STRUCTURING KNOWLEDGE ON ROMANIAN COMMUNISM: THE CASE OF THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Diana PAINCA
Université Libre de Bruxelles
dbpainca@yahoo.com

Abstract:
The present paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the way in which the oral history interview can organize knowledge about communism in Romania. The data are retrieved from the book *Memorialul Durerii: Întuneric şi lumină* (2013) compiled by author Iulia Hossu Longin from dozens of oral history interviews with survivors of communism. As the examination demonstrates, the first element commanding attention is *memory*. Hence, oral history shifts the focus from memory as object to memory as subject, or as a source of investigation per se. Secondly, the analysis reveals how the extensive use of *lists* structures knowledge about Romanian communism in an intelligible and insightful way. These lists not only provide a window on the communist experience but they also bring the individual -fighting against the regime - into the foreground.

Keywords:
Oral history, Romanian Communism, memory, catalogues / lists.

1. Oral History

1.1. Defining oral history

Oral history was both reinvigorated and refined as a scholarly discipline in the 1950s and 1960s, feeding off the works of researchers like Portelli (Italy), Thompson, Evans and Perks (the United Kingdom) or Ronald Grele (the United States). It weaved its way into the orbit of social sciences at a time when the world was experiencing major political and cultural disturbances. As Khanenko-Friesen and Grinchenko (2015) minutely explain, the disintegration of European colonialism, the emergence of new nations and the spread of cultural and ideological activism (for

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human rights, gender equality or environment) coupled with technological breakthroughs (the tape recorder for example) made the world increasingly aware of its pluralism.

But what is oral history? In his widely acclaimed and cited work *The Voice of the Past* (1988) that paved the way for further research, Paul Thompson pithily yet meaningfully contends that "*…oral history is as old as history itself"* (P. Thompson, 1988, p. 25). The eminence of the oral tradition in pre-literate societies remains undisputed and one might rightly argue that history was at first, by definition, oral. It was thus the spoken word that held sway before the appearance of written history and it should be noted that myriads of written historical works were built around information transmitted orally (Thucydides' "History of the Peloponnesian War", Bede's "History of the English Church and People" in which the author drew on the "*countless faithful witnesses who either know or remember the facts*"[1]).

Tumblety and Perks agree that oral history developed in the 20th century as an offshoot of social history and sociology. The societal upheavals impacting mainly the working classes, the women and ethnic minorities had to be documented by complementary resources – that is, the collection of oral testimonies provided by these people. Benefiting from such a vigorous revival, the discipline started to elaborate its theoretical framework. The field and its objectives might have been defined in alternative ways, yet Ronald Grele's explanation is still regarded as a useful point of reference:

„*the interviewing of eye witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction*" (R. Perks, 2003, p. IX).

The true goal of oral history is embedded in its intrinsic power to create new meanings of the past through the agency of groups of people 'hidden from history' and who are now given the chance to simply enrich, correct or challenge the authoritative historical record. Historians like Cox, Summerfield, Grele, Thompson or Perks labour on the strength of the field to help the historical actors, previously on the side lines, take centre stage. As Thompson (1988) conclusively states, it provides a means of expression

[1] For further reference see https://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/no1.pdf

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for the lower classes, the defeated, the exploited, the beleaguered etc, people neglected by history who can reconstruct the past in a more realistic and clearer way.

1.2. Oral history in Post-Socialist Europe

In their seminal work *Reclaiming the Personal Oral History in Post-Socialist Europe* (2015), Khanenko-Friesen and Grinchenko zoom in on the way oral history narratives are constructed in Eastern Europe, more precisely in the former Socialist countries. The Romanian case does not come under scrutiny, but the other examples provided can be easily extrapolated to other countries as well. No stone is left unturned and no document is neglected, their work being a laborious attempt to provide answers to a number of questions.

Why did not oral history develop in socialist countries? As the two historians argue, the answer clearly lies in the refusal of governments to let people, ideas, merchandise and capital freely circulate in their countries, cutting off any connections with the effervescent western world (N. Khanenko-Friesen and G. Grinchenko, 2015, p. 6). More than that, these regimes tended to conceal the wide gamut of human experiences using instead hackneyed language about equality, unity and interethnic harmony. The socialist ideology cultivated the image of a unitary state with common past memories and visions of the future.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, "*alternative memories and experiences of socialism"* (N. Khanenko-Friesen and G. Grinchenko, 2015, 2015, p. 7), that had previously been hushed up were finding their way back into public discourse. It became then obvious that post-socialist countries had "*more than one past*" (N. Khanenko-Friesen and G. Grinchenko, 2015, p. 7), which could be accessed via oral history interviews with first-hand witnesses. Oral history rose as a unique and indispensable tool in discovering the histories, achievements, universe and identities of entire groups of people, sharing their recollections, memories and stories.

As Khanenko-Friesen and Grinchenko pointedly remark, the development of the discipline was commensurate with the growing need to expose the stories of the past. However, as the practice of oral history is inescapably underlain by politics, it goes without saying that politicians were prompt to capitalise on its power (N. Khanenko-Friesen and G.

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Grinchenko, 2015, p. 8). New national projects heavily relied on the methods of oral history to bring the suppressed narratives of communism into the public eye and thus to incriminate the former regime. One of the first examples is offered by the oral history project unfolding in Hungary in the 1980s intended to harvest data about the 1956 Revolution.

More than that, research institutions and various programmes invested with the power to investigate totalitarianism spawned across these countries, with oral history being, of course, the main tool used to condemn this political system. To give just a few examples, the Romanian Centre for the Study of Communism (1993), the Memory Institute of the Slovak Nation, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (1998), the Romanian Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes (2005), and the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (2007), all are dedicated to a trenchant analysis of the crimes perpetrated by these regimes. Apart from archival work, they have also set out to interview thousands of victims, in their attempt to prove the pernicious and corrosive impact of communism in Eastern Europe.

Yet another important function exercised by oral history in post-socialist countries reflects the effect of this burgeoning field on the humanities and social sciences. Parting with the social classes and institutions and away from the collectivist take on history, the new public discourse brought into the limelight the experiences of individuals who lived under the regime. More than that, in the second half of the 20th century, history itself, as an academic discipline, steered away from a positivist stance (focussing on nations, politics, conflicts) to a more social type of history, that reclaimed the importance of daily life, ideas and "*the history of humanity whatever the context*" (N. Khanenko-Friesen and G. Grinchenko, 2015, p. 12). These mutations and the reassertion of biographies, personal stories and narratives (as methods of historical investigation) occurred concertedly, catapulting the individual onto the public arena. Consequently, using mainly the interview as research tool, oral history can undoubtedly be considered at the leading edge of the developing post-socialist social sciences.

Last but not least, oral history legitimises and validates the individual as an active participant in history. Interestingly enough,

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Khanenko-Friesen and Grinchenko confidently claim that, if the discipline was framed theoretically in the West, its more practical approach was undoubtedly delineated in the East by the very singular nature of its territories.

2. Communism in Romania

Since the present paper is developed around the oral history interview on Romanian communism, a rough outline of this historical episode is indeed necessary.

Talking about communism means not only unearthing hidden truths, but also gaining a better understanding of the regime so that people could come to terms with the past and act sensibly in the present.

In the space of more than 25 years after the Revolution, research on communism has evolved rather sluggishly, as historians themselves had to approach their discipline anew. One prominent historian that has investigated communism in Romania is Vladimir Tismaneanu. Political scientist and director of the University of Maryland's Centre for the study of Post-Communist societies, he has written extensively and trenchantly about the Romanian communist regime. In works like *Stalinism for all seasons: A political History of Romanian Communism* (2003) or *Communism and Post-Communism in Romania: Challenges to Democratic Transition* (1998) he peels off the layers of the Soviet-style regime, dealing with the Communists' ascension to power, the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej dominance, the period between 1963-1964 when the Romanian Communist Party disowned the Kremlin rules and embraced nationalist symbols and discourse, and that spanning between 1965-1989 and characterised by Ceausescu's policy of national communism.

The British historian Denis Deletant (1999) sought to delve into the terror-stricken years of Dej's rule in his work *Communist terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965*, while also weaving together the story of Romanian Communism in *România sub regimul communist* (2010). Compelling and pertinent accounts are also Peter Molloy's *The Lost World of Communism* (2009) and Martyn Rady's *Romania in Turmoil* (1992).

Last but not least, it should be noted that historians' archival examination is complemented by valuable field work that aims to recover

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the truths of the past by turning and listening to its oppressed witnesses. The foundation of the Oral History Institute in 1997 has stimulated the publication of numerous oral history interviews with former political prisoners, dissidents, members of armed resistance groups that provide a first-hand narrative of their communist experiences. Amongst the most prominent ones, I can single out *Rezistenţa anticommunistă din România: Grupul "Capotă-Dejeu" (1947-1975): mărturii* (2006) by Cosmin Budeancă and Bodeanu Denisa or *Suferinţa nu se dă la fraţi...": mărturia Lucreţiei Jurj despre rezistenţa anticomunistă din Apuseni: (1948-1958),* by Cosmin Budeancă and Cornel Jurju (2002). Another important oral history project is pieced together by Doru Radosav's *Rezistenţa anticomunistă din Apuseni: Grupurile: "Teodor Şuşman", "Capotă-Dejeu", "Cruce şi Spadă": Studii de istorie orală* (2003).

All these works demonstrate, as Tismaneanu[2] himself acknowledged, that the past (as in the case of many other former socialist countries) is inextricably linked to the present and cannot be simply repudiated or overlooked.

3. Analysis

As I have previously shown, the oral history interview has been effectively used in post-socialist countries as a method of organising knowledge about the past and providing insightful and subjective narratives about the communist experience.

In what follows, I intend to look at the general patterns that emerge when knowledge on Romanian communism is cast in the form of an oral history interview. Consequently, my analysis reveals two striking patterns: the question of memory and the use of lists. The data used have been extracted from the Romanian book *Memorialul Durerii: Întuneric şi Lumină* by Iulia Hossu Longin (2013, published by Humanitas) which brings forward interviews with former members of the Anti-Communist Resistance Groups that fought in the Carpathian Mountains. It should be mentioned that I translated from Romanian into English all the examples surveyed hereunder.

[2] For further reference see https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/1998-811-23-Tismaneanu.pdf

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3.1. Memory and the reconstruction of the past

In the early 1970s, oral historians were interested in finding witnesses to the events they were writing about. Their main concern was the accuracy and reliability of the information provided. However, contemporary research investigates the narratives people create about the past and perhaps more importantly, the ways in which society, culture and psychology impinge on human memory. In other words, there has been a shift in focus from *what* is said to *how* things are said, to how people handle memory when reconstructing their stories (Samuel 1971, Thompson 1988, Turnbull 2000, Summerfied 2000, Tumblety 2013).

One of the hallmarks of oral history, *memory* has been a much used and abused term. At first, it was frowned upon, being considered a featured that hinted at the mediocrity of oral history. According to historian Eric Hobsbawm (P. Summerfield, 2016, p. 3) memory could not be a reliable conduit for historical work. Nevertheless, citing Trevor Lummis, Penny Summerfield (ibid) aptly explains that if short-term memory gradually deteriorates as a result of age (being thus difficult to recollect the events that occurred yesterday) long-term memory might be refined.

More than that, Thompson supports this claim adding that the reliability of memory is determined by the sort of things remembered. Certain dates and public episodes might not be easily recollected, yet regular activities or personally significant events are remembered without great difficulty. Annmarie Turnbull's view on this topic gives even more substance to the idea that memory is generated where "*it has made an emotional impact*" (A. Turnbull, 2000, p. 25).

In her gripping and compelling work *Memory and History: Understanding memory as source and subject* (2013), Joan Tumblety showcases the epistemological, methodological and ethical setbacks the historian might experience when tapping into such an intricate concept. She sets out to explain that scholars do not tackle memory "*just as source but as subject*" (Tumblety, 2013, p. 2). Elaborating on this tenet, Tumblety argues that historians are preoccupied not only with what is remembered but rather how and why people remember past events in one way and not in another. What becomes then more scientifically important is how a particular

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depiction of the past is integrated, supported or neglected through the channels of the present (both on personal and public levels).

Her ideas resonate with those of Thompson who states curtly, yet pertinently, that: "*History, in short, is not just about events, or structures or patterns of behaviour, but also about how these are experienced and remembered in the imagination*" (1988:162).

As I have seen in my analysis, interviewees may be asked if they remember certain episodes, people's names, occupations, etc. Their answers may vary from 'yes' or 'no', to 'I have vague memories' or 'my most vivid memory is...'.

As my research pointed out, it is worth mentioning the interviewer's role in organising and teasing out important information ("*Mrs. Alexandrina Murariu-Cârstea, when did you find out that your father was executed?;* L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 257), insisting on certain matters ("*Please tell us, when did that meeting take place? Was it in July 1950?*"; L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 132) or channelling discussion towards different issues ("*You live now in the United States. Do you miss Romania*?"; L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p.231). He may ask for more details, question information or, on the contrary, encourage interviewees to frame their stories the way they see fit.

Thus, it is worth mentioning that both Turnbull and Tumblety emphasize the need for scholars to comprehend that their *living* sources of analysis provide an interpretation of the past imbued with thoughts, feelings, beliefs and principles. An understanding of the *truth* of the past is hence conditional on a decoding of these elements. Perks also substantiates this postulate, adding that meanings cannot be severed from the social and political background against which they are framed. As a result, memory "*is not a solitary act*" (R. Perks, 1998, p. 335). This stance is further reinforced by Penny Summerfield who considers that the various messages about the past, trickled down through the medium of family traditions, group culture, religion, politics, media etc., shape the way people remember and interpret their private stories.

The study of memory gains indeed an ever-increasing importance in oral history, for researchers collectively acknowledge that this is not a static repository of facts, but rather an active mechanism designed to create

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meanings. Portelli thus identifies the greatest value of oral history not necessarily in its power to preserve the past but rather in the transformations (on a personal and socio-economic level) caused by memory. All these changes illustrate the narrators' struggles to understand the past and "*give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context"* (R. Perks, 1998, p. 69).

3.2. Lists

How can we organize information about the Romanian communist past so that this could make sense and be useful? Structures such as lists acquire a role to be reckoned with. Even though not conspicuously employed, lists can adduce evidence or corroborate different statements of the interviewees, or, interestingly enough, emphasize the veracity of their declarations by bringing into the public eye fallacious or contrived Securitate documents. The chapter dedicated to the fighters in Banat Mountains brings into sharp relief a list of the people executed by the Securitate:

- *„Nicolae Ghimboaşă, sentenced to twenty years of hard labour. Died of pulmonary TB on 2 August 1949 at 12 o'clock.*

- *Gheorghe Luminosu, sentenced to ten years in prison. Died on 2 August 1949 at 10 o'clock. Heart failure.*

- *Gheorghe Popovici, sentenced to hard labour for life. Died on 2 August 1949. Chronic myocarditis.*

- *Petre Puşchiţă, sentenced to fifteen years of hard labour. Died on 2 August 1949 at 12 o'clock. Cause: hypertension.*

- *Gheorghe Smultea, sentenced to hard labour for life. He died in the same year and on the same month and day, but at 1 PM, of pulmonary TB.*

- *Teodor Ungureanu, hard labour for life. He died on the same date and hour. Diagnosis: pulmonary TB.*

- *Aurel Vernichescu, sentenced to hard labour for life. He died in similar conditions. Diagnosis: circulatory failure and hypertension* (L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 60-61).

This list, pointing out the natural death causes of so many political detainees, contrasts starkly with the truth. As Marcel Cazacu (vice-president of the Association of former political detainees in Romania) testifies, death certificates were issued by the Securitate, bearing no doctor's signature and

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putting forth unlikely death causes. According to him, the falsity of these acts churned out by the Securitate to conceal the executions of the prisoners, is glaringly obvious - all people in question died on the same day, some even on the same hour and of the same causes.

Hence, the use of this list found in a register, offers a snapshot of the Securitate's machinations to mask its wrongdoing and obtain the legitimacy of the regime it defended. A vestige of the communist public discourse, this list is countered by oral history interviews that seek to provide an accurate and true account of the communist past.

To continue, as the interviewer painstakingly explained, towards the end of the 1940s, the clusters of villages lying at the foot of the Western Romanian Carpathians, resembled a battleground. The Securitate started taking retributive action against entire communities that supported the so-called bandits. What is more, the interviewer laments the absence of photos of these people, whom she called 'martyrs', claiming that the Securitate wiped out all traces of their existence. However, the Securitate files provide a revealing glimpse at these people, their identity, fortune, age, education and families. The following list, rather rigorous and thorough in its composition, is pre-eminently used with an affective purpose. It aims to stir up feelings and emotions about the communist experience and incorporate personal stories into the Big History, giving thus a voice to the unknown actors of the past.

- [...] *"Pavel Bona, peasant, no wealth, 29 years old, 7 grades, one child: Matei;*

- Dionisie Carepa, ploughman, no wealth, 37 years old, 4 grades, one child: Ana;

- Corneliu Costescu, lawyer, 34 years old, degree in law;

- Petre Domăşneanu, student in the fifth year at Medical School, 25 years old, grandson of colonel Petre Domăşneanu, executed at Pădurea Verde;

- Samuilă Duicu, the fourth of the Duicu brothers, peasant, no wealth, 25 years, 4 grades, one child: Ana;

- Alexandru Nicolici, priest, wealth 4 acres of land, 38 years old, degree in theology, one child: Speranţa;

- Ştefan Popescu, lieutenant-colonel, no wealth, 48 years old, bachelor's degree, one child: Florica;

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- Pavel Stoichescu, middle peasant, 32 years old, 5 primary school grades, one child: Călina [...]; (L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 63-65).

The oral history interview, by definition a method steeped in subjectivity, acquires even more validity when recollected stories are corroborated by lists. Such an example is given by a simple, unadorned list that uses words sparingly and groups the persons executed by the Securitate according to the villages they came from:

"Executed on sight, without trial, during the massacre of 1949:

- Apateu village (Arad county): Gheorghe Maliţa, Ioan Mang, Petru Moţ, Aurel Moţiu, Simion Stan;

- Batar village (Bihor county): Ioan Crăciun, Ioan Sucigan;

- Berechiu village (Arad county): Mihai Haiduc, Gheorghe Ilonca;

- Chişlaca village (Arad county): Ioan Moţ;

- Coroi village (Arad county): Matei Leucuţa;

- Girişul Negru village (Bihor county): Ioan Bolog, Gheorghe Botou, Silviu Sârbu;

- Şepreuş village (Arad county): Petru Faur, Mihai Incicău, Ioan Pârvu, Ioan Stana;

- Şomoşcheş village (Arad county): Ioan Faur, Gheorghe Margine;

- Susag village (Arad county): Ioan Huţiu, Teodor Huţiu;

- Ucuriş village (Bihor county): Ioan Bodean, Alexandru Mateoc, Florea Mateoc, Ioan Mateoc son, Ioan Mateoc father, Ioan Panta" (L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 88).

Therefore, a sense of gravity infuses this list, which, if read aloud, might sound like a death statement reminiscent of those tragic episodes that punctuated Romania's communist past.

In much the same vein, the names of those who took to the mountains offering resistance to the oppressive regime are also catalogued. The fighters who died either in clashes with the Securitate forces in the Făgăraş Mountains or in prisons or under fire from the death squad, are all recalled in the following list:

„*Gheorghe Arsu, peasant, born in the Râuşor village. Wounded in fight, he died following his release from prison;*

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Arsenie Boca, monk, abbot of the Sâmbăta Monastery, imprisoned many times. Died prior to the revolution;

Ion Chiuşdea, called 'The Teacher', born in Berivoi village, a student in Cluj. Executed in 1957;

Marcel Cornea, born in Şinca Veche, student at the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Science. Killed in a fight.

Partenie Cozma, officer, he provided the fighters with weapons. Executed in 1952.

Ion Duminecă, born in Aluniş-Olt village, student. Executed in 1952.

Brothers Andrei and Gheorghe Haşu, born in Pojorta. The first, a worker, was killed in a fight in 1952. The second, a peasant, was executed in 1957;

Laurean Haşu, called Lion, born in Breaza village, student. Executed in 1957;

Mihai Maga, born in Berivoi village, student. Served fourteen years in prison. Died after his release from prison;

Victor Metea, born in Ileni village, student at Medical School. Executed in 1957;

Ioan Mogoş, born in Toderiţa village, pupil. Killed in fight;

Gelu Novac, born in Făgăraş, pupil. Killed in a fight near Blaj together with Gheorghe Şovăială;

Gema Novac, daughter of teacher Mihai Novac, born in Făgăraş. Died following her release from prison;

Ion Novac, born in Berivoii Mari village, student. Executed in 1957. His father, Pătru Novac, was imprisoned for fourteen years and died after serving his sentence;

Toma Pirău, called Porâmbu, peasant. Returned from the Air Force and refused to join the communist army. Killed in fight in 1950;

Ion Pridon, primary school teacher, born in Pârâu village. While in prison, he was asked to deny his faith. Sentenced to death, he died in Jilava;

Silviu Victor Socol, born in Berivoi village, wounded in fight. Executed in 1952;

Remus Sofonea, born in Drăguş village, student. Killed in fight;

Niculae Stanciu, born in Aluniş-Olt village, student. Executed in 1952;

Gheorghe Şovăială, born in Berivoi village, student. Killed in a fight near Blaj" (L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 233-234).

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This list that states, in a telegraphic-like style, the real names of the partisans, their birthplace, occupation and death circumstances, fleshes out or rather supplements the oral history interviews. By turning the spotlight on real people and their personal stories, these interviews are buttressed by such lists, acquiring more credibility and significance. Seamlessly interwoven with the oral history interviews, the lists organize knowledge around a well-defined pattern, namely that of the individual who contributed to the development of events and whose heroic acts need to be retained by the Big History.

To continue, it may not be surprising to discover that lists are also used to add colour to the interviewees' descriptions about the 1989 Revolution. Hence, the attempt to catalogue the slogans chanted by the demonstrators in Timişoara is felicitous, as it zooms in on people's demands and emotional build-up of the historic event.

„The evolution of slogans shouted out on 16 December 1989: "This is the beginning", "We want bread!", "We want heat", "Free-dom", "God exits", "Wake up, Romanian!", "You won't get away with it!", "Down with Ceauşescu!", "Down with the tyrant!", "Down with the reelected one!", "We aren't going anywhere!", "The army is with us!", "Cowards! Cowards!", "We are the people, whom do you defend?", "Romanians, come with us!", "Don't be afraid, come with us!", "The students! The students!", "Students, come with us!", "No violence!", "Today in Timişoara, tomorrow in the whole country!", "Come down! Come down!", "We are fighting! We are fighting! We are fighting and we are winning!", "Down with communism!", "Down with Ceauşescu!" (L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 393-394).

The rising crescendo of people's excitement is reflected by the changing themes of their demands charted effectively by the list. Their cries for basic needs segued into ones for (religious) freedom and reawakening of the nation. As the demonstrators worked themselves up into a frenzy, they called for the ousting of Ceauşescu or the tyrant, manifesting their refusal to leave. Emotions escalated, and people felt more emboldened and exhorted the entire nation to join them. Finally, their slogans reached such a pitch that they envisioned their victory and called more emphatically for the end of communism and Ceauşescu's regime.

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It would then be interesting to note, even briefly, that the orders issued by army commanders are also catalogued, offering thus a glimpse into the manoeuvres of the opposite camp. Despite its conciseness, the list oozes violence, ruthlessness and a wicked determination to shoot down the unarmed protesters.

"*Orders given by the army commanders: "You'll shoot at live targets!", "Strike without any mercy!", "Shoot them down, they are not people!", "What are you waiting for? Open fire!", "If you let someone break through, I will accuse you of committing treason against the state!", "We won't forgive anything!", "I've received orders to open fire. And that's exactly what I'm doing!"* (L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 410).

This sequence of instructions provides a clear picture of the intentions of those opposing the demonstrators in the streets and can only hint at the proportions taken by the ensuing clashes.

Last but not least, oral history interviews can fall back on lists when explanations or supporting details are deemed necessary. Hence, interviews with former participants to the 1989 revolution are cemented by whole paragraphs listing the names of those who lost their lives in Timişoara on the 17th of December 1989. What is more, the exact places of shoot-outs that numbered many casualties are also inventoried. According to the Military Prosecutor's charge, the orders given by the generals of the Ministry of National Defence claimed lives all over Timişoara:

- *"in the area of the Orthodox Cathedral, twelve people dead and thirty four wounded, seven of them women;*

- *the surrounding area of the Opera, nine victims and twelve people wounded, three of them women;*

- *in Liberty Square, two victims and twenty people wounded, two of them women;*

- *in 700 Square Timişoara, two people dead and five wounded;*

- *around Decebal Bridge, four people dead and twenty one wounded, six of them women;*

- *at Traian Square, two people dead and seven wounded;*

- *at Students' Centre, two students killed;*

- *in Calea Girocului area, ten people dead and twenty five wounded, six of them women;*

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- in Calea Şagului neighbourhood, four people dead;

- in Calea Lipovei area, six people dead and twenty seven wounded, five of them women;

- on Ialomiţa street, one person dead and six wounded;

- in Calea Aradului area, two people fatally shot and eight wounded;

- in North Railway Station, one person dead and three wounded" (L. Hossu Longin, 2013, p. 446-447).

This new list shifts attention away from people's names (that imparted a personal colour to many lists) to topography. Landmark places are mapped out, retracing thus the violent itinerary of the revolution. Unarguably, the perspective zooms out and the individual or personal story seems to be interwoven into a national one.

Conclusions

The oral history interview can be unmistakably perceived as a valuable conduit for knowledge about communism in Romania. Both interviewer and interviewee seek to arrange their information into a coherent and intelligible way. Their structured accounts collate important data and articulate new patterns of knowledge.

More than that, the issue of memory is also analysed from a different perspective. It is not only the object of oral history, as people naturally resort to memory in order to recollect past episodes from their lives, but its subject as well. In other words, not only what people say (the accuracy of their information) is important, but also how they say it, why they choose to leave out certain details and include others instead. From a passive tool questioned for accuracy, memory has become an active one, examined in close detail, as it can yield significant information about the way people grade knowledge.

Last but not least, as I have shown, the oral history interviews are replete with lists mainly designed to corroborate information. As befits this historical method, emphasis is laid on individuals, and the names of those who stood up to the communists from the Carpathian Mountains are grouped together in extended lists. These lists provide information about the number of years spent in prison, causes of death or even occupation and age. As history is always about time and place, geographical elements gain

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salience. Names both of villages where fighters were born and of places where violent shoot-outs took place during the revolution are all carefully recorded. What is more, listing the demonstrators' slogans or the army commanders' instructions calls attention to one of the strengths of the historical interview, namely the acoustic element. Reading the sequence of slogans and orders, one might have the impression of actually listening to them or being directly involved in the recounted events.

To conclude, the oral history interview is a worthwhile method of organising knowledge about the communist experience in Romania. It is perceived as a corollary of the written historical record, or as a means to supplement or complement data, stimulate new questions and provide alternative interpretations. The interviews are complemented or validated by lists that further reinforce the human element, casting more light on people's fight, courage and call for resistance against the oppressor. They give a voice to those reduced to silence, a voice that should be heard and understood so that the scars of the past could gradually heal.

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