FAMILIES AS FREE SPACES? INTERSECTIONS WITH THE SYSTEM OF ETHNIC HUNGARIANS IN ROMANIA AFTER 1956[*]

Dalia Bathory[**]

Abstract: *The 1956 revolution in Hungary had effects and repercussions throughout the Soviet Block and inspired many to take action against the regimes installed after 1945. Romania witnessed different organized political movements or individual actions that expressed dissent and / or discontent with regard to the political situation in the country. Many groups of "dissenters" formed across the country and the repressive measures against them were harsh in 1956 and several years after that. This article studies the contentious political actions taken by the ethnic Hungarian groups in Transylvania and the intersection of the political system with everyday life. The research relies on a theoretical background from history and political science, and it structured on three levels: ideological, macropolitical and micropolitical. The primary sources are interviews with former political prisoners or their family members of Hungarian ethnicity as well as documents from the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives*.

Keywords: Family, Hungarian Minority, ethnic groups, Transylvania.

INTRODUCTION

This article is part of a larger research project that deals with the families of the former political prisoners in the first two decades of Communism in Romania. This piece of research follows the former political prisoners ethnic Hungarians and their families in Transylvania, in the cities of Sfantu Gheorghe, Oradea and Cluj-Napoca. I use three categories of sources in this article: CNSAS documents, oral history interviews, as well as general literature on communism and political science. I use qualitative analysis to interpret the CNSAS documents, as well as the interviews. The limits of the research are represented by the short timeframe in which the research had to be conducted, which implied a very drastic selection of the sources. Working with Securitate files as well as with oral history interviews implies other limits with regard to credibility and subjectivity respectively.

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[**] PhD, The Institute for the Investigation of the Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile; e-mail: dalia.bathory@gmail.com

Interviewees manifested also issues of emotional distress and sometimes inaccurate memories, as the act of remembrance was obstructed by the advanced age and the emotions brought about by the stories.

I will employ two concepts: "free spaces", in order to depict areas of informal communication where state power does not reach to regulate the behavior, and "contentious politics", in order to describe the dissenting attitude and manifestations that occurred among the Hungarian ethnics after 1956. I will also resort to Kenneth Jowitt's theoretical framework of the Leninist regimes in order fully understand the context of the interaction between the Hungarian minority in Romania and the Romanian communist regime. I will thus conduct an analysis on three levels – ideological, macropolitical and micropolitical in order to set a clear context of the intersections between the regime and the Hungarian minority.

My hypothesis is that contentious politics was mostly possible because families and other informal networks offered the educational background and the safe haven to support a critical understanding of the social and political present, as well as space for discussions, in the context of a still traditional, untransformed "lifeworld". The communist authoritarian regime was not interested only in restricting the access of the dissenter in the communist public sector but also in dismantling the supportive family, thus taking down that cell of the society that does not function according to the requirements.

FREE SPACE AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

Free space is defined in Polletta[1] 1999 as "small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization". In this author's view opposition or "counterhegemonic ideas" are born and supported inside of communities and from long-standing community institutions. Before Polletta, Couto[2] asserted that what maintained resistance in communities and prepared them for action were narratives preserved especially within families[3], but there might be free spaces expanding outside families when repression weakened; in the same time "when the conditions of repression are paramount and the possibility of overt resistance is small, narratives are preserved in the most private of free spaces, the family or the memory of a few individuals"[4]. Many of the Hungarian families were keepers of

[1] Francesca Polletta, *Free Spaces in Collective Action*, in "Theory and Society", no. 28, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Netherlands, 1999, p. 1.

[2] Richard A. Couto, *Narrative, Free Space and Political Leadership in Social Movements*, in "The Journal of Politics", vol. 55, no. 1, The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 58.

[3] James C. Scott quoted in Richard A. Couto, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[4] Richard A. Couto, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

contentious narratives[5], and the 1956 autumn events in Hungary triggered discussions that outreached the families and extended the free spaces to high-school dormitories, universities, villages otherwise not connected to the Radio Free Europe coverage or to daily political news[6]. Unfortunately, overall, the small and many contentious political actions that spread across Romania in 1956 and the years afterwards had little effect and stopped because they lacked a broader support in society[7]. Their impact however was on the repressive system, which reorganized and tightened its control over the population and penitentiaries[8]. Even so, there were many contentious groups that formed across ethnicity, across the occupational interests, and across the regions of the country, as well as contentious individuals. My focus was on the Hungarian groups. The groups that I managed to study so far during this research project are White Stags, Young Szeklers' Society, Youth for Freedom, Kossuth Circle, EMISZ. Only two groups will be mentioned in this article, due to limited space: Association of Young Szeklers and Youth for Freedom. These groups were located in Transylvania, some of them in the north-eastern part, close to the border with Hungary, others in the centre of the region. I studied the criminal files of some of their members, as well as informant network and surveillance files. I interviewed some of the members of these groups with the purpose of understanding how they decided to take action against the regime and what role did their family play in their story of survival and detention.

CONTEXT

The situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania during the first two decades of the communist regime in Romania has been a subject of interest for many historians and is discussed from many historical and theoretical angles – systemic, institutional, international relations, everyday life, repression etc. Among the authors are Stefano Bottoni, Bardi Nandor, Muradin Jozsef, Tofavly Zoltan, Novak Csaba Zoltan, Janosi Csongor, Vincze Gabor, Kantor Zoltan, Bodo Julianna, Olah Sandor etc. There is also a large production of memoir especially

[5] During the interviews I carried out in November 2016 in Transylvania some of the interviewees stressed that their families preserved counter-narratives and had a long experience of being under surveillance by the Securitate. The most important cases: the Visky family in Bihor and the Puskas family in Cluj.

[6] In the interviews from November 2016 the interviewees named the following sources for the news regarding the revolution in 1956: Radio Free Europe, Radio Kossuth, Radio Budapest, family discussions, discussions in the high-school dormitories, or by the spread of word, the latter especially in the remote villages.

[7] Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious politics*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2015 p. 36.

[8] Dragos Ursu in his report in snitching in the Communist Prisons at the conference *Motivațiile interioare ale colaborării cu Securitatea* [Inner Motivations for Collaborating with Securitate], ISPMN conference, 24-25 November 2016, Cluj-Napoca.

regarding the repression after the 1956 revolution, among which I would mention Szilagy Arpad, Puskas Attila, Benko Levente etc., taking the form of narrations or interviews. For the purpose of this article, the context I am more interested in is that of "lifeworld"[9]– meaning how the mechanisms of solidarity and the system of values responded to the mechanisms of power imposed by the political system. From this microhistorical and political perspective I try to see how local dynamics and local construction of citizenship functioned through the practices of membership, belonging, rights, and recognition[10] in the free spaces formed in Hungarian communities in the view of political culture (in the words of the Securitate: how the "local reaction"[11] intersected with the regime). Jowitt gives the definition of political culture as a set of informal, behaviorally adaptive and attitudinal positions that answer to and interact with a set of formal definitions – ideological, political and institutional – that characterize a given level of the society[12]. All three stakeholders – the elites, the regime and the community have a political culture that defines the interactions and the relationship between them.

The first years of the instauration of the regime brought about significant changes in these interactions, considering that all the Hungarian institutions in Romania – the political, as well as the artistic and the press – went through transformations[13]. The Romanian political police was especially concerned about the Hungarian minority – and this concern was perceived by the Hungarians[14] as such. It is relevant to understand the attitude of the authorities in 1956 and after, as it explains not only the context but also the reaction of the Hungarian communities and the measures taken by the regime after 1956.

THE "COHABITING MINORITIES" AND THE SOCIALIST NATION – THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

My first premise is that all decisions taken by the Romanian regime were ideologically informed and justified, as it is was demonstrated by Zbigniew

[9] "Lifeworld" is a Habermasian concept that I choose to use in this paper as it is very concise. Habermas considers that there are three mechanisms that holds society together: power, money and solidarity; the first two operate in systems – economics and politics, whereas the third operates within the "lifeworld" – the taken for granted cultural and social environment in which we usually interact and it is a product of "communicative action" (Alan G. Gross, "Habermas, Systematically Distorted Communication, and the Public Sphere, in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* Routledge, 2006, p. 309).

[10] Andres Di Masso, *Micropolitics of Public Space: On the Contested Limits of Citizenship as a Locational Practice*, in "Journal of Social and Political Psychology", vol. 3, no. 2, 2015, PsychOpen, p. 63, http://jspp.psychopen.eu/article/view/322/html.

[11] ACNSAS, Informative Fund, File no. 160836, page 57.

[12] Kenneth Jowitt, *Noua dezordine mondială* [New World Disorder: the Leninist Extinction], Bucuresti, Curtea Veche, 2012, p. 77.

[13] See Muradin Janos Kristof, *Transformări instituționale în viața culturală maghiară din Transilvania în perioada 1944-1948* [Institutional Transformations in the Hungarian Cultural Life in Transylvania between 1944-1948], Cluj-Napoca, Scientia, 2012.

[14] A topic of discussion that came up during the interviews in November 2016.

Brzezinsky[15] – that the policy of a given Communist regime involves an intricate balance between its universal ideological values and particular power imperatives – and therefore there is an interdependent nature of ideology and power. The ideological framework within which the Romanian communist approached the minority issues was Leninist-Stalinist. Stalin denied the idea of nationalism, arguing that science had proved it wrong: "Science, through the medium of dialectical materialism, proved long ago that there is no such thing as «national spirit» and that there cannot be. Has anyone refuted this view of dialectical materialism? History tells us that no one has refuted it. Hence, we must agree with this view of science, and together with science, reiterate that there is no such thing as a «national spirit», nor can there be"[16]. Still, he defended the idea of the "nation", which he defined as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of the common possession of four principal characteristics, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifested in common specific features of national culture"[17]. These are bourgeois nations that would give rise to the "socialist nation", but that could not happen in the phase of the "victory of socialism in one country". To enforce that from above would lead to failure and revolt. The socialist nation, considered Stalin, had to be obtained gradually, in phases. The first was the one during which the national oppression would be abolished and the formerly oppressed nations would grow and flourish, the equality among nations would be consolidated, the mutual distrust eliminated and the international ties among nations would be strengthened[18]. The new nations would be "in content socialist cultures". All this would not be possible without making culture and education extensively accessible and in all native languages, "Because only in their native, national languages can the vast masses of the people be successful in cultural, political and economic development"[19].

Up to some point the Romanian communist regime respected this vision and until 1959 the Hungarian minority, along with other 14 minorities in Romania, enjoyed their rights to education and culture in their native languages[20]. But even

[15] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc. Unity and Conflict*, Harvard University Press, 1967, p. X.

[16] Stalin, *The Social Democratic View on the National Question*, in *Works,* vol. 1, nov. 1901 – apr. 1907, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1904/09/01.htm.

[17] *Idem*, *The National Question and Leninism* in *Works,* vol. 11, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, available on Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1929/03/18.htm

[18] *Ibidem.*

[19] *Ibidem.*

[20] According to the 4th annex of the 8th protocol from the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party from 20-23 April 1959, the right to education in the mother language is present in the Romanian constitution since 1948. In 1949 there were 2000 schools with 15 different teaching languages. (Andreea Andreescu, Lucian Nastasa, Andreea Varda, *Minorități etnoculturale, mărturii documentare. Maghiarii din România (1956-1968*, Centrul de Resurse pentru diversitate etnoculturala, Cluj, 2003, p. 493).

before 1956 the Romanian Workers Party progressively changed its position and policies on the question of minority issues and by 1959 Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej was forcing an early socialist nation[21] despite that his methods to do this were contrary to the Stalinist view. We already saw above that Stalin was against assimilation, whereas Dej's policies were more and more assimilationist. 1959 was the year when the Romanian University in Cluj Babes was "unified" with the Hungarian University Bolyai, to name the one event with echoes until this day, as well as the year in which all Hungarian sections from other universities in Transylvania were cut down. It was in that year that schools with programs in languages of minorities less present in Romania (Tatars, Slovaks, Turks, Bulgarians, Poles, Greeks, and Czechs) had to switch to Romanian and keep mother tongues only as objects of study and not as teaching languages. For larger minorities schools could keep the mother tongues as teaching language during the mandatory eleven years of education, but with many prescriptions and limitations meant to ensure that the graduates would be able to use the Romanian scientific and engineering vocabulary accordingly[22].

The whole line of argumentation elaborated to support these very drastic measures indicated a switch of the just line in the Party: the schools for minorities did not ensure the proper knowledge of the Romanian language for their graduates; there were created more schools than the actual need; the current organization of the educational system isolated children belonging to the national minorities from Romanian children, nurtured national separatism and damaged the internationalist education of the young; and the faulty functioning of the General Directorate for Education and Culture of the Cohabiting Nationalities that was set up in 1956 that displayed "tendencies of national isolation and nationalist tendencies. This Directorate was directly responsible for issuing handbooks with serious errors and inimical assertions"[23]. It was in 1959 that Gheorghiu Dej stopped using the standard denomination for ethnicities living in Romania – "cohabiting nationalities" – and started using the denomination of "national minorities". Historian Calin Morar Vulcu interpreted this as the position of the regime according to which the minorities were unable to build by themselves the socialist nation and therefore they needed to perfectly blend with the only actor that could reach that statute – the Romanian nation[24]. But I would add that this maneuver was one of the aftermaths of the Hungarian revolution in 1956. 1956 in Romania had deep consequences and reverberations, both in the regime apparatus and in the masses. There were not only the students' protests and other meeting attempts in the street[25], there was also a

[21] Emanuel Copilas supports a similar position in *Natiunea Socialistă*….

[22] A. Andreescu, L. Nastasa, A. Varga, *op.cit.,* , pp. 495-496.

[23] *Ibidem,* pp. 493-495.

[24] Călin Morar – Vulcu, *Republica îşi făureşte oamenii. Construcţia identităţilor politice în discursul oficial in Romania, 1948-1965*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2007, p. 376.

[25] See Doina Jela, Iosifimir Tismaneanu, *Ungaria 1956. Revolta minţilor şi sfârşitul mitului comunist* [Hungary 1956. The Revolt of the Mind and the End of the Communist Myth], Bucuresti, Curtea Veche, 2006.

profound reorganization of the Romanian political police and also a reorganization of the cadres.

A second premise that is very important to mention is that the Hungarian "problem" was described more or less in the same discursive key throughout all the changes of the political regime in Romania. I will develop this idea in another section of the article, but it is important to say that Romania was a new state and started to engage in systematic state and nation building only after the First World War, and grounded this process on an exclusive understanding of the idea of the Romanian nation, based on ethnicity rather than on citizenship and with a territorial dispute involved. After 1945, once the Romanian – ethnic minorities relationship (implicitly Romanian-Hungarian ones) were to be regulated according to Leninist-Stalinist principles, all ethnic minorities enjoyed rights of education and representation in their own language. The nationalist points of view were considered out of date and incompatible with the communist ideology. Minorities demanding cultural rights was something acceptable and legitimate in the first stages of building communism, but these rights could not be pursued when they would come against the interests of the communist regime itself and would jeopardize the future of the socialist nation. Starting 1956 more and more the pursuit of cultural rights became "retrograde" because any nationalist idea was bourgeois, conservative, elite driven and against the interests of the working class, the Party and the socialist nation[26]. Nationalism was evoking the horrors of the Second World War and especially for Hungarian and German ethnics this was an even more sensitive situation, for obvious reasons[27]. Nationalism was also a threat to the strong soviet influence in Romania. Therefore the political police was particularly reactive to the nationalist ideology.

There are four aspects in building the socialist nation[28]: the political aspect – achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat in Leninist terms – the unlimited dictatorship of the Communist Party; the economic aspect: building socialism; the social aspect: the alliance between the proletariat and the working peasantry; and the ideological aspect: elimination of all alternatives to the Leninist-Marxist discourse. Nationalist discourses were concurrent and had to be eliminated.

The Hungarian communist leaders in Romania conceded to the demands of the Romanian leaders and all Hungarian representative institutions were constricted, transformed or even eliminated, even before 1956[29]. I argue that for the

[26] Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej quoted in Emanuel Copilas, *Natiunea socialistă. Politica identității in epoca de aur* [The Socialist Nation. Politics of Identity in the Golden Era], Iasi, Polirom, 2015, p. 95.

[27] *Ibidem*, p. 141: the memory of the horthyst regime, due to which Hungarians would have allegedly supported the annexation of Transylvania to Hungary. But such a suggestion never existed, although the Romanian Communists encouraged this idea because it contributed to the recantation of the Romanian population from the Hungarian requests that were common in most of their points.

[28] *Ibidem,* p. 95.

[29] Stefano Bottoni, *Transilvania rosie, Comunismul român și problema națională 1944-1965* [Red Transylvania. The Romanian Communism and the National Problem 1944-1965], passim.

communist leadership in Romania the impact of 1956 on the population, both on the short and on the longer run showed that the regime was far from secure and accepted, and the project of the socialist nation had difficulties in taking roots into the population. Dej was the first to use this concept as a legitimation strategy to deepen the influence of the party and of the political police.

I would explain these difficulties by resorting to Kenneth Jowitt's systemic and cultural analysis of the Romanian regime in the 50s[30]. I consider his theoretical framework useful for explaining what happened to the Hungarian communities in Romania in 1956 and after, and his analysis of the Romanian elite as pertinent. Jowitt explains what "just line" means in the Leninist ideology: it is not a party program, but it functions like an analytical and empirical declaration of the stages of national and international development, plus political instructions and a political and ideological declaration, which is authoritarian and exclusivist and which must be adopted[31]. This explains how Dej changed the party line from supporting minority rights to restricting them and did this by using pro cultural rights for minority arguments. For Jowitt the Romanian Workers' Party was not only involved in nation building but also in system transformation and system building. He enumerates the three components of the Stalinist way of system building: 1. the dictatorship of the proletariat, 2. the nature of the system building – set for a rapid development of the society and a mobilization of resources by stressing the economic sector and using the strategy of **"priority sectors"** – the relations between the regime and the society are built together with the priorities of the ruling elite and **the sectors that do not constitute a priority for the regime are controlled, not transformed;** 3. the regime that builds this Stalinist system is led by elites that are production-oriented and they define the success of building socialism according to economic, political and social progress, whereas the cultural transformation occurs only as a derivation of the others. This strategy of prioritizing production was favored out of the belief that this would transform the cultural sector and the remains of the origins of bourgeoisie would be erased. But Jowitt also shows that there is a paradox in system building: the attempts to fundamentally transform some sectors strengthen some of the features of the non-leninist political culture – and consolidates many traditional positions[32]. I would remark that this is the reason why the Hungarian communities were able to keep most of their traditional practices.

Jowitt also states that Leninist parties put a monopoly on the public sector and assumed responsibility directly for the social progress as well as concentrated all the power of decision within the Party. Therefore the public sector was one and the same with the official sector[33]. This is one aspect of the regime. The other

[30] Jowitt, *op. cit.*
[31] *Ibidem,* p. 26.
[32] *Ibidem*, pp. 78-85.
[33] *Ibidem*, p. 85.

aspect is the use of coercion, which encouraged a deep separation of the public and private sector, because the public sector was hostile. As long as there is the threat of severe punishment there is no contradiction between the flexibility shown in public and the dissociative behavior manifested in the private life[34]. This also conduced to a process of alienation of large segments of population, due to mistrust in the official, public and political sectors[35]. Shafir points out that the mistrust was valid the other way around too; Dej was uncertain of the local bonds and so he preferred to emulate the Soviet model[36].

Moreover, Jowitt distinguishes between three objectives and stages of development of the elite: 1. The transformation of the old society; 2. The consolidation of the revolutionary regime; 3. The inclusion – the phase in which the party wants to extend into the unofficial sectors, thus giving up isolation; transformation is the phase of struggles, social unrest and conflicts, while consolidation implies setting up the nucleus of a new system and of a new political community in a framework that must prevent the existing social-cultural forces, newly "reconstructed", to exert any uncontrolled and unwanted influence on the development of the new institutions, values and practices agreed by the Party. A successful consolidation means a socialist intelligentsia that is coherent, a solid industrial basis and a military power. Through consolidation the destruction of the traditional elite and of the traditional institution is complete[37]. The next phase is that of inclusion, in which the elites try to prevent any attempt at plurality by revising the structure of the regime and relating with society by way of changing isolation with integration in the mass of society[38]. While the official division in developmental phases of Communism practiced by Romanian communist theoreticians marked three phases of evolution, out of which the phase of consolidation of the socialist society was placed between 1965 and 1969[39], I argue that Dej attempted to reach the phase of consolidation after 1955 and that of inclusion after 1959. Jowitt rightly points out that Dej was "manipulating the nationalist symbols" in order to cover up the leadership's avoidance of commitments to society[40], but he also wanted to take as far as possible the process of system-building.

It was with this purpose that the framework of the educational system for the 15 minorities in Romania radically changed, and the classes in the languages of the minorities were cut down drastically. The ethnic Hungarian leaders approved all changes. But the rest of the Hungarian population in Romania was in a state of general unrest.

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[34] *Ibidem*, p. 93.
[35] *Ibidem*.
[36] Shafir, p. 43.
[37] Jowitt, *op.cit*, pp. 114-116.
[38] *Ibidem*, p. 117.
[39] Shafir, p. 39.
[40] *Ibidem* p. 51.

THE INTERSECTION OF HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN ROMANIA WITH THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM – THE MACROPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to better explain the context of 1956 and its aftermath I would like to give some further macro-political considerations with regard to the relationship between the ethnic Hungarian group and the Romanian political system.

The intersection of Hungarian minority with the Romanian political system throughout the century is dominated by the concurrence of nation-building processes that transformed the both ethnicities after the First World War[41]. With respect to this intersection, in terms of political culture one may observe changes in behavior and attitude in the Hungarian community in Romania, while in the Romanian majority these have been rather linear, with significant differences only after 1996 when the representatives of the minority were part of the government.

During its own nationalizing process the Hungarian minority transformed and adjusted their nationalist discourse to the transformations of the Romanian political system, but the Romanian nationalist discourse in itself remained by and large the same with regard to the Hungarian ethnics. The key floating signifiers were "territorial revisionism", "chauvinism", "irredentism", disloyalty, mistrust. In the interwar period and after 1989 the Hungarian minority tried to reach its nationalizing purposes within and together with the Romanian political system, while during most of the communist period the ethnic Hungarians tried to preserve their identity despite the system. Up to the Hungarian revolution in 1956 the Romanian communist regime appeared to be friendly to the "cohabiting nationalities", and the Hungarian minority benefited of most of its cultural and political rights, and therefore there was an apparent common agenda of Romanian and Hungarian elites in building Communism. But the discursive turn that followed after 1956, clearly visible from 1959 onwards, re-engaged the two nations in a competitive relationship. What worsened the relationship between the two ethnicities after 1959 was the context in which Dej initiated the process of building the "socialist nation", the ultimate stage of the socialist regime that eluded any bourgeois, retrograde form of nationalism, be it Romanian, Hungarian or any other kind.

Of course this macro-political overview has strong limitations. One would be that it considers the Hungarian group as acting uniformly, while actually it was heterogeneous and divided with regard to its attitude towards the communist regime, at the elite level as well as among the population. There were outright anticommunist manifestations from the very beginning to the very end at both levels, as well as there have been procommunist positions throughout the existence

[41] See here the concept of nationalizing minorities defined by Kántor Zóltán, *Nationalizing Minorities and Homeland Politics: the Case of Hungarians in Romania* in Nalazs Trencsenyi, Dragos Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Constantin Iordachi and Kántor Zóltán, *Nation Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies,* Regio Books Budapest, Polirom Iasi, 2001, p. 250.

of the regime at both levels. The important thing to understand is that what the Romanian political system and the Romanian political police considered "retrograde nationalism" was in fact anti-system behavior. By 1956 the origin of this anti-system behavior was the incapacity of the Romanian socialist system to transform the political culture and the cultural practices of the Hungarian communities. The Hungarian revolution was the context that provided visibility to this situation.

The Romanian communist system, which was still in building process, reacted on the one hand with measures that could reach the private sector and improve the everyday life – a fervent organization within the party system, issuing many protocols to raise paychecks, and directives for ensuring satisfactory food supplies[42]. On the other hand, it responded with much aggression, and on the long run stopped any attempt to opposition, no matter how symbolic that was.

FAMILY, FREE SPACES AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS – MICRO-POLITICAL INTERSECTIONS

The Hungarian private sector kept its own networks of communication and connections, and developed its *free spaces*, mainly with the support of families and friends. Traditionalist ideas were reinforced rather than eliminated and this was possible especially because of the paradox that the nuclear family was supported by the Stalinist regime in USSR and throughout the bloc, therefore in Romania as well.

While the Leninist view on family was rather relaxed and not fully regulated[43], the Stalinist one stressed on the traditional role of the family as a nucleus of the society: "The family is an economic and moral union, a nursery for primary education and preparation for social life"[44]. I In the beginning of the communist regime in Soviet Russia the family ties were loose and the primary functions of a family were to support children, while its adult members enjoyed full freedom. After 1936 this view was abandoned and the society returned to the traditional family. The Stalinist soviet family was "the basic cell of the social organism" and marital relations were taken seriously, thus returning this institution to its previous conservative and stabilizing role. Formalities for divorce became complicated and the prohibition of abortion was introduced in 1936[45]. Moreover, the Soviet penal code considered the whole family responsible in cases of treason of one member and permitted changes of property in cases of embezzlement and

[42] Andreea Andreescu, Lucian Nastaső, Andrea Varga, documents 16 and 17 representing telephone notes with regard to the situation in the territory and the implementation of measures connected to the 1956 events in Romania, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-199.

[43] George C. Guins, *Soviet Law and Soviet Society*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1954.

[44] *Ibidem*, p. 287.

[45] *Ibidem*, pp. 297-298; also not very difficult to track down some ideas in the demographic policy in Romania after 1966.

breach of trust – the family ties were considered so strong that the members would refrain from doing harm to the others. Guins explained that these regulations occurred mainly because the family was the one single organization in society based on freedom of consent and "independent initiatives of private persons"[46].

In Romania the institution of family never went through any Leninist deregulation, and so the traditional model persisted and was even reinforced. By and large the common ground was that families were nuclei of society within which theoretically the socialist morale was to be reproduced[47], and so the reproductive functions of women were protected, even if women were encouraged to take part in the production and political fields[48]. It also true that eventually all members of a family would suffer the consequences if one member got involved in acts of rebellion against the regime.

Generally families have the following characteristics[49]: they generate reliability and uninterrupted social bonds and they are vehicles for support, gift and reciprocity, thus forming a "structural bond of trust" and therefore creating *"relational goods"*- upholding the structures in order to create the necessary environment for the development of individuals.[50]

The family environment is thus one medium capable of actively supporting anti-system activities and narratives and has the largest potential of becoming *free space*. Combining the stable structure of family with a rhizome character[51] of "spreading the word" of news of the revolution in Hungary, along the more unstable friendship/acquaintances/colleagues networks adding the overall deep atmosphere of resent against the Communist regime that had been spreading along these clusters, we have the clearer picture of the intensive "dissentient" activities in Romanian areas with a large Hungarian minority.

I deal with the groups that acted in the free spaces that formed around the year of 1956 and were situated in the small urban or rural areas of the Hungarian

[46] *Ibidem*, p. 301-302.

[47] Mara Mărginean, *Ferestre spre furnalul rosu. Urbanism şi cotidian în Hunedoara şi Călan (1945.1968)* [Windows to the Red Furnace. Urbanism and Everyday Life in Hunedoara and Calan], Iasi, Polirom, 2015 p. 211.

[48] Luciana M. Jinga, *Gen şi reprezentare în România comunistă, 1944-1989* [Gender and Representation in Communist Romania], Polirom, 2015, p. 206. 211, 215.

[49] Riccardo Prandini, *Family Relations as Social Capital* in "Journal of Comparative Family Studies", vol. XLV, no. 2, 2014, p. 222.

[50] *Ibidem*, p. 224.

[51] Rhizome in a deleuzian sense: "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative arts, sciences, and social struggles" in Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and schizophrenia*, vol. 2, University of Minnesota Press, London, 1987, p. 7; Deleuze and Guattari oppose the rhizome to the arborescent structure in that it has no actual form, and no "localizable linkages between points and positions" but the networks of dissent are rather arborescent in that they have a logic of connection; but in my opinion what is rhizome –like is the spread of the dissent: a rhizome is also "all manner of becoming", in this case the becoming of the opposition (p. 21-22).

Autonomic Region or in the small cities close to the border to Hungary (in Brasov, Cluj, Timisoara and Bucharest the reactions were immediate and across ethnicities, but also crushed in due time by the repressive forces[52]). Gyula David enumerates 53 groups of dissenters across the country, in smaller or larger cities, and quotes Stefano Bottoni for a number of arrests: 24249 by 1962, but one has to keep in mind that the arrests continued even after 1964[53].

The structure of the anti-system Hungarian groups indicates a relationship between the members of kinship and/or collegiality and friendship, formed either in the same institution of education or in the local factories, which meant that the connections were already stabilized through everyday life interactions by 1956[54]. Most of the members were very young, between 16 and 30 years old – meaning they were high-school students, teachers or workers in local offices or factories. The Hungarian "lifeworld" was preserved despite the rest of the transformations caused by the regime and the system of solidarity reacted when confronted with the actions of the secret police.

The news of the 1956 events in Hungary triggered a rapid and random mobilization within all available free spaces – regardless they were friendships in high-school dorms, or in factories, or within close family ties with a tradition of being under surveillance of the Securitate transmitted from parents to children[55]. What primarily contributed to this effect was proximity and the high density[56] of the social ties within the networks in the local communities. Another factor was the access to Hungarian press, although the printed one was controlled by the Romanian government, which thoroughly selected what could be available in Romania and what not[57]. Therefore, the news spread rather through radio (Kossuth Radio but also Radio Free Europe or Radio Budapest, which were listened to in secret and in private gatherings) or through the word of the mouth, especially in poor village areas where nobody owned a radio[58].

The rumors of the events dynamized the local political identities and the sense of belonging and rights; groups formed with the declared aim of giving support to any larger movement that would overthrow the Soviet occupation; the political discontent persisted even after 1964[59]; and the surveillance of the political

[52] Ioana Boca, "1956 în România" in Vladimir Tismăneanu, Doina Jela, *op.cit.*, pp. 171-184.

[53] Gyula David, *In Memoriam 1956*, Cluj-Napoca, Polis, 2012, p. 44.

[54] In all the groups studied so far and mentioned at the beginning of the text the "recruitment" of members is done within the proximal circles of the people that form the nucleus.

[55] ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File 14586: mapping of all Hungarian political parties or associations from Banat, all the members, and their current situation and address, state of health. File put together between 1961 and 1963.

[56] See S.D.Berkowitz, *An Introduction to Structural Analysis. The Network Approach to Social Research*, Butterworths, Toronto, 1982, p. 20.

[57] Document no. 177, Report on the meeting with the Hungarian Communist Party in 1949, in Andreea Andreescu, Lucian Nastasă, Andrea Varga, *op. cit.,* vol. 1, pp. 624-626.

[58] Interview with Török József in Sfantu Gheorghe, November 2016.

[59] *Ibidem*, Török József was arrested in 1965.

police continued until 1989. I will analyze two of these groups from the perspective of the points of intersection with the regime, which are: goals (the goal of a contentious group is a point of intersection with a dictatorial regime because it disputes its authority), political practices (they break the rules of the regime and give it opportunity to intervene) – recruitment, enactments, slogans, and means – and consequences of their actions (the measures the representatives of the regime consider appropriate to take) as well as their strategies of surviving the intersections. In order to have a broader view in what political practices and strategies of survival within the families consisted of, I will also resort to material from interviews with persons that did not belong to the two mentioned groups, but they or their parents were dissenters of the regime and suffered various types of persecutions.

Societatea Tinerilor Secui [Young Szekler's Society] and Tineri Doritori de Libertate [TDL – Youth for Freedom] are two groups formed mostly of high-school students, the first one in the Autonomous Hungarian Region, the other one in Oradea, closer to the border with Hungary. I choose these two groups because I managed to document their activities from the political police files as well as from interviews with some of the surviving members. I will also introduce the cases of the Puskas family and the Visky family, for a broader perspective on family ties and free spaces.

a. Aim. According to the secret police files, both groups had as purpose to fight for the annexation of Transylvania to Hungary. The members of the groups were "chauvinists" and "revisionists", with some of them belonging to families with a "tradition" of being under communist surveillance. But according to the interviews, the members of the groups were fighting against the soviet occupation, taking on the model of the revolution in Budapest and arguing for building communism by considering the specificities of the country[60], as inspired by the Titoist example. Their actions were thus rather anti-system, not anticommunist and especially not anti-Romanian. Jancso Csaba and Petri Iosif[61] stressed on the fact that their criminal files contain many untrue affirmations, especially those with regard to their subversive actions intended to gain the independence of Transylvania in order to annex it to Hungary. Iosif Petri stated that the files reflect only the authorities' side of the story, and everything written there is a lie[62].

b. Contentious political practices. It may seem too much to define underground anti-systemic activities as political practices but the moment the Hungarian youth in Transylvanian areas decided to act they became political actors with a set of planned actions within the semantics of the contentious politics.

[60] An idea that occurs in the interviews with Jancsó Csaba, Vancsó Csaba and Petri Iosif. Jancso Csaba was a member of the Association of Young Szeklers, and Vancsó Arpád and Petri Iosif were members of Youth for Freedom.

[61] Former political prisoners. The first activated in the group The Society of Young Széklers, and the second in the Youth for Freedom. Interviewed at Sfântu Gheorghe, Oradea respectively in November 2016.

[62] In Romanian: "Numai minciuni sunt acolo".

This newly discovered political identity could not have been triggered by these events unless nurtured and grown within the networks of families and friends. Families, in their capacity of media of trust and providers of "relational goods" offered the physical and / or mental space for discussions and planning the anti-systemic actions. For example, according to the political police files, the group The Young Szeklers' Society formed around the nucleus of the Gyertyanosi brothers, that listened to the news at the radio in their home together with some friends and afterwards used their parents' garage to further plan their actions[63].

One famous case is that of the Puskas family, which had been under surveillance for 40 years – starting with the father and continuing with the two sons. The two sons were also imprisoned. I interviewed Puskas Attila, one of the sons, who was arrested and imprisoned in the wave of 1956 arrests as one of the heads of a high-school movement in Miercurea Ciuc. All he did was to keep notebooks with "subversive" poems that his students entrusted him with[64].

A third case, also well-known, is that of the Visky family. The father, a famous and loved reformed priest, was arrested due to his activities and dissenting beliefs. The rest of the family was deported in Baragan (mother and seven children). The deportation in Baragan put the family through years of hunger and poverty, but it also integrated them in the local network of support[65]. After the liberation of the father and the reunification of the family in Bihor County, the Visky house was a place of gathering for intellectuals ("convicts", "father's friends"[66]) and a real "political science faculty" for the young Andras (the youngest son) who learned then to participate in debates and later became a "node" for dissenters. Visky Andras was especially targeted by the Securitate when he tried to link the two networks: his father's, with a rather clerical character, with his, rather laic. This attempt took place at the end of the 80s[67]. Linking the two "worlds" was perceived as a real threat for the regime and brought upon him and his wife the usual harassment from the secret political police.

It is important to mention that a difference should be made between families of intellectuals and those of workers and handicraftsmen in terms of transmitted political culture: in the first case the acts of contention are more theoretically informed and clearly conceptualized, while in the second case they are more practical and action-oriented. But a class based research of contentious politics during Communism should be the subject of a different study. For this paper I would like to add that my research so far shows that most of the members of the youngsters' contentious groups that formed around 1956 had as a background families of pastors in small communities or workers.

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[63] ACNSAS, Documentary Fund D14585, pp. 12-13.

[64] Interview with Puskas Attila, Sfantu Gheorghe, November 2016.

[65] Interview with Visky Andrţs, Cluj, November 2016. He gives examples of local support but also of support of the enlarged family and friends, who helped with food supplies, or with taking care of some of the children and lessening the burden of the mother etc.

[66] *Ibidem*.

[67] At this point Visky was referring to the group "Limes".

For example, The Young Szekler's Society comprised of 17 members, all high –school students at Gymnasium School no.1 in Sfantu Gheorghe or very young workers from the Textile Factory in the city. The leader was Uto Lajos, of 20 years old, worker at the factory. According to the secret police files, the members of the group placed a wreath at the 1848 monument of Heroes in the city, first in the 15th of March1957 and then in the same day in 1958. The second public act was followed by a letter of request to the authorities to release the high-school students that were caught while they had been trying to place the second wreath on the monument in 1958. The members of the group were accused of creating a subversive armed band as the authorities found after a search in their homes a pistol, some badges with the logo of this "band" and some traces of paint and paper with which they allegedly had intended to create banners with anti-regime messages. The letter itself was a political manifest and a symbolic act through which the members of the group claimed their legal right to honor the "memory of their ancestors". The manifest concluded with the phrase "Long live the Romanian-Hungarian friendship!" [68] as in anticipation of all the chauvinistic and revisionist accusations. The youngsters started their secret meetings in one of their parents' garage after listening to news about Hungary at Radio Free Europe and planned some actions of their own. They had debates about the events in Hungary and soon started to recruit more friends and friends of friends, with a specific recruitment method[69]. The Securitate investigators insisted that the members had paid member fees and had had fake code names, as well as a ritual for new members to swear an oath of blood[70].

During the interview, Jancso only admitted to placing the wreaths at the monument, dismissing the other accusations in the files as false. Still for the secret political police it was more convenient to consider the group much more dangerous. Therefore their criminal files led to important prison sentences (between 10 and 18 years of prison, with Jancso receiving a punishment of 10 years in prison)[71].

The Youth for Freedom was a larger organization, and according to the Securitate files it comprised of 137 persons, with other 54 aware of its existence. 78 persons were arrested, 59 were condemned and the rest were released and used as witnesses. The 58 condemned received punishments of sentences between 3 and 25 years of prison, a total of 547 years[72]. Among them there were two teachers, Kun Iosif and Agoston Andras. The organization extended from Oradea to all

[68] ACNSAS Documentary Fund, File no. 14585, p. 69.

[69] *Ibidem*, p. 14: The recruitment method consisted in establishing secretive meetings in the park in the city and establishing contacts by using passwords: "the recruiter would wear a pipe and the recruited would ask if the recruiter had a fire, to which the recruiter would answer that there was enough fire in Budapest".

[70] *Ibidem*.

[71] ACNSAS, Informative Fund, File I160836, p. 2.

[72] ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File no. D 3451, p. 3.

regions with a consistent Hungarian population (Crisana, Mures, and Maramures), according to the Securitate. The same source described the activity of this organization as "subversive", "terrorist", "nationalist". The Securitate claimed that the youngsters had purchased arms and had tried to provoke terrorist acts, had spread flyers and had written inscriptions with a "counterrevolutionary" message. They also allegedly had tried to contact organizations of the Hungarian émigré from the "imperialist countries" by "illegally crossing the border of some of the members of the organization". They also recruited new members of the organization, discussed "inimical" issues and decided upon the further "criminal" actions[73]. According to the same source they would meet in small groups, in literary circles or would use other opportunities to discuss, such as trips. They would use remote, deserted areas as meeting places[74].

According to the interview with Iosif Petri, who was introduced in the organization by Domokos Miklos and Tokacs Ferenc, the situation was a little bit different than the one presented in the files. He said that the members of the organization were Marxist-Leninists but they were against dictatorship, and their only actions were to write on the wall "Down with the communists". The organization was divided in groups of five, every ten members formed a brigade and every brigade had a chief that reported to the brigade who were the new members. But he declared that he never knew about this, he only discovered this after 1989. Not to mention he only discovered he was part of an ample organization during his trial in 1961. Another member, Vancso, says the situation in Romania was similar to that in Hungary, a communist dictatorship, so he and his colleagues from a professional school decided to be part of this revolt and wanted to act against the dictatorship. They were listening to Radio Budapest and they decided to form a small group and cross the border in Hungary, in the nearby villages, but they didn't succeed. After some time one of the members, Burcsa, found out about the Youth for Freedom and suggested to join that organization. Vancso said that young people trusted each other and talked about politics because they knew they were thinking alike, and so they took the freedom of forming new groups or joining older and larger ones. The Securitate only discovered the organization in 1961, accidentally, as one of the former members, Rocska Gyula, wanted to illegally cross the border and got caught. He wanted to escape to Yugoslavia and together with other three friends he stopped a taxi, got up in the car and outside the city they beat the driver up, threatened him not to alert the Militia and stole the car. But they were caught at the border because the taxi driver managed to contact the authorities. When they searched Rocska's house they found lists with the names of the members of the organization. Vancso also mentioned that the teachers were not involved in any way and that the organization was formed only of high-school students, but the secret political police needed to blame teachers in order to prove that the high-

[73] *Ibidem*.
[74] *Ibidem*.

school students had important leaders and had not done this on their own. Vancso was condemned to six years in prison.

c. **Consequences and survival strategies**. One can group these strategies in three categories: family related, work related and network related.

By and large the survival strategies used by the former political prisoners and their families were the following: family and friends support – relying on the personal networks; divorce – especially in the case of women married with political prisoners, otherwise they would have risked to lose their jobs and/or belongings; a very high mobility – the ability and will to move around the country with different jobs; marriage and/or leaving the area– in the case of sisters or other close relatives of former political prisoners; the most employed tactic was to give up other career ambitions and become workers in the hundreds of new factories and construction sites that had been opening across the country. Most of the political prisoners were released by decree in 1964 and they were promised that their files would not influence their carrier and the rest of their lives. In fact, many had difficulties in climbing the hierarchical ladder, obtain a driver's license, pursue a carrier in the army or continue their studies and take up a faculty, other than engineering. Because the regime needed workers and engineers, that was one carrier available to all, in a nondiscriminatory regime. The survival strategies could be employed in the private sector solely. Many times they depended on luck, favorable context, someone's kindness. Based on the case studies so far, the violence with which the political police reacted against these groups, overestimating their power and degree of threat, had nothing to do to the acts per se, but to the solidity of the networks and the fact that the "lifeworld" remained almost intact, untransformed but also close to impossible to control.

In the interviews I took the situation was no different, but for the fact that most of the members of these groups were very young at the moment of their arrest and were not married, thus less vulnerable. They all qualified as engineers and had their own families later. One of them suspects that his political past affected even his children[75].

CONCLUSION

Within the context of the 1956 Hungarian revolution and its aftermath in Romania I tried to analyze and understand its repercussions both on the Romanian communist regime and on the Hungarian minority. I tried to engage on a three level analysis: the ideological one, that informed all the decision making processes, which had to follow the "just line" of the Party; the macropolitical one, where the decisions were made and the "just line" was adjusted in accordance to ever –

[75] Török József, also member in the Youth for Freedom, suggested that his daughter might have not gotten a job in a local city hall because of his past (interview taken in November 2016 in Valea lui Mihai).

changing legitimation needs; and the micropolitical one, where the regime intersected with the individual, leaving him/her with few solutions to react. For the Hungarian minority in Transylvania the free spaces formed within their families and networks of friends gave them the freedom to act. Their engagement in contentious politics could last for a longer time (in the larger cities the protests were crushed in a couple of days, in smaller cities and villages in Transylvania some of the groups resisted for years without being discovered by the Securitate). And it were the same networks that gave the political prisoners support after they had served their sentence.

On the macropolitical level the system gained advantage, as it managed to transform most of its former political prisoners in its subjects, since most of them became workers and thus, part of the proletariat and eventually, of the socialist nation. On the micropolitical level, at least in the cases studied so far, the "lifeworld" in the Hungarian communities resisted and solidarity was not destroyed, considering that quite large groups of dissenters did not turn against each other and did not inform the political police of their activities, confirming the solidity of their networks.