

The Radiography of a Historical Anomie
Periprava¹ – the Narrative Memory of a Communist Labour Camp

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Abstract: The paper is a first case study researching the *Formațiunea 0830 Periprava* labour camp in the Danube Delta (1957–1964). The analysis focuses, pertinently and objectively, on the situation of political prisoners sent to this unit of forced labour in the first two decades of communism. The work is based on a wide range of historical sources (published and unpublished archival documents), the legislation of the age, and sources of oral history (testimonies and interviews). This study is the result of a two-year research, including the examination of files connected to the subject from the archives of the *Consiliul Național de Studiere a*

¹ Geographically, Periprava is the last settlement on the Chilia branch of the Danube Delta, at a distance of 103 km from Tulcea. It is located at the northernmost part of the Letea sand banks, bordered on the north by the Danube, on the west by lake Nebunul, on the east by the fish farm, and on the south by Letea forest. The only way of access is by water. Periprava is highly important also as a touristic area due to its many natural heritage sites: Sulimanca river, Cernovca island, Merha, Mătița and Lopatna lakes all the way up to Mila 23. Downstream Periprava the terminal delta of the Chilia branch offers the spectacle of the waters flowing into the Black Sea. Administratively, Periprava is part of C. A. Rosetti commune. The village has 320 inhabitants and around 150 households. The main activity of the villagers is fishing, but the active labour force is mostly unemployed. According to the local people, in the past “The village [was] full of youngsters, boys and girls. There were dances [...] There were very many people here. They worked in agriculture, the zootechnology sector was well developed. There were crowds here, really [...] There were fish ponds, they bred fish. It was flourishing [...] Today? It’s deserted. Few people in the village. The youth has dispersed: some went to the city. There is nothing left, no zootechnology sectors... Everything has turned to dust, there’s nothing left. Foreigners came and bought land. What they are doing around here, I don’t know, some sort of agricultural tourism... They bought the lot of the former colony, too. Nothing was left of the buildings. Everything was destroyed”, “Periprava is like a *village without dogs*, as they say. No one is stable here, to lead it ... everything’s dispersed. In the past it used to be a bit smaller”. [“Satul [era] plin de tineret, băieți, fete. Se organiza horă [...] Era lume foarte multă aici. Se lucra agricultură, era sectorul zootehnic dezvoltat. Ce mai, era lume aici [...] Erau helește, se creștea pește. Era înfloritor [...] Astăzi? E pustiu. Lume în sat puțină. Tineretul s-a împrăștiat: care s-a dus la oraș. Nu mai e nimic, sectoare zootehnice... Praf s-a ales, nu mai e nimic. Au venit străinii, au cumpărat teren. Ce fac ei pe aici nu știu, un fel de agroturism... Și terenul fostei colonii s-a cumpărat. N-a rămas nimic din clădiri. Totul s-a distrus (*sic!*)”, “Periprava ca și cum ar fi *sat fără câini*, așa-i spune. Nimeni nu este aici stabil, ca să-l conducă ... e împrăștiat tot. În trecut era oleacă mai strâns (*sic!*)”] (Testimonies of the inhabitants of Periprava, 2008). The locals are unsatisfied because the people left, moved to different places, and there are less and less families left.

Arhivelor Securității (National Council for the Study of Security Archives) and field research in the village of Periprava conducted on two occasions. The analysis failed to identify any published materials approaching the subject from the same perspective as the present research. From this point of view, the study can be regarded as an original contribution to the subject discussed.

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The present research is an attempt to revive the memory of those who have suffered in communist labour camps. The target group is formed by those who were called political prisoners during the regime, that is to say, people who opposed the communist regime one way or another. The primary presupposition of this approach is that both in Romanian communist prisons and in the labour camps of other countries under the *Iron curtain* after the Second World War, political prisoners made up over three quarters of all prisoners. They were the social product of conflicts taking place as the new regime was instated, whose motto was: “Who’s not with us, is against us!”.

I used the forced labour camp *Formațiunea 0830 Periprava* as a case study. My main purpose was to establish how the *world* of the labour camp was perceived both inside and outside it. The internal perception of the camp reveals a double perspective. First, there is the perception of the political prisoner, unfolding the image of his repetitive daily life. This perspective is doubled by that of the labour camp’s employee as a witness and co-participant of this life. The other, external perception represents the image preserved in the memory of the local villagers about the suffering of the prisoners and their attitude to the camp’s employees. In order to conduct a research as pertinent and objective as possible, I made use of a wide range of sources: interviews¹ with all three categories of subjects, archival research of published and unpublished documents, memoirs, and the historiography of the treated subject.

“Periprava is a village of fishermen lost in a forest of reed whose name – if ever mentioned in history – will only be remembered due to the bitter pains suffered here and the thousands of graves where the Romanian elite was lost”.² This is

¹ For the sake of a better fluency of the text, the fragments of the interviews and excerpts from other source publications are translated into English in the main body, while the originals are included into the footnotes. The ungrammatical language use or erroneous expressions occurring all over the cited texts are characteristic for orality and also betray the educational level of some of the interviewed persons.

² Gheorghe Andreica, *Omul din groapă: Povestiri din perioada cruntei terori comuniste 1948-1964* (The man in the grave: Stories from the age of the cruel communist terror, 1948-1964) (Ploiești: Editura Printeuro, 2000), 39. [“Periprava e un sat de pescari pierdut într-o pădure de stuf al cărui nume – dacă va fi pomenit în istorie – se datorează numai amarnicelor suferințe mistuite aici și miilor de morminte în care s-a pierdut elita românească.”]

precisely the “assumed subjectivity”¹ that I wish to extract from the confessions and testimonies gathered, approaching it with the methodology of oral history. The purpose of this research is precisely to reconstruct the image, as lively and close to reality as possible, of what happened in the Periprava labour camp. The collective memory of Periprava is constructed, this way, from the words of the interviewed, corroborated with documents and general writings on communism and repression in Romania. Due to aesthetic considerations, some of the more extensive descriptions and quotes are inserted in the notes.

The methodology I applied in elaborating my article pertains to the general context of oral history. Oral confession has been increasingly appreciated in the course of the 20th century, mostly among anthropologists and sociologists. Although it has been contested by a number of historians as being too subjective, the western literature on the subject still considers it a fundamental source of history and an invaluable instrument of the historian.² The expression immediate history or oral history, used for quite some time in modern history research highlights a certain type of historiography, characterized by double closeness. First, there is the closeness in time of the treated subject matter and the closeness of the author (historian) to the problem he/she studies. This type of history, although making use of live archives, the witnesses of a historical event, does not favour the oral to the written document, but attempts at a historical balance of these, at crediting both sources in the reconstruction of the historical fact.³ Halbwachs claims that, in addition to written history, there is also a live history, handed down and renewing in the course of time, and the memories, even the most personal ones, belong to the group of which the subject is a member. His research is an important contribution to collective memory and the understanding of group life, imposing and developing the notions of collective memory and social memory. Memory for him is “the actual knowledge of the past”, while not being “a preservation of images”, but the “reconstruction of past images”. The world of the past may bring along a series of old trends, which have supposedly disappeared. Even the recollection of one’s own past implies the social aspects of the recalled time: participation in various events or organizations, instances of school or family life. Thus, memories are strongly connected to social life, permanently interacting with it.⁴ Taking into account the methodology used in this research, our responsibility is to assume the risk of subjectivity, as mentioned before, of the methods and instruments applied. Essentially for oral history, the research is situated at the crossing point of several

¹ A concise and clear exposition of the thesis of “assumed subjectivity” is to be found in: Doru Radosav, “Istoria orală și etnotextul: afinități și subiective” (Oral history and the ethno-text: affinities and subjectivities), *Anuarul de Istorie Orală* (Annual of Oral History) 12 (2010): 5–14.

² Jean-Francois Soulet, *Istoria imediată* (Immediate history) (Bucharest: Editura Corint, 2000), 71–72.

³ Doru Radosav, *Donbas, o istorie deportată* (Donbas, a deported history) (Ravensburg: Landsmannschaft der Sathmarer Schwaben in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1994), 8.

⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *Memoria colectivă* (Collective memory), trans. Irinel Antoniu (Iași: Institutul European, 2007), 49–94.

disciplines, on account of the fact that this qualitative analysis borrows instruments of work which are as yet interdisciplinary.

Repression and political prisoners

The instauration of the communist regime in Romania brought about a radical change of society in what concerns individual rights and liberties. Similarly to all totalitarian regimes, communism also used all available means to eliminate civil society, namely the institutions promoting individual values, at a gradual pace depending on the “stages of the communists’ seizing the political power”.¹

Once they seized the power, the communists both in Romania and in other countries of the Soviet territory pursued the introduction of a totalitarian system which would allow them full control over the society, regardless of the consequences and the ways to attain this. They attacked their adversaries in a *selective* and *successive* way, promoting always the less trained in all fields under the pretext of *defenders of a part of peasants* whom they “incited against landowners and wealthy peasants”.² Using the means of repression, they gradually eliminated any kind of opposition in any form. They imprisoned innocent people, some even without a trial, and others were driven into invented law suits, the sentence of which was known from the beginning.

The organism most feared in communist Romania was the *Securitatea* – DGSP (General Directorate of People’s Security, the secret police agency), founded on 30 August 1948. Its role was to protect the People’s Republic of Romania from the *conspiracy of external and internal enemies*, with the main purpose of eliminating any kind of resistance against the communist regime.³

The process of annihilating the old Romanian political class and any form of resistance initially manifested itself by massive internment in forced labour camps and colonies, then continued with “forcing the convicted to a diabolical programme of physical exhaustion, *re-education by labour*, and systematic starvation”.⁴

¹ Marin Radu Mocanu, “Forme și strategii de comunizare a societății românești (1949–1950)” (Forms and strategies of communizing the Romanian society, 1949–1950), in *Anii 1949–1953: Mecanismele terorii* (Years 1949–1953: Mechanisms of terror), *Analele Sighet* (Annals of Sighet) 7, ed. Romulus Rusan (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 1999), 30.

² Apostol Stan, *Teroare și rezistență în România democrației populare* (Terror and resistance in Romania in the age of people’s democracy), in *Anii 1949–1953: Mecanismele terorii*, 16.

³ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gulagul în conștiința românească. Memorialistica și literatura închisorilor și lagărelor comuniste* (The Gulag in Romanian conscience. Memoirs and writings from communist prisons and labour camps) (Iași: Polirom, 2005), 100–101.

⁴ Marian Cojoc, *Evoluția Dobrogei între anii 1944 – 1964. Principalele aspecte din economie și societate* (The evolution of Dobrogea in the years 1944–1964. Main economical and social aspects) (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2001), 78.

Forced labour, a means of education and purging

On 3 April 1950, the General Directorate of People's Security diffused the Order no. 100 of the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Pintilie Gheorghe, on the fight against the "class enemy" (sending to labour colonies).

The decree stipulated in article 1 that "for re-educating the elements hostile to the People's Republic of Romania with the purpose of preparing and integrating them into social life in the conditions of people's democracy and the building of socialism, labour units are established".¹ Consequently, the interest of the system to *re-educate* those who did not agree with their actions, was visible from the very beginning. The *modus operandi* of the totalitarian system meant, in the first years of activity, the physical elimination of all opposition. What followed then was the next process: that of forced integration into the established regime by re-education, even if this meant the application of violent or inhuman methods. Actually, as it is common knowledge by now, and as we shall see in this paper, this *re-education* was in most cases only a masked form of reality. The repressive, brutal methods were the same. However, to indicate the lawfulness of these procedures to the Romanian society and international public opinion, the legislation and official communications abounded in similar formulations, in conformity with international human rights.

Article 2 of this legislation displays the same official discourse of the age. The following persons can be sent to units of forced labour: "a. those who by their actions or manifestations, directly or indirectly, endanger or try to make more difficult the building of socialism in the People's Republic of Romania, as well as those who, in a similar way, defame state power or its organs, if these actions do not or cannot by analogy constitute criminal actions.

b. convicts for criminal actions against the security of the People's Republic of Romania, who on the completion of their sentence do not prove to be re-educated."²

Therefore the period of re-education proved to be only a *veil* thrown over the cruel reality of labour camps and prisons. The criminal actions mentioned in the text of the decree meant any form of opposition to the communist regime. This period is very well described by historian Mihai Cojoc, who saw no great differences between the extermination period of the first years of communism, and the following years when terror was imposed under the mask of *re-education*. The

¹ National Council for the Research of the Archives of the *Securitate* (CNSAS), *SECURITATEA. Structuri-cadre. Obiective și metode* (SECURITATEA. Structures and staff), vol. 1. (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2006), 286–287. ["pentru reeducarea elementelor dușmănoase Republicii Populare Române și în vederea pregătirii și încadrării lor pentru viața socială în condițiunile democrației populare și construirii socialismului, se înființează unitățile de muncă (*sic!*)"]

² Ibid. ["a. acei care prin faptele sau manifestările lor, direct sau indirect, primejduiesc sau încearcă să îngreuneze construirea socialismului în Republica Populară Română, precum și acei care, în același mod, defăimează puterea de stat sau organele sale, dacă aceste fapte nu constituie sau nu pot constitui prin analogie, infracțiuni.

b. condamnații pentru infracțiuni împotriva securității Republicii Populare Române care la expirarea executării pedepsei nu se dovedesc a fi reeducați (*sic!*)"]

process of annihilating the old Romanian political class and its remains began at first by massive internments in forced labour colonies and camps, then it continued by “exposing the convicts to a diabolical programme of physical exhaustion, re-education by labour, and systematic starvation”.¹

The main objective of the *Securitate* was the fight conducted against the *class enemy*. The adequate outcome of their plans was ensured by the methods, techniques, and means of repression. Their slogan was to make “definitive order, to clear the society of enemies and decisively contribute to the building of socialism”.²

With the avalanche of arrests of those who opposed the newly set up regime, came the need to establish new concentration spaces. Thousands of people were arrested, the prisons became overcrowded. The enemies of the regime had to be annihilated. On 23 September 1949 the Ministry of Home Affairs decided that “all convicts in the prisons must, are forced ... to work.”³

Decree no. 6/1950 ordered the establishment of labour camps, later transformed into labour colonies by the Decision of the Council of Ministers [*Hotărârea Consiliului de Miniștri*] no. 1554/1952, “(...) taking into account the active resistance of elements hostile to the regime, and the fact that they continuously try to sabotage in an organized way the measures of the government and the party to enforce the dictatorship of the proletariat and the successful building of socialism, in order to facilitate the supervision of the activity of elements hostile and alien to the working class, in order to attract them to socially useful labour”.⁴ In continuation, it was decreed that internment to labour colonies must be made by decision of a special committee which was to be founded in the framework of the Ministry of Home Affairs and which had to deliberate on the basis of proposals of the G.D.S.S. (General Directorate for State Security) and G.D.M (General Directorate of the Militia).⁵

Although formally legalized, soon forced labour actually meant huge punishment camps which housed all people accused of sabotage or the failure to fulfil production quotas and party duties. Of these camps, let us mention those at the Danube–Black Sea Channel, Balta Brăilei, the Danube Delta, Galați, Craiova, Vlăhița, Ialomița, or the building sites of the hydro-electric plant of Stejaru-Bicaz. According to some statistics made on the basis of the confessions of former

¹ Marian Cojoc, *Evoluția Dobrogei*, 78.

² Cristian Troncotă, *Practici și mentalități în activitatea aparatului de Securitate din România, 1948-1965* (Practices and mentalities in the activity of the security apparatus in Romania, 1948–1965) I, *Arhivele Totalitarismului* (Archives of totalitarianism) no. 24–25, 3–4(1999): 72–73.

³ *Cartea Albă a Securității* (The White Book of the *Securitate*) vol. II, August 1948–July 1958, 211. [“toți deținuții din penitenciare trebuie, sînt obligați... să muncească” (*sic!*)]

⁴ C.N.S.A.S., *Arhivele Securității* (Archives of the *Securitate*) 1 (Bucharest: Editura Pro Historia, 2002), 108–109. [“[...]având în vedere rezistența tot mai activă a elementelor dușmănoase regimului și faptul că încearcă în continuu să saboteze în mod organizat măsurile guvernului și partidului îndreptate spre întărirea dictaturii proletariatului și construirea cu succes a socialismului, pentru a ușura supravegherea activității elementelor dușmănoase și străine de clasa muncitoare, pentru a le atrage la munca de utilitate socială”]

⁵ *Ibid.*

convicts, the permanent population of these camps could have reached as many as over 80,000 individuals.¹

Some of the researchers use the term *the legislation of repression* to denote the legislation elaborated beginning with 1948, due to the very high number of arrests. Therefore it is considered that the authorities had to establish labour colonies since the penitentiary system only comprised 74 prisons with 15,000 places.²

The formulation *temporary labour service* (used by the Council of Ministers when new labour force was needed) concealed in fact forced labour as a punishment for those who disturbed the communist regime one way or another. The high number of convicts was increased even more with those deported in massive amounts, mainly people from urban environment, in order to make room for workers brought in to work in new factories and plants.³ There is no official and single statistics as yet of those who died in labour camps and prisons. A former internee of these colonies states that “For the convicts at the Channel, at Bicaz, and from the Delta, where I was, who remained forever in the clay they were supposed to dig daily, 18 hours of 24, no objective estimation has been made. [...] to the Midia labour camp around 80-90 corpses were brought daily via the Channel, waiting, crushed as timber, for a physician of the *Securitate* to certify their death”.⁴

In 1955, the Directorate of Penitentiaries, Labour Camps and Colonies (D.P.L.C.C.), subordinated to the Ministry of Home Affairs, issued the regulations on *acceptance, detention, regime, and supervision in labour camps and colonies*. The analysis of these regulations reveals the improvement of the labour camp system. It specifies the role and character of labour camps and colonies: “The duty of labour camps and colonies is to isolate and guard the convicts, to make it impossible for them to commit any kind of actions that may prejudice the state of people’s democracy, to re-educate the convicts by labour, to accustom them with order and train them in various professions, so that, after the completion of their sentence, they might become useful elements of the society”.⁵

¹ Ibid., 164–165.

² Marin Radu Mocanu, *Forme și strategii de comunizare a societății românești (1940 – 1950)*, 32–33.

³ Marius Oprea, *Banalitatea răului. O istorie a Securității în documente 1949–1989* (The banality of evil. A history of the *Securitate* in documents, 1949–1989) (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 31.

⁴ Iosif Toma Popescu, *Teroarea comunistă în câteva episoade* (Communist terror in a few episodes) *Analele Sighet* 7 (1999): 199. [“Pentru deținuții de la Canal, de la Bicaz, din Delta, de la mine, care au rămas în lutul pe care trebuiau să-l răscolească, zilnic, 18 ore din 24, nu s-a făcut încă o estimare obiectivă. [...] la lagărul de la Midia erau aduse zilnic, de pe traseul Canalului, circa 80-90 de cadavre care așteptau strivite, ca teancurile de cherestea, ca un doctor al Securității să certifice decesul (*sic!*)”]

⁵ Radu Ciuceanu, *Regimul penitenciar din România 1940–1962* (The penitentiary regime in Romania, 1940–1962) (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2001), 72. [“Sarcina lagărelor–coloniilor este de a izola și păzi pe condamnați, de a-i pune în imposibilitatea să săvârșească orice fel acțiune care ar putea aduce prejudicii statului de democrație populară, de a reeduca pe condamnați prin muncă, de a-i obișnui cu ordinea și de

Based on other, earlier regulations, the 1955 regulation was merely an artificial legislative framework, meant to show the internal and international public opinion the normality and educational character of labour camps and colonies. The real situation was completely different. The living conditions of the convicts, as will be seen below on the following pages, were inhuman, and re-education meant in fact the elimination of political opponents by methods which could not be considered criminal: physical labour until exhaustion, starvation, physical violence, etc.

Periprava – “the village without dogs”¹

In the first decades of communism, one of the most important forced labour and extermination camps operated at this location.²

Former convicts say that they remembered the place because of the hard working conditions (harvesting reed) and the staff, whose behaviour *left much to be desired*. Members of the staff for their most part were sent here for reasons of *discipline*. Their testimonies reveal the inhuman conditions they were subject to, as forced labour was regarded as a way or re-education, in accordance with the slogan *Arbeit macht frei* (Work liberates). This place, due to its isolation and extraordinary measures of security, remained in the collective memory of the former convicts as a place with no possible escape.

Formation 0830 Periprava was established in the course of year 1957, and it was made up of a central unit, *Periprava Centru* or the *Casa Roșie* (the Red House), as the locals called it, which was to administrate, as of 1959, when the first political prisoners were brought there, the other sections around it: Grind, the Bacs – Bac 1, Bac 2, Bac 3, Sfîștofca, Saivane.³

a-i califica în diferite meserii, pentru ca, după expirarea termenului de pedeapsă ei să devină elemente folositoare societății”]

¹ Testimony of *Cuțov Grigore*, inhabitant of Periprava, 2008.

² The term extermination camp was often used by former political prisoners. One may find the same term used retrospectively in contemporary historiography.

³ The locals still preserve the nostalgia of the years when Periprava was *quite a little town*, and the young people were not compelled to leave the town in order to earn their living. Today, there is no perspective there for the young: “Collectivization was done in 1959–1960. We had no land, but the State gave us some four hectares. The collectivization was forced [...] no one agreed. For those who did not join the Collective, they took everything from them, a couple of oxen, cows, sheep, or whatever they had, because they didn’t have much [...] There were much more people, there were young people, more than today. At least three times as many. They were young. They left then, at the collectivization, in ’60, when the towns, Sulina, Chilia, were industrialized.” [“Colectivizarea s-a făcut în 1959–1960. Nu aveam pământ, dar ne-a dat de la Stat vreo patru hectare. Colectivizarea s-a făcut forțat [...] n-a fost nici unul de acord. Care nu s-a înscris le-a luat tot, o pereche de boi, vaci, oi, ce aveau, că nu aveau mult [...] Era multă populație, era tineret, mai mult decât e astăzi. Cel puțin de trei ori mai mult. Erau tineri. Atunci au plecat ei, cu colectivizarea, în ’60 și cu industrializarea orașelor, Sulina, Chilia”] (*Testimony of Mihalache Ion*, inhabitant of Periprava, 2008).

The decision on building the Formation 0830 Periprava was issued in 1957: “1. – Formation 0830 Periprava came into being on 01.07.1957, in conformity with the Order of the Ministry of Home Affairs no. 2394 and of D.S.P.C.M. no. 015512”.¹

On account of its geographical position, situated on the border of what was then the Soviet Union [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], the Periprava labour camp was a place with no possibility of escape. This primary image of Periprava remained in the memory of former convicts: “On the left side there was the colony. [...] When you get down, because Periprava is just across Vâlcov. It can be seen very nicely, [...], the churches could be seen there, you could see them, so the whole town. [...] They had these channels they were going on. [...] And we here, on this side, there was a dam, a dam we made, protected Periprava itself. And in some places it protected even the arable fields. (*sic!*)”²

The life of prisoners in a labour camp depended very much on its management. Since at a national level the normative documents which specified the role and implication of prisoners in the life of the camp were abrogated, the important decisions were all made at the level of each camp’s management. The

¹ [“1.–Formațiunea 0830 Periprava a luat ființă la data de 01.07.1957, conform Ordinului M.A.I. Nr–2394 și al D.S.P.C.M. Nr. 015512. (*sic!*)”] Archive of the National Council for Studying the Archives of the *Securitate* (henceforth referred to as A.C.N.S.A.S.), fond Documentar (Document collection), Dosar (Folder) Nr. 8859/43, fila (page) 4–6: “The Formation is located on the territory of Periprava village, Tulcea county, Constanța region, 4 km south of Periprava village. – To the north of the Formation there are swamps and the Chilia branch ... and beyond the Chilia branch, in the Soviet Union, the town of Vîlcov [Vîlcove, present-day Ukraine]. To the south-east there are swamps, and at around 14 km there is Sfiștofca village, and more to the south there is C. A. Rosetti village. – To the south and south west there are swamps, and at a distance of around 4 km there is the Letea forest – to the east there are swamps, and to the north-west also swamps and at a distance of 4 km Periprava village. – Enclosure. The Formation is enclosed with a wired fence on a line of poles, 2.5 m high. On the south-eastern side, the Formation borders upon the social unit, which consists of: Administration, staff bedrooms, and the guard house. On the other sides, the Formation borders on swamps.” [“Formațiunea se găsește pe teritoriul comunei Periprava, Raionul Tulcea, Regiunea Constanța, la 4 km. Sud este de comuna Periprava. –La nord de formațiune se află balt și brațul Chilia ... iar dincolo de brațul Chilia în uniunea Sovietică Orașul Vîlcov. La sud est se află baltă iar la o distanță de circa 14 km se află comuna Sfiștofca și mai la sud de aceeași comună se află comuna C.A.Rosetti. –În Sud și Sud Vest se află baltă și la distanță de circa 4 km pădurea Letea–La este se află baltă, iar la Nord-vest deasemeni baltă și la o distanță de 4 km se află comuna Periprava. –Împrejmui. Formațiunea este împrejmuită cu un gard de sîrmă pe un rînd de pari, înalt de 2,5 m. Pe latura de Sud–Est, formațiunea se mărginește cu grupul social, în care se găsește: Administrația, dormitoarele cadrelor și corpul de gardă. Pe restul laturilor formațiunea se mărginește cu baltă. (*sic!*)”]

² *Testimony of Traian Neamțu*, Cluj-Napoca, 2010. [“În partea stîngă era colonia. [...] Când vă dați jos, fiindcă Periprava-i vis a vis cu Vâlcovul. Să vede foarte frumos, [...], acolo se vedea bisericile, să vedeau, deci tot orașul. [...] Aveau acolo canale pe care umblau. [...] Iar noi dincoace, era dig, dig făcut de noi proteja propriu-zis Periprava. Și era loc în care proteja inclusiv terenul agricol. (*sic!*)”]

testimonies collected made me conclude that in the Periprava camp, due to the management and the employees, conditions were extremely hard and cruel. Between the years 1958–1960, the commander of the Periprava labour camp was Condurache Dumitru, colonel of the *Securitate*. Doina Jela in her book *Lexiconul Negru* (The Black Lexicon) describes him as a person without scruples, the perfect model of *Securitate* officer promoted by the communists: “**CONDURACHE (?)** – colonel of the *Securitate*, commander of labour camps in the Danube Delta, Grindu, and Periprava, camps with exterminating labour conditions. Between the years 1958–1960, commander of the Periprava labour camp. The labour done in the camp under his supervision was reed harvesting, in wintertime, in chest-high water, full of snakes. Weak and starved, the convicts had to transport sheaves of reed twice as large as the diameter of their arms, and 80 kg in weight. Trained dogs jumped over those who fell down with exhaustion, to tear them to pieces.”¹ His name appears also in the *Fond Documentar* (Documents Stock) Folder of the A.C.N.S.A.S. Here is the image preserved by the convicts about the commander of the colony: “The Captain was fat, had red hair, and a red face. The convicts called him *the red beater*,”² “Well, and on 6 December, I’ll never forget it, in the morning, on Saint Nicholas’ day, we arrived at Periprava. They put us down, there, all of us, I think there were around two thousand of us, they aligned us, they crowded us. And the commandment of Periprava colony came, and there was Colonel Condurache. A beast of a man, a criminal. He came and watched us, he sorted us out. They passed in front of him, and he distributed us, where to go. With one finger. All passed in front of him, and he asked: what’s with you? Are you sick? [asked the commander] Some were sick, others weren’t. Of course everyone said what came to their mind [...] Well, and I passed in front of him. And we didn’t know, we, who knew each other, didn’t want to separate from each other. Because we knew each other, some of us of the old convicts. But when you got there before him you didn’t know what your fate, your destiny would be [...] And of course, when I got there, now this is something vulgar, but I’ll say ‘cause this is how it was. When I got there before him, after Sârbu Desideriu passed before me, he said: What’s your problem? [asks the commander] Ischaemic cardiopathy and so forth. He pointed: to the right. Another: What’s your problem? [asks the commander] Duodenal ulcer. And so on. There was Father Prunduș who was dystrophic. He pointed with his finger. When I got there. What’s your problem, damn you [asks the commander], I was skin and

¹ Doina Jela, *Lexiconul negru: unelte ale represiunii comuniste* (The Black Lexicon: means of communist repression) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2001), 80. [“CONDURACHE (?) – colonel de Securitate, în conducerea lagărelor din Delta Dunării, Grindu și Periprava, unde s-a lucrat în condiții de exterminare. Între anii 1958 – 1960, comandant al lagărului de la Periprava. În lagărul administrat de el se lucra la tăiat stuf, în timpul iernii, cu apa până la piept, mișunând de șerpi. Slabi și înfometați, deținuții erau obligați să transporte snopi de două ori mai mari decât diametrul propriilor brațe și de 80 de kilograme greutate. Pe cei care se prăvăleau de epuizare, câinii dresați săreau să-i sfășâie”]

² Gheorghe Mazilu, *În ghearele Securității: mărturii*, (In the claws of the *Securitate*: testimonies), 5th ed. (București: [s.n.], 2004), 124. [“Căpitanul era gras, avea părul roșu și o față congestionată. Deținuții îi ziceau *bătăușul roșu*”]

bones only, after the labour in the Brăila swamps. I say: I have a hole in my lung. Where, hole in your... [asks the commander], you understand. I don't repeat. [the convict] No, sir, a hole in my lungs. And he pointed with his finger to the other side, and this way he separated me from the others. Well, after he sorted out all the people, aligning. Some on the ferries. We were aligned and taken to Grind.”¹ The interviews taken from several former convicts made me conclude that in most cases convicts arriving to the colony were sorted out at the mercy of the commander.

A document from the CNSAS Archives presents a report on the history of the colony: “The Periprava penitentiary is a unit of detention, with a productive character both from an agricultural and industrial point of view, where common right convicts complete their sentences, with penalites between one month and 25 years, convicts at their first conviction, brought by transfer from various detention units across the country.

The Periprava penitentiary came into being in 1957, first having a restricted activity, after which in 1959 two more sections were established, namely: Grind Section and Saivane Section, as a result of the internment of counter-revolutionary convicts, but later both sections were abolished as a result of the freeing of C-R convicts and re-adapting to common right convicts.

This unit works with a capacity of 250 convicts per year, but their number differs depending on the requirement of the beneficiaries (I.A.S. Chilia Veche and T.A.V.S. Tulcea).

The total effectives of the staff are 110 persons, of whom 2 officers, 100 noncommissioned officers, and 8 civilian employees. The convicts in the penitentiary are guarded by soldiers on military service, and their escort to, and supervision at the working locations by non-commissioned officers, through reduced guarding system. [...] There are elements within the Penit. which try to conduct hostile activities at their place of detention, wanting to attract other

¹ *Testimony of Traian Neamțu*, Cluj-Napoca, 2010. [“Ei, șâ pe data de 6 decembrie, n-o să uit veci, dimineața, de Sfântul Nicolae, am ajuns la Periprava. Ne-o dat jos, acolo, pe tăți, cre c-am fost vreo două mii, ne-o încolonat, ne-o pus grămadă. Ș-o venit conducerea coloniei Periprava, era Colonelul Condurache. O bestie de om, un criminal. Care-o venit șâ se uita, el o făcut trierea. Prin fața lui trecea, și el făcea repartiția care unde să meargă. Cu un deget. Tăți trecea prin fața lui și te-ntreba: tu ce ai, mă? Ești bolnav? [întreabă comandantul] Care era bolnav, care nu. Binențeles că fiecare spunea ce-i vine prin minte [...] Ei, și am trecut prin fața lui. Și nu știam acum, noi care ne cunoșteam nici nu vroiam să ne separăm unu de altu. Că ne cunoșteam dintre foștii deținuți. Însă când ajungeai în fața lui nu știai care ți-e soarta, destinul [...] Și, binențeles, când am ajuns eu, acum-i ceva vulgar, da o să spun, da asta o fost. Când am ajuns în fața lui, după ce-o trecut înaintea Sârbu Dezideriu, o zâs: Ce ai? [întreabă comandantul] Cardiopatie eschemică și așa mai departe. Făcea: În dreapta. Altul: Ce ai? [întreabă comandantul] Ulcer duodenal. Și așa mai departe. Era Părintele Prunduș care era distrofic. Făcea cu degetu. Când am ajuns eu. Tu ce ai, mă, fir-ar să fii? [întreabă comandantul], Eram numai piele și os, după muncile din Balta Brăilei. Zic: Eu am gaură în plămâni. Unde mă, gaură în... [întreabă comandantul], m-ați înțeles. Nu repet. [deținutul]Nu, domnule, gaură în plămâni. Ș-o făcut cu degetu invers, și în felul acesta m-o separat de ceilalți. Ei, după ce-o triat tăta lumea, încolonarea. Unii pă bacuri. Pe noi ne-o încolonat și ne-o dus la Grind (*sic!*)”]

convicts as well. Therefore, in order to prevent the leak of secret information, and also in order to keep an organized registry of the suspicious elements and the informative network within the location, We propose; the opening of a registry record for the location of Periprava Penitentiary.”¹

In 1959, the penitentiary’s policy brought a small change into the internal organization. That was the time when political prisoners or “counter-revolutionaries”, as they were called in the official documents of the time, began to be brought to the camp. Later, as of year 1964, when the decree of pardoning was issued, the colony was reorganized to receive common right convicts.²

¹ A.C.N.S.A.S., Documents Collection, Folder no. 8859/43, page 2. [“Penitenciarul Periprava este o unitate de detenție, avînd caracter productiv atît din punct de vedere agricol cît și industrial, aici executînd pedeapsa prin muncă deținuți de drept comun, cu pedepse între o lună și 25 ani, deținuți la prima condamnare, aduși prin transfer dela diverse unități de detenție din țară.

Penitenciarul Periprava a luat ființă în 1957, avînd la început o activitate redusă, după care în anul 1959 s-au mai înființat două secții și anume: Secția Grind și Secția Saivane ca urmare a introducerii deținuților contrarevoluționari, dar ulterior ambele secții sau desființat în urma punerii în libertate a deținuților C-R și profilarea din nou cu deținuți de drept comun.

Această unitate lucrează cu o capacitate de 250 deținuți pe an, dar numărul lor diferă în funcție de cerințele beneficiarelor (I.A.S. Chilia Veche și T.A.V.S. Tulcea).

Efectivul total al cadrelor este în număr de 110 oameni, dintre care 2 ofițeri, 100 subofițeri și 8 angajați civili. Paza deținuților în penitenciar se face de către militarii în termen, iar excorta și supravegherea la punctele de lucru de către subofițeri prin sistemul de pază redusă. [...] În cadrul Penit. Există elemente care la locul de detenție încearcă să desfășoare activitate ostilă căutînd să atragă și pe alți deținuți. De aceea pentru a preveni scurgerea de informații cu caracter secret, totodată în vederea ținerii unei evidențe organizate a elementelor suspecte și a rețelei informative din obiectiv, Propunem; deschiderea dosarului de evidență pe obiectiv a Penitenciarului Periprava. (sic!)”]

² A.C.N.S.A.S., Documents Collection, Folder no. 8859/43, page 2: “In the course of month June 1959, on the order of D.G.P.C.M. Bucharest, the colony’s reorganization started because the formation’s character is about to change, that is, instead of common right convicts, *counter-revolutionary* convicts would be brought, which was executed. Thus on 21 June 1959 a number of 500 c.r. convicts were transferred to Formation 0957 Ostrov (Salcia) to be used for further labour there. On 5 July and 9 July 1959 another 505 c.r. convicts were transferred to Formation 0600 Chilia Veche. On 12 July 1959 another 544 c.r. convicts were transferred to Formation 0957 Ostrov, formerly Salcia.

With this last group all the common right convicts of the formation were transferred, but 18 more c.r. convicts were left there, who serve the formation with labour bir in the administrative and building sector, and these were isolated from the rest of the interned or c.r. convicts.” [“În cursul lunii iunie, 1959, din ordinul D.G.P.C.M. București, s-a trecut la amenajarea coloniei, pentru faptul că se va schimba caracterul formațiunii, adică în loc de deținuți de drept comun, vor fi aduși deținuți *contrarevoluționarii*, lucru care s-a executat. Astfel că la data de 21, iunie 1959, au fost transferați un număr de 500 deținuți de d.c. la Formațiunea 0957 Ostrov (Salcia) pentru a fi folosiți la muncă mai departe acolo. La data de 05, iulie și 09, iulie, 1959, au mai fost transferați un număr de 505 deținuți d.c. la formațiunea 0600 Chilia Veche. La data de 12 iulie, 1959, au mai fost transferați un număr de 544 de deținuți d.c. la Formațiunea 0957, Ostrov fost Salcia.

The testimonies collected from the villagers and the former convicts reveal that in the mid-50s there was only one section at Periprava which belonged to the I.A.S. [the State Agricultural Company] Chilia Veche. Towards the end of decade 5, the *section* was enlarged, and Periprava became an individual colony – an *independent administrative entity*, including several temporary or permanent sections and auxiliary labour camps, depending on the work needed to be done, and the accommodation possibilities. Thousands of convicts were brought here, as labour force was needed for harvesting reed, in agriculture, livestock breeding, or constructions.

On the basis of these testimonies, one may ask the simplest question: why was the profile of the labour camp changed? While at first sight it looked like an easy place of detention, “For us, coming from blind and putrid cells, the contrast offered by nature was unbelievable!”,¹ where they had the illusion of being free since they could freely circulate around the camp and were not closed up in cells, but by the end of their detention they changed their opinion on what a labour camp or colony meant, and curse the hell they went through; in these *open-air* prisons one could die much more easily and surely. Many of them remained there forever, buried in the sand which caused them so much suffering, the grave of the Romanian elite.

They were taken to the Delta for harvesting reed, agriculture, animal breeding, or zootechny. Physical labour was taken to exhaustion, to extermination, a labour for slaves done by thousands of political prisoners brought here to be silenced, in many cases forever. The memoirs of the former political prisoners reveal that one of the most important labour camps of the region was at Periprava. The first impression about the village on my getting there after a 7 hours long voyage by ship, *in human conditions*, was to wonder what those thousands of people might have thought when they stepped for the first time on the rough sands of Periprava. Here is the testimony of a former political prisoner who passed through this labour camp: “On the banks of the Danube there was a ferry anchored, onto which we loaded all the equipment, we set up the beds and mattresses in three lines inside the ferry; after we finished loading the equipment, we started with the timber and food, on 3 December 1959 we finished loading, and at night we were accommodated, and started out, after receiving cold food for three days; we didn’t know our destination, but we not sorry about leaving the Stoienişti labour camp. These 3 days, while we transported the materials with the ferry, we nice days like in the summer, and we dried well our clothes on us, which we had worn wet for weeks, as we had stayed in the rain all day, and in the barracks as well, it was raining on us, especially those who slept in the last row of beds.

Cu acest ultim lot au fost transferați toți deținuții de drept comun din cadrul formațiunii, dar unde a mai rămas un număr de 18 deținuți d.c. care deservea formațiunea cu muncii de birou în sectorul administrativ și de construcții, iar aceștia au fost izolați de restul deținuților internați sau c.r. (*sic!*)”]

¹ Gheorghe Mazilu, *În ghearele Securității: mărturii*, 123. [“Pentru noi, cei ieșiți din celule oarbe și împuțite, contrastul oferit de natură era de neînchipuit! (*sic!*)”]

In the evening of 3 December 1959, after the 1100 prisoners were accommodated, we looked for a bed each in the dark, everyone where they could; we all sought to be near our friends and acquaintances [...] We headed to an unknown direction day and night, without stopping, we didn't know if it was daytime or nighttime, because there in the ferry it was always darkness. In order to maintain our psychological balance, and not to collapse morally, there in the darkness you could hear jokes or spiritual sayings, as it is befitting the Romanian people to make fun out of trouble even in the most desperate of moments. We heard these in the darkness, some were of the opinion that by the direction the ferry was going, and if it didn't stop at the mouth of the Danube, it would take us to experience exchange to the Soviet Union, to see on the spot the soviet man's advanced methods of building communism [...]

In the afternoon of 6 December 1959 the ferry anchored and we received orders to prepare all our luggage except the beds and mattresses and get out of the ferry; when we went outside, there was an icy wind from the east, as if sent particularly to contribute to our ordeal. You could see nothing but frost, covering the willow plantations on the banks of the Danube, and the whistling icy wind ready to take us off our feet and spray us into the waves of the Danube penetrated to our bones, and all you could see were people with tears in their eyes, weeping with cold. From the discussions of the guards, we found out we were nearby Periprava. We were gathered on a field where the icy wind met no natural resistance, and the only resistance against it was us, the 1100 convicts. We crowded into each other to form a common front against the furious unleashed nature, merciless with us. On the field we were gathered we could barely tear ourselves out of the mud, and in a few minutes the whole field was frozen because of the terrible cold, and we were all crying, falling down to the ground, frozen with cold; our clothes hardly protected us from the wrath of nature. The guards and soldiers had furry coats and footwear to meet the climate of these regions.”¹ “We've seen many harbours. Our ship sails on

¹ Victor Maghear, *Drumul robilor* (The road of the prisoners), vol. 1. (Baia Mare: Editura Corneilius, 2006), 162–163. [“Pe malul Dunării era ancorat un bac, în care am încărcat tot cazarmamentul, am instalat paturile și saltelele pe trei rânduri în interiorul bacului; după ce am terminat de transportat cazarmamentul am început cu lemne și alimente, în 3 decembrie 1959 am terminat de transportat și seara am fost cazați și am pornit, după ce am primit hrană rece pentru trei zile; nu cunoșteam destinația, dar nu regretam părăsirea lagărului de la Stoienestii. Aceste 3 zile, cât am transportat materialele la bac au fost zile frumoase ca de vara, și ne uscasem bine hainele de pe noi, pe care le purtasem săptămâni întregi ude, cum stăteam toată ziua în ploaie, iar în barăci la fel, ne ploua, mai ales pe cei care dormeau în ultimul rând pe paturi.

În seara zilei de 3 decembrie 1959, după ce suntem cazați cei 1100 de deținuți ne căutam fiecare prin întuneric un pat, care unde nimerisem; fiecare căutam să fim în apropierea prietenilor și cunoscuților [...] Mergeam într-o direcție necunoscută zi și noapte, fără oprire, nu știam când e ziua sau noapte, că la noi în bac era continuu întuneric. Pentru a ne menține echilibru sufletesc și a nu ne prăbuși moral, în întuneric mai auzeam bancuri și vorbe de duh, așa cum îi stă bine românului de a face haz de necaz în cele mai disperate momente. Din întuneric auzeam câte unul, care era de părere că după sensul în care mergea bacul și dacă acesta nu avea oprire până la gurile Dunării, acesta ne duce în schimb de

further on the Chilia channel. After a while we arrive to the end of our journey. It is Periprava, our destination, the policemen tell us. When we get down, a particularity struck me: a lot of sand. We climb on a hill, after which the first houses start to show up. All covered with reed, and reed is also what makes the fences of farmers. Still, the people fixed the sand, planting trees. The locals watch us curiously. It is difficult to walk. Somewhere further on, our journey comes to end, blocked by a gate guarded by a large board on the top. I remember two words: internment and Periprava.”¹

Starting with 1959, the labour camp became overpopulated and overcrowded, which brought about the establishment of a new section.² The

experiență în Uniunea Sovietică, să vedem la fața locului metodele avansate ale omului sovietic de construcție a comunismului. [...]

În după-masa zilei de 6 decembrie 1959 bacul ancorează și primim ordin ca să ne pregătim tot bagajul în afară de paturi și saltele, și să ieșim afară din bac; când ieșim afară era un crivăț venit din răsărit, parcă anume trimis pentru a contribui la calvarul nostru. Nu vedeai nimic, decât chiciură, care acoperea plantațiile de sălcii de pe malurile Dunării, iar crivățul șuierând gata să ne ia de pe picioare și să ne pulverizeze în valurile Dunării, ne pătrunse până în măduva oaselor și nu vedeai numai oameni cu ochii în lacrimi și plângând de frig. După discuțiile gardienilor, am aflat că suntem în apropierea Peripravei. Suntem adunați pe un câmp, unde crivățul nu întâmpina nici o rezistență naturală, și singura rezistență împotriva lui, eram noi, cei 1100 de deținuți. Ne înghesuiam unul în celălalt pentru a face front comun împotriva dezlănțuirii furioase a naturii, împotriva noastră, fără milă. Pe ogorul unde eram adunați, abia ne puteam smulge din noroi, iar în câteva minute tot ogorul era înghețat din cauza frigului năprasnic și noi plângeam gata să ne prăbușim la pământ, înghețați de frig; îmbrăcămintea noastră prea puțin ne proteja de urgia naturii. Gardienii și soldații aveau haine îmblănite, la fel și încălțăminte, cu care puteau să întâmpine clima din aceste regiuni”]

¹ Nicu Păun, *Muntele suferinței* (The mountain of suffering) (Iași: Editura Institutul European, 1997), 303. [“Multe porturi am văzut. Vasul nostru navighează mai departe, pe canalul Chilia. După un timp, ajungem la punctul terminus al călătoriei. Este Periprava, locul destinației, ne spun milițienii. Când coborâm, mă izbește o particularitate: mult nisip. Urcăm un dîmb, după care încep să apară primele case. Toate învelite cu stuf, stuf care formează și gardurile gospodarilor. Totuși, oamenii au fixat nisipul, plantând pomi. Localnicii ne privesc curioși. Merg greu. Ceva mai departe, drumul nostru se oprește, fiind barat de o poartă, pe care străjuiește o firmă mare. Rețin două cuvinte: internat și Periprava.”]

² A.C.N.S.A.S., Documents Collection, D 8859/43, page 7–8: “On this occasion another section was established, subordinated to the centre, called the Grind Section, which is located at about 3 km south-east of the centre, in the direction of C.A. Rosete (*sic!*) and Sfiștofea villages. On 24 May 1959, as this section was established, 641 counter-revolutionary convicts were brought here, while on 06.06.1959 and 26.06.1959 in two series first another 92 c.r. convicts and then another 49 c.r. convicts were brought to us and accommodated at this section at Grind.

They were brought from the penitentiaries in Gherla and Aiud, and a minor part from Penit. Constanța, who were convicted for 2 to 10 years inclusively. Here they were used for labour, one brigade worked on the finalization of the buildings, the rest of the brigades worked in agriculture, cultivating corn, sunflower, beet root, and vine.

memoirs of the former convicts mention the most important sections of the colony – the Grind section: “We have been distributed to a minor camp, Grind, at about 5 km away. Lined up in columns of 5, we swam through the sand till exhaustion. [...] We have been sorted out to bedrooms with bunk beds, some 50–60 individuals in a room. Instead of flooring, we had sand on the ground. Great was our happiness when we saw they didn’t close the door but left us free, in the yard. Since the wind was blowing almost all the time, the sand penetrated even in the most hidden creases of our clothes. In the evening we got frightened of the people who came from harvesting corn. We could only see their eyes and teeth, otherwise they were packed with dust and sand. The second day we were taken again to the banks of the Danube, where we unloaded construction stones from a ship. The third day we formed brigades and were taken as well to harvest corn. The great surprise came later, when the frost came and we were sent to harvest reed.”¹

On 1 June 1959 in the Grind section the commander of the section was appointed Lt. Maj. Agache Ion, and his deputy Lt. Maj. Rădună, who was reintegrated with the army of the P.R.R. By an order of the D.G.P.C.M. a number of 514 c.r. interned convicts, Legionaries were brought here on 01.07.1959 from the Craiova region without any sentence or condemnation.

They were used in the formation for construction works, and the majority for agricultural works. On 8 July 1959 another 618 convicts came, also legionaries from the Craiova region, all-in-all 1132 legionaries, who are all used for agricultural and construction works.” [“Cu această ocazie a mai luat ființă o secție subordonată centrului și care se numește Secția Grind, care este situată la circa 3 km de centru Sud-Est, în direcția com. C.A. Rosete și satul Sfiștofca. La data de 24, mai, 1959, luînd ființă această secție au fost aduși un număr de 641 deținuți contrarevoluționarii, iar la data de 06.06.1959 și la 26.06.1959 în două serii, ne-a mai sosit odată 92 de deținuți c.r. și a doua oară 49 de deținuți c.r. în total 782 deținuți c.r. au fost cazați la această secție de pe Grind.

Toți aceștia au fost aduși dela Penitenciarul Gherla, Aiud, și o mică parte de la Penit. Constanța, care au fost condamnați dela 2 ani și pînă la 10 ani inclusiv. Aici au fost folosiți la muncă, dintre care o brigadă lucra la terminarea construcțiilor, iar restul brigăzilor munceau la munci agricole, a prășitul porumbului, floarea soarelui, sfeclă și vie.

La data de 01.iunie, 1959, la secția Grind a fost numit comandantul secției Lt. Maj. Agache Ion iar ajutorul lui Lt. Maj. Rădună, care a fost reîncadrat în rîndurile armatei R.P.R. În urma unui ordin al D.G.P.C.M. au fost aduși aici la centru pe data de 01.07.1959, un număr de 514 deținuți c.r. internați, Legionarii, din Regiunea Craiova, fără a avea vreo sentință sau condamnare.

Aceștia au fost folosiți de către formațiune la muncii de construcție, iar majoritatea la muncii agricole. Pe data de 8, iulie, 1959, au mai venit încă 618 deținuți internați, tot legionarii din Reg. Craiova, în total 1132 de legionarii, care toți sînt folosiți la muncii agricole și de construcție (*sic!*)”]

¹ Dumitru Oniga, *Urme, lacrimi, sânge, morminte* (Traces, tears, blood, graves) (Suceava: Editura Lidana, 2007), 218–219. [“Am fost repartizați la un lagăr mai mic, Grind, la vreo 5 km depărtare. Încolonați pe cinci, am înnotat prin nisip pînă la epuizare. [...] Am fost împărțiți în dormitoare, cu paturi suprapuse, cam 50–60 de inși într-o cameră. În loc de dușumea, pe jos, aveam nisip. Bucuria mare a fost, când am văzut că nu ne închide ușa, ci ne lasă liberi, în curte. Cum, aproape tot timpul, bătea vântul, nisipul pătrundea și în cele mai ascunse cute ale hainelor. Seara, ne-am speriat de oamenii, care veneau de la cules porumb.

According to the memoirs and the legislation of the age, there was a *permanent* auxiliary labour camp at Grind, the largest of all sections, where the convicts lived and worked as well. This was the zootechny sector of Formation 0830, dealing with agriculture and animal breeding.

“The labour camp of Grind was located at approx. 4 km distance from Periprava towards the east, to Şistavca [Şiștofca] village. Periprava was the centre of the Danube Delta labour camps, its commandment was subordinated to the Ministry of Home Affairs. That is where some of the convicts were taken once in a while for problem of record, *important communications*, or *supplementary interrogations*. These people came from very diverse categories. From upright people with impeccable behaviour (priests, intellectuals, etc.) to worthless people without principles or scruples. Almost all who came back from there were very enigmatic, and, when asked why they were called there, they all gave stereotypical answers: *supplementary interrogations* or problems of record. Many of them would later become silent and reserved. Few of them, perhaps a priest or another, answered in a revolted tone: *Stop asking me questions. They wanted to turn me into an informer. They are blackmailing and threatening me*. It was clear for us. There they recruited the informers from among the convicts. How many and who was able to resist the blackmails, threats, or promises?”¹

The locals told stories about a real small town existing there in the 1960s. The staff working in the camps moved there with their families, their wives and children. They had stores, schools, cinemas. These were situated outside the barbed-wired barracks of the convicts.

Here is the testimony of a former employee of the camp who presented some data on the living conditions and dwellings of the officers and non-commissioned officers: “[...] and for the non-commissioned officers who were accommodated there. Because they were accommodated here in the village too, the officers, then they took them there, to the flats [...] it was like a small town. It was nice then, yes. Like Mamaia. It was like a building, apartment type. There were five, six

Li se vedeau doar ochii și dinții, în rest erau bătuți de praf și de nisip. A doua zi, am fost duși, iar, pe malul Dunării, unde am descărcat piatră de construcții, de pe un vas. În cea de-a treia zi, ne-am constituit în brigăzi și am fost scoși, și noi, la cules porumb. Surpriza mare ne era rezervată pentru mai târziu, când va veni înghețul și vom fi trimiși la recoltat stuf.”]

¹ Aurel Baghiu, *Printre gratii* (Among bars) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Zalmoxis, 1995-2003), 102. [“Lagărul de la Grind se afla la o distanță de cca. 4 km de Periprava, pe direcția Est, către comuna Şistavca [Şiștofca]. În Periprava era centrul lagărelor din Delta Dunării, având un comandament subordonat M.A.I.-ului. Acolo erau duși, din când în când, unii deținuți pentru *probleme de greșă, comunicări importante sau anchetă suplimentară*. Categoria acestor oameni era foarte diversă. De la oameni integri cu comportament impecabil (preoți, intelectuali, etc.), până la oameni de nimic, lipsiți de caracter și scrupule. Aproape toți care veneau de acolo erau foarte enigmatice și, întrebați fiind de ce au fost chemați, răspundeau stereotip: *supliment de anchetă sau probleme de greșă*. Mulți din aceștia deveneau ulterior tăcuți și rezervați. Puțini dintre ei, eventual câte un preot, răspundea revoltat: *Nu mă mai întreba nimic. Au vrut să mă facă turnător. Mă șantajează și mă amenință*. Era clar pentru noi. Acolo se recrutau dintre deținuți turnătorii. Câți și care rezistau la șantaj, amenințări sau promisiuni?”]

apartments. Lived there. There were non-commissioned officers, living in two, three rooms. So, like in a block of flats. Only that it was simple. [It was separated from the territory of the convicts.] Well, so, as it is normal, the convicts had no business with us. That is, for instance, if I there, there was no way you could be. This was far, at three or four hundred meters, something like that. From here to there there was a dam [...] it was separate.”¹ “Some barracks were built, so, and a unit was raised here, they called it strong here [...] buildings for the staff, yeah, for the officers who worked there, there was a food store, there was a school [...] Yes, for the children of the staff, but the IAS was strong here, it was [...] there was labour force for the IAS. [...] There were some from Letea, some from Periprava, but most of them were from the country [...] Yes, with families, children, everything all right, it was like a sort of village there.”²

The flats of the staff were also built by the convicts. There were teams made mostly of convicts who were engineers and they built the blocks of flats. According to the testimonies it can be remarked that after year 1955 the camp developed very much. The local people say that the employees, officers or non-commissioned officers, came here with their families, their wives and children. Stores, a school, and a cinema was built for them.³ “At my arrival to the camp, the

¹ Testimony of *Cuțov Grigore*, worked as a non-commissioned officer in the camp, inhabitant of Periprava, 2008. “[...] și pentru subofițeri, care erau acolo cazați. Că erau cazați și aici în sat, ofițerii, mai apoi i-au adus acolo, la locuințe [...] era cât un orășel, cum ar fi. Era frumos atunci, da. Tip Mamaia. Era cum e o clădire, tip apartament. Câți cinci, șase apartamente era. Locuit. Era subofițer, locuit două, trei camere. Adică, ca și cum îi bloc. Numai că era simplu. [Era separat de locul unde stăteau deținuții]. Ei, cum, dapă-i și normal, deținuții n-avea treaba cu noi. Adică, de exemplu eu dacă acolo, n-aveai cum să fii. Asta era departe de cam trei, patru sute de metri, cam așa. De-aici, în acolo era dig [...] separat era (*sic!*)”]

² Inhabitant of Periprava, worked as a non-commissioned officer in the camp. He wished to remain anonymous. Interview taken in 2009. (A0064 and A0065, as it appears on the tape). “[S-au construit niște barăci, așa, și s-a ridicat o unitate în zicea puternic aici [...] clădiri pentru cadre, da, pentru ofițerii care lucrau acolo, era magazin alimentar, era școală [...] Da, pentru copiii cadrelor, dar era și IAS-ul puternic aicea, era [...] era forță de muncă pentru IAS. [...] Erau câțiva din Letea, câțiva din Periprava, dar majoritatea din țară erau [...] Da, cu familii, copii, totu-n regulă, era ca un fel de sătuc acolo (*sic!*)”]

³ “It was like a small town, then there were good conditions there, they even had a club there, and they were also brought there once in a while by the policemen who guarded them there, and there were blocks of flats built, blocks exactly of one floor, with bathroom [...] For the employees, the policemen, yes; the convicts had barracks, they lived in barracks, but also in the premises, later they had cows... later they had better food, the convicts, they had cows, their own MAI, separately, and they had cows too, they bred them there, they collected the hay and they had everything [...] and you could hear their moaning, and I said *mother, but what is it?* Then she said that the convicts were crying [...] because they are beating them because they cannot work any more, because they didn’t cut as much reed as they were supposed to”. (Testimony of a local woman in Periprava, 2009). “[Ca un orășel era, atunci aveau condiții bune, aveau și club acoloș îi ducea și pe ei din când în când milițienii care-i păzeau acolo, paznicii și erau făcute blocuri, un bloc exact numai cu un nivel făcute, cu baie [...] La angajați, la milițieni, la caralii, da; deținuții aveau barăci făcute,

security troops charged with guarding the camp and the building sites, most of which were outside the camp, were not housed nearby the camp but probably somewhere else in tents. Our duty was to build the barracks for them, vis-à-vis the camp, where I worked as a labourer myself, and of course, guarded by these troops. At first they treated us very hard, because they were told we were criminals parachuted by the Americans and that we were extremely dangerous, so the poor soldiers treated us as if we had been that indeed. Slowly, however, as they changed some words especially with peasant convicts (they were afraid of the intellectuals) and they found out the reality, these soldiers of the *Securitate*, some even with their families (parents) oppressed by the communist regime, became much kinder and treated us with more confidence.”¹ “There was a large square of sandy earth, enclosed on all sides by a barbed wire fence in two rows. The side of this square-shaped camp was almost one km. At the gate and at each two hundred meters there were watch-points on high platforms, where sentinels armed with automatic pistols, machine guns, grenades [...] The platforms were equipped with spotlights, telephone, and alarm system; the whole arsenal against escape, equipped and perfected by the long Soviet experience. Not even the most ingenious of birds could have escaped from communist labour camps.”²

Whereas the employees of the labour camp were offered good living conditions, the situation of the convicts was different. There were no feasts, days off, better food for them, nor the hope that the next day might be better: “Oooh, what should I say. There were some two, three bedrooms, four; I don’t know how many

în barăci stăteau, dar tot în perimetru, mai târziu au avut vaci...de-acuma ei aveau mâncare mai bună deținuții, aveau vaci, MAI-ul, separat, al lor, aveau și vaci, creșteau acolo, ei creșteau, ei recoltau fânul, și aveau de toate [...] Și se-auzeau gemetele și ziceam *mamă, dar ce e asta?* După-aiia ea ne povestea că deținuții plâng [...] că îi bat acolo că nu mai poate să mai muncească, că n-au tăiat atâta stuf cât trebuia (*sic!*)”]

¹ Ing. Iosif Boroș, *La braț cu Securitatea, calomnie și crimă: audiatur et altera pars* (Shoulder to shoulder with the *Securitate*, calumny, and murder: audiatur et altera pars) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Napoca-Star, 2000), 118–110. [“La sosirea mea în lagăr, trupele de securitate însărcinate cu paza lagărului și a șantierelor, ce în marea lor majoritate erau în afara lagărului, nu erau cazați prin apropierea lagărului, ci probabil pe undeva prin cortuei. Nouă ne-a revenit sarcină să construim cazarma pentru ei, vis a vis de lagăr, unde am lucrat și eu ca muncitor și, bineînțeles, păziți de aceste trupe. La început, aceștia se purtau foarte dur cu noi, fiindcă li se băgase în cap că suntem criminali parașutați de către americani și că suntem extrem de periculoși, așa că bieții soldați ne tratau ca atare. Încetul cu încetul, după ce mai intrau în vorbă, în special cu deținuții țărani (se fereau de intelectuali) și luau la cunoștință de realitate, acești ostași securiști, unii chiar cu familiile lor (părinții) năpăstuiți de regimul comunist, deveneau mult mai blânzi și ne acordau multă încredere (*sic!*).”]

² Gheorghe Mazilu, *În ghearele Securității: mărturii*, 124. [“Era un pătrat mare de pământ nisipos, închis de jur împrejur cu un gard cu două rânduri de sârmă ghimpată. Lagărul pătrat avea latura de aproape un kilometru. La poartă și din sută în sută de metri, erau posturi de supraveghere pe platforme înalte, unde făceau de pază sentinelele înarmate cu pistoale automate, mitraliere, grenade [...] Platformele erau prevăzute cu reflectoare, telefon, sistem de alarmă; cu tot arsenalul contra evadării, pus la punct și perfecționat de îndelungata experiență sovietică. Nici pasărea cea mai măiastră nu putea să scape din lagărele comuniste.”]

were there. What should I say, I don't remember any more. I don't. It was a camp, the bedroom was large, like a street, or so. It could've had seventy meters. Sixty, seventy; who knows how many. Houses covered with reed. But how many? Two or three there were – I don't know. I think there was one like this [he makes a sign on the table] but it was large inside [...] There were 50–70 convicts in one bedroom. Oh my! So there were bunk beds. Some fifty of them. They were crowded in there like you crowd the pigs [...] he looked at him that he can't, he has no air. They kept them there, closed up. There were very many buildings, very many. There was the camp, the offices. The office is still there, it seems, but it's demolished, it's broken. Cows went inside, broke it with their horns, their head, it got broken. [...] This one, but the camp, inside, on the premises, who the hell would go in there. You couldn't go inside. It was enclosed with barbed wire, you had no business in there. [...] The flats are still there today. There are still flats; but they were demolished, broken. Many of them were broken; they took the bricks.”¹

The comparative analysis of the perspective of the convicts and that of the employees regarding the living conditions shows a discrepancy in their opinions. The interview taken from a former non-commissioned officer of the camp reveals that the living conditions were not in fact as hard as the convicts say. That is to say, *there were good days as well*. If we look at it objectively, we shall see that in more than three quarters of the interviews taken from those who were employed in the camps, from the villagers, as well as from the former convicts, the *balance of the truth* leans towards the testimonies of the former convicts. The former employees only answered some of my questions, those which they thought were not very uncomfortable, and most times they just deviated from the subject and told other stories.²

¹ Testimony of *Cârlan Gavril*, electrician in the camp, inhabitant of Periprava, 2008. [“Uuu, ce să vă spun. Era vreo două, trei dormitoare, patru; nu știu câte erau. Ce să vă zic, nu mai țin minte. Nu mai țin. Era lagăr, dormitor era mare, cât strada, așa. Poate să aibă și șapte zăci di metri. Șaizeci, șapte zăci; eu știu cît avea. Învălite cu stuf casâli. Da câți era? Era vreo două - trei, nu știu. Cred că era una așa [face semn pe masă] dar era incinta mare [...] Erau câte 50-70 de deținuți, Intr-unul. Vai di mini! Pai erau paturi suprapuși. Ce câte cinci zăci. Îi băgau acolo ca cum bagi porcii în maternă. [...] să uita la el că nu poate, n-are aer. Îl țânea acolo, închis. Clădiri era foarte multi, foarte multe. Lagărul era, birourile. Ș-acum este biroul, pare că, da-i demolat, s-o defectat. O intrat viti în el, l-o rupt cu coarnele, cu capul, s-o stricat. [...] Åsta, da lagăru, înăuntru, în incintă, cini dracu intra. Nu puteai să intri în incintă. Era închis cu sârmi, cu, n-aveai ci căuta înăuntru. [...] Locuințele sunt și la ora actuală. Sunt locuințe; dar s-au demolat, s-au stricat. Au stricat mulți din ele; au luat cărămida (*sic!*)”]

² Testimony of *Cuțov Grigore*, non-commissioned officer in the camp, inhabitant of Periprava, 2008: “The convicts stayed in large lodgings, around one hundred meters long, fifty, sixty, seventy meters, and room. Rooms with 30, 40 people, there were. [...] So it was, on two rows [There were two convicts in one bed?]”

No, no, this wasn't the case here, it wasn't, I can tell you that. When I was there, from '59 until so, from '59 until '70, no, '80, until '79. I stayed there, from '59 and until seventy nine, the convicts were housed there separately, only in the morning we presented and took them out to work, on the fields, on the cornfields, some for corn, some for reed. That was it [...]

The research of the *archival materials* regarding the convicts interned at Periprava revealed that the dispositions of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Regional Directorate of Dobrogea stipulated the followings: “In the colony M.A.I. Periprava there are incarcerated 3255 convicts of which 709 C.R. [counter-revolutionary] internees, 1800 C.R. convicts, and 746 common right convicts, housed as follows:

C.R. internees are housed at the centre section in barracks 2, 3, and 4, and barrack 11, where there is the infirmary for the sick internees, the 1800 C.R. convicts are housed 891 at Grind section, 643 on ferry 1 and 3, and 266 in barrack 10 at the centre, common right convicts 266 on ferry 2 and 318 on ferry 4, 79 at district 2 and 110 at the centre, used for works with reduced guarding.

Of the 709 C.R. internees there have been identified 561 legionaries, of whom 82 nest chiefs, 63 garrison chiefs, 71 sector chiefs, 22 county chiefs, 13 F.D.C. unit chiefs, 22 F.D.C. group chiefs, 11 group chiefs of the isolated body, 3 chiefs of legionary labour body, one chief of legionary student body, and the rest of 272 members.

Of the 561 interned legionaries 421 are intellectuals, of whom 37 engineers, 55 lawyers, 68 professors and teachers, 91 priests, 15 doctors, 136 various functionaries, 63 workers, and 82 peasants, of the 82 peasants 15 former exploiters, and 67 middle peasants.

Of all the internees identified as legionaries, 414 have been condemned before for various punishments, and at present they are interned in L. C. [labour camps].

Of the 709 C. R. internees 481 are capable of working, and 82 incapable, after the internment the situation is as follows:

34 elements with 24 months of internment
156 elements with 36 months of internment
161 elements with 48 months of internment
125 elements with 60 months of internment
91 elements with 72 months of internment

Lodgings were built before, before they came. Buildings were built also after that [Were they built specially for the convicts?] Yes of course. This, the building of course, they called it barracks before. They called it labour colony. That's how they called it. Now it moved after, how to say, penitentiary, that's how, afterwards, later”. [“Deținuții stăteau locuință mari, cam la o sută de metri lungime, cincizeci, șaizeci, șapte zeci de metri, și cameră. Camera cu locuitori de 30, 40 era. [...] Așa era, pă două rânduri [Deținuții erau câte doi în pat?] Nu, nu, la noi nu exista treaba asta, nu exista, ca să vă spun asta. Eu când am fost acolo, din '59 până în 'ăsta, din '59 până în '70, nu, '80, până în '79. Acolo am stat, din '59 și până în șapte zăci și nouă, deținuții era cazați separat, acolo, dicât dimineață prezentai șă scoteam la muncă, pă câmp, prin porumb, fiecare, care la porumb, care la stof. Asta era [...] Locuințe construite înainte era, până când să vină ei. Locuință construite și după aia a apărut [Au fost special pentru deținuți construite?] Da bine-nețeles. Asta-i, sigur că clădirea, barăci se spunea înainte. Să spunea colonie de muncă. Așa spunea. Acum s-a mutat după, acesta, penitenciar, așa-i spune, după aia, mai încolo (*sic!*)”.]

In the course of year 1962, that is, until 30 December, 74 internees will have been freed upon completion.



Irina Dumitrașcu, *Untitled Nature 23*

Photography – Cprint, ø 40cm, 2010

Website: www.bavardestudio.ro

We mention that the rest of 124 internees are without antecedents, and they are in their majority are peasants from the Argeș and București regions, arrested in February–March 1961 for participating in actions of dissolution of the G.A.C. [Collective agricultural farms] of these regions.

Within this colony we have 1800 more C.R. convicts of whom there have been identified 621 legionaries, of whom 3 garrison chiefs, 1 legionary instructor, and a F.D.C. unit chief, 40 members of the P.N.Ț. [National Peasant Party], 26 members of the P.N.L. [National Liberal Party], and 2 members of the P.S.D. [Social Democratic Party]

Of these 776 are intellectuals, 505 workers, and 529 peasants, of the intellectuals 55 are engineers, 19 doctors, 59 professors and teachers, 92 priests, 52 lawyers, and the rest various functionaries, of these 1535 are capable of working and 265 incapable, as for their sentence they are as follows:

From 1 to 5 years 257 elements

From 5 to 10 years 620 elements

From 10 to 15 years 41? elements

From 15 to 20 years 326 elements

From 20 to 25 years 180 elements

In the course of year 1962 until 30 December, 69 elements will have been freed upon completion.

Of the 746 common right convicts there have been identified 8 legionaries, a member of the P.N.Ț. and a member of the P.N.L. of all the common right convicts 150 are intellectuals, 384 workers, and 185 farmers, of these 708 are capable of working, and 11 incapable.

On the basis of the sentences, the situation is as follows:

From 1 to five years 458

From 5 to 10 years 136

From 10 to 15 years 86

From 15 to 20 years 71

From 20 to 25 years 5

Of these until 30 December 1962, 25 elements will have been freed upon completion.”¹

¹ A.C.N.S.A.S., Documents Collection, Folder no. 8859/43, page 130–132. [“În cadrul coloniei M.A.I. Periprava sînt încarcerați un număr de 3255 deținuți din care, 709 internați C.R., 1800 condamnați C.R. și 746 condamnați D.C. care sînt cazați după cum urmează:

Internații C.R. sunt cazați la secția centru în baraca 2,3 și 4, plus baraca 11, unde se află infirmeria pentru internații bolnavi, cei 1800 de condamnați C.R. sunt cazați 891 la secția Grind, 643 pe bacul 1 și 3 și 266 în baraca 10 de la centru, condamnații D.C. 226 sunt cazați pe bacul 2 și 318 pe bacul 4, 79 la cantonul 2 și 110 la centru care sunt folosiți la munci cu pază redusă.

Din rîndul celor 709 internați C.R. s-au identificat 561 legionari, din care 82 șefi de cuiburi, 63 șefi de garnizoană, 71 șefi de sector, 22 șefi de județe, 13 șefi de unitate F.D.C., 22 șefi de grup F.D.C., 11 șefi de grup din corpul răzleților, 3 șefi de corp muncitoresc legionar, un șef corp studentesc legionar și restul 272 membri.

Din cei 561 legionari internați 421 sunt intelectuali din care, 37 ingineri, 55 avocați, 68 profesori și învățători, 91 preoți, 15 doctori, 136 diverși funcționari, 63 muncitori și 82 țărani, din cei 82 țărani 15 foști exploatare și 67 mijlocași.

Din totalul internaților, identificați ca legionari 414 au mai fost condamnați anterior la diverse pedepse iar în prezent sunt internați în L.M.

Din rîndul celor 709 internați C.R. 481 sunt aple de muncă și 82 inaple, după internări situația se prezintă astfel:

34 elemente cu 24 luni internare

156 elemente cu 36 luni internare

161 elemente cu 48 luni internare

125 elemente cu 60 luni internare

91 elemente cu 72 luni internare

For a better course of activities within the colony, regulations were elaborated containing various organizational dispositions. These were not always observed. This was only an official version, a variant which specified obligations and benefits. However, according to the testimonies of former convicts, the actions or decisions taken in a labour camp, colony, or penitentiary depended very much on the person at its *leadership*.¹

În cursul anului 1962, adică pînă la 30 decembrie urmează să se elibereze la termen 74 de internați.

Menționăm că restul de 124 de internați sunt fără antecedente și aceștia în majoritatea lor sunt țărani din regiunile Argeșii și București, arestați în februarie-martie 1961 pentru participare la acțiuni de destrămarea G.A.C. Urilor [Gospodării agricole colective] din aceste regiuni.

În cadrul acestei colonii mai avem incarcerați 1800 condamnați C.R. din rîndul cărora s-au identificat 621 legionari din care 3 șefi de garnizoană, 1 instructor legionar și un șef de unitate F.D.C. 40 membri P.N.Ț. 26 membri P.N.L. și 2 membri P.S.D

Din aceștia 776 sunt intelectuali, 505 muncitori și 529 țărani, din rîndul intelectualilor, 55 sunt ingineri, 19 doctori, 59 profesori și învățători, 92 preoți, 52 avocați și restul diferiți funcționari, dintre aceștia 1535 sunt apți de muncă iar 265 inapți, după condamnări sunt după cum urmează:

De la 1 la 5 ani 257 elemente

De la 5 la 10 ani 620 elemente

De la 10 la 15 ani 41? elemente

De la 15 la 20 de ani 326 elemente

De la 20 la 25 ani 180 elemente

În cursul anului 1962 pînă la 30 septembrie urmează să se elibereze la termen 69 elemente.

Din rîndul celor 746 condamnați D.C. s-au identificat 8 legionari, un membru P.N.Ț. și un membru P.N.L. din totalul condamnaților D.C. 150 sunt intelectuali, 384 muncitori și 185 agricultori, din aceștia 708 sunt apți de muncă și 11 inapți.

După condamnări situația se prezintă astfel:

De la 1 la cinci ani 458

De la 5 la 10 ani 136

De la 10 la 15 ani 86

De la 15 la 20 ani 71

De la 20 la 25 ani 5

Din rîndul acestora pînă la 30 decembrie 1962 urmează să se elibereze la termen 25 condamnați (*sic!*)”]

¹ A.C.N.S.A.S., Documents Collection, Folder no. 8859/43, page 4–6: “LIGHTING. The formation is supplied with electric current provided by two electric power generator systems in the formation’s equipment, set up in the administrative area, also the formation is equipped with storm lamps which lighted in case the electric network broke down.

SIZE. The perimeter of the formation is 720 m, its surface is 18,000 m², containing 5 buildings made of adobe which are not yet finished, in the detention area. Also, the buildings of the farming area are not built, as well as other necessary buildings as prescribed in the constructions plans. The detention capacity cannot be established but it is stipulated for an amount of 700 convicts at the centre.

BASIC MEANS AND ALARMS. The formation is equipped with: 1 truck, 10 wagons with 2 horses and 2 wagons with oxen, 2 carts with 1 horse, 1 tractor, 24 horses and 4 oxen. [...]

The memory of Periprava remained very alive for the convicts also due to the hard working conditions. Reed harvesting was one of the most difficult *activities* that the prisoners had to do. When arriving at Periprava, the convicts were sorted out¹ according to the commander's will to be sent to work at constructions –

The formation has a telephone centre of 10 numbers and 4 military phones. The telephone centre is connected with the outside world by the M.P.T. Centre of Chilia Veche village. Communication and transportation to the outside world is done by ship anchored at Periprava (4 km distance) or at Panton (2 km distance) or by aeroplane to the Ministry of Home Affairs, which lands near the formation along the north-western side. As alarm equipment, the formation has rockets, toci, agents, riders, those who walk, , with boats and phone.

RESTRICTED AREAS. Except for the south-eastern side of the formation, the restricted area is delimited by indicators at a depth of 50 m. No clearing has been made since it is not necessary.” [“ILUMINATUL. Formațiunea este alimentată cu curent electric furnizat de două grupuri electrogene din dotarea formațiunii ce se află instalate în zona administrativă, deasemeni formațiunea este dotată cu felinare de vînt care asigură iluminatul în caz de defectarea rețelei electrice.

MĂRIMEA. Formațiunea are perimetrul de 720 m. cu o suprafață de 18 000 m.p. , având un număr de 5 clădiri din chirpici care încă nu sunt terminate, în zona de deținere. Deasemeni nu sunt construite clădirile din zona de gospodărire și alte clădiri necesare prevăzute în planul de construcții. Capacitatea de deținere nu se poate stabili însă este prevăzut pentru un număr de 700 deținuți, la centru.

MIJLOACE DE BAZĂ ȘI ALARME. În dotarea formațiunii sunt: 1 autocamion, 10 căruțe a 2 cai și 2 căruțe cu boi, 2 șarete a un cal, 1 tractor, 24 cai și 4 boi. [...] Formațiunea dispune de o centrală telefonică cu 10 numere și 4 telefoane de campanie. Centrala telefonică are legătură cu exteriorul prin centrala M.P.T. din comuna Chilia Veche. Legătura și transportul în exterior se asigură cu vaporul care staționează la Periprava (distanță de 4 km) sau La Panton (distanță 2 km) sau cu avionul la M.A.I. care aterizează lângă formațiune pe latura de nord – vest. Pentru alarmă formațiunea dispune de rachete, toci, agenți, călăreți, pe jos, cu bărci și telefon.

ZONE INTERZISE. Exceptînd latura de Sud-Est în jurul formațiunii, zona interzisă este delimitată prin indicatoare pe o adîncime de 50 m. Nu sînt excutate defrișeri nefiind necesare (*sic!*)”]

¹ Father Zosim Oancea, *Închisorile unui preot ortodox: memorii* (Prisons of an Orthodox priest: memoirs) (Bucharest: Editura Christiana, 2004), 217: “Those *able* have now long been working with reed, with rubber boots above their knees – you were very lucky if they had no holes – and the whole reed cutting equipment. A much harder work – people said – then working in the channel bed. They took the poor people from Oltenia to work even when there were 40 degrees [Celsius] outside, and they brought them back on stretchers dead. [...] There was much work to be done in the fields, quite difficult, on a land from which they tried to root out the reed. It was part of the plans of the domination to give back tens of hectares to agriculture. Experts of the matter said this was a great mistake, because there were so many uncultivated agricultural fields across the country, and reed was a great treasure of the country. Naturally, due to the exceptionally good soil, the crops went very well, only that a harsh struggle was going on with the reed which would not give in. On some of the field onions were sown which, being related to reed, could hardly be distinguished from it. [...] The show terrified me: people whose twill coat concealed doctors, lawyers, judges, priests, and all categories of intellectuals, in addition to workers

those from the centre – or the zootechny sectors – those from Grind –, and those who were less lucky were selected to the *troops* or brigades, as the convicts called these, for harvesting reed.¹ This is what former convicts confess: “The work was extremely difficult, done in oven-like temperature. The water barrel brought to us from the Danube was full of silt, but we drank it nonetheless, having no other choice. While digging the ditches for irrigation, we cut the reed roots with the spade, and we also found big, black leeches. Water was dripping from the root of the reed. We would put the dixie under it and gathered the water drops which tasted differently. I had the habit of crying: Căciulata Water! It was better than the one in the barrel.”² “They are still feeding us a penitentiary diet until the beginning of reed harvest, we only find out now that we shall harvest reed, and the convicts are prepared and organized in new brigades and teams. The administration appointed a team leader for each brigade, by criteria that only they knew, but they sought to appoint as leaders for all brigades people who had some kind of knowledge on the particular work to be done. [...] We were equipped and prepared for harvesting reed with everything necessary for this kind of work, and we were all unfamiliar with

and peasants, were flanked by guards with loaded guns and surrounded by wolf-dogs, trained to jump on them at the smallest deviation from the line.” [*“ApŃii lucrau acum demult la stuf, cu cizme de cauciuc până peste genunchi – era mare noroc dacă se nimereau negăurite - și cu tot instrumentajul de tăiat stuful. Muncă cu mult mai grea–spuneau oamenii–decât pe albia canalului. Ńi duceau pe bieŃii olteni la muncă și cu 40 de grade temperatură, și-i aduceau seara pe targă morŃi.[...] Era și de lucru la câmp, destul de greu, pe un pământ din care au încercat să extirpe stuful. Făcea parte din planurile stăpânirii să redea agriculturii zeci de hectare. Cunoscătorii în problemă spuneau că se face o mare greșeală, pentru că erau în țară atâtea terenuri agricole necultivate, iar stuful este o mare bogăție a țării. Firește că, datorită pământului excepțional de bun, culturilor le mergea foarte bine, atât că se ducea o luptă acerbă cu stuful, care nu voia să cedeze. Pe unele terenuri se semăna ceapă, care, fiind rudenie cu stuful, cu greu se deosebea unul de cealaltă. [...]Spectacolul m-a îngrozit: Oameni, sub a căror zeghe se ascundeau medici, avocați, judecători, preoți și toate categoriile de intelectuali, alături de muncitori și țărani, erau flancați de gardieni cu puștile încărcate și înconjurați de câini–lup, dresați să sară pe ei la cea mai mică abatere din rând. (sic!)”]*

¹ Due to its special qualities of thermal and phonic insulation, reed is an important raw material used in combination with other construction materials such as timber, brick, etc. By the combination of its physical and ecological qualities, reed is also favoured in modern architecture. Its harvesting needs special efforts since it is done in wintertime. In the communist period reed was harvested in huge amounts, part of which was exported. This required a very significant labour force, which, moreover, had to also be very cheap. The communists soon found the solution: political prisoners.

² Loredan, *Amintirile „banditului” Loredan scrise de el însuși: zile de disperare în ancheta și lagăr* (The memoirs of the “bandit” Loredan written by himself: days of desperation under investigation and in the labour camp) (Bucharest: Editura Ramida, 1994), 144. [*“Munca era extrem de grea, pe o temperatură de cuptor. Butoiul cu apă care ne veneav de la Dunăre era cu mъл, dar o beam, neavând altă soluție. Săpând la șanțuri pentru irigare, tăiam cu hărlețul rădăcini de stuf, unde găseam și lipitori mari, negre. Din rădăcina stufului picura apă. Puneam gamela și adunam picăturile de apă care aveau un gust diferit. Aveam obiceiul să strig: Apă de Căciulata! Era mai bună decât cea din hărdau.”]*

this work, and couldn't even tell the methods of harvesting reed. Each convict is given [...] a reed scythe, whetstone for honing the scythe, a pair of peasant's sandals made of rubber waste from used car wheels; we were also given Manila hemp ropes, not to end our lives, but to tie our sandals on our legs, out of sympathy and respect for the criminal colonel Condurache [...] When on 16 December 1959 we were taken out of the ferries and lined up and counted to be taken over by the chief of the working site, we were terrified by the sight in front of our eyes, everything was white with hoar and white-frost, a typical Siberian landscape, we even changed its name from Danube Delta into Romanian Siberia. We arrived to the battlefield, where our potential enemy was the reed; this enemy we were to fought in the winter of 1959. [...] We are lined up brigade by brigade at the edge of the reed field, not seeing the margins and limits of the reed bed, it was like an endless sea. We stood there with the scythes under our arms, not daring to take our hands out of our pockets, with gloves and all. The guards pass over to each of us to show how to hone the scythe and how to handle it and the position you had to face your enemy which for us was reed. [...] We couldn't work anything, we were hungry and cold, it took some days before you, once in a while, saw one or two people to do some work, we all stood in the position the guards fixed us. Some people would cut a bundle or two. But most of them nothing, the beatings of the guards had no effect on us, and we preferred the beating with all its risks. There were people from intellectual environment who had never before seen such kind of work or especially such working conditions; they were terrified also with the repulsive winter landscape of the Delta.”¹ “In the autumn and winter; in the winter

¹ Victor Maghear, *Drumul robilor*, 168–170. [“Ni se dă tot hrană în regim de penitenciar până la începerea recoltatului de stuf, abia acum aflăm că vom recolta stuf și se face pregătirea deținuților și o nouă organizare pe brigăzi și echipe. La fiecare brigadă administrația numește un brigadier, după criterii numai de ei știute, dar se caută ca la fiecare brigadă să fie numiți ca brigadieri oameni având oarecare tangență cu specificul muncii.[...] Suntem aprovizionați și pregătiți pentru recoltarea stufului cu cele necesare specifice acestei munci, și toți eram străini de această muncă, și nici nu ne dădeam seama de metodele de recoltare a stufului. Fiecare deținut primește [...] Tarpan, gresie pentru ascuțirea tarpanului, o pereche de opinci confecționate din deșeuri de cauciuc provenite de la roțile de mașini uzate; mai primeam ață de *Manila*, nu ca să ne punem capăt zilelor, ci pentru legarea opincilor de picioare, din simpatie și respect pentru criminalul colonel Condurache [...] Când în ziua de 16 decembrie 1959 suntem scoși din bac și încolonați și numărați pentru a fi luați în primire de șeful punctului de lucru, ne-am speriat de peisajul apărut în fața ochilor, totul era alb din cauza brumei și chiciurii depuse peste tot, un peisaj tipic siberian, i-am și schimbat numele din Delta Dunării în Siberia Românească. Ajungem pe câmpul de bătaie, unde dușmanul nostru potențial era stuful; cu acest dușman aveam să luptă în iarna anului 1959. [...] Suntem înșirați pe brigăzi la marginea lanului de stuf fără să i se vadă marginea și capetele tarlalei, era ca o mare fără margini. Noi stăteam cu tarpanul subțioară, fără să îndrăznim să scoatem mâinile din buzunar cu mânuși cu tot. Trec gardienii pe la fiecare să ne arate cum se ascute tarpanul și cum se manipulează și poziția în care trebuie să-ți înfrunți dușmanul, care pentru noi era stuful. [...] Nu puteam lucra nimic, ne era foame și frig, a durat câteva zile până când rar, mai vedeai câte unul că mișcă ceva, toți stăteam în poziția în care ne-au fixat gardienii. Unii mai tăiau doi, trei maldări. Dar majoritatea nimic, bătaia gardienilor nu mai avea efect asupra noastră, și preferam bătaia cu orice risc. Erau oameni

the water froze and they had to harvest reed. ‘Cause before the convicts harvested reed and the people from the village came and peeled it for handicraft, I don’t know what they were doing there, they sent that reed, and took them out to cut the reed, but some of them, if they froze every day [...], there on the ice, they sandals wore off, and they got sick and couldn’t go out to work any more who were sick and they beat them to death.”¹ I think no more commentaries are needed after all those said above. It is up to the reader to formulate the image of the convicts’ daily life.

The harvested reed was most often exported: “Again, there was an organization, a company which collected it, sorted it, selected it, and sent it for export [...] and the convicts baled them and took them by special ferries and carried them to the factories at Iscani, Brăila, Călărași, they were making cellulose,”² “We were announced to prepare for transporting the bales to the storage place on the banks of the channel; this work was more exhausting, first we had to make our way through the channel bank, through the stubble-field of reed remaining after the harvest. As long as we didn’t tread out the way, the transportation wasn’t possible, because there were the reed stubs remaining after the harvest, of 40–50 cm high. To make this road, we lined up, all the brigades, and trod the stubble-field all the way to the storage place. Once we had trodden the way, our ordeal began, from the harvesting place to the trodden way, convicts with bales on their backs, in teams, escorted by soldiers of the security troops armed with machine guns, forcing us to hurry with the bales on our backs; when we happened to take some swamplier way, with frozen water, the ice broke under us, and we sank into the water often quite to our waist. We asked for the help of our fellows, but this help often failed to arrive because they were all afraid to help, since the soldier or guard intervened at once with their clubs and the bed of their weapons to help him get out of the water, and the ice was always breaking in front, as you tried to make a step to get out of the swamp. Meanwhile the team moved on, continuing their way, and the person in question, once managing to get himself out of his trap, was helped with the bed of pistols and clubs to hurry his steps to reach the team.”³

din mediul intelectual, care nu mai văzuseră în viața lor acest gen de muncă și mai cu seamă condițiile în care se practica; erau timorați și de peisajul respingător din Delta în anotimpul de iarnă.”]

¹ Testimony of an inhabitant of Periprava, 2009. [“și toamna și iarna; iarna îngheța apa și stuf trebuia să taie. Că înainte recoltau stuf deținuții și oameni din sat veneau și-l cojeau pentru artizanat, nu știu ce făceau ei acolo, trimiteau stuful ăla, și-i scoteau să taie stuful, dar unii din ei deja, dacă-n fiecare zi [...] răceau, acolo pe gheață, opincile se toceau și sembolnăveau și nu mai puteau să iasă la muncă care erau bolnavi și-i băteau până mureau (sic!)”]

² Inhabitant of Periprava, worked as a non-commissioned officer in the camp. He chose not to reveal his name. Interview taken in 2009. (A0064 and A0065. This is how it appears on the tape). [“Tot așa era o organizație, o întreprindere care îl colecta. îl sortau, îl selecționam și-l dădeau la export [...] și deținuții îl balotau îl duceau în bacuri speciale și cărau la combinat, Iscani, Brăila, Călărași, făceau celuloză (sic!)”]

³ Victor Maghear, *Drumul robilor*, 174–175. [“Suntem anunțați să ne pregătim pentru transportul maldărilor la locul de depozitare pe malul canalului; această muncă era mai epuizantă, în primul rând trebuia să ne croim drum până la mal, prin miriștea de stuf care

Even the local people who had no contact with the convicts or the camp, and who did not even work there, speak about the hard working conditions of the convicts. Their eyes betray pity and compassion for these damned people. I must confess that all this came as a surprise for me while I made these interviews. I expected them to express fear towards the convicts, the need for protection and staying away from them, but not feelings of regret and compassion.¹

rămânea după colectarea stufului. Până nu făceam drum bătătorit nu era cu puțință transportul, că rămăneau cotoarele de stuf în urma recoltării, care aveau o înălțime peste 40–50 centimetri. Ca să facem acest drum, ne încolonam toate brigăzile și cu picioarele bătătoream miriștea până la locul de depozitare. După ce bătătoream drumul începea calvarul nostru, de la locul recoltatului și până la drumul bătătorit, deținuți cu maldări în spinare pe echipe și escortați de câte un soldat din trupele de securitate înarmați cu automate ne forțau în ritm alert cu maldărul în spinare; când nimeream într-un teren mai mlăștinșos și cu apa înghețată, gheața se rupea și noi ne scufundam în apă de multe ori până la brâu. Ceream ajutor de la colegi, dar de multe ori acest ajutor nu venea din cauză că la fiecare îi era frică să vină în ajutor, că deja soldatul sau gardianul intervenea cu bâtele și paturile armelor pentru a-l ajuta să iasă din apă, iar gheața se rupea mereu în față, cum încercai un pas ca să ieși la mal. În timpul acesta echipa se îndepărta continuându-și drumul, iar cel în cauză după ce reușea să se smulgă din capcană, cu paturile pistolului și cu bâtele era ajutat să forțezi pasul pentru a ajunge echipa (*sic!*).”]

¹ Inhabitant of Periprava, he chose not to reveal his name, interview taken in 2008: “They were cutting reedmace, harvesting reedmace, dried it, tied it, and carried it to the Danube banks by tractors. With [unclear meaning] from the swamp they took out with [unclear meaning]. And they carried from the Grind and too it to the banks of the Danube. [...] Summer, autumn. It was autumn. Autumn, autumn. ‘Cause they still had leaves and they dried. It was autumn. Look, they started to harvest around this time, they did. A month or two, they harvested, doormats, small baskets they made at Poarta Albă, at Constanța, or I don’t know where. [...] It was hard, of course it was hard: in the water, through the swamp. [...] Of course, they had a work quota. If they didn’t make their work quota, they received no food and they were closed up.

[...] What, to give them suits and ties. No. To protect the convicts in times of communism? We free people as we were, if we did something they took you to the police and beat you until you said like them. But the convict who was condemned [unclear meaning].” [“Tăiau papură, recoltau papură, uscau, legau și cărau la malul Dunării cu tractoare. Cu [nu se înțelege] din baltă scotea și cu [nu se înțelege]. Și cărau de la Grind până la malul Dunării ducea. [...] Vară, toamnă. Toamnă era. Toamnă, toamnă. Că încă aveau frunze și uscau. Toamna era. Uiti, începeau cam di pi timpul acesta să recolte, începeau. O lună, două recoltau, rogojini, coșulețe, ce făceau ei la Poarta Albă la Constanța, sau nu știu unde. [...] Era greu, normal că era greu: prin apă, prin mocirlă. [...] Sigur, că avea normă. Că dacă nu făcea normă nu dădea mâncare și îi închideau.

[...] Da ci, îi dădeau costum sau cravată îi dădea. Nu. În timpul comunismului să protejeze deținutul? Noi liberi, care eram, și dacă făceam ceva te duce la poliție și te bătea până nu spuneai ca ei. Dar deținutul care era condamnat. [nu se înțelege] (*sic!*)”]

Inhabitant of Periprava, interview taken in 2009: “Yes, when we were children we pitied them, our parents told us how before... and we pitied them [...] We heard their moans, how they cried there and our parents told us they were beating them, they took them out to work, and they had nothing to wear on their feet, with their bare feet in the water, in that frost to cut the reed, and they, some of them got sick, ‘cause there is no man made of iron [...] I

The political objectives of the communist leaders were represented by the need to eliminate any opposition. This was of primary importance in any field of activity and constituted the basis of any demagogic discourse on the subject. In this sense, the 22/23 December 1948 plenary meeting of the Central Committee [CC] of the Romanian Labour Party [PMR] clearly specified who the *class enemy* is, and therefore the following objectives had to be identified: “the liquidation of reactionary bourgeois parties, the elimination of the representative of the bourgeoisie from the government, the subversion of the monarchy and the proclamation of the people’s republic, the enforcement of the alliance between the proletariat and the working peasantry, and the working class’ obtaining the role of leader of state life [...]”, and applied as soon as possible.¹

The objective comparative analysis of Romanian labour camps of the communist period will easily reveal the differences between them, seemingly quite insignificant at a first glance. Working and living conditions varied also depending on the camp’s leadership. There were camps which the convicts refused to even remember,² calling them *extermination camps* or *death camps*. However, there were

don’t know, I don’t know what to say, but I want to say, then we got bigger, and we heard one of the convicts escaped, and they looked for him, and whatever, and they kept telling the people *Close your doors so that he wouldn’t come*, to I don’t know what. But we with our parents never locked ourselves up in the house, we weren’t afraid, our parents never frightened us with anything, to say that someone was coming to us [...], there in the forest, farther on, we had a garden, it wasn’t fenced, of course, we had corn on the plantation, and we guarded it, and we even talked to them, being there all day, ‘cause we were quite big then, around 10 or 12. But it never happened that any of the convicts would abuse us. [...] Yes, peaceful, they weren’t violent”. [“Da, uite cât de copii eram nouă ne era milă de ei, părinții noștri ne povesteau cum înainte...și nouă ne era milă de ei [...] Auzeam gemetele lor, cum plângeau ei acolo și povesteau părinții că îi bătea, îi scotea la muncă, ei n-aveau cu ce să se încălze, cu picioarele goale pe apă, pe gheața aia să taie stuful și ei, care sembolnăvea, că, na, nu-i om de fier [...] Nu mai știu, nu știu ce să vă zic, dar vreau să vă zic, de-acum eram noi mai mari, și-am auzit c-a evadat un deținut, și-l caută și nu știu ce și tot ziceau la oameni *Să-nchideți ușile ca să nu vină*, ca să nu știu ce. Dar noi la părinții noștri niciodată nu ne-am încuiat în casă, nouă nu ne era frică, părinții niciodată nu ne-au speriat cu nimic, ca să zică că vine cineva la noi [...], în pădure acolo, mai departe am avut noi o grădină, nu era îngrădită, bineînțeles, pe plantație am avut porumb și-l păzeam și chiar stăteam de vorbă cu ei, că, na , toată ziua, că de-acuma eram măricei, aveam câte 10-12 ani. Dar nu s-a întâmplat niciodată ca vreun deținut să abuzeze de noi [...] Da, pașnici, nu erau violenți (*sic!*)”]

¹ Marian Cojoc, *Evoluția Dobrogei între anii 1944 – 1964. Principalele aspecte din economie și societate*, 78. [“lichidării partidelor burgheze reacționare, înlăturarea reprezentanților burgheziei din guvern, răsturnarea monarhiei și proclamarea republicii populare, cimentarea alianței dintre proletariat și țărănimea muncitoare și cucerirea de clasa muncitoare a rolului de conducător în viața de stat [...] (*sic!*)”]

² Inhabitant of Periprava, worked as a non-commissioned officer in the camp. He chose not to reveal his name. Interview taken in 2009. (A0064 and A0065. This is how it appears on the tape): “It depends on the working sector, let’s say those who worked in the zootechny sector had to go out every day, to feed the animals, milk the cows, prepare the milk, because they came from Tulcea, they took it every day [...], it was a special company which

camps where living conditions were, while not much easier, but bearable still. In order to offer a comprehensive presentation of the way of life in the labour camps, I shall use a clear discourse, a well delimited order of ideas, based each time on the interviews I have taken.

The work quota which had to be done was extremely big and hard to meet. Violence, hunger, and the instinct and need to survive were the main reasons for the physical and psychological decline of the convicts. Most times, their working conditions were inhuman. No man can be expected to work regardless of the weather conditions, whether there are 30°C or -30°C outside: “[Interviewed:] Yes, every worker had a work quota, let’s say in agriculture, hard work, different feeding standard, those who worked in administration, easy work, different standard. [Interviewer:] And those who did harder work received more food? [Interviewed:] More bread, their amount of bread lasted longer. Otherwise they incorporated up to 3000 calories. [Interviewer:] But was the food enough for the convicts? [Interviewed:] No, they received from home, too. [Interviewer:] Were they allowed to receive packages? [Interviewed:] They were allowed, and also first degree relatives also came to the talker, because not everybody could go in and speak to them. They brought them food from home, or sometimes sent them packages by post. It probably wasn’t enough for them if they worked, and they were young too.”¹

If these quotas were not done, they caused a series of problems to the convicts such as: reducing the amount of food, which had fatal consequences, transforming the prisoner into a weak, exhausted person ready for any kind of compromise to get his food, the daily beatings which caused all kinds of illnesses and suffering, punishments of various kinds which were meant to cause moral and

collected milk, so they couldn’t stay inside, they had to go out [...] there were also civilians who worked with them, tractor drivers for instance, and they were free, if the tractor drivers didn’t go out, they were free as well [...] it depended everywhere on the work [...] Well this was it, agriculture and the zootechny sector and the administration, and those who made the food, cooks, bakers”. [“Depinde de sectorul de lucru, să zicem cei care lucrau în sectorul zootehnic trebuia să iasă zilnic, să hrănească animalele, să mulgă vacile, să prepare laptele, că venea de la Tulcea, zilnic se ridica [...], era o întreprindere specială care colecta laptele, deci nu putea să stea înăuntru, trebuia să iasă [...] erau și din ăștia civili care lucrau cu ei, tractoriști să zicem și erau liberi, dacă tractoriștii nu ieșeau, și ei erau liberi [...] depinde peste tot de muncă [...] Păi atâta era, agricultura și sectorul zootehnic și administrația, și cei care făceau de mâncare, bucătarii, brutarii (*sic!*)”].

¹ Inhabitant of Periprava, worked as a non-commissioned officer in the camp. He chose not to reveal his name. Interview taken in 2009. (A0064 and A0065. This is how it appears on the tape). [“Da, fiecare muncitor avea normă, să zicem că-n agricultură, muncă grea, altă normă de hrănire, în administrație cei care lucrează, muncă ușoară, altă normă. [interviewatul] Și-n funcție de cei care aveau munca mai grea primeau mai multă mâncare?[interviewatorul] Mai multă pâine, mai mult ținea la cantitatea de pâine. În rest până la 3000 de caralii se-ncorpora [interviewatul] Dar le-ajungea hrana deținuților? [interviewatorul] Nu, ei mai primeau și de-acasă [interviewatul] Aveau voie să primească pachet? [interviewatorul] Aveau voie, dar veneau și la vorbitor neamurile de gradul I, că nu oricine putea să intre să vorbească. Le-aducea mâncare de-acasă, mai le trimitea și pri poștă pachet. Nu le-ajungea probabil, dacă munceau și erau și tineri [interviewatul] (*sic!*)”]

psychological degradation besides the physical one, the interdiction to send or receive postcards or packages, etc. In most cases if you failed to execute the quota imposed you were held on the working site until you finished, and, of course, you received no food. The failure to execute the daily work quota or the refusal to work were punished by lock-up. Denunciations and the exposure of intellectuals and the bourgeois by common right prisoners as stooges were encouraged in communist labour camps, these people were rewarded with extra food or their being moved to other penitentiaries: "If you failed to do your work at the construction site, you didn't do you quota for a day or two, or for a week, or you intended not to do it, and if not doing it, of course they punished you. Or they sent you to a maximum security prison where you had to finish your sentence, not to the channel, because they considered that the channel was an easier means of punishment. It was open air, you got food three times a day as was usual, but at the prison you only received once. As I've said, there were punishments in the prisons as well, that is, lock-up rooms, and there were lock-up rooms on the working site as well. Those who didn't execute the work quota they were sent for to the working site, were naturally punished with overtime work. This was it first of all, or the reducing of the amount of food, even if you went to work on the construction site, your food was reduced, your food for three meals was reduced. Or if some other method was found for using punishment on the construction site, they could send him to a penitentiary unit where to execute his punishment day after day because, I forgot to tell you: because those who worked at the construction sites had a conditional, their punishment was reduced by a certain percentage, it was reduced from their sentence. This was the best advantage one got if working on the construction site."¹

Such things have been declared by several convicts. All the persons I have interviewed complained about the inhuman conditions they had to endure. Another major problem that the convicts had to face was nutrition. Hunger is considered to be one of *the four knights of the Apocalypse*, being responsible for innumerable deaths throughout the centuries. At the same time, the lack of feed favoured the appearance and spreading of various diseases and epidemics.² For this reason,

¹ Testimony of Constantin Fodor, Târgu-Mureș, 2008. ["Nu-ți făceai datoria pe șantier, nu-ți făceai norma o zi, două, o săptămână sau intenționai să nu faci norma, și nefăcând norma, sigur că te pedepsea. Sau te trimitea la o închisoare de maximă siguranță unde terminai pedeapsa, nu pe canal, pentru că considera că pe canal era un mijloc de pedeapsă mai ușor. Era în aer liber, primești mâncare de 3 ori cum primeai, dar la închisoare primeai numai o dată. Cum spuneam și în închisori exista pedepse, adică camere de pedeapsă și pe șantier erau camere de pedeapsă. Care nu-și făceau norma pentru care erau duși pe șantier, sigur că se pedepsea cu muncă peste program. Asta era în primul rând sau reducerea alimentelor, chiar dacă intrai la lucru pe șantier, reducerea mâncării, a hranei pentru cele trei mese ți se reducea. Sau dacă găsea altă modalitate de folosire a pedepsei pe șantiere, putea să o facă să fie trimisă într-o unitate de închisoare, unde sa execute zi la zi pentru că, am uitat să vă spun : pentru că cei care executa munca pe șantiere li se aplica condiționalul, adică li se aplica o reducere de pedepse cu un procentaj cu atât la sută, li se scădea din cât aveai de executat. Asta era cel mai bun avantaj pe care primea dacă lucra pe șantier (*sic!*)."]

² Massimo Montanari, *Foamea și abundența. O istorie a alimentației în Europa* (Hunger and abundance. A history of nourishment in Europe) (Iași: Polirom, 2003). This book is an

starvation of the convicts was the most frequently used instrument of the communists to eliminate them. The hard works and little food had a devastating effect on the organism, which brought the convicts close to desperation. Almost anything which seemed to be edible made part of the convicts' food, and the narrated testimony shows the need to survive: "They were sick people [...] They ate all kinds of crap. You went on the field, you found all sorts of things. [...] I worked in agriculture too. And in agriculture, if your work quota is too high, it is torture. Still, those who worked in agriculture were a bit better off. You'd find all kinds of plants of the field: beginning with sorrel, and continuing with all sorts of black berries, all kinds of [...] They ate everything that was edible, or suspected to be edible [...] There were some who ate bread with [...]. These substances for greasing [...] which they thought looked nice: whale blubber treated with something, used as a lubricant. They ate anything. They ate dogs. Dogs were very good. They ate snakes, frogs, cats. Everything they could catch, they ate. They ate raw potatoes. They ate raw corn [...]"¹

There is an endless number of cases when the lack of food caused the death of the convicts in these labour camps. Although such a treatment seems inhuman today and it is also forbidden by international human right laws, in those times inhuman treatment was considered normal. Any form of protest, even hunger strike, was very harshly punished. Maxim Ion tells about the drama of a 25 years old boy who, because of the lack of adequate nutrition for his age, died in front of his eyes: "He was so weak, after the work he has done to get some extra food, that he reached the limit of his resistance and died standing in front of me, while I was, somehow, talking to him, [he was] 25-26 years old. Around this age, approximately. And I know his name too: he was called Zoițan. Zoițan, and he was somewhere from Dorohoi county, along the Prut. I know there were two of them: the uncle and the nephew, and they were working together. They were both arrested. While I stayed at the infirmary, I witnessed the death of some who died there while I was there."²

outstandingly useful instrument for getting acquainted with the devastating impact of hunger in the course of time.

¹ Testimony of Constantin Fodor, Târgu-Mureș, 2008. ["Erau oameni bolnavi [...] Mâncau tot felul de porcării. Mergeai pe câmp, găseai tot felul [...] Am lucrat și în agricultură. Și-n agricultură dacă-i dai omului norma prea mare, este un chin. Cei care lucrau în agricultură totuși au adus-o mai bine. Mai găseai diferite plante pe câmp: începând de la măcriș, continuând cu tot felul de buburuze negre, tot felul de [...] Se mânca orice era comestibil, bănuie comestibil [...] Erau unii care-au mâncat pâine cu [...]. Substanțe din-astea de uns [...] care li se pare că arăta frumos : untură de balenă care era tratată cu ceva, care era pentru lubrefianți. Orice se mânca. S-au mâncat câini. Câinele era foarte bun. S-au mâncat șerpi, broaște, pisici. Tot ce se putea prinde se mânca. S-au mâncat cartofi nefierți. S-a mâncat porumb nefiert [...] (*sic!*)"]

² Testimony of Ion Maxim, Cluj-Napoca, 2008. ["Era așa de slăbit, după munca pe care o punea el, ca să primească un supliment de mâncare, că o ajuns la limita rezistenței și-o murit în fața mea stând, așa, cumva, de vorbă cu el [avea] 25-26 de ani. În jur de vârsta asta aproximativ. Și știu și numele: Zoițan îl chema. Zoițan și de prin județul Dorohoi, de pe malul Prutului. Știu că erau doi: unul era unchi și celălalt nepot și amândoi lucrau împreună.

Under the pretext of *pressing some works* which needed to be urgently completed, the convicts were taken out to work in Sundays and religious holidays as well. These holidays were not celebrated in the labour camps, only those dedicated to the Communist Party. The convicts most often had to work till exhaustion. Even in the winter they could not enjoy some rest, some work was always found for them to do: “They had here a bunch of people who worked. The whole dam was made by them. Which goes from the pontoon for 24 km, the length of the dam. Made by hands. This is what I can tell you. ‘Cause I’ve worked there myself. Then they went for agriculture. There was agriculture before too. What was there in agriculture, hoeing, that’s it. The rest couldn’t do anything. They had nothing to do here. [...] The reed, yes, the reed, exactly. In wintertime there was reed harvesting [...] Hard, they worked for quotas, and it was hard [he says it wasn’t hard], whoever. They had a hundred, two hundreds, three hundreds of bales each. What else could they have done? They had no other job. This was their job. So the man, the convict was a convict. He executed his sentence, he earned by labour. [...] Oh, in the summer, in the summer it was ten hours, in the winter it was eight hours [...] In the summer it was weeding, and some other things, and gardening, and as I said, zootechny, and more. But no. In the winter, when they had no job, they stayed in detention. To say so. They didn’t take out, they didn’t take out only as much as it was planned by, so, the farmer who was working there. But there was the IAS separately, we were convicts [he worked there, he was an employee of the camp, not a convict ... it is only a form of expression] separately. And we had to check in at seven or half past seven in the morning.”¹

Since *the regulations prescribed repose per week, not per Sundays*, the labour programme was continuous. The breaks or certain festive days were always connected to the celebrations imposed by the Party:² “No days off, no nothing. It was continuous work. The same rhythm. Sometime, very rarely, it happened, when

Erau arestați amândoi. Cât am stat eu la infirmerie am fost martor a unora care au murit acolo cât am fost eu (*sic!*).”]

¹ The testimony of *Cuțov Grigore*, non-commissioned officer in the camp, inhabitant of Periprava, 2008. [“Aveau aici o grămadă de oameni care lucrau. Tot digul făcut de ei. Care este de la ponton și 24 de kilometri, cât are digul. Manual făcut. Asta pot să vă spun. C-am lucrat și eu acolo. Și pi urmă s-a intrat la agricultură. Și până atunci era agricultură. În agricultură ci era, la prașă șâ atât. Restu nu putea să facă nimic. N-avea ce să facă aici. [...] Stuful, da, la stuf, exact. Timp di iarnă era la recoltat stuf [...] Greu, muncea normă, ci greu [zice că nu era greu], oricini. Avea fiecare om câte o sută, două sute, trei sute de legături. Ci pot să facă? Altceva n-avea meserie. Asta era meseria lor. Adică omul, condamnatul era condamnat. El executa pedeapsă, pe baza de muncă câștiga. [...] O, vara erau, vara era zăci ori șâ iarna era opt ori [...] Vara era la plivit, la, mai multi era, și grădinărie, cum am sus, zootehnie, mai multi. Însă nu. Iarna când, dacă n-avea, acesta, locuri di muncă, stătea la, în detenție. Ca să zici așa. Nu scotea, decât scotea cât era planificată di, asta, fermierul care lucra. Da era IAS-ul separat, noi eram deținuți [el a lucrat, a fost angajat al lagărului, nu deținut...doar o formă de exprimare] separat. Și noi, dimineața prezentam la șapte acolo, șapte jumati (*sic!*)”]

² *Arhivele Securității* (Archives of the *Securitate*), Vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 2004), 101–102.

the weather was unfavourable: too much rain. Or it happened once in a while, for example, at New Year's Eve. But not always. But at New Year's Eve, when the guards, that is, the soldiers, the battalion of soldiers guarding the camp, asked for leave, not to work in that day. But in there, there was no Celebration. There was no Eastern, there was no Christmas. There wasn't. [...] They were working at nights too. At nights they were working, there were two shifts: a day shift and a night shift [...] But they worked in 3 shifts, but only a few brigades worked in 3 shifts. Most of the work was done in one shift, and the shift consisted of 12 hours. Those who worked in shifts were those in the workshops, but those working at loading and unloading earth and stones planted mountains and cut hills [...]. Who worked at these works, worked 12 hours a day, and 12 hours a day without Sundays, without Feasts, and without holidays. This is how it was then. What's more, as you got to the camp, they put you to other works.”¹

The living and working conditions in labour camps and prisons were extremely difficult, having a manifest purpose of destroying the human being. The Communist Party instated its regime by force, terror, and lies. They tried to physically and psychologically destroy people, to destroy the social relationship between individuals, to make people lose their moral values. Although they fought for the values of democracy, as innocence was a main characteristic of these convicts, many of them lie now in unknown graves. The sacrifice they made in the name of ideals was rewarded by denying them a decent burial, in a Christian spirit. Whereas hunger, labour, and violence was a burden for their bodies, the fact of dying without the most elementary aspects of a conservative Christian society meant a heavy spiritual burden for them. The testimonies of the survivors are the evidence for present and future generations. The unfair historical past of the deceased whose bodies were thrown into common graves, many of them yet undiscovered, must be rehabilitated by appropriate civic actions: “[Interviewer:] did the camp have a cemetery for those who died? [Interviewed:] No, no, those who died were brought and buried here in this cemetery. But not many of them died. I saw here at the church in the centre a cemetery and a large cross made in the honour of the former convicts who died. This only happened after that system had passed, after communism had collapsed, they started to unearth the death, so to say [...] Do I know how they were buried? I saw it on a small stone that they were Catholics, someone has put it here, but nobody knows, no crosses were erected [...] and

¹ *Testimony of Nistor Man*, Târgu-Mureș, 2008. [“Fără zile libere, fără nimic. Într-una se muncea. Același ritm. Se-ntâmpla, câteodată, foarte rar, când era timp nefavorabil: ploi prea mari. Sau [ii] se-ntâmpla câte-o dată, de exemplu, de Anul Nou. Dar nu întotdeauna. De Anul Nou când gărzile, adică soldații, batalionul de soldați care păzea lagărul, cereau învoire să nu se muncească în ziua respectivă. Dar, încolo, nu exista Sărbătoare. Nu exista Paște, nu exista Crăciun. Nu exista. [...] Se lucra și noaptea. Noaptea se lucra, două ture erau: una de zi și una de noapte [...] Dar se lucra în 3 schimburi, dar puține brigăzi lucrau în 3 schimburi. Cea mai mare parte a muncii era făcută într-un schimb și schimbul era făcut din 12 ore. Care lucrau în schimb erau cei din ateliere, dar care lucrau la descărcări, la încărcări pământ și piatra sădeau munți și tăiau dealuri [...]. Care lucrau la aceste lucrări, lucrau 12 ore pe zi și lucrau 12 ore pe zi fără Dumineci, fără Sărbători și fără concedii. Așa era atunci. Plus ajungeai în lagăr, te puneau la alte lucruri (*sic!*)”]

communism didn't recognize religion, you know [...] [Interviewer:] But how were they buried? Did they have any coffins, what were they made of, reed? [Interviewed:] But how can you make a coffin out of reed? no, they made these simple coffins. You cannot make coffins out of reed.”¹

Therefore communism has confiscated everything from these *saints of prisons*, as they are also termed in the literature. After having been deprived of a decent life besides their families, they were also deprived of the right to be buried in a Christian way. In many cases *death* in the oppressive system created by the communists was regarded as a much awaited salvation. The struggle with religion seemed to have been won. The death of the convicts was simply a matter of figures, and the traditional burial customs specific for Romanian society – the lighting of candles, the cross on the grave, the pilgrimage of relatives and friends – were not respected by the system.

The testimonies of these people heard in their entirety are shocking. They hand down to us the echo of the strength of their fight, and the calmness proved in the survivors' narration of the hell they had gone through is indeed impressive.

Any work of this type requires originality, since the testimonies of the convicts always complete and “update” the image that historiography displays on the world of concentration camps. Any convict, member of a convict's family, or survivor of the terrors of a labour camp, any person who has come in contact, some way or another, with a former political prisoner, has experienced this drama in person and has judged it or understood it from his perspective.

The analysis of published and unpublished documents, of CNSAS files of former convicts which have never been researched before, or the archives of the mayor's office of C. A. Rosetti commune to which Periprava administratively pertains, are evidence yet to be consulted for a more comprehensive study of the matter. My purpose in this paper was to expose but a small part of an invaluable documentary treasure, too little investigated by historians. I have not aimed at exhaustiveness, only at pointing out some of the most relevant problems for the treated period and subject. The use of an adequate methodology proposed by experts in oral history has been of great help in outlining a possibly most realistic image of the Periprava labour camp. The conclusions of these analyses show that the subjectivity of suffering opens up new dimensions for classical historiographical research.

Translated by Emese Czintos

¹ Inhabitant of Periprava, worked as a non-commissioned officer in the camp. He chose not to reveal his name. Interview taken in 2009. (A0064 and A0065. This is how it appears on the tape). [“Pentru cei care mureau avea cimitir lagărul? [interviewatorul] Nu, nu, cei care mureau îi aducea și-i îngropa aici, în cimitirul ăsta. Dar nu prea mureau. Am văzut aici la biserica din centru un cimitir și o cruce mare care e făcută în cinstea foștilor deținuți care-au murit. Asta deja după ce-a trecut sistemul ăsta, după ce-a căzut comunismul, a-nceput să dezgroape morții, cum s-ar zice [...] Eu știu, cum erau îngropați? .Am văzut pe-o pietricică că erau catolici, cineva a pus-o aici, dar nu se știe, nu se punea nici o cruce [...] și comunismul nu recunoștea religia, știți [interviewatul] [...] Dar cum erau înmormântați? Aveau sicrie , din ce le făceau, din stuf? [interviewatorul] Dar cum să faci sicrie din stuf? nu, confecționau sicrie așa simple. Din stuf nu se pot face sicrie [interviewatul] (*sic!*)”]