

CĂLIN OLARIU, *Povestea mea – povestea noastră. Gaborii din județul Mureș* [My story – our story. The `Gabori` from the Muers County] (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut and Mega Publishing Houses, 2016)

“Memory becomes more important in its social aspect than as an individual phenomenon. By placing an individual as a member of a community, he assimilates memory schemes. Each community holds a different collective memory that is transmitted and reproduced among its members, from one generation to another one.”¹ This would be, par excellence, the essence of the volume *Povestea mea – povestea noastră. Gaborii din județul Mureș* edited by Călin Olariu. The oral history interview fragments presented within its pages emphasize very interesting accounts on Gabori everyday lives in Transylvania in *longue durée*: throughout the interwar period, the years of the Second World War, the communist decades and the post-1989 years. By bringing into question the “lived history” of Gabori Roma in Transylvania, the editor emphasizes the daily life of Gabori Roma in the context of change in terms of discrimination and marginalization as well as in terms of integration and acculturation.

“Povestea mea – povestea noastră. Gaborii din județul Mureș” is part of the “Supplementum AIO” Series published by Argonaut and Mega Publishing Houses in Cluj-Napoca in 2016. Using several interviews from “The Untold Story. An Oral History of the Roma People in Romania” Project, which aimed at collecting, preserving and interpreting oral history testimonies of Roma to contribute to the knowledge of their past in Romania, this volume engages the reader into the world of the Gabori, the traditional community of Gypsies living in Transylvania, who are defined by a strong Hungarian influence. The volume is edited by Călin Olariu, who gained experience on the topic of Roma history and oral history methodology as he acted as a member of the interviewing team (at the Oral History Institute in Cluj-Napoca) during the fieldwork campaign within the traditional community of Gabori in Mureș county in 2015. In his endeavour, the editor seeks to bring within the academic and public discourse the topic of the history of Roma in Romania recalled by the Roma communities. In this sense, the publication of such testimonies, states at the very beginning the editor, may become a means of combating the negative stereotypes of the dominant public discourse portraying the Roma as a “problem”. Moreover, the editor emphasizes the pivotal idea of the volume which is at the same time its main aim: “individual biographies, family histories and histories of different communities crossing the major historical events of the twentieth century are restored by dint of oral history.”(p.21) In this respect, Mr. Olariu manages admirably

¹ Ionuț Costea, *Lazăr de la Rusca. Mitbiografia în comunism și postsocialism* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2008), 40-41.

to convey the world of the traditional community of Gabori, to bring to the fore the witnesses that become, by publishing the volume, authors of history. The importance of this volume is significant for the members of the community who realize the fact that their everyday life is relevant to history.

Within the introductory study, the reader finds a short history of the oral history discipline, described as being at the same time the oldest and the newest form of history. The study emphasizes several paradigm changes in the study of oral history and its methodology from the 1970s until the 2000s. Thus, the first pages of the volume take the reader to the ancient time with the writings of historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides, then to Voltaire in the 18th century, to the first genuine oral history program initiated in the USA in 1948 by the historian Allan Nevins, to the British Oral History School with the oral historian Paul Thompson, and then to the Italian oral history representatives Gianni Bossio, Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli. Referring to Romania, it is remarked the activity of the Oral History Institute in Cluj-Napoca, initiated by Prof. Pompiliu Teodor and Prof. Doru Radosav in 1997.

Interview fragments in the volume provide the reader with information about the individual past of the Gabori witnesses as well as about the Gabori community in Mureş county. Thus, all interviewees recalled the traditional occupations and the manner they evolved over time. During the communist era, most Gabori were tinsmiths but they also practiced trade. A more profitable but illicit occupation was gold trade which was practiced in most Transylvanian cities, Gabori being known as suppliers of gold or silver jewellery. The interviews show the relationship between Gabori and the communist authorities, the ongoing negotiations with them, illustrating plenty survival strategies the Gabori had to undertake during the shortages over the 1980s. Taking a critical look on the meanings witnesses attributed to their histories, one can discover the manner Gabori build a specific identity; how their solidarities are always built in relation to the Romanians, Hungarians, or Saxons, and never or seldom to other Roma "nations"; their attitude towards their traditions; the changes they have adopted alongside the Adventist religion; or the living presence of nostalgia for the communist regime.

The volume encompasses seven parts each being preceded by a short biographical description of the witness, a description of the context in which the interview was conducted and a short summary of the oral history interview. The selected interview fragments are illustrating different instances of life within the Gabori Roma communities in Transylvania. Thus, for instance, the first one displays the abusive arrest of the witness during the communist regime. The time spent in prison is filled with several miraculous episodes which led the interviewee to believe that the reason for which he was held in detention was to spread God's word – the interpretation of the event in this manner shows how important the Adventist

religion is to the interviewee and to the Gabori community in general. Another interviewee recounts the time he spent in the city of Cluj-Napoca practicing gold trade, emphasizing: the areas gold and antiquities were sold, the people involved in this trade, the buyers, the most popular objects to be sold and their origin, Gabori's relationship with the authorities, Militia's constant chase of Gabori gold traders, the bribes Gabori used to give to Militia to avoid prison etc.

The village of Crăciunești in Mureș County represents an emblematic settlement among Gabori since it is thought to be the origin of the community. Residents of this village are thus highly regarded. Speaking of life in Crăciunești, one of the interviewees highlighted that living in a compact community was and still is a very important issue which makes it easier to maintain and forward values and traditions to young Gabori generations: "My parents and grandparents were born here, they lived here [...] but my father moved his business in Brașov where we lived there for about 20 to 25 years. Then my father said: 'That's it! My children have grown, it's time to go home!'. Almost everyone has returned home so far. [...] The biggest houses in Crăciunești are now Gabori houses." (Ștefan Burcea, pages: 148 and 154) Most Gabori interviewees claimed a sense of belonging to a space inhabited mainly or entirely by Gabori.

One of the most interesting topics, frequently tackled by the interviewees, is the Decree No. 153/1970 and its effects within Gabori families. This Decree aimed to regulate "social co-habitation, public order and tranquillity". The law provided that all those who did not comply with the citizens' duty to ensure means of living through work, tending to have a parasitic lifestyle are committing a contravention punishable by imprisonment or fees. The provision of the Decree regarding unemployment at a State-owned company placed the Gabori communities under the surveillance of the authorities, as most of them were tinsmiths. Even though most Gabori obtained authorisations issued by the local councils, they were multiple times questioned by the Militia and sometimes even imprisoned for a couple of days/weeks/months.

The last interview fragment in the volume addressed a topic which helps the reader discover a rather sensitive reality of the everyday life of Gabori women during the communist period: the practice of illegal abortions. The interviewee asserts that despite the provisions of Decree No. 770/1966, which regulated the interruption of pregnancy as being prohibited, doctors clandestinely performed abortions in hospitals in exchange for money. If one could not afford the fee, the most frequent solution was to appeal to very dangerous traditional methods of abortion performed by midwives in the community.

In conclusion, the volume entitled "Povestea mea – povestea noastră. Gaborii din județul Mureș" edited by Călin Olariu manages to bring within the academic and public discourse the topic of the history of Gabori Roma in Romania recalled by the Gabori Roma community itself, fitting within essential works

regarding the Gabori community in Romania such as Gabriel Sala's publication entitled "The Gypsy Gabori Nation - History, Mentalities, Traditions" (Cluj-Napoca, 2007), and that of Martin Olivera "La tradition of integration. An ethnology of the Gabori Roma in the 2000s" (Paris, 2012).

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