erau aceștia. Deci, religia a lucrat un mare rol. Nu, chiar și asta a lui Tőkés, și el. E, că după aia și-a schimbat puțin. Când a plecat în Ungaria, a divorțat… A fost nu de mult adus la Timișoara și ne-am întâlnit, am vorbit, m-a ținut minte. Mie chiar mi-a plăcut. Dar... și-a schimbat puțin. Nu mai acel om pe care l-am cunoscut, de a suferit. El a fost un tip… Cred că ai ceva și în cartea care ți-o dau, dar care o scot acum acolo, e... Cred că am fost printre primii care au publicat tot istoricul așa. Dar religia a avut un rol. Mie îmi pare rău că Dugulescu... Spun sincer, am văzut dosarul Dugulescu. Asta e. Puteam veni și cu motivație. N-a avut încotro. Ca să plece în America pe vremea... Să o luăm și invers… Trebuia să... Dar copiii ăia pe mine nu aveau ce vedea. A fost carne de tun. Scut uman, sau care a fost? Bine, a avut șansa că nu s-a întâmplat nimic cu el.

AM: Ce credeți despre situația asta, politica României de acum sau viitorul situației României cu gândul la 89?

CB: Dezamăgit total. Pașii României, nu? A, păi suntem în Uniunea Europeană, suntem în NATO pentru că s-a dorit să fim în NATO, fie foarte clar, nu… De ce? Rolul nostru, poziția noastră este... Dar... Nu, eu aveam alte așteptări, apropo că au omorât piața asta cum era pe vremuri, cărbune și oțelul. Nu, suntem… De ce? Pentru că nu avem reprezentanți. Nu, nu, cei care să aducă... Păi a fost doamna Dăncilă, doamna Dăncilă care a fost prim ministrul României, piața cu Comisia de Agricultură. Păi, domnule, tu ai terminat petrol și gaz. Ce are prefectura cu agricultura? Nu trimiteam oameni competenți acolo. Nu, e bună Uniunea Europeană, dar dacă n-ai om să se bată... Pentru români, pentru nația asta! Nu, nu. Politica externă. Păi ce-am făcut mă cu politica externă? Domnul Cioroianu de la PNL, care penibil în Spania, a făcut gafa aia monumentală. Oameni care nu sunt pregătiți…Noi am avut înainte, din păcate, zic înainte,

doamne, și la om, doamne, oameni care gândesc să... Nu, nu mai avem calitatea aia. Nu avem calitatea. Noi am avut oameni extraordinari. Nu, eu am crezut!

O înghesuială pentru ce?…Câți tineri sunt acolo? Câți tineri sunt acolo? Când se ridică un tânăr, zic, a, că a fost următor. Nu, nu, eu sunt dezamăgit. Sunt dezamăgit de învățământ. Păi unde este învățământul românesc? Învățământul de masă discutăm. Da? Că bruma generală…Cultura generală. Nu. A murit școala de la sat. A murit. Dacă erai acolo, erai cineva. Nici preotul nu era mai mare ca tine. În sensul bun al cuvântului. Respectat. A murit, nu? Nu este o generație bine pregătită. Păi de cine? Păi dascălul formează. Nu e școala, nu. Dascălul o formează. Ne uităm la facultate. Ce? Pentru că... Dascălul este croitor. Da? Păi dacă nu-i vine materialul bun. Ce să croiască? Nu. Nu-i vine materialul bun. Ce să croiască? Ne uităm. Unde sunt liceele industriale? Școala de artă și brățara de aur. Unde sunt liceele? Școlile profesionale. Uite, unde sunt? Unde sunt? Nu mai avem nevoie de finanțeri, de constructori, de marinarii ăia. Unde sunt? Au dispărut pe odată cu flotul. Dezamăgire. Este o mare... Noi ne-am tot comparat cu bulgarii. Cu restul. Da, cu restul. Pentru că nu am avut politicieni. N-am avut. Să fie adevărați pentru țara asta. Nu, nu. Nu, nu să fie pro-nu știu ce. Pentru țara asta. Mă uit la țara vecină, tot și Ungaria. Omul ăsta se bate. Se bate pentru a lui. Se bate. Bine, și în România, deși îl dăm noi cu aia, că s-a dus și a pus steagul maghiar, nu, poate să pună și 7.000 de steaguri. Dar se bate pentru țara lui. Se bate. Da? Are un cuvânt despre asta. Da, să trăiți. Să trăiți bine. Era un citat din clasici. Nu, nu. Din păcate. Din păcate. Iar dacă înainte școala se făcea cu meditația dascălului la școală pe bune, cu clasa, acuma, multe articole din 90 încă, copiii cu cheia la gât. Păi dacă nu te meditezi, nu meditezi pe copii, la revedere. Înainte. Eu n-am luat în viața mea o meditație. Ceva ore la fizică, soția mea care a intrat la medicină, câteva la profesorul meu de fizică, care a zis, Pichii, dragă, e materialul bun. Deci câteva ore, cu brio a intrat. Acuma, păi, din clasa întâi aia, vroiau un meditator. Nu, nu. Oare școala nu poate? Sau nu vrea?…Fără școală, tot furăm modele din stânga în dreapta. Nu, nu. Lipsește. Plus încrederea, nu mai este încredere. Divizate, populații. Promisiuni din astea care se fac, fără acoperire. Sunt promisiuni fără acoperire. România, din păcate, spun sincer, este departe de unde ar trebui să fie. Locul unde este, ne-am mirat că nu primim. Ungaria de ce are visă cu Statele Unite?…Noi de ce nu avem? Dacă mâine se dă, Alexandra, ascultă-mă, trei sferturi din Români vor pleca acolo. Deci dacă mâine se dă. America știe ce știe. Trebuie să plecă acolo.

...Unde sunt chestiile astea? Nu mai sunt. Și atunci fiecare pe cont propriu…Da, vocabularul. Nu mai este. Nu mai este. Deci educația este la pământ, deși președintele a promis. Da. Din păcate, este generația în derivă… Să ne uităm cât merg la bacalaureat acum. Câți? Moldova e praf. Moldova e praf. Meserie nu. Aia nu, aia nu. Atunci vine Afganistanul, vine Thailanda, da? Vine aici și lucrează. Ii vezi. Și la noi, a început acel brainstorming, nu? Da, furtul de inteligență. Băieții știu, au plecat afară. Ești de-a crema, pleacă afară. Cu ce rămâi? Ce construiești? Cu ce construiești? Dacă n-ai investit în forța asta umană, resursa, resursa umană.

E război la graniță. Ce armată avem noi? Ce armată avem noi? Ăștia care dau din gură mari generali, îi vezi la televizor, dau din gură toți îs NATO…Deci viitorul nu e războiul, e al păcii. Eu n-am auzit să vorbim și despre pace…Viitorul ăsta e concurența la ce? Nu, nu, chestia asta... Tineretul nu-l văd pregătit pentru viitorul. Eu mă refer. Lăsăm crema, că sunt cei care... Că mă uit la politicieni, pe unde pleacă copii lor? Păi de ce nu rămân aici? Nu, nu l-a pus nimeni. Sunt universități care de renume. Aveam Timișoara Politehnică, deci și rezistențe materiale, deci aveam... Medicină, nu mai vorbim. Culmea că erau nemți, evrei profesori, dar medicina era medicină. Când am zis că doamna mea, trebuia să merg cu

ea la mare, avea un nou, s-a dus la mărirea pentru 10 pentru medie, pentru un punct s-a dus la mărire. Era cu risc, că dacă nu era, putea să iei 8. Deci era chestia asta pentru... Nu pentru atât, dar meserie. Acum, medicină peste tot, mai e greu după anul. Cum spune țiganul, practica ne omoară...Deci văd un tineret debusolat.

AM: Vreau să vă întreb dacă vedeți cumva ca un fel de continuare a revoluției, dacă vă gândiți, de exemplu, la proteste anticorupție și genul de proteste.

CB: Da, am înțeles întrebarea. Corupția nu a apărut de ieri, de azi. După 90, trebuie să luăm unul. Cine a știut? Cine s-a privatizat? Cine a luat alimentarea? În primul rând, Securitatea a știut. Toate lucrurile acestea, Securitatea a știut. Deci, Securitatea casă liberă, securitatea a lucrat cu notarii...Deci, țara asta a fost prăduită, lozinca aia, ,,nu ne vindem țară," nu, n-am vândut-o, am dat-o gratis. Și au luat-o cine o trebuie. Deci, corupția, devalorizarea băncilor, pe asta... Dar cine a plătit toate chestiile astea? Românul l-a plătit, da? Românul l-a plătit. Ea este în continuare. Prea puțin se luptă. Am desființat legea aia… Acuma, nu... Ești prieten cu puterea, n-ai nicio treabă. Păi, mă nene, tu ai fost bugetar, da? Ai lucrat la astea. Păi de unde, mă, casa asta, că numai terenul e 107.000 de euro? Nu, sincer, de unde? Păi soția mea, medic primar, eu am fost dascăl o viață. Eu n-am reușit. Bine, că n-am avut nicio treabă cu băncile. Dar nici n-am stat cu mâna întinsă. De ce? N-am fost niciunul. Eu, de exemplu, nu am mașină, că nu mă interesează. Nu că n-aș fi putut doamne. N-am pasiune. Dar alții, de unde? De unde bunăstarea asta? Nu ne-a pus niciodată întrebarea. Sau nu vrem să ne punem întrebarea? Nu, nu. Nu vrem să ne punem. Sunt niște case numai în terenul în Timișoara, numai terenul, peste 100.000 de euro…Dar el e bugetar.

Iar corupția? Deci chestia în spitale este un dezastru. În spitalele ceva de... Dumnezeule! Eu am avut și eu o… La o anumită vârstă mai ai și niște... Doamna mea e medic și parcă îmi scuperdea. Scuperdea. Dar aud de la și vezi niște prețuri. Hai mă, mori în drum. Mori în drum. Deci e o corupție. Dar nu se întâmplă nimic. Nu se întâmplă nimic. Rămâne cazul... Păi ai luat în cazul Oprescu, copil de general, primarul Bucureștiului. Mă, rapid a fugit dincolo. Păi când acasă la tine ai luat 50.000 de euro. Mă, la tine acasă așa... În glumă. Ai plecat dincolo, nu ai nicio treabă. Corupția a rămas. Asta e endemică. Corupția este endemică. Este o chestie... Și trădările, trădările specifice. Mă, la poporul României, e specific trădarea…Ăsta e endemică. A rămas corupția. Pentru că se transmită și copiilor din familie. Se transmit niște chestii. Se transmit și… mergem mai departe. Deci, să fii notar, băi, te-ai niște sume de bani ca să ajungi acolo. Deci, nu... Meritocrația nu există. Dacă ești bun, deranjezi.

English Translation by Author

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AM: Everything is working. Great! So – your name, date of birth, where were you born? Just an introduction!

CB: 1953, Costel Balint was born in Bucharest. My father was in the military. Before I was born, he came to Lugoj. My mother was from Lugoj, and at a ball, in Lugoj, near Timișoara, at a ball, my father saw my mother, he was a young lieutenant, he took her, they moved to Bucharest, where he went to the academy, and I came into the world like a voluptuous thought in 1953, September 20th, in the Uranus area, where *Casa Poporului* now stands. We moved around a lot until I was 10, lived in about five cities: Vaslui, Huși, Sibiu, Craiova, Sfântu Gheorghe. In Sibiu, I started kindergarten, just one year, at a German kindergarten. From there, we moved to Sfântu Gheorghe, where my father was a major, stationed at a military unit. That's actually where I started going to school – from within the military unit. We stayed there until I was ten, when we moved to my mother's hometown, Lugoj. So, in the first ten years, we moved through about five cities, in quotations.

In Lugoj, I had an extraordinary childhood. I started with Hasdeu School, where I completed grades 1 through 8. An extraordinary childhood. Lugoj is something special, a capital with more lasting power, I'd say, than Timișoara, and I love Timișoara. So, an extraordinary childhood. I also started doing sports. I have a brother who did gymnastics. I started off, at first I played football, but my coach left for Canada in the exact same year Nadia got her perfect 10 score. My football coach was also from the organizing committee, with his wife, who was a gymnastics coach. It was something amazing. After my football coach left the country, the athletics people noticed me and I stuck with athletics. I did high school at Trăian Vuia in Făget, on the humanities track, and graduated. I wanted to apply to study history. I changed my mind. I wanted to become a paratrooper, but my father didn't want me to. So I studied physical education and sport, I started in Timișoara. There were 60 candidates and only 7 spots. I got in. I got in, and I finished. I really loved this profession, being a PE teacher. I don't know what it was, but there was a charm in it for me. I received a government placement in Timiș. In Len, a German village, Lenauheim, an extraordinary village. I could have taken the post in Lugoj too, but a colleague of mine took the Lugoj post, even though I had priority. That's another issue. But I ended up fine. For the placement, I commuted. Eventually, the German section, many of the Germans had left the country. The German community left Germany and they practically paid their way out. They had discounts on the activities at the German section in Lenauheim, and I moved to Liebling, another German village. An extraordinary village. I remember, it was one-of-a-kind. And because we're at the camp in Năvodari,

there at Năvodari, the minister, let's say, of the youth, was Nicu Ceaușescu's wife, Poliana Cristescu. I met her. From the first few days in the Năvodari camp, I was spotted by Mr. Cotuna, who was the Ministry's representative, the one overseeing the camp, and he told me, starting tomorrow, you leave your squad and you're in charge, you'll supervise the PE teachers. There were about 40 of them, and I was responsible for them. That is, for organizing the activities. Năvodari was one of the largest children's camps in the world, after the Russians, Soviets at the time, and in the evenings there were around seven thousand kids. I had three camps, with five thousand children that…

AM: Oh wow!

CB: Please believe me, not a single child ever drowned. It was something extraordinary. The camp at Năvodari was a beehive of activity. From morning until night, sports activities, there was a summer theater, performance, there was always something going on. And the beach, don't even get me started, it was packed. The most interesting part was the election of the "nisc." When there was a nisc, it was something incredible. I think I spent about seven, almost eight years there. I would stay for a whole month at that camp. Sure, with responsibilities, but it was an extraordinary camp. There were also kids from what was then called the socialist camp, let's say. The difference was immediately noticeable. I mean in terms of freedom. It's not that they'd spoke a pipe or anything, but they didn't have lights out at 11 PM. Still, they were extraordinary kids, but there was definitely a visible difference.

From Liebling, whether we like it or not, we arrive at the year 1989. I was in Liebling, a school – I repeat – an extraordinary school, with wonderful colleagues. The English teacher, for example, her father was a prosecutor, and had been a classmate of King Mihai, even sat at the same desk with him. And I still remember, even now, between classes, where we, the head teachers, used to be, there was a hallway with a notebook showing the students' grades, including behavior grades. And as a head teacher, of course, I cared a great deal about that. My class was on the ground floor and it looked like a botanical garden, it was mandatory to keep it that way. The flowers were in the back, and the cleaning lady wouldn't come in. I really cared a lot about that. The village kids, there were many, and many of them were German. But their parents were open-minded and wanted their children to become something in live, to achieve something. My God, even a trade. Not all of them were meant to be teachers, doctors, or engineers, but even learning a trade mattered.

There was that respect, first and foremost, for dance, because they valued it, they appreciated it. And the town would help you too, because there were those agricultural tasks. Those started around September 15-16 and went on until almost November 1. So, they'd work in the sugar beet fields, in the cornfields, but you'd get through it. But schooling remained, it was such an extraordinary team.

AM: Awesome!

CB: That's how it was up until 1989.

AM: Perfect. If we can, let's begin… I mean, we already started speaking a bit about before 1989, but I wanted to know what your experience was like living through this Ceaușescu period, under communism, and how you understand the communist ideology?

CB: So I lived through it, let's take it in reverse, first came the pioneer necktie. I was still in Sfântu Gheorghe, the teacher came in, and to make you a pioneer, I still remember, you had to draw a picture. When it came to drawing, I was basically cartoon-level. So, hands, not even an inclination, anyway. Luckily, my brother had amazing talent, so he made a drawing for me, and I became a pioneer in third grade. Oh, the necktie, I think I even slept with it on the first day. It was done in small groups, around three or four of us at a time, and you had to make a pledge. But what can I say, it was something emotional, being a pioneer, that flag, being a group leader, at that age! But there was a good side too. I had an amazing teacher, who, starting in 3rd grade, once we could read fluently, got us subscriptions, it wasn't mandatory, to *Traista cu povești*. The first books, *Traista cu povești.* I remember, even now, one book was 60 bani, 1 leu was enough. That first encounter, lets say, with being both a student and a pioneer. There wasn't any over-the-top zeal back then. But I already liked it, by 4th grade we started learning Romanian history and geography. Geography fascinated me. Geography fascinated me, as did botany in the fifth grade. Skipping ahead, when I got to 8th grade, we were the last generation where high school ended in the 11th grade… And she asked me a question, I told them, I knew the whole Central Committee! All of it, I knew it by heart [laughing]. The young lady in 11th grade couldn't believe it, she was a neighbor of mine from the apartment block where I lived, on the bank of Timiș. But not the committee itself, it's just that I was fascinated by history from a young age. So we'd play as the Germans, or the partisans, we had these childhood games, but I was fascinated, really fascinated by history.

Already, by seventh grade, I had read quite a lot…Because I was so passionate, and we used to pass books around, maybe you didn't always have them all, and you couldn't even get them all. We did live in a cultural town, as Lugoj was, with renowned painters…You were left with something from that, but you also came into it with your own background, with your bags. I used to listen to Radio Free Europe, and oddly enough, not just me. Already from sixth grade I was into Radio Free Europe and Voice of America. But the crazy part was that my father listened also. When we'd argue, it would go, Why are you listening to them? Well, why are *you* listening to it? Even though we didn't have much, everything was rationed heavily, he still listened. He was a major at the time, not yet a colonel, so there was a connection to Radio Free Europe too, meaning news still circulated. No, I mean it didn't seem like a huge deal, but I remember that the Vietnam War was going on. I don't know how, but I ended up with a badge, a big one, and when the philosophy teacher saw me wearing it, he got very upset. He brought me to the board, asked me some questions, it was about the common market at the time. And I said, comrade professor, three more countries are going to join. Wow, he said, how do you know that? Well, I heard it on Radio Free Europe.

My God, he asked for my gradebook, gave me a three, and threw it on the ground. For me, it was such a rebellious act, I had long hair down to here. And he said, pick it up. I said, you pick it up – I was being naughty – you pick it up, because you threw it. Wow! They called my father, the colonel, to the school. Oh dear… I got a slap in the face. How could he be summoned to school? He reached into his pocket, pulled me out of class, gave me a hundred lei and sent me where? To the barber, of course, right? You have to cut your hair. I didn't really get it cut. He gave me a hundred lei and sent me to the *other* barber. That's when I got the haircut… And I got expelled for three days. Three days, it was like being grounded, on house arrest, let's say…So yeah, I was outraged. The whole thing really revolted me.

AM: So then how did you become a revolutionary in '89? How did it happen?

CB: The word revolutionary doesn't quite… It's 1989. What did I want? I had spent years commuting…I had a five-year-old child. When I moved to Liebling, my wife was a primary doctor, stationed in Hunedoara. So, for two weeks at a time, she'd stay there, then I'd go, then she'd come, we'd use medical leave. We'd take the child to my parents. They were retired. So it wasn't easy. And I really wanted to make it to Timișoara. There were two ways to do it. Of course, one was through the general inspector, but my dad, the colonel said: You won't do that! You made your choice, he told me, you're not going to be posted. National construction sites are where you'll go, son! I conformed. But still, I wished to end up in Timișoara. On December 6th, I held an open lesson. It was the third in my teaching career. An open lesson as a PE teacher. That means 60 teachers from Timișoara and nearby areas came to observe my open class. It included a traditional folk dance element in the PE class. I still remember it today. I taught the lesson and incorporated some folk dances; my Romanian teacher colleague helped me… And then the inspector told me he liked the lesson, even though he was a little upset because…Balint, man, you could have included… you could have included a dance from Carași, you knew I was from Carași! Well, that's how it was. We got over that. They liked the lesson. It ended with a festive meal, full-blown. Mayor Ceapeu helped me out. If I recall right, one person even broke their leg. They showed up anyway, well. I'm joking now. And he told me, look, starting in January, second term, there's a position opening at General School no. 7 in Timișoara. It's no secret. I couldn't believe it.

The lesson was on December 6th. December 14th was a Friday, and school was ending on the 16th. And I came with those colleagues, with Doina and Delea Vulpe. Her husband was with the music faculty. No, he was… at the conservatory. Yes, he was the head of the conservatory, let's say, Mr. Vulpe. He was a music professor. And on the 14th, we walked from the train station, because on the 16th, when school ended, we always held kind of a get-together, like people used to do in the good old days. With sandwiches, dancing. And we even had stuff from abroad, Lambada was all the rage then, and we had that Lambada cassette. Really nice, with soft drinks, yes. Each teacher with their class. We stayed… until the afternoon and evening, then took the train back home. But on the 14th… I saw that over by the tram yard there were some people gathered. Man, I said, these folks, they're not right in the head. They're gonna get arrested, I'm telling you that they're gonna get arrested. When the party ended, I went home. That night I came home quietly. My mother-in-law, this was Saturday, she had gone to a wedding. A wedding in the city center, at Lloyd, near the cathedral. And at some point, a man in civilian clothes came and told her to go home, that the event wouldn't go on. Well, people revolted. My mother-in-law came home and told me about it. When I heard that, I said, man, those folks I saw earlier, they definitely got arrested. I got dressed really fast. And right in front of me, the tram left. It didn't stop. No, no, it didn't stop. I was living in Modern. From Modern to the city center, I walked. And something was driving me to take action, but I didn't know what, in quotation marks. And at Maria, I caught the events that took place.

The most interesting, really, too interesting, was the clash, the fight with the riot police. It was something extraordinary. At first, I saw them coming, the riot police beating people like they were Roman soldiers. It stuck with you. Well, that part wrapped up. But at the start, there was a grocery store on the right, and there were milk bottles there. That's how it started, they began throwing those bottles at the riot police…I was stunned by this, when the firefighters came, people climbed on the firetruck and beat up the driver badly. I didn't agree with that. I was standing near a traffic light, and at some point, a guy came with a big pole in his hand and right when the red light came on, bang! He smashed it with the stick…And then I got hit by that first blast of water, the water cannon. I had this watch from Germany, really nice, with a black face; whatever, a highlight! Anyway, I was wearing this petroleum-colored

parka, leather pants, because I was into leather, leather pants, leather clothes, you know. I wasn't fully realizing what was happening. No, there weren't that many people, but it felt like a crowd was worming, and even the trams were stopped. I didn't really grasp what was going on…

…What was interesting is that along the road, young people would stop cars, take gasoline, and pour it on the pavement. It was extreme. You were, I don't know, not exactly in a trance, but in a kind of incredulous state. There were two types of people: those marching in columns not that many. And the onlookers. No, people weren't shouting. I went into the student housing complex, I remember it was minus seven degrees at the time. A young man climbed up on my shoulders. I'll say his name now: Sorin Oprea. I found out later, I didn't know who Sorin Oprea Was. There's a lot to say about him. He gave a short speech. I kept asking, where are the students? I asked myself that. The dorms were locked, and I spoke with an Arab student, a Palestinian. He told me he was on a scholarship and couldn't come out. He said, man, if they sell us cigarettes, we're good. Come on, join us. No, the student's didn't come. They didn't come. I returned with the column and we returned near the cathedral. On the left was the city hall. There was a line of soldiers, and people were furious, ready to fight them, just some soldiers guarding the building. I said, guys, leave them alone, they're just here to protect their institution, what business do we have with them? So yes, people were ready to revolt, I'd say.

At the cathedral, there was an issue with Sorin Oprea, we're getting to him now, because I only found out his name later. He had a bycicle. I asked him, what are you doing with that bike? Well, okay, there was no leader, he wasn't a leader. But they really wanted to go to the Metropolitan Cathedral, it was very close, to get the keys, open the cathedral, and ring the bells. So to speak. Of course, the metropolitan wasn't there, he was in Constantinople. I even know who answered their call…there was Dorobanțu, Father Dorobanțu. We stayed a little while at the cathedral, there, on the steps. I let the group go ahead, and I ended up in front of the University of Construction. I was left alone, standing in front of it. I feel like laughing now. I instinctively picked up a stone and put it in my pocket, I don't even know why. I put it in my pocket, a stone. The group passed by. It caused a small incident. After they passed, that big sign up top fell down. While it was falling, they were throwing stones. After they moved on, I followed the group. But when I arrived, there were two DAC military trucks from the Securitate intervention forces. Two or three guys from up top were throwing stones down. I walked past those trucks, sweat was pouring off of me. That's it, I thought, I saw my life flash before my eyes, I lived the movie of my life. And yet, there I was, with stones too. But I think what saved me was the parka and the leather pants, I think they thought I was with the Securitate. I got away and caught up with the group again at Dacia Square. There was a man, an engineer, I later found out, named Dan Sobol. I saw him again last year, after 33-34 years. Dan Sobol gave a speech from on top of a table in the square. He said a few words. But meanwhile, there was a line of soldiers, also from the Securitate, with clubs. No guns, just clubs. They came toward the group. People in the group had stones, branches, whatever they could grab, and that's where the group got scattered. The guys, most of them were from Moldova, they were throwing in some swear words too. They were throwing stones and branches. I didn't, I admit. If I didn't throw anything, then I guess I wasn't *that* into it… I didn't throw, that's clear, right? But it felt like something out of a movie. Anyway, the group scattered. There weren't that many of us. The whole idea was to get people to come out. Don't just stand on your balconies, know that you're starving to death. We want Christmas dinners. Why? Because at that point, no one was shouting Down with Ceaușescu yet, none of that was being yelled, clearly, but people were still hesitant.

So, the group had dispersed, I lived in Modern, we passed by Dacia Square. I thought, well, I should go home, right? I was whistling, I think I was definitely whistling. On the left side, just before the clinics, those are the new clinics, two guys came down from a building, each with a bottle in hand, and asked, what happened? I said, how do you not know what happened?! I was truly outraged. And when I told them, they were like, get outta here, you're drunk, that's what they said to me. Anyway, they were the ones with the bottles, but I was the one who was drunk. Right… Then an ARO vehicle pulled up…two guys got out, asked for my ID. I had it right here, instantly, I reached for it. One of them hit me in the kidney, I dropped like a rock. There was a young woman there, they grabbed her and hit her on the head. It's not funny, it's something to cry about. They threw us in that ARO and took us to the police, to the Securitate. There, very interesting, we had barely gotten there, and two lines of men had already formed. As we walked between them, they beat us hard, like we were whales or something. I still didn't quite realize what was happening. They sent me into a cell. And at first, you could still move a little, I'd say the cell was half full, but then it got so packed that you couldn't even sit down anymore, only stand. It was awful.

The strange thing was that there was even a child there with his father, a seventh-grade student…And his father had been beaten badly, he worked at the beer factory. That really left an impression on me. I was furious, really furious, I even shouted through their visor for them to get over here and tell me why they arrested me, because I didn't do anything. I really hadn't done anything. Man, they landed a punch straight to my chin. But fine, that was that. They took down our information altogether, all the way until the morning. In the morning, they brought us out into the courtyard of the institution. We were collapsed on the ground, groaning. Just grotesque scenes. At one point, someone said, take five, you get five. Well, what is that? Because I'd skipped the army, I didn't want to serve. Five. They had lined us up in five rows, but I didn't really understand. Of course… I don't know, somehow I always ended up in front, and got another rain of hits… I saw all kinds of things. I took my five quickly. Five's a passing grade, after all, right? [both laughing] The van came, they threw us inside. I wasn't the first anymore, I was the last one, climbing in. It was grotesque, I could barely stand on my feet after all the blows I had taken. They handed me a guy to hold in my arms, he didn't have legs. They were amputated from the knee down, and he was in a wheelchair. I had to hold him. Great. They took us to the penitentiary. From there, we had some kind of trial. We were in a room, let's call it a reading room, or maybe a dorm, whatever it was. And there we had to start going forward, one by one. First of all, everyone had to undress. Everyone, even the kids, the boys. There were children there. And you had to put everything you had on the table. Necklaces. That morning, before school on the 16th, I had found a 25 bani coin. I picked it up, and… That symbol… I don't even know what to call it. I had forgotten all about it. And when the guy shook out my pants pocket. My God… I messed up again. I messed up again. From that day on, if it's made of gold, I'm not picking it up. I don't need it anymore.

Yes, it was grotesque. And from there, they brought me into a cell. A pretty big one. Strangely enough, they were prepared. The cell was ready. It had three rows of bunk beds. And I remember, at first, it was one person per bed. Then they kept bringing more and more. Eventually, it was three of us in one bed. So, interesting. Food was even brought…And it was actually nice that there was a toilet and cold running water. It was very nice. Very nice. But students kept arriving. People beaten up. I remember clearly. They brought in an old man the next day, still in his pajamas. The man had just come downstairs to see what was happening with his car. They grabbed him. Took him in the van. He was in pajamas, and we were like, man, they're gonna give us striped prison clothes too. When I saw him, I thought, I guess

they're giving us those clothes also. Because we weren't in our own clothes. But it didn't turn out that way. In the evening of the 17th… Yes, the 17th. They took a young man away. They didn't bring him back… I went to the bathroom. In the bed with me, two students arrived. Both from Lugoj, like me. One of them was just a kid. He was studying medicine. Duții and Bibi, those were their nicknames. One's father was a Romanian teacher, from Marga. Bibi's mother was a psychiatrist in Lugoj. They were both terrified. They had just come to go to a party. It was just for fun, and they were thrown into the van. But they were desperate. They stayed with me. The three of us shared that bad, my fellow Lugojeni! But I also saw students from Baia Mare, they were horrified. I mean, first off, being a medical student, we all know how hard it has to get into med school. I know from my wife, personally. It was something major, you had to prepare like crazy. And now? They were automatically losing. What can I say? One time I went to get a drink of cold water, it was decent, and there was this guy bandaging himself. When I saw him, he had been shot in the shoulder. I forget his name now. I called over my little doctor friends, my buddies, and they said, yeah, it's a bullet, but it didn't go through. It's near the bone, but the bone's not broken. I tore up my shirt and made some bandages, wrapped it tight, yeah.

But what really moved me, what really stuck with me, was the thing with the students. Yes, on the 18th, they let the students go. School principals came and took them out. We all wrote little notes to send home. But people were desperate, panicked, like that… Yeah, it was that kind of atmosphere. Plus, there was a vehicle that kept circling all night. You could hear gunfire outside. It was horrible.

…I remember that before the interrogation, I had come up with a plan. What should I say? How did they take me? So I made up a nice story. That I had come to Lugoj, brought a Christmas tree, and brought it home to Timișoara… So, I kept going on about the tree. That's why they supposedly arrested me. But what was the real story? While I was telling this embellished story, the guy questioning me asked: Why did you set the car on fire? What car? Where I was standing, by the smashed traffic light, right across the street was the regional rail office. And that ARO vehicle caught fire. But the driver was the one who set it on fire. I can still see him carrying a bucket of diesel and setting it on fire. But the guy filming, one named Ștef from the Securitate, captured me in that scene. But I said, first of all, I don't smoke. I didn't set it on fire, I don't smoke. So… of course I got hit. I needed to change my statement. What was I shouting? Why did I go out? Anyway, after a few corrections, I stuck to my story and they stuck to theirs. I think I got through the interrogation pretty lightly, I'd say. But it really got me thinking.

…The night before, on the 19th, someone came and said a list had to be made with our name, surname, workplace, the street you live on… In the morning, around 9, they took three people out of the cell. They never came back. Man, the tension! It was awful! And that evening, it was terrifying all the way through. Get out of the cell, we're letting you go. The students didn't want to leave. They were scared. What might they do? I went out. Depressed…into the courtyard. I stood next to someone… Talking with him, I said, man, I think there was a revolution. That guy that had been brought in with a gunshot. Another guy was telling us how he saw someone holding his own intestines in after being shot in the abdomen. You could hear the shooting. There was this unbelievable roar. Man, there was a revolution. It is a revolution!...And at one point, someone came up and gave me a flag, a guy. He gave me a white flag. Teacher? I didn't even say I was a teacher, it was too interesting. He gave me the flag. I'm giving you this flag. We're handing you over to the crowd. You hold the flag. I don't know what came over me. I said, You know what? If you're giving me this flag, I'm asking you for something. I came with my ID. Please give me my ID. He went and brought me my ID. The people next to me froze. Wow, what a nerve

he's got! I tucked the ID into my pocket, Balint, ah, proud of myself. And I stood there with the flag, in the van. They wanted to close the door. No, no! If you said you're releasing us, leave the door open. We were taken downtown to the Council building that evening. Getting out of the van, there were already people around, I don't remember the exact time, maybe around 8. And this young guy comes up, yeah, let's call him that, and gives me a flag with a hole in it. I was like, no, I want a flag with the emblem. What am I supposed to do with a holey flag? Later, of course, I found out that the holey flag, that's from the model of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. That was the model, the holey flag. It was even up at the cathedral, back on the 18th, they had that same flag.

But I didn't know what to do. I didn't really have, not courage, exactly… I just thought, let me go home. Surely, they're waiting for me…Then I got home. Oh man, on the stairwell, when they saw me, it was like a choir of mourners. First thing I did, I went to see my little one. She wasn't even five yet, her birthday was in January. I kissed her, saw her sleeping. Okay, good. I didn't say anything. I think I even got a little sleep, but had terrible dreams. In the morning, I took my crew, Gabi (his wife) and the little one, five years old, to the front of the Opera, December 21st. People were shouting all kinds of slogans. Everyone was saying something… But I didn't hear anything about pluralism. No one was shouting that, I thought. Next to me was an engineer, I found out later he was from the PNL, Leonte Munteanu, who's since died, and he was shouting about pluralism. My little one, a child that wasn't even five years old yet. Impressive, right? She told me, so young, that this is what we need, pluralism. That really left a mark on me. No, I didn't go up onto the balcony, even though I could've. Because I was with my kid and… on the way down Alba Iulia street, I ran into a colleague of mine, a former rugby player, calling me Pichii…My childhood nickname is Pichii, and all the people from Lugoj know it. Man, he spoke from the Opera's balcony: they're going to arrest me! He was crushed. His name was Purice. Yes, a PE teacher. Rugby player. He spoke from the Opera's balcony. So yeah, that was that. Up until the 21st, I was involved, and Gabi too, since she was a doctor at the Children's Hospital, even though she was still officially assigned to the countryside.

So, when I saw the soldiers, at first they were firing, but I didn't even know what at. I thought, man, what are you shooting at? It was madness, panic, even though I had spent a few days in sort of a days, I hadn't processed it. I visited my English teacher colleague, Doinița, who lives in Germany now. She couldn't believe it. I told you already that her father was a classmate of King Mihai's. And she couldn't believe it. But I had the courage to keep going…I got involved. I remember, in my apartment building, a lot of soldiers were stationed in the area…And I really annoyed me that no one was doing anything, they just stayed inside. They just stayed in their apartments. And the crazy part, on the 16th, there were still students in the buildings tying. That bothered me. On the 22nd-23rd, when the terrorist panic began, the chaos stirred up by Bucharest… I still remember, I had just come from the city center with Gabi, and we were carrying this girl. I still can't believe it. Even though we had a child at home, we were staying with my mother-in-law. Four of us were living in a two-room flat, so it wasn't easy. That's another story altogether. Anyway, it was past midnight, I think, you could hear this rumble, this…So, a column of tanks was coming, that terrorist psychosis was beginning. Man, I found myself right in it. I stayed, and in the end, from… from one of the tanks, with the machine gun open. I had a tricolor ribbon. I don't know how I even ended up with it. Gabi was there, and there were three other people… I saw, off to the right, there was a burst of machine gun fire. Someone fell right next to me. Gabi ran away immediately, I left too. But the guy, he was screaming, the guy who'd been shot, so we came back. But that man, who had come for a wedding, we carried him, Gabi and I. Gabi gave him first aid, since she was

a doctor. On the way to Babeș, no one wanted to get out or go with us. It was a long way to Babeș. The doctor there was incredible. He operated on him, I don't know for how many hours. But he saved him. If we'd left him there… yeah, I said, look at that, I got lucky again, man. It could have been any of us. The machine gun burst.

For that, I have never forgiven them. Forgiven in the sense of, what for? Just because I had a tricolor ribbon, because I wasn't a terrorist. That whole terrorist psychosis had started. But right then, I proposed to myself. When I went home, let me tell you something from the 18th, Gabi was looking for me at the hospital. My father came from Lugoj. Gabi went to the country hospital…And Gabi, when she got to the county office, it hit her in the chest. He's not here. He crossed the border. And strangely, my father had heard by the phone in Lugoj that I had crossed the border, that I was gone. So, people figured, if I was missing, something must have happened. That I died, or I escaped across the border. It wasn't pretty… Gabi went to the cathedral with my dad, right? That was on the 18th, when Chițac showed up with his troops and opened fire toward the cathedral. But my father, standing there with Gabi, said: don't worry, Gabi, I know Chițac. We did drills together and I know him. He won't shoot. And not even a few minutes later, the gunfire started. If not even my dad remained there, Gabi ran off. Anyway, that was a thing that…

Yes, this is where I wanted to get to. When I got home, I don't even remember what day exactly, when I saw my dad, the first thing I told him was disband the army, because they acted like criminals. So… I felt such a hatred! I didn't do the army, because I didn't want to. The irony is that I'm the child of a military man, so, no… I just didn't want to. I never would have wanted to do it. I don't know if that was a good or bad thing, it's not about being a man. I was doing sport anyways, it wasn't…But I hated them so much, because I've seen so many cases. Take what happened with the Russians, for example. My God, to shoot… Innocent people, who literally came out for freedom. How can you shoot them? Their hands, empty, as they say. I don't even want to talk about the Otopeni case…My father had tears in his eyes. My father who loved the army so much. A man who was in Transfăgărășan, he made the Transfăgărășan. So, my dad was… And every five years, during the military parade, my dad was the deputy parade commander. My dad was an upright guy, a real professional. He was a professional guy, mathematical. My brother and I used to play chess against him, just the two of us against him alone, no queen – and he'd wipe the floor with us. He had so much love for the soldiers. He really loved that career, being in the military. He cried when I said that the army should be disbanded. That's how it was, that's how I saw things at the time. Even though I defended them… After the Revolution, everyone, my God, there was this kind of hatred, everywhere, and…So yeah, that's what it was.

CB: December 1989, in Timișoara, the crowd succeeded. I want to go back to Iași. Why mention Iași? Because this whole thing was being prepared in Iași. There we had Dan Petrescu, Ana Maria Spiridon. Dan Petrescu, who in France, made a declaration. Because of that, it was clear he was being watched. They had prepared manifestos. Two kinds of them. Still about the Front, it was the same idea. Timișoara, the democratic Front. So, whether we like it or not, Iași fell from the start. They arrested them immediately. They were very upset with me. One of them, right when I joined, when I was a writer for the first time, before I truly got into the career, I was at the sorting of the file. And I asked him why. Him, what do I want with their files? I was right. I was saying it straight – I was upset with how my writer's file got rejected, even though I kept writing. Later, I got in. I got in for real, through my own work, not for

anything else. So, Timișoara, Timișoara's chance was not random. It had serious problems with the Securitate. That should be very clear.

…But that's where the spark was. Because if… Let's think about Brașov. There, people went out in the streets, and that was it, goodbye. Here, the dead appeared. The arrests began. There were over 800 people arrested…So, if people hadn't gone out into the streets in Timișoara, well, looking back now, years later, there were two categories. There was the category, let's say, of the political types. Because the first ones out in the streets were from the patriotic guards. The Securitate and the militia quickly brought people out into the street. Who did they send out? Informants. Yes, I remember, I saw them, I know them. A barber, a currency dealer…Those were the first ones brought out. The irony is that the first ones beaten badly were the policemen. They got it with the chain…But the biggest mistake was this: the army opened fire. If the army hadn't shot, that would've been it. Now it's sad that years later, most people don't acknowledge these things. What I appreciate now, looking back, is that the Prime Minister, General Ciucă, issued an apology. For me, that was something extraordinary. I really admired that. The army was a mistake/ And not just anywhere, only in Timișoara. Only in Timișoara; only in Timișoara. Regarding the Milea case, I've studied it for a long time. The Milea case. When he shot himself. Shot from above, stories with pistols. No, he shot himself. Why? Let's think logically. He contributed. Even though at first he opposed it and he said he didn't find it in the military rules, he told Ceaușescu that the army could fire on its own people. Though the army had fired before in 1907 also, but let's skip over that. But he saw what happened in Timișoara. When he was personally in the barricades area in Bucharest on the 21st, they ran over people with tanks. What are we even talking about? A matter of conscience. Clearly. Clearly! And let's not forget, back during collectivization, he was a strong military activist there too. So there's no use, some people keep trying. Like that Dogar guy, talking about history. Makes me want to laugh out loud, that Dogar. The Otopeni case. So Mister Dogar, the military historian, tells me terrorists were hiding in the forest. I've documented the Otopeni event, my God. I talked to the survivors. It marked me… I saw the military file. I got to the bottom of it quickly. I wrote about the Trosca case. Serious things, not stories. So Dogaru keeps going with his little stories. It's embarrassing that a military man, after all these years, comes out with that kind of story. There's only one truth. There aren't multiple truths.

That moment changed me: your hands are up, right… and they shoot you? They shoot you. But to leave them there for two days. It's sad, sad. It's so sad! The so-called terrorist phenomenon that appeared. That's the political wing of it. Starting with the television, we're instantly back at the Opera in Timișoara. When the guy we took to the hospital got shot, at the Opera, the lights went out. They were firing, but we didn't know what at. They had weapons. The TF troops had brought the weapons. By the way, we're also talking about military logs, those have been reopened, trials have started. The only log that doesn't exist is the one from TF. I still laugh now, I know what TF really did. But this whole terrorist phenomenon spread with the help of television. Because there were two command structures, political and military…But this phenomenon spread across the whole country, this thing with the terrorists, stories with 40,000 dead even in the American press. I had the typewriter, the book, I collected everything the American press wrote in 1990. And even Radio Free Europe, another case of disinformation that is careless, careless, careless. You mean to say that the tanks and all that were going to the airport because the terrorists were coming. What terrorists? What terrorists?

AM: I still have a few more questions.

CB: Yes, of course.

AM: I wanted to ask, we touched a bit on churches and religion earlier.

CB: They played an extraordinary role.

AM: I wanted to know what role they played during the Revolution.

CB: We've got one specific case. Just one thing. And I found you one. Let's go back to Dugulescu, if you want. So, to be very… Let's leave that to the pastor… Dugulescu came with his children to the cathedral. He was there. He was also my neighbor, Dugulescu. But unfortunately, to be direct, he was a collaborator with the Securitate. I'm sorry to say it, but he was a collaborator. The children never came on their own. I wouldn't have done something like that. Let's not forget that they opened fire at the cathedral. Now, why did he bring those kids there? But… Religion, the children… At school I had, I'll say it again…

There were wonderful kids. But there were a little stressed out. That was the issue in that region. Because it was their right, I repeat. My father is a Greek Catholic, for example. And there was a real struggle involving the Greek Catholics there. So, I used to go to the Easter vigil with my father. I still remember now, you know, we were just kids, right? But that was something we respected. Religion should be respected. So no, we don't… Well… I see what's happening in Gaza now. My God, what fault do they have? Because some are terrorists. Sir, 13,000 children have died there. For what? Why did those children have to die? No, no, it's a tragedy, for nothing. No, religion… No, no… Let me give an example. Kids from, how should I say, religious families, yeah? They have a teacher, right? And I see how calm they are. It's a different kind of education. Honestly. A different kind of education

…No, I really appreciated them. Truly, I appreciated them deeply. Because it was a different kind of education. I see it even in my own experience, I've met people from that world and my God, they're educated, cultured, elegant people. So, religion, with a phrase that seems made up, but with power… It's a gain, let's call it that, but some are opportunists. Some are opportunists. Unfortunately, some are just that – opportunists. I don' accept that. Not profiteers. Like anywhere, there are leaves, forest, and deadwood mixed in. So yes, religion played a big role. Yes, even Tőkés, his role too. Well, later on he changed a bit. When he moved to Hungary, he divorced…Not long ago, he was brought back to Timișoara and we met, we talked, he remembered me. I actually liked him. But… he changed a bit. He wasn't the same man I had known, the one who suffered. He was a guy who… I think there's something about him in the book I'm giving you, the one I'm putting out now, it's… I think I was one of the first who published the whole history like that. But yes, religion played a role. I'm sorry about Dugulescu. I'll be honest, I saw Dugulescu's file. That's how it is. I could explain his reasons too. He didn't have a choice. If you wanted to go to America back then… Let's look at it from the other side too… You had to… But those kids, what were they supposed to see? They were cannon fodder. A human shield, or what? Well, he was lucky nothing happened to him.

AM: What do you think about the current political situation in Romania or the future of Romania's situation, thinking back to '89?

CB: Completely disappointed. The steps Romania has taken, right? Sure, we're in the European Union, we're in NATO because others wished for us to be in NATO, let that be clear. Why? Our role, our

position is… But… No, I had different expectations. And they've destroyed the market we once had, coal and steel. No, we are… Why? Because we don't have proper representation. No, no, nobody who can bring in… Take Mrs. Dăncilă, Mrs. Dăncilă who was Romania's Prime Minister, and she was in the Agricultural Committee. Well, your background is in oil and gas. What does that have to do with agriculture? We weren't sending competent people there. The European Union is good, but only if you have people willing to fight…for Romanians, for this nation! No, no. Foreign policy. What have we even done with foreign policy? Mr. Cioroianu from the PNL, who embarrassed himself in Spain, he made that huge blunder. People who are just not prepared… We used to have, sadly, I have to say in the past, my God, we had people who actually thought about… No, we don't have that quality anymore. That quality is gone. We used to have extraordinary people. No, I truly believed!

All this crowding, for what?...How many young people are there? How many young people are really there? When a young person steps up, they say, oh, he is a follower. No, no, I'm disappointed. I'm disappointed in education. Where is Romanian education today? I'm talking about public education. Yes? That bit of general knowledge…General culture. No. The village school is dead. It's dead. If you were there, you were somebody. Not even the priest was more important than you. In the good sense of the word. Respected. But that's dead, right? We don't have a well-prepared generation. Well, by whom? The teacher shapes them. It's not the school no. It's the teacher that shapes the student. Look at universities now. What? Because… the teacher is a tailor, yes? But if they don't get good material. What can they tailor? No. If the material isn't good, what are they supposed to work with? Look around. Where are the industrial high schools? The trade schools and the golden bracelet. Where are the high schools? The vocational schools. Look, where are they? Where are they? We don't need financiers, builders, those sailors. Where are they? They disappeared together with the fleet. Disappointment. It's a big one… We kept comparing ourselves with the Bulgarians. With everyone else. Yes, with the rest. Because we didn't have true politicians. We didn't. To actually serve this country. No, not to be pro-whatever, I don't know what. But for this country. I look at our neighbor, Hungary. That man fights. He fights for his people. He fights. Sure, in Romania, we criticize him, say that he went and raised the Hungarian flag, no, he can go and put even 7,000 flags. But he fights for his country. He fights. Yes? He has something to say one that. Yes, live. Live well. It was a quote from the classics. No, no. Unfortunately. Unfortunately. And before, school was done through the teacher's real mentorship, in the classroom, now, many articles even from the 90s, we had kids walking around with keys around their necks. If you don't tutor your kid privately, goodbye. Before. I never had a tutor in my life. A few tutoring hours in physics, for my wife who entered in med school, a few with my physics teacher who said, Pichii, dear, this is good material. Just a few lessons and she got in with flying colors. But now, well, they need a private tutor from the first grade. No, no. Is it that the school can't do it anymore? Or that it won't? Without education, we just steal models from left and right. No, no. Something's missing. And trust, there's no trust left. The population is divided. These promises they make, completely empty. Promises without backing. Romania, sadly, and I say this honestly, is far from where it should be. Where we are now, we wonder why we don't receive more. Why does Hungary have visa access to the United States?...Why don't we? If tomorrow they opened it up, Alexandra, listen to me, three quarters of Romanians would leave. If tomorrow they allowed it. America knows what it knows. And people will go there.

…Where are those things? They're gone. So now everyone's on their own…And vocabulary. It's gone. Just gone. Education is in ruins, even though the president promised otherwise. Yes. Sadly, this is a generation that is drifting…Look at how many actually take the baccalaureate now. How many? Moldova

is a mess. Moldova is a mess. No trade. No this, no that. And then Afghanistan comes, Thailand comes, yeah? They come here and work. You see them. And here, we started that so-called brainstorming, right? Yes, the stealing of intelligence. The smart ones, they go abroad. If you're the cream of the crop, you leave. So what are you left with? What do you build with? What do you build with? If you haven't invested in this human force, this resource, human resource.

There's a war at the border. What army do we have? What kind of army do we even have? These big-talking generals, you see them on TV, running their mouths, and all of them are NATO now…But the future isn't war, it's peace. I haven't heard anyone talk about peace… This future, what is it competing for? No, no, this whole thing… I don't see the youth ready for the future. I mean. Let's put aside the top ones, the cream of the crop…When I look at politicians, where do their kids go? Why don't they stay here? No one forced them to leave. We had prestigious universities. We had Timișoara Politehnică, we studied material resistance, we had that… Medicine, don't even get me started. Surprisingly, the professors were Germans, jews, but medicine was real medicine. I remember with my wife, we were supposed to go to the seaside, but she had a 9, and went to retake an exam just to push her average to 10, for one point she went back. And it was a risk, if it didn't go well, you could have ended up with an 8. That's how seriously it was taken… Not just for grades, but for the profession. Now, you find med schools everywhere, though it gets hard after the first year. Like the gypsy saying goes, the practice is what kills us. So yeah, I see a disoriented generation.

AM: I want to ask if you see any kind of continuation of the Revolution in today's events, for example, in the anti-corruption protests or similar protests.

CB: Yes, I understand the question. Corruption didn't start yesterday or today. After 90, let's start with one thing. Who knew? Who got privatized? Who took over the food stores? First of all, the Securitate knew. All of it, the Securitate knew. So the Securitate had free rein, worked with all the notaries…This country was looted. That slogan, "we're not selling our country," no, we didn't sell it, we gave it away for free. And the ones who needed to take it took it. So, corruption, the collapse of the banks, all of that… But who paid for all of it? The Romanian did, right? The Romanian people paid for it. It's still going on. There's too little resistance. We scrapped that law… Now, no… If you're friends with those in power, nothing can touch you. Look, my guy, you worked with budgets, right? You worked in these things. So how, exactly, do you own this house, when just the land alone is worth 107,000 euros? No, seriously, from where? My wife is a primary doctor, I was a teacher my whole life. I never managed that. Sure, I never messed with the banks. But I also didn't go around with my hand out. Why? Because neither of us were like that. Me, for example, I don't have a car, because I'm not interested. Not because I couldn't afford it, goodness. I don't have a passion for it. But others, from where? Where is all this wealth coming from? We never even asked ourselves the question. Or maybe we just don't want to ask ourselves the question? No, no. We don't want to ask. There are houses in Timișoara where just the land is worth over 100,000 euros… But he's works with budgets.

And corruption? The situation in hospitals is a disaster. What's happening in hospitals is… my God! I had my own… At a certain age, you start having… My wife's a doctor, and it's like she was keeping me in check. Scolding me. But you hear those things, and see some of the prices… Come on, you'll die on your way there. You die on the way. So, there's a corruption. But nothing happens. Nothing happens. Take the case of… Well, look at Oprescu's case, the general's son, the mayor of Bucharest.

Man, he ran off abroad real fast. When they find 50,000 euros at your home. At your own house… Like a joke. You left the country, and nothing happened to you. Corruption is still here. It's endemic. Corruption is endemic. It's a whole thing… And the betrayals too, the betrayals are specific. Betrayal is specific to the Romanian people. That's endemic. Corruption has stuck around. Because it gets passed down to the children in families. These things get passed on. They do… and we go on. So, to become a notary, you need to pay insane amounts just to get there. So, no… Meritocracy does not exist. If you're good, you're a threat.