

The Folklore Archive of Cluj (Romania) in the Totalitarian Period

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General Frame

I had begun to be interested in the very peculiar history of the social sciences in Romania and generally, in Eastern Europe, a few years ago, as a PhD candidate, my doctoral thesis being mainly on the ethnographic, ethnological research tradition in Romania. To be more specific, I was interested to understand how these sciences (and the social sciences in general) had become committed to certain ideologies, beginning with the 19th century and in the 20th century as well.

Mainly, I focused on the ways in which the relation in between them and national ideology had been developed from the 19th century till the second World War and how their image was then damaged in the totalitarian period. A normal evolution of these sciences had been impossible at that time, due to ideological control. Separate departments of Sociology had not functioned independently in Romanian Universities for some decades, the idea of social work was nonexistent, many top interwar specialists had been sent to prison for political reasons, and certain bibliography had been forbidden.

I would say that this re-evaluation and analysis of these aspects has been, and still is, absolutely necessary in Romania and broadly in the East European context, as all social sciences are in the process of legitimating themselves, of defining their meanings and goals in new social and cultural contexts.

“Indigenous” Research

If we refer to cultural analyses of Eastern European areas, it is absolutely necessary to include in the discussion folkloric/ethnographic/ethnological works of “indigenous” researchers among other socio-humanist approaches. These researches were initiated in the 19th century. Their main goal was to demonstrate the existence of distinct, specific cultural units in this area. It is a task that makes sense if we evaluate the historical context of that time: the fact that so many, distinct populations of this part of Europe were incorporated in multinational empires--Habsburg, Ottoman, Tsarist. Generally speaking, cultural elites of these distinct populations/ peoples were committed to the ideals of national emancipation. This is the case of folklorists/ethnographers as well. The fact that they were literally involved in this process is well known.

After the First World War, when the process of constituting nation–states in this part of Europe was more or less accomplished (the multinational empires disappearing), the folklorists/ethnographers continued to have the same ideals as before. In the interwar period, their researches assessed basically issues related to the nation and nationalism, trying to consolidate what the end of the world war offered to peoples they represented. The discourse and the methodology they used were more or less the same in each of the East European countries (it was the case for Polish, Hungarian, Serb, and Romanian scholars). All these discourses were constructed the same way, of course debating specific, national topics (Jakubowska,1993).

In the communist period, these discourses perpetuated to a certain extent the same issues, as the national ideology was used by the authorities to control and manipulate society. Generally speaking, the discourses of any social science (including the folklore/ethnographic approach) could not evolve normally in the totalitarian period: due to the above mentioned manipulation, to ideological control, to specialists’ isolation and so on.

Of course, there has been a shift in this respect since the 90s, at least in the Romanian case: one can observe an internal change in this type of discourse, a tendency to analyze cultural phenomena in a broader, more comparative way. But there is another aspect to be noticed at this level: a new generation of Eastern (including Romanian) cultural anthropologists has been educated since 1990, most of them in Western universities. This idea was part of the policy of certain East European universities to update their social science curricula, bringing them into harmony with international standards. At the same time, it requires us to draw a distinction between a new type of sociocultural research and the old and, to some certain extent, compromised model.

The task of these recently trained specialists would be to practice anthropology at home, using methodological approaches specific to the essence of this science. Some of these specialists have made radical changes, in the sense that they just ignore the ethnographic/folklore local research traditions, impugning them as inescapably bound up with nationalist and nationalist-communist ideologies. They propose instead, a critical, relativistic approach of their own sociocultural realities, using anthropological methodology. This type of discourse is in the process of receiving validation and legitimation. Journals such as the *Yearbook of the Romanian Society of Cultural Anthropology* are publishing studies that illustrate this trend (some of them debating problems related to the ways of doing anthropology at home or the reasons to practice it as such). In the curricula of several Romanian universities, some programs in Cultural Anthropology appeared after 1995, so this process of validation is obvious also at this level. The situation is more or less similar in all countries of this area.

An ambiguity is induced in academic curricula and in research processes by the coexistence of domains that have almost the same methodology and topics and coincide

sometimes even at the level of the issues approached: Ethnology and Social/Cultural Anthropology. Ethnology continues the local folklore/ethnographic research tradition while having moved to a broader and more comparative approach; Cultural/Social Anthropology, imposed in the above-mentioned context, has different goals. Thus the process of self-legitimation common to all social sciences takes on certain historical peculiarities in Eastern Europe: necessary reevaluations, the redefinition of disciplinary boundaries, the exploration of affiliations to certain ideologies, and resulting processes of incriminating certain research traditions. In this context, an examination of the activity around the Archive-Institute of Folklore from Cluj in totalitarian times could be quite revelatory.

Historical Data

The Archive of Folklore was founded in **1930**, in the enthusiastic context that characterized post First World War Romania. For 18 years, **1930-1948**, the activity of its members consisted of an indirect investigation on 860 localities, as contribution to the Romanian Linguistic Atlas. The work was done on the basis of 14 questionnaires, applied in representative rural communities of interwar period Romania. The intention was to approach these localities in a monographic way and to contribute, through it, to a general Atlas of Romanian Folklore, to the Encyclopedia of Romanian Traditional Culture and to a Romanian Corpus of Folklore. Other projects of that period concerned and targeted a general Bibliography of Romanian Ethnography and Folklore, the publication of a scientific newsletter and of a Yearbook of the Folklore Archive, contribution to the European Ethnological Bibliography and systematization of the existing manuscripts (Muslea, 2003). All these broad and enthusiastic projects had been themselves part of a general optimistic context characterizing Romania in the interwar period. After the 1st World War, the unification of the three “historical provinces” Transylvania, Moldavia, and Wallachia and the

foundation of greater Romania represented achievements for the Romanian people, involved for centuries in the effort of emancipation from different powers that incorporated or dominated them (the Habsburg and later Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Tsarist Empires).

Especially in the 19th century, Romanian political and cultural elites were deeply committed to the ideals of national emancipation and independence. It was the case of folklorists and ethnographers, too. Through all their scientific work, they tried to demonstrate the existence of a Romanian, very distinct, specific cultural background among neighboring others, an old, well-internalized cultural element. It is important to mention that the Romanian case is not singular in this respect. The situation characterized the whole Eastern and partly Central Europe, inhabited by populations (Serbs, Slovaks, Polish people, etc) with a common history of domination by certain centers of power. Their folklorists and ethnographers were also deeply committed to the ideas of emancipation and independence; their affiliation to national ideology was the same (Halpern, Kideckel, 1983; Jakubowska, 1993).

One can say that even after the First World War, when Eastern and Central European Nation–States came into being, marking in this way the achievement of national ideals, the ethnographers and folklorists of the area continued to be committed to them. It is the case of Romanian specialists: the projects proposed and developed in between 1930-1948 at the Archive- Institute of Folklore from Cluj had these obvious orientations, even if not expressed directly.

In 1948, when the communist regime was installed in Romania, the Archive of Folklore became part/section of the Institute of Linguistics, History of Literature and Folklore. Ion Muslea, its founder and former director, also former University Professor and Director of University Library was, in the new political, ideological context, a humiliated

“scientific collaborator” (Muslea, 2003). His previous efforts were ignored, his activity perceived as “dangerous” for the new regime.

Meanwhile, in 1949, a new Institute of Folklore had been founded in Bucharest, replacing the activity of the two Archives, developed also in the interwar period, by Constantin Brailoiu and George Breazul. A branch of this Institute was opened in Cluj. For better political and ideological control, these new Institutes were made directly subordinate to the Ministry of Culture, not to the Romanian Academy.

Indeed, Iulia Szego, a prominent member of Romanian Communist Party, was appointed director of this new Institute from Cluj. The members of her team (Jagamos Janos, Farago Jozsef, Almasi Istvan) were mainly Transylvanian Hungarians, their research foci being on folklore of the Hungarian speaking communities from Transylvania and Moldavia (Szeklars and Csangos) and on Bela Bartok’s contributions to folklore research. The Hungarian profile of this section of the Institute began to change in 1957, when a few Romanian researchers were employed part time: Ion Muslea returned (working also at the Institute of Linguistics, History of Literature and Folklore, with which the Archive had been affiliated in 1948), along with Valer Butura and Dumitru Pop.

Efforts to carry forward certain projects of the interwar period were rejected, politically controlled, or censored. One of the best example in this respect is the authorities’ refusal to renew publication of the Yearbook of Folklore despite Ion Muslea’s well-known efforts in 1957. Despite all these unfavorable circumstances and sophisticated strict control by different institutions of the totalitarian State, most famously the “Securitatea”, researchers found paths to continue and widen the researches carried out previously. Scientific reports from 1958-1960 demonstrated a peculiar interest in a mixed, Romanian–Hungarian village, Branistea; the fieldwork had been done there in a very systematic way.

The period after 1964 was one of an apparent ideological opening, of a formal change in public discourses. At least to western eyes, Romania appeared to be a sort of dissident in the Soviet bloc, emancipating itself from Soviet power. The refusal to participate with other countries of the Warsaw Pact in the invasion of Czechoslovakia and some “symbolic gestures” of the new leader Ceausescu were interpreted as courageous and unique by both westerners and Romanians at that time. In fact, they represented the first brick of the foundation of a horrible autarky and new form of totalitarianism.

Nonetheless, these changes in the official discourse had an impact on the researchers’ scientific orientations and on the ways in which research projects were carried out. As of 1964, the two research teams (one affiliated to the Institute of Linguistics, History of Literature and Folklore, the other, directly subordinated to the Institute from Bucharest were reunited under the Romanian Academy as the new Section of Ethnography and Folklore under the direction of Ion Muslea.

Muslea became part of the top-down, imposed process of “rehabilitation” of well-known, western-trained intellectuals of the interwar period. Treated as “undesirable” by the communist authorities of the 1950s, many had been exterminated prior to 1964 in the political prisons of sad memory: Sighet, Gherla, Aiud, Targosor, Pitesti, the famous Canal. Those who survived lived under strict surveillance, both before and after 1964.

It is obvious that the supreme purpose of the transformation was to regain a sort of “normality.” The standard of this, in the researchers’ eyes, was the interwar period. Thus, after 1964, many interwar projects were resumed: the General Bibliography of Ethnography and Folklore, the Corpus of Romanian Folklore. From 1964 to 1968, national bibliographic typologies and earlier studies on particular folkloric regions were deepened and widened.

But this period of so-called “opening” proved to be illusory. In 1971, the Archive-Institute from Cluj was incorporated, for a stricter control, into the Centre for Social Sciences of the Academy of Social and Political Sciences. Meanwhile, the Institute from Bucharest became part of the Council for Socialist Culture and Education. This institutional instability, deliberately induced by the authorities of the totalitarian state, created an unfavorable climate for research and determined also a chain of discontinuities in the approach to issues and projects.

Researchers’ efforts consisted in finding strategies of scientific survival. Now part of the Centre for Social Sciences, the Institute-Archive subsisted together with other small institutes (or better, small teams-- ‘*colective*’ in Romanian), in order to keep the imposed terminology of psychology, law, philosophy, folklore, etc., all functioning under the same umbrella of this big Centre for Social Sciences). As a strategy of survival, scholars of the Institute tried to avoid collaboration with members of those teams more exposed to ideological pressure. It was well known, for example, that part of the Centre’s team had to participate in campaigns of atheist propaganda in rural areas). Fieldwork was not supported or even permitted by the authorities, so what the researchers did, in this specific period between 1974 and 1989, was to complete the documentation of the existing archive materials. In this way, scientists of the Institute-Archive could continue their work in a totally unfavorable situation.

Other Details and Comments

I. All contacts and scientific exchanges with significant Western institutes had been completely, brutally interrupted in the period 1948-1956, one of direct Soviet control in Romania. Only associations with institutes from countries of the Soviet bloc were permitted. After 1956, there was a slight change in this respect: the contribution to European

Bibliography was restored and a few western scientists could consult Archive materials and were allowed to do fieldwork in different parts of Transylvania.

In the period of apparent opening, after 1964, all the old contacts and exchanges were renewed and some specialists were allowed to participate at various international conferences and apply for grants, taking research leaves in Western countries. Foreign researchers visiting Transylvania, in turn, eventually included Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, Harry Senn, Ann Briegleb, Claude Karnouh, Marianne Mesnil, Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, etc. After 1974, it became more and more difficult for Western specialists to obtain permission to stay in rural areas and, in these conditions, they could not do proper fieldwork. Again, after a decade of formal softening of ideological control, the mechanisms of power became more and more sophisticated, the Romanian researchers being again damned to isolation. In exceptional cases when members of the Cluj Institute were allowed to go abroad it was generally suspected that they were “informants” for the Securitate.

II. The terrible influence of the totalitarian state on cultural institutions, including the Cluj Institute-Archive, in the period 1948-1989 worked through fear. Fear was the most common feeling of that time and influenced the life of individuals, groups, teams, and institutions. The state created monstrous organisms, such as Securitate, clearly involved in the strict control of the population: qualifying, encouraging, and infiltrating agents and informants everywhere. In this way, the totalitarian state managed to spread fear all over: the fear of being denounced as having anticommunist, anti-state attitudes, the fear of expressing intimate anti-regime thoughts even in small groups.

In conditions threatening the physical annihilation of any possible dissident, the regular response, with influence on the life of cultural institutions of that time, was to live somehow in duplicity, in an almost schizophrenic way: one was the public way of everyone's

expression, the other- the true, intimate way of thinking, exposed just in very familiar milieus (even there, sometimes with fear).

In the life of institutions, this duplicity meant one way of doing research (which, at least to a certain extent, was the regular one, and another, completely different one "reported" in public meetings, of course, very much reproducing the official, standardized discourse)

In a report of 1953, the delay of some of the scheduled, imposed research projects were explained as such: "We mention that, due to many problems (...), due to the new Soviet bibliography, published recently and also due to recent debates concerning Comrade Stalin's paper *Economic Problems of Socialism in USSR* and Malencov's *General Report at the 19-th Congress of The Communist Party of Soviet Union*, Comrade L.R. (...one of the project coordinators) changed the plan of his project." (Official Report on a General Meeting of the Institute, 1953)

Meanwhile, the mentioned specialist's project had been developed in a normal, scientific and highly qualified manner, but this was the way in which he (like many others) tried to protect his approach from ideological intrusion or censorship.

Official reports (or better formulated, reports for officials) of that period revealed enough discussions on five-year plans. The concept of the five-year plan had been imposed in Romania by communist authorities, adopted as such by researchers. Again as a strategy of scientific survival, they filled in the "five-year plans" with topics of scientific interest, continuing the interwar projects and traditions. Investigations of diverse Transylvanian areas included the Gurghiu Valley, the Barsa region, and the Prose of Saxons. A scientific edition formed part of such five-year plans.

Every strict attempt to control the scientific activity by several mechanisms of the totalitarian state had a response from researchers, even if they were always forced to use

trickery. For example, an issue such as the *Folklore of North Transylvanian Miners*, according to the title a debate on a segment of the working class, a topic ‘protected’ by the totalitarian regime, was in fact a careful treatment of aspects of rituals and religiosity performed by these communities. Examples could continue in this respect.

There have been many debates on the fact that, after 1965, when Ceausescu became president of Socialist Republic of Romania, he instinctively used a strange mixture of nationalist and Marxist ideas in order to legitimate his power and to consolidate his dictatorship. Related to that, comments on the way in which, through different strategies, his regime could manipulate social scientists to promote this nationalist- communist types of ideology and discourse have been written. This is a very broad discussion and it deserves a separate paper. One can say that, with respect to the peculiar case of Cluj Archive and the team of researchers around it, there were just isolated cases of major compromise. Issues such as *Workers from Cluj Revolutionary Songs...or The Evolution of Folkloric Elements in the New Context of Socialism* represented clearly an acceptance of ideological intrusion in the intimate substance of scientific approaches.

This is, in brief, the discontinuous, tragic history of the Archive in totalitarian times, with inevitably negative consequences for post-1989 activity. The researchers’ activity in that period of time and the “survival” as such of the Archive were forms of resistance in a completely unfavorable historical period and should be marked and understood as such.

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