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STEFAN DETCHEV  
SVETLANA DONCHEVA  
ALEXANDER MAXWELL  
MIHAIL NEAMȚU  
SIMINA RADU-BUCURENCI  
RĂZVAN SEBASTIAN STAN  
SMARANDA VULTUR

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New Europe College  
Str. Plantelor 21  
023971 Bucharest  
Romania  
[www.nec.ro](http://www.nec.ro); e-mail: [nec@nec.ro](mailto:nec@nec.ro)

Tel. (+4) 021.307.99.10, Fax (+4) 021. 327.07.74



## **SIMINA RADU-BUCURENCI**

Born in 1980, in Bucharest

Ph.D. candidate in Comparative History of Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe, Central European University, Budapest.

Dissertation: *Late Communism in Romania Through Documentary Images of Everyday Life*

Researcher, Romanian Peasant Museum, Bucharest

Researcher in the project *Remembering Communism: Methodological and Practical Issues of Approaching the Recent Past in Eastern Europe*,  
Institut für Slavistik der Universität Leipzig

Editorial Assistant, *East Central Europe/L'Europe du Centre-Est*.  
*Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*

Doctoral and MA full scholarship from Central European University, Budapest

Doctoral fellowship from Volkswagen Stiftung

Participation in international conferences both in Romania and abroad



## BEYOND HUNGER. PERCEPTIONS OF AND REACTIONS TO SHORTAGES IN 1980S ROMANIA

The 1980s in Romania are largely remembered as a period of scarcity and shortages of every kind: from food to books, from electricity to colors. And it is not only that they are remembered this way but scholarly analyses also lean into the direction of remembering, capturing the anecdotic, the laughable or horrible<sup>1</sup> instead of trying to put forward coherent theoretical frameworks that might lead to a comprehensive and normalizing view on Romanian Communism.<sup>2</sup>

Everyday life during Communism is not yet a proper historical topic. The historian is only among the many voices to talk about the Communist past which remained a matter of personal and public memory, of intellectual debate engaged among people whose only expertise comes from having lived through it. This makes the subject highly sensitive and sometimes suffocated by taken for granted concepts and theories. Most of them originate in the dissent discourse and operate with binary oppositions such as oppression versus resistance, official versus unofficial, public versus private, and ultimately truth versus lie.<sup>3</sup> These concepts were not only restricted to the intellectual sphere, but also to the most mundane aspects of everyday life: from telling a joke to the illegal purchasing of a pig for Christmas, more and more actions are considered, in nowadays accounts of the period, subversive.<sup>4</sup> One of the reasons for this inflexibility of arguments when historicizing the Communist past is the political standing behind these accounts. Most of them are anti-Communist pamphlets written in a time when the acknowledgment of the “crimes of Communism” was still far from sight.<sup>5</sup>

This article will enquire into the everyday life of the Romanians in the 1980s using the queue (the omnipresent food line) as its starting point of enquiry into reactions and perceptions of shortages. I count among the reactions to shortages the long-debated “solidarity” among citizens of Socialist states; I argue that the queue can be described as a form of community activity whose organization was left almost entirely in the hands of the community itself. Officially non-existent, the queue provided an opportunity for Romanian citizens to exercise their organizational and communitarian skills. This is of course a reading that emphasizes “the bright side” of queuing; a more complex description of the phenomenon will be provided in the body of the article.

The second part of the article is concerned with perceptions of shortages. An account of the answers to the question ‘*Why are we queuing?*’ will be presented at both official and unofficial levels. Analyzing the unofficial answers (extracted from oral history sources) I will argue that they were mainly a reworking of the state propaganda, successfully internalized by its citizens.

The main arguments of this article, i.e. the existing agency of Romanian citizens even in harshest times and a level of belief in state propaganda higher than previously remarked upon, support a broader conviction that the binary oppositions derived from dissent discourse are no longer useful theoretical tools in accounting for the reality of everyday life in Socialist states.

### **The research: methodology and sources**

My research<sup>6</sup> consisted of interviewing members of a community formed by the inhabitants of a block of flats from Bucharest. The district (Tineretului) is a central one and its inhabitants are proudly thinking of it as a neighbourhood of mainly intellectuals (i.e. people with higher education).<sup>7</sup> The interviews focused on experiences of queuing, according to a set of questions (see Appendix 1) that nevertheless had the status of guidelines and were not restrictive for the interviews. One of my purposes was also to see what personal connections do memories of queuing arise and how each interviewee embeds these narratives in his/her own life-story.

Some brief comments about the memory issues involved should be made at this point. First, my sources, the interviews, speak of the 1980s from the distance of more than 15 years. These are not first-hand testimonies, contemporary stories about life in the 1980s. They are **memories** of the 1980s and the distance that separates the moment of the telling from the moment of the happening is not only temporal but also, and maybe more important, cultural. It is the distance that separates two worlds. The world of the 80s with all its written and unwritten rules, with its sophisticated ways of coping with the system has collapsed in 1989. Thus, what my interviewees are recalling is practically another world, but another world that is part of their lives and still influences their present life. It is a world that they try to integrate into contemporary realities, to explain and understand not only for themselves but also for a whole generation that doesn't understand it anymore since it was never theirs.

Working with oral history sources is both challenging and disturbing for a historian always on guard on source criticism and authenticity. The fragility of this kind of sources led to very sophisticated theoretical developments on the nature and uses of oral history. The first choice faced by the oral historian is that between description using information derived from oral sources and interpretation. As Paul Thompson puts it, "All testimonies normally carry with them a triple potential: to explore and to develop new interpretations, to establish or confirm an interpretation of the past patterns or change, and to express what it felt like."<sup>8</sup>

Each choice has its dangers. I believe that oral sources, presented to the readers as such, are still very powerful. Sometimes much more insight can be gained into "what it felt like" by reading edited interviews on a particular topic than by reading hundreds of pages of clever analysis on the same topic. This first choice was largely taken up by Romanian oral historians, as few as they may be. However, the historian's task will always be interpretation and here the potential of oral history is also great. Paul Thompson names two basic forms of interpretation, "the narrative analysis" and the "reconstructive cross-analysis." The narrative analysis focuses on the interview as a text, on its language, themes, repetitions and silences. Its aim is not to establish the relevance of the oral text for the broader social context but to reconstruct a personal world or experience. In the reconstructive cross-analysis, which is most common among oral historians, "the oral evidence is treated as a quarry from which to construct an argument about patterns of behavior or events in

the past.”<sup>9</sup> This second approach is used even by those historians who do not define themselves as oral historians but use oral evidence as a part of their research. Sometimes, especially illuminating and challenging life-stories emerge during the fieldwork and special attention is granted within the wider analysis to these life-stories using the methodology of the narrative analysis. It is in this in-depth approach that the special value of oral history can best be seen. It is here that the “different credibility of oral sources,” as Alessandro Portelli calls it, emerges. “Oral sources are credible but with a *different* credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no ‘false’ oral sources.”<sup>10</sup> Narrative analysis brings the historian to Allan Megill’s question on the cognitive value of the narrative. And, hopefully, also to his conclusion. “Narrative has a cognitive value of its own, in that sense that the coherence of narrative is the coherence of a possible world.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the historian, and especially the oral historian, is always searching for another “possible world” whose truth comes only from its internal coherence. It is what Chris Lorenz calls “internal realism”.<sup>12</sup>

Oral history is at its best if one tries to follow Daniel Barbu’s invitation in analyzing the Communist regimes:

The history of Romanian Communism must be seen less as a whole global and totalizing history of the Party, the industrialization, the collectivization, the repression, of doctrinaire and ideological elaborations but rather as a chain explosion with immediate effect of concrete, multiple, incoherent, intersected and conflicting histories of real people, of specific interests, of individual careers. Summing it all, a history of the way Romanians have ‘coped’ (*s-au descurcat*), better or worse, but each for himself and for those near him.<sup>13</sup>

### ***A. The queue. A test case for discussing solidarity in 1980s Romania***

While talking about the 1980s, most of my interviewees would spontaneously bring into the conversation the subject of queuing, an activity and a site that they considered essential for the period. I will first reconstruct from their memories the scenario according to which the queue functioned, including the ‘plot’ and the characters that most queues were



relying on. I will then analyze the special solidarity, the networks created around queuing, in support of it and in spite of it.

Leon Mann considers that the underlining principle of queuing is “distributive justice” that he defines as the belief that:

There is a direct correspondence between inputs (time spent waiting) and outcomes (preferential service). Generally, if a person is willing to invest large amounts of time and suffering in an activity, people who believe there should be an appropriate fit between effort and reward will respect his right to priority.<sup>14</sup>

He also describes the queue as an “embryonic social system” that reflects the broader social organization. If one was to apply both his theories to the Romanian queue of the 1980s, the resulting image becomes contradictory. For, if the queue reflects the society at large, then any notion of “distributive justice” cannot be applied since it contradicts the broader reality. My hypothesis is that the queue does reflect the society’s organization, thus including all the privileges that some groups of people had and all the bypasses that other people employed.

I will try to provide in the next pages a description of the Romanian queue of the 1980s, its functioning, its characters and its unwritten rules. One informer considers the Romanian queue to be a special type of queue. “I often stood in queues, but the Romanian one was corrupted by other rules than an ordinary line.”<sup>15</sup> He does not explain what “an ordinary line” is, but it is probably connected to the notion of “distributive justice” that Mann proposes. That is, an ordinary line means respecting the right to priority, in the order of arrival, of the people who spent equal amounts of time waiting next to each other.

### **A1. The two times of the queue**

There are several aspects of the Romanian queue that make it distinct from the standard image defined above. First, most of the queues in the 80s formed before the desired product actually arrived. By a complicated system of spreading information within a community and also much presuppositions, people formed long queues before closed shops. The queues for milk, which was more or less supplied daily, started at 4 or 5 in the morning, even though the shop only opened at 7 or 8. If a special

product were supposed to come the next day, the first members of the queue would be there from the previous evening, spending their night on the spot. The life of a queue can be thus split into two phases: the first phase in which the queue only grows by addition of new members and there is actually no movement towards purchasing the commodity and the second phase when the products are actually put on sale. The first instance is more related to waiting than the second instance since there is no physical movement towards the beginning of the queue and there is also no certainty whether or not and at what time the products would arrive. As testimonies show, this is the more relaxed part of the queuing process. Order is looser and people find time to discuss and socialize. When products actually arrive and the selling begins, the atmosphere suddenly becomes tenser. The passage from one situation to another is remembered as a short moment of chaos when anything can happen. People start squeezing into each other, pushing towards the interior of the shop.

And then there was this well-known thrill in the crowd: somebody announced that the meat car might have parked in the back. And it seemed like everybody became more focused and occupied their place more firmly. ... Then the children were taken out of the line, we had to wait somewhere aside because when the doors of the butcher's or shop opened, everybody started pushing in an awful manner, they would step on each other's feet, and the children risked being squashed unaware.<sup>16</sup>

This is the moment when queuing becomes an active process, involving physical strength and determination. It is no more about waiting, but about fighting, as this man remembers:

Whenever I had planned to buy meat, I woke up round one or two a.m., and I was there at half past two or three a.m.;... so we waited there in the hall, and, at the right time, those inside pushed the gates open and ran. But, the crazy thing was that they did not have the time to actually open the gates, they just drew the bolt. The moment people heard the clacking of the bolt, the throng started through the gate. If you were among the first, and had the bad luck to have an old lady that stumble and fall in front of you, it was a disaster. And let me tell you how things went, doing these things many times I developed a strategy. Whenever I queued, I noticed who was next to me, and I always behaved almost like a stag or a deer. I gathered some speed and I pushed on one side, yet I immediately withdrew

and thrust myself on the other side, and in this way I made three, four zigzagged steps to get among the first.<sup>17</sup>

Nancy Ries characterizes stories like this as “tales of heroic shopping.”<sup>18</sup> However, they are not characteristic for queuing stories in the Romanian 1980s. The narration of the queuing process, in the Romanian case, mostly relies on the waiting component as a painful and humiliating experience. In these narratives, *queuing* and *waiting* are usually used as synonyms, which testifies to the major importance of the time, seen as wasted time, in the queuing process. This is one of the interesting points that Mann makes in his analysis of Australian football ticket lines. The queuing system reflects the surrounding society in as much as it dwells on “the importance of time as a value in Western society.”<sup>19</sup>

The imposition of waiting, as Barry Schwartz explains it,<sup>20</sup> is a manifestation of power, thus leading to feelings of humiliation. “The queues for meat were the most humiliating, one could have *wasted* a night and a day, and when one got to the door or to the counter, it was finished. So many times I came back home with an empty bag after hours and hours of *waiting!*”<sup>21</sup> This testimony includes the key words like *waiting* and *wasted time* and also another important aspect of these queues: one could not be sure that after having invested a large amount of time, the desired commodity would be in his/her possession. This is because these queues also included some virtual members, people that were not physically present but whose existence should always be taken into consideration.

The most numerous group of virtual members were those who would have their place “kept” by other members of the queue. This practice could double the number of the people who were actually present in the queue. As one interviewee states: “When I was about to get to the counter, almost every time, two or three persons stepped before me, saying that they had been there before and they had asked the old people, who queued almost every day, to reserve a place for them, and thus, there was not enough for me anymore.”<sup>22</sup>

Another group of virtual members were the ones with whom the seller had a special relationship. He/she would always keep a small part of the stock for his personal arrangements, products later to be exchanged for other products/services. Even if these people did not actually join the

queue, they represented nevertheless a decrease of the stock that the members of the 'real' queue were counting on.

And there were also some with a privileged status who would go directly to the counter and buy the products without having to queue. It could be the local policeman who proudly recalls how he would get in the shop apparently to reestablish order and then get out with his bag full or other 'authorities' that no one dared to submit to the "distributive justice" of the queue.

## **A2. Solidarity within the queue and against it**

Solidarity is one of those concepts whose meaning seems "obvious" and thus in need of no more definition. However, there are at least two major understandings of the word, which are quite distinct: the philosophical and sociological one. The 'human solidarity', a philosophical and ethical concept, mainly Kantian, is based on the recognition of humanity in fellow human beings and the duty one should feel towards that human quality. This understanding of solidarity has been challenged on account of universalistic claims even from within the discipline of moral philosophy.<sup>23</sup> However, this concept, even in its current restricted understanding is quite useless as a historical variable. The level of 'human solidarity' of a past society eludes any analysis, precisely because it is very personal and should be judged rather on intentions than on outcomes.

Social solidarity, on the other hand, a concept used by sociologists ever since Durkheim, might prove to be helpful. "The classical form of solidarity refers to the cooperation of concerned people with the goal of improvement of their own fate."<sup>24</sup> The basic difference between the sociological understanding of the term and the philosophical/ethical one is that the former does not downplay the personal interest solidarity is based upon. Those who claim the Communist regime destroyed the feeling of solidarity among Romanian citizens mainly refer to the moral/philosophical understanding of the term. However, the existence of this kind of solidarity, at any time and in any place in human history is much debated today and would be indeed impossible to prove.

Returning to the subject of queuing and reacting to shortage, my claim is that solidarity is one of the reactions shortages triggered. I will argue for a solidarity of the queue, manifest in its organization, left entirely in the hands of the queuers who assumed responsibility for achieving the

common goal: buying the desired products. There is also a solidarity expressed in the informal networks meant to decrease the amount of queuing in one's life. So far in my research, I have not encountered a single informer who would admit to relying only on merchandise bought from state shops. Everybody had other sources of food products. Some were so well "organized" that they did not even have to queue: "To put it bluntly, between 1980 and 1989, I never stood in a queue to buy meat from shops."<sup>25</sup> The purpose was not only to have a full refrigerator; the higher accomplishment was not having to queue for that.

One of the paradoxes of this shortage period is that, even though the shops were empty, people were convinced that there was sufficient food in the country. The basis of this belief was that nobody was actually dying of hunger; having a refrigerator or a storage room full of food products was a common occurrence in that period. Thus, the problem seemed to be more a shortcoming in the distribution of these products than a real lack of basic foodstuff.<sup>26</sup> It is in this context that small networks of people in a position of obtaining different commodities or providing different services were created. Some of these networks actually replaced activities that should have been conducted by the state, especially the distribution system. This is why these networks and the secondary economy developed were necessary for the survival of the system. As two Polish sociologists observed, "the basic difference between the informal economy in the West and in the socialist countries is the fact that in the West, informal economic activities are marginal, while in a socialist planned economy, they are a fundamental part of the activity of state-owned enterprises."<sup>27</sup> As these activities were mainly illegal, the kind of solidarity that they encompass refers back to the etymological meaning of the term. "The term "solidarity" has its roots in the Roman law of obligations. Here the unlimited liability of each individual member within a family or other community to pay common debts was characterized as *obligatio in solidum*."<sup>28</sup>

A couple remembers how they would pay somebody in the countryside to raise a pig for them.<sup>29</sup> In 1989, it was in a village of Sibiu county, in the center of the country, where they "raised" their pig and the Revolution "caught" them on their way to bring the pig to Bucharest. They successfully got hold of the pig but they could not also reach Constanța, at the seaside, where they were supposed to collect some wine. Earlier in the 80s, they knew somebody who had an illegal slaughtering place in his own house. Every Thursday he would slaughter a cow. Mr. B.P. would come and take

his fifty kilos share. There was no negotiation; it was fifty kilos or nothing. So, Mr. B.P. also had to organize a network of his own to distribute the extra meat. In other periods, his neighbor, Mr. S.P., who was a member of one of the national sports team and had access to the special food store for sportsmen, would provide aliments for him. All of these arrangements did not spare the family of having to queue from time to time, but the amount of wasted time and humiliation was seriously diminished.

Mrs. D.V. is married to a TV repairman. "He had lots of clients; he had bread-salesmen and food store-salesmen so we had some relations..."<sup>30</sup> But these relations only helped with flour (each year she had to gather 100 kilos of flour to send to her parents in the countryside who had difficulties finding bread in the winter), corn flour or sugar. For meat they still had to queue. Queuing for meat was also organized in a small community formed by her work colleagues. She was an accountant in a health institute.

One of my colleagues who came from the neighborhood, when she came in the morning, stopped at the meat-store, kept a place there, came to the institute, signed the register, we gathered two or three women, went there to register to the queue, too and then we took shifts. One of us stayed one hour, she came back, then... At three o'clock when the program was finished, we all went there. And by five, five and a half the meat truck came.

Q: So these queues started in the morning...

From morning to evening. And of course, there were lots of people who did the same thing. If I went there and I had 20 or 30 persons ahead of me, by five o'clock it was double, they kept coming from work and so on. And I would also telephone him [her husband] and say, I am at the meat-store. And then he appeared at six, seven and we stayed there, they started giving... And he would take, too and this meant that for that month we were assured. So once a month we made this effort but this meant that we arrived home at half past nine, ten in the evening.

As explained earlier, these queues did not always respect the "distributive justice" system. There were people who attempted to join the queue from the middle or access the salesman with whom they had a special arrangement. And as these queues, officially, did not exist, there was no organized supervision of the functioning of the queue. Except the one people organized themselves. "The queues were very rarely ordered, they surged periodically so an ad-hoc police was in charge of maintaining the order. One or more men would place themselves near the counter

or office and prevented the ones who wanted to rapidly get in front of everybody else.”<sup>31</sup>

This ad-hoc police would not only supervise the queue, but also the salesman from keeping too much of the stock for himself. “At a store, they had brought beer. Immediate queue and extraordinary scandal. They did not bring large quantities and this generated a lot of problems.... A few representatives of the queue insisted in witnessing the whole thing until the beer sold out.”<sup>32</sup> These people, the “representatives of the queue” stayed longer after they managed to buy their share of the products only to ensure that all the stock was sold to the population. It was not easy to be a queue-representative; it took a lot of time, knowledge of the functioning of the queue and the ability to exercise one’s authority.

I am convinced there were some queue-supervisors. People that had learned how queuing goes (*cum se face coada*) and they were keeping the discipline. So, if the queue supervisor happened to be at the beginning of the queue and he sacrificed himself, it was a very ordered queue. So this guy came in the evening, around eleven, put his little chair there, brought a book, a something, a neighbor to talk to. He slept during the day and stayed the night there. And everybody who passed by there talked to him, he would let them go from time to time. There was a list, of course.<sup>33</sup>

To be able to take part in so elaborate activities, one needed a lot of time. Not everybody could afford, in as much as time is concerned, to spend twelve hours or more in front of a shop. As this system was time-, and not money-, consuming, people who had more time at their disposal became more important in the household economy. And these were the elders, the already retired grandparents, and the children. Besides providing for their own family, some elders found in queuing an alternative activity that could earn them some extra money. Instead of staying at home, they stayed in queues transforming the wait into a money-earning activity. If time is a value, then it can also be sold.

There were especially the retired people, they stayed in the line, like I tell you, a whole day, took two kilos of meat to give them to somebody who couldn’t stay and take some money so... instead of 37 [lei] that he gave for it, he would sell it with 50. He won some extra money like this. It wasn’t only the gypsies who speculated. There were also some other categories of people who had the time to stay.<sup>34</sup>

The children also had an important role to play in an economic system more complicated than it appears at a first glance. Even before the rations were introduced, a system of unofficial rations functioned in order to ensure that the stock brought at a certain moment in the shop would be divided among as many people as possible. Usually, the quantity, two kilos of meat, one chicken, one kilo of oranges per person, was established by common agreement between the salesman and the "representatives of the queue." This "ration" was a function of the quantity of products that were brought to the shop, however since the quantities supplied were usually the same, these unofficial rations had the tendency to become fixed as the later introduced official rations. When recalling the ration system of the 1980s, people have troubles distinguishing between the two types of rations, testifying thus to the strong establishment of these unofficial rations.

Q: Do you remember if there were rations in the 80s?

Yes, of course, there were. They introduced them. Rations for meat. Well, even the other products, flour, corn flour, these, you couldn't buy more than two kilos, this was the ration, two kilos of flour. And you kept going from one food store to another, when they brought, because it wasn't there always it wasn't on the shelves. Oil was "rationalized" too, two kilos of oil. And when it was brought you queued for it. You went to this food store and took two kilos, then to the other and took two kilos.<sup>35</sup>

When the official rations were introduced, one was assigned to one food store in the neighborhood and was not allowed to buy the products on ration from any other store. What Mrs. D.V. is referring to is the system of unofficial rations when you could actually go to several stores and buy small quantities of flour, oil or sugar in order to increase your stock. Or, you could stay in the same line, if it was not that large, several times. Or, you could bring your children along since the quantity was sold per person. There are testimonies of parents queuing with their very young children, two or three year old, in order to buy a larger quantity. Sometimes, children were also 'borrowed' from one person to another within the queue.

Kathy Burrell examined the problem of queuing in the 1980s Poland, also relying on oral history material. She documents a situation that I have not encountered in the Romanian case. It is the story of a Polish woman who recalls that she did not have to queue since "it is a tradition that old



persons and the mothers with the small children or babies are put first. So if there was something and I would take [my daughter] in my arms, then I could skip the queue, and people were putting me at the front.”<sup>36</sup>

The Romanian queue of the 1980s is saturated with old people and children queuing. Children were sometimes assigned the role of informing their parents about new deliveries in the neighborhood stores.

Many times, instead of playing in the parks by our blocks of flats, we had to play near the stores because the car with products could arrive any time. When this thing happened, we would run to our houses and let our parents know, mainly mothers. As most of us lived in blocks of flats, it was easier to shout from down there that the car had arrived and thus we announced all the neighbors. In maximum five minutes, everybody was there, their bags in their hands, ready to run towards the respective store, where we got there before them and “saved a place for them in the line”. The problem is that it did not matter whether there were children, old men; everybody was dashing, as if blind, for fear they might be left without that product.<sup>37</sup>

### **A3. Solidarities and communities of queuers**

These children as it becomes evident from the example above and the practice of ‘borrowing’ them among queuers were also used in the functioning of a community working together in facilitating access to food. This community could be formed by the inhabitants of a block of flats, colleagues of the same work place or members of the same family, in a very extended meaning of family. Everyone was a part of one or more of these networks. The exchange and reciprocal help went from spreading information about up-coming deliveries to keeping a place in the queues and to facilitating access to informal, usually also illegal, sources of commodities.

The debate about the meaning and extent to which solidarity functioned in these societies is still on going. One of the most influential theories states that within these societies, different types of solidarity were among the first victims of the regime. David Kideckel claims it strongly as the basis of his study *The Solitude of Collectivism. Romanian Villagers to the Revolution and Beyond*. “The title of this book reflects on one of the basic contradictions of life in many socialist communities: the socialist system, though ostensibly designed to create new persons motivated by

the needs of groups and society as a whole, in fact created people who were of necessity self-centered, distrustful and apathetic to the very core of their beings."<sup>38</sup> This perspective does not only belong to Kideckel. It is widespread among scholars of socialist and post-socialist societies, among which the phenomenon is also held responsible for the apathy and lack of civil society in post-1989 Eastern Europe. It is an opinion that needs, in my view, a reevaluation.

Daniel Barbu, a political scientist, attempted to do this in an article published under the coordination of Lucian Boia in *The Myths of Romanian Communism*. The article breaks the apparent unity of the contributors by boldly suggesting from the beginning that an analysis of the communist period is as much subjected to myth making as the communist regime itself. "I wonder if the analysis that, for decades, is focused on the system of symbolic representations and ideological imaginary of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet type has not itself generated a new series of myths."<sup>39</sup> Looking at the problem of the supposed solidarity promoted by the regime and the lack of solidarity observed by the analysts, Barbu proposes a third way, a "dependent individualism born under totalitarianism"<sup>40</sup> which would account both for the situations within the socialist states and after their collapse. Regarding the common image of an imposed regime over a helpless society, he notes that the degree of acceptance by Romanian society greatly surpassed the degree of its resistance. Also the lack of power of the society cannot be argued for if one understands power as Foucault does, not only as political power. Barbu claims that "to cope with the regime," "to manage" (*a te descurca*), a frequent word when people refer back to those years, "is only another way to name participating at power, access to the normal functioning of it."<sup>41</sup> What Barbu is arguing against is an image of Romanian Communism as "an anonymous and impersonal ghost that drove unexpectedly on a population forced to improvise its resistance."<sup>42</sup>

As I have explained in this article, establishing a community of common interests was an essential, necessary feature of everyday life in communist Romania. Other researchers have noted the special solidarity that queuing entailed. "Albeit much hated and ridiculed, the queue outside the shop produced forms of sociality that might be coded to demonstrate the existence of values and close-knit solidarity in spite of the alienating effects of socialism."<sup>43</sup> This type of solidarity is usually dismissed as only being based on the short or long-term project of obtaining food or other commodities. However, using the sociological understanding of solidarity

which relies precisely on “the cooperation of concerned people with the goal of improvement of their own fate,” the argument becomes a nonsense. As Tita Chiper remembers the 1980s, “In the time of rationing, they would move ‘the community of the block’ (*spiritul scării*) to the queue, reciprocally informing on the products that were to arrive, keeping the place in the queue for each other, discovering a solidarity that functioned perfectly against the ‘intruders.’”<sup>44</sup> It is, thus, a solidarity directed against the others (and what type of solidarity is not?) in the everyday contest of coping more easily with the system.

These types of smaller scale solidarities within the socialist system, even when constructed for personal gain, should not be disregarded. The ephemeral solidarity of the queuers reflects the contradictions of the society at large. People interacted with each other with a degree of caution and self-surveillance that they employed in other circumstances as well. Thus, there are testimonies of queues as that type of ancient peasant evening gatherings (*sezătoare*) where people would tell stories, discuss politics, in a word - socialize. “For the rest, I liked very much to queue, especially with my grandfather, who would stand in the line telling stories to other old men, boasting about all sorts of youth adventures.... There was a real contest of wonderfully embellished stories.”<sup>45</sup> Or, other memories:

At the queue there was big cheerfulness. Yes, whistling, curses, jokes. Everybody was talking.

Q: So you were not afraid of the people you didn't know.

No, no. Then, as now, there were people who were against you. But there was no restriction. Who has the courage to talk, talks anywhere. And then, in a collectivity like this where you see that that one is talking, the other one is talking... Especially since the discontent was general. How was I not to talk?<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, there were people who thought that it was better not to get involved in these kind of discussions. “The people around, especially since most of them were retired, talked only about troubles and scarcity and ...generally, it was much better not to listen. It happened to me once, while I was standing in a queue for butter, to witness how a man in front of me started to swear: ‘the hell with Ceaușescu and everything, and...’ I do not know what else. Suddenly two men came to him and took him away.”<sup>47</sup>

Without disregarding the contradictory testimonies on this issue, the queue was both a space that reflected the rules and restrictions of the broader society, and also a space where a greater degree of individual freedom could be experienced. There are not many examples in the everyday life of those years when people really had the urge and willingness to organize themselves, to organize a distribution system underlined by some assumptions of “distributive justice.”

### ***B. Why are we queuing?***

Václav Havel put forward one of the most acclaimed theories of life in Socialist countries: *living within truth* versus *living within a lie* was for him the daily dilemma of the Socialist citizen. Havel, a playwright, the leader of the Czech dissent movement and the first president of the Czech Republic wrote the story of the grocery man in his widely influential essay *The Power of the Powerless*.

His character, the grocery man is fictional but he presents him as representative for the common man in the Czech Socialist Republic, part of the Czechoslovak Federation. The reader doesn't find out much about the greengrocer. Only that, on official holydays, he “places in his window, among onions and carrots, the slogan: ‘Workers of the World, Unite!’”<sup>48</sup> Why does he do it?, Havel asks. It is not that he believes in the slogan, not that he actually ever thought about what it means that all the workers of the world should unite. Rather, the sign he puts in the window actually reads: “I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and I am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace.”<sup>49</sup>

Dwelling on this example, Havel explains how these post-totalitarian systems, as he calls them, derive their strength from widely accepted lies.

“Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason however, they must *live within a lie*. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, *are* the system.”<sup>50</sup>

Along with his theory of living „within a lie“ and his plea for living „within the truth“, Havel develops in the same essay the concept of post-totalitarianism. The Czech society of the 1970s that he describes is no longer a dictatorship in its classical form. This means that it is no longer based on military power, but on something subtler: ideology. As Havel understands it: “the primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe.”<sup>51</sup>

As I understand it, this function of ideology, and therefore of propaganda<sup>52</sup> goes way beyond truth and fakery. The slogan in the window is not there because it is true or fake; it is there because this is how it should be, because “the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe.” There is no question here of whether that human order, or even less, the order of the universe is right or wrong. It simply is and it should be obeyed by virtue of its mere existence. However, this is my reading of Havel’s story, since he insists that truth and fakery are still valid concepts even within this systems; that people actually knew what was right and wrong, true or fake and simply chose the latter.

I argue in the following pages that the border between official and private discourse is not as sharp as Havel, and many were his followers would claim. By looking at the answers people gave me when asked why did they think they had to queue, I argue that most of them are forms of internalized official discourse. And one of the reasons for this phenomenon is the fact that, sometimes, official discourse was true, or at least plausible.

One of the most frequent answers is related to the goal of paying foreign debts. The final goal was to achieve the total independence of Romania, not only political, but also economic. The absurdity of such an economic policy, in the context of the emerging global market, needs no further explanations. However, in a country with so weak connections to the other countries, the development of world economy was not so widely understood as it is nowadays. The issue of the independence of the country was closely related to an upsurge in nationalism that the government successfully promoted. This is why the project of paying all the debts of the country was sometimes positively assumed; it was seen as a goal worth sacrificing personal comfort for.

There was no food because it was in small quantities, because they were giving a lot for export and it was this period when we were paying the debts that the Romanian state had. And these were paid from what? From the earnings of the populations, they had no other source.

Q: Why do you think they insisted so much on paying the foreign debts? Why they wanted to pay them? I don't know. I suppose Ceaușescu had a purpose. If he would have lived to do it, what do I know...? It got into his head that he has to pay them. And he finally did. And? It was no use since the ones who came after them made them all over again.<sup>53</sup>

There were hardly any official explanations for the shortages. Journals and the two-hour TV broadcast presented the on-going increase in living standards, productivity and enthusiasm in Romania. An interview with Nicolae Ceaușescu, published in *Newsweek* in August 1989, presents a totally distorted image:

N.C.: I believe we are among the first countries when it comes to consumption per capita. And we are exporters of food and clothing. But this is not done at the expense of consumption. It is based on productivity. We don't have problems regarding the consumption of food.

Q: When do you think some of the empty shelves will be full?

N.C.: We don't have empty shelves. On the contrary, we have lots of stock in our shops. It's possible that we started having negligence in the shops and we don't want to put extra stock in the shops. You can go in any shop and you can buy anything including products that you find in the United States, because we export some of those to the United States.<sup>54</sup>

This is more or less what the Romanians were hearing every day, with the notable exception that no one really dared to ask when will some of the empty shelves be full. There were, however, two events that were meant to put the shortages in a more favorable light. One incentive was the *Program for scientific alimentation of the population (Programul de alimentație științifică a populației)*. The idea of "scientific alimentation," basically meaning reducing the number of calories per capita, appeared as early as 1982, thoroughly explained in an issue of *Scântea* daily newspaper on July 14. The idea became a program, approved by the Grand National Assembly, only in 1984 and it was published in *Scântea* on June 30.

It was not clear how the new program would to be implemented. How can state control the number of calories that a citizen is eating? The answer was simple: by providing less. The purpose was to change the obvious conclusion, "We are eating less and worse" into "We are eating more healthy." Even though the program did not meet the approval of the population it was nevertheless 'implemented.' First by providing less food in the shops, rationalizing some products and then by building those huge cantinas, nick-named the Hunger Circuses,<sup>55</sup> that were supposed to feed entire neighborhoods thus making home-cooking and food-shopping useless. Fortunately, the building of the Hunger Circuses began in the late 1980s, so they never actually functioned. The unfinished building sites can still be seen in Bucharest, although some of them were completed and transformed into shopping malls - which is actually not very far from their initial purpose.

The idea of controlling in such a direct manner the meals of the population is only an exacerbation of the 'dictatorship over needs.' In a socialist economy, the state holds a monopoly on the distribution of food products, however to seek to establish a daily menu, the same menu, for the entire capital of Romania was a new idea, even for a socialist country. As one of my interviewees put it:

You go there [to the Hunger Circus], you take your three little boxes, you go home, you heat them and you eat them. The bad thing is that behind this project there was a terrible idea. Since everything can be found like this, there is no need anymore for markets, for raw products. So by this system, **he** would manage to control even what you ate. So **he** would tell you what you eat Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. This idea with the fish, one day only with fish, would have become reality. Plain reality.<sup>56</sup>

When speaking about the 1980s, the interviewees either use 'he' or 'they' for state decisions or measures that had disastrous effects. 'He' is obviously referring to Ceaușescu, but to establish who are 'they' is more difficult. It does not designate members of the Communist Party, for they use it also. Most probably, it refers to the leadership of the Party, the nomenclature. Today, 'they' are also mentioned in conversations about the current unfortunate situation, economical or social, in Romania. Some people maintain that 'they' are the same.

*The Program for scientific alimentation of the population* is thus closely linked with the Hunger Circuses growing overnight in different parts of Bucharest. Neither of them were the cause of the shortages; they were merely a response, a justification for the obvious lack of basic products. The same interviewee thinks that the program was realized, but only on a theoretical level, in calculating the amount of food that was necessary to maintain the subsistence level of the population:

This program was only achieved at a global level. That is, some calculations were made. How many Romanians are we? 22 millions. How big is the cereal production? How many calories must a Romanian consume? 3,000. Well, 22 million to multiply by 3,000 it means I don't know how many gicalcalories. Let's see, we keep in the country that much grains, that much rice, that much meat, that many eggs and that's it! Everything else goes for export!<sup>57</sup>

The other idea that the propaganda disseminated regarding the shortages is that they are the result of some people actually hoarding food in order to resell it at a higher price. Actually, a law against hoarding was issued in October 1981. Hoarding was defined as having more than one month's supply of oil, sugar, flour, corn flour, rice, coffee and other food product. The announcement on the radio, broadcasted on October 9, also warned the Romanians that they should return excess food to the stores for refund at official prices by October 12.<sup>58</sup>

Contrary to the widespread lack of trust in the official discourse, it seems that this justification convinced some. Not as far as to say that this was the cause of the shortages, but that it was an important factor that influenced the crisis.

Meat was brought, you had to queue. And this is where the problem of speculating intervenes. There were some people who were staying there and they were taking. This is why there was not enough for me to buy a piece of meat when I finished my working hours. Because they were systematically taking<sup>59</sup> it and selling it on the black market. But I would still buy it. Even on the black market, I would still buy it.<sup>60</sup>

But I think that it is not only Ceaușescu that led to this thing. I say that we as individuals, as a nation... after a while, when you see that there is no more, you hide it, isn't it? When you see that you can't find anymore in the market as much as you need, you hide it.<sup>61</sup>



There is a difficulty at this point in establishing where is the border between hoarding and speculating. The official discourse made anyone having in his house more than one month's supply of food a potential speculator. Even though everybody was trying to keep their refrigerators as full as possible, it was not for speculating purposes. However, the ambiguity between a hoarder and a speculator persists in fragments of interview like this one:

"So that is when food disappeared, the cheese and so on. And then speculating began, because the Romanian never died of hunger. He always used to say: there's no meat, there's no that, there's no I don't know what. Vasile, can you keep in your refrigerator for two days three kilos of meat? Well, I don't have place. So why don't you have place? It was, it was also this panic."<sup>62</sup>

People used to have refrigerators and storage rooms filled with food products, despite or, better said, exactly because of the shortages. Most of my interviewees confess to this at some point during our talks:

"Now, saying this in brackets, I always said that we eat too well in our house... We eat too well, my wife having a real genius of administrating, saving and valorification, to put it this way."<sup>63</sup>

Having supplies for a long enough period of time, exceeding a few weeks, gave them a feeling of safety that allowed them to accomplish other activities.

"After 1980, our only preoccupation was the lack of food. The food. If we knew that we had butter in the refrigerator or that we had meat, we were very happy... If the storage room was full, then we were calm. We would meet, talk, we would read a lot."<sup>64</sup>

This is the reason why one can encounter frequently, apparently astonishing statements like this one:

"The problem was with the alimentation. Because you had to queue to buy something. And yet, you see, there is this paradox. There wasn't [food], but I had the refrigerator full. Full because of foreseeing. When I would find, I would buy and put it in the refrigerator."<sup>65</sup>

There are two points to be made to clarify the situation. First, the reason why the issue of hoarding seems to be a success idea of state propaganda in those years, is that it was true. People were hoarding food, and not only food. Janos Kornai describes the functioning of a shortage economy<sup>66</sup> (the term belongs to him) as a mixture of bargaining and hoarding. He explains how this functions for enterprises, not only for the people. Hoarding is, however, only a result of the shortages not their cause, and this is where the official discourse was very effective. It managed to pass an effect for a cause. Consciously or not, the authorities relied in this issue on some very ancient popular beliefs related to periods of dearth. They were identified by R.C. Cobb in his study on 18<sup>th</sup>-century France. Among them, "the belief in the existence of vast and preferably underground supplies at home"<sup>67</sup> is exactly what the Romanian propaganda in the 1980s suggested, and partially succeeded to induce as a cause of the food shortages confronting the country.<sup>68</sup>

It must be underlined, in the end, that providing explanations for the shortages was not a habit of the Romanian authorities in those years. They were actually more inclined to deny that an alimentation problem existed, as Ceaușescu does in the above mentioned interview, than to acknowledge and explain the situation. The queues were usually formed behind the stores, especially when the stores were on the big boulevards of the city. The image of people standing in long lines waiting for food was not congruent with the allegedly prosperous Romanian economy.

For this reason, when asked what were the official explanations for the shortages, my interviewees usually answer that there were not any. Or, at most, they remember some of the most absurd ones that stuck in their memory precisely because of their absurdity:

"The first thing that started to disappear was sugar. They blamed it, this was the motivation, on the peasants who were making brandy (*țuica*) in the countryside and sugar is disappearing because it is used there. This is non-sense. They started with an excuse, like this. And then there were no more problems for them to start removing slowly, slowly everything."<sup>69</sup>

Whatever explanation they may have given, the foreign debts, the hoarding, the speculators, I could not help but notice that this was one of the most startling questions they were asked. They usually took a pause, repeated my question in slow motion, Why were there no more

aliments? And then provided me with one of the explanations enumerated above, explanations that mostly come, as I have shown, from the official discourse of those years. My hypothesis in this matter is that they were not really thinking, in the 80s, at possible explanations for the shortages. They were accepting them like everything else: the cutting of electricity, the cold in the apartments or the mandatory participation at political manifestations. This attitude is closely related to the usage of pronouns explained above. It is either 'them' or 'him' who brings these misfortunes upon them, misfortunes that they experience like natural calamities. There is nothing to be done about an earthquake or a flood. Asking why did the aliments start disappearing was a bit like asking why has an earthquake occurred.

This type of attitude was observed by Slavenka Drakulić in one of her essays on Communism in Eastern Europe, and she connects it to the experience of World War II and everything that came afterwards.

One of the things one is constantly reminded in these parts is not to be thoughtless with food. I remember my mother telling me that I had to eat everything in front of me, because to throw away food would be a sin. Perhaps she had God on her mind, perhaps not. She experienced World War II and ever since, like most of the people in Eastern Europe, she behaves as if it never ended. Maybe this is why they are never really surprised that even forty years afterwards there is a lack of sugar, oil, coffee, or flour.<sup>70</sup>

I hope to have shown in this article that some of the main topics in analyzing the Romanian Communist regime are still controversial: resistance and collaboration, living within a lie and constructing one's own truth, constructing solidarities or individualistic pursuits. I argued that even one of the most hated activities of the 1980s, queuing, is retold by former queuers in conflicting memories: some emphasize the solidarity, others the alienation that queuing developed. Most of my interviewers actually testify to both. Instead of sticking to black and white, they prefer to remember the grey. The same applies to their explanations of the shortage situation. The answers to the question *Why did you have to queue?* span from purely official explanations, like the paying of the national debt or hoarding, to unbelievable rumors. This shows, in my opinion, that the former black and white, good and bad image of the Communist regime, originated in the dissent discourse, is no longer academically sustainable and has reached a dead end.

## **Appendix 1. Interview guidelines**

How old were you in 1980?

Where were you working in the 1980's?

Were you married? Who were the members of your family? (It is important to determine how many people the family had to sustain.)

When you think about the 1980's, is there any particular image/event/story that comes to mind?

How did you acquire the necessary food?

What did you queue for?

What did you queue for except food?

Was queuing for food different than queuing for other products?

Who used to queue more often in your family? Were the children also joining the queues?

When did you queue? In the morning, during daytime or night-time?

Some people were asking the others to keep their place in the queue? How did that function?

Were there rules of the queue? Was there anybody establishing an unofficial order?

How much time did a queue last? Were you always standing or did you bring something you would sit on?

How did you explain the fact that you had to queue?

What do you remember about the "Hunger Circus"? How were they to function?

Do you also have some good memories about the queue?

Do you remember when you first had to queue?

Do you still have to queue now?

Do you sometimes talk about the communist period (the 1980's) in your families? What topics do you talk about? In which moments?

How would you characterize your life in the 1980's?

How would you characterize the period as a whole? (This question doubles the question in the beginning. The image that the interviewee provides as a frame at the beginning may be reshaped as memories unfold during the interview.)

## NOTES

- 1 The latest publications in the increasingly fashionable topic of everyday life during Communism fit this description: Paul Cernat, Ion Manolescu, Angelo Mitchievici, Ioan Stanomir, *Explorări în comunismul românesc*, vol 1, 2 [Explorations in romanian communism] (Iași: Polirom, 2004, 2005); Irina Nicolau, Ioana Popescu et al., *Anii '80 si bucureștenii* [The 80s in Bucharest] (București: Paidea, 2003); Tom Sandquist, Ana Maria Zahariade, *Dacia 1300. My Generation* (București: Simetria, 2003); Adrian Neculau, *Viața cotidiană în comunism* [Everyday life during communism] (Iași: Polirom, 2004).
- 2 There is terminological overlap between Communist and Socialist regimes that I do not plan to settle in this article. Romanian academia prefers to call the 1948-1989 regime Communist. Western academia and even Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech, etc. call it Socialism, actually existing Socialism, real Socialism and so on. I personally prefer the later as it also historically more accurate. Even in the Romanian case, the regime never claimed to have reached the stage of Communism and the country was called Romanian Socialist Republic. However, the ruling party called itself Communist.
- 3 See, for example, Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless : Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (London : Hutchinson, 1985). For a critique of using these binary oppositions in assessing the Communist regimes see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was forever, until it was no more: the last Soviet generation* (Princeton, NJ) : Princeton University Press, 2005).
- 4 So much so that even joining the Communist party is sometimes decoded as a "subversive" action.
- 5 I developed this argument in an article written together with Gabriela Cristea, *Raising the Cross. Exorcising Romania's Communist Past in Museums, Memorials and Monuments* to be published with CEU Press, 2007.
- 6 I started this research during my MA studies in History at Central European University, Budapest (2003-2004) and continued it during my Europa Fellowship at the New Europe College, Bucharest (2006-2007). I am also using as sources the archive on everyday life in the 1980s gathered by the Romanian Peasant Museum (a project in which I also participated) and published in *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review*, VII (The eighties in Bucharest), 2002 and in Serban Anghelescu, Cosmin Manolache, Anca Manolescu, Vlad Manoliu, Irina Nicolau, Ioana Popescu, Petre Popovat, Simina Radu-Bucurenci, Ana Vinea, *Anii '80 și bucureștenii* (The 80s in Bucharest). Bucharest: Paidea, 2003.
- 7 I interviewed 11 people, 5 women and 6 men, most of them in their 50s and 60s. They all inhabit the same block of flats so they all depended on the same shop (Alimentara) for basic food. During the 1980s they were also queuing together.

- <sup>8</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 265.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.
- <sup>10</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What makes oral history different" in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 68.
- <sup>11</sup> Allan Megill, "Does Narrative Have a Cognitive Value of Its Own?" in Walter Blanke, Friedrich Jaeger and Thomas Sandküller, eds., *Dimensionen der Historik. Geschichtstheorie, Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Geschichtskultur heute*, (Köln: Böhlau, 1998), p. 52.
- <sup>12</sup> Chris Lorenz, "Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality: A Plea for 'Internal Realism'", *History and Theory*, 33, 3, 1994.
- <sup>13</sup> Daniel Barbu, "Destinul colectiv, servitutea involuntară, nefericirea totalitară: trei mituri ale comunismului românesc" (Collective destiny, forced servitude, totalitarian unhappiness: three myths of Romanian Communism) in Lucian Boia, ed., *Miturile comunismului românesc* (The Myths of Romanian Communism) (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998), p. 183.
- <sup>14</sup> Leon Mann, "Queue Culture: The Waiting Line as a Social System," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 75, 3 (Nov. 1969), p. 346.
- <sup>15</sup> Testimony of Dragoș Olea, *Martor. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review*, 7, 2002 (The eighties in Bucharest), p. 70.
- <sup>16</sup> Testimony of Gabriela Șulea, student, *Martor*, p. 134.
- <sup>17</sup> Testimony of Stancu Daniel, designer, *Martor*, p. 103.
- <sup>18</sup> Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 51.
- <sup>19</sup> Mann, "Queue Culture," p. 350.
- <sup>20</sup> "To be kept waiting - especially to be kept waiting an unusually long while - is to be the subject of an assertion that one's own time (and therefore, one's social worth) is less valuable than the time and worth of the one who imposes the wait." Barry Schwartz, "Waiting, Exchange, and Power: The Distribution of Time in Social Systems," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 79, 4 (Jan. 1974), p. 841.
- <sup>21</sup> Testimony of Victor Bărbulescu, electrician, *Martor*, p. 101.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Richard Rorty, one of the most acclaimed and controversial contemporary philosophers challenges this universalistic view on human solidarity: "My position entails that feelings of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike us as salient, and that such salience is a function of a historically contingent final vocabulary." Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony and solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), p. 192.

- 24 Hans W. Bierhoff and Beate Küpper, "Social Psychology of Solidarity" in Kurt Bayertz, ed., *Solidarity* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), p. 133.
- 25 Testimony of Dragoş Olea, *Martor*, p. 70.
- 26 This feature of Socialist regimes is explained in Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller and György Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), an attempt to analyze East European societies with the tools provided by Marxist theory. The economies of Socialist countries do not function towards the maximisation of profit, which would imply an effective distribution system. On the contrary, they function towards enforcing the "dictatorship over needs," i.e. that state seeks to control most of the means of production and thus actually need a defective distribution system.
- 27 Elżbieta Firlit, Jerzy Chłopecki, "When Theft is Not Theft" in *The Unplanned Society. Poland During and After Communism* ed. Janine R. Wedel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 96.
- 28 Kurt Bayertz, "Four Uses of «Solidarity»" in Kurt Bayertz, ed., *Solidarity*, p. 3.
- 29 A.P., B.P, interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on April 18, 2004.
- 30 D.V., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on April 19, 2004.
- 31 Testimony of Şerban Anghelescu, ethnologist, *Martor*, p. 131.
- 32 Testimony of Dragoş Olea, *Martor*, p. 133.
- 33 R.C., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on February 25, 2002.
- 34 D.V., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on April 19, 2004.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Burrell, Kathy. "The Political and Social Life of Food in Socialist Poland." *The Anthropology of Eastern Europe Review*, 21, 1, Spring 2003, p. 4.
- 37 Testimony of Ana-Maria Bucium, *Martor*, p. 134.
- 38 David A. Kideckel, *The Solitude of Collectivism. Romanian Villagers to the Revolution and Beyond* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.xiii.
- 39 Daniel Barbu, "Destinul colectiv..." (Collective destiny...), p. 175.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 192.
- 43 David Cromley and Susan E. Reid, "Socialist Spaces. Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc" in David Cromley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces. Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2002), p. 15.

- 44 Tita Chiper, "Provincia pe verticală" (The counties on the vertical), *Dilema*, 312, 1999.
- 45 Testimony of Gabriela Șulea, student, *Martor*, p. 134.
- 46 D.V., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on April 19, 2004.
- 47 Testimony of R.R., Romanian language teacher, *Martor*, p. 137.
- 48 Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*, p. 27.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p.28.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p.31.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 52 My understanding of propaganda seeks again to elude ethical judgments. I agree that "any act of promotion can be propaganda only if and when it becomes part of a deliberate campaign to induce action through influencing attitudes." (Terence Qualter, *Opinion Control in the Democracies*, 1985). However, "whether or not that which is being presented is true or false, it is the way in which it is used (and not its "truthfulness") that determines whether or not is in fact propaganda" (Reeves Nicholas, *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality?* London : Cassell, 1999, p. 238).
- 53 E.B., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on September 10, 2002.
- 54 Nicolae Ceaușescu, interview in *Newsweek*, August 21, 1989, HU OSA 300 - 60 - 1, 3200 Standard of living, General 1980-1989, Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary.
- 55 They were built around a huge, circus-like, cupola.
- 56 C.R., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on February 25, 2002.
- 57 C.R., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on February 25, 2002.
- 58 HU OSA 300 - 60 - 1, 3200 Standard of living, Hoarding 1981, Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary.
- 59 In the 1980s, the verbs *to buy* and *to sell* were replaced by *to take* (a lua) and *to give* (a da). The shops were giving and the customers were taking. The proper question was never "Did you buy meat?" but "Did you take meat?" or, even better, "Did you catch meat?" when there was long queuing involved.
- 60 M.M., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on April 18, 2004.
- 61 S.P., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on May 4, 2004.
- 62 E.M., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on December 3, 2002.



- <sup>63</sup> Z.T., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on January 7, 2004.
- <sup>64</sup> A.P., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on April 18, 2004.
- <sup>65</sup> M.M., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on April 18, 2004.
- <sup>66</sup> János Kornai, *Economics of Shortage* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1980).
- <sup>67</sup> R.C. Cobb, *The Police and the People. French Popular Protest. 1789 - 1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 278.
- <sup>68</sup> The issue of rumours related to shortages is fascinating and indeed under researched. One very telling example comes from an anonymous letter sent to Radio Free Europe: "I find the children yellow and sleepy, because the kindergarden food is scarce and bed. However, the children ask for it, so the party took care and gives each child a small pill to take away the appetite." Letter from "a group of workers and peasants from Romania", August 29<sup>th</sup> 1982, Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement, HU OSA 300 - 60 - 3, Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary.
- <sup>69</sup> A.P., interview by Simina Radu-Bucurenci, tape recorder, Bucharest, Romania on April 18, 2004.
- <sup>70</sup> Slavenka Drakulić, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (London: Vintage, 1992), pp. 14-15.