

WAS THERE A 'GYPSY PROBLEM' IN SOCIALIST ROMANIA? FROM SUPPRESSING 'NATIONALISM' TO RECOGNITION OF A NATIONAL MINORITY¹

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ABSTRACT: After the fall of the socialist bloc some authors celebrated the advent of Romani nationalism, emphasising its Eastern European roots and its potential force to foster emancipation among an ethnic minority oppressed for so long. There is another perspective on the community organisation among the Roma from actors who had much less sympathy towards collective claims on behalf of the 'Gypsies'. Recently published documents from the archive of the secret police testify that *Gypsy nationalism* ("naționalism țigănesc") was systematically denounced in Romania. Roma leaders suspected of being its proponents were persecuted during the late period of the Ceaușescu era. This article is an attempt to interpret a contested category in the context of late socialist Romania.

Keywords: Securitate, minorities, nationalism, Nicolae Gheorghe, Romani movement

Introduction

On 12 March 1980 an informative note was filed in an office of Securitate, the infamous domestic secret service of Romania. It contained a list of accusations against Nicolae Gheorghe, a young scientific researcher of the Centre for Sociological Research, Bucharest.³ The note was authored by

¹ Sam Beck and Steven Sampson read and generously commented on draft versions of the article. They suggested important corrections. Conversations with Stefânia Toma, Marian-Viorel Anăstăsoaie, and Gergő Pulay pushed me to clarify the argument. Iuliu Rațiu, convener of the SRS panel and co-editor of this thematic issue, as well as Gabriel Troc, the editor of the journal, helped improving the text. I am grateful to all of them. The remaining shortcomings are my responsibility.

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³ Nicolae Gheorghe (1946–2013) was a Romanian Romani sociologist and activist. He is one of the founders and promoters of the international Romani movement fighting against discrimination and advocating for the political and cultural recognition of the Roma.

Cristian, a code-name apparently hiding a colleague of the targeted person. He claimed that the research done by Gheorghe during the last 6-7 years since he had been employed by the centre was not in line with the institutes' activity plan, as he used the daily allowance offered by the state for personal purposes: he was studying the 'problems of the Gypsies' (*problemele țiganilor*) being a Gypsy himself.⁴ Moreover, the conclusions of his research were 'effectively damaging' to the regime, as Gheorghe advocated for recognizing Gypsies as 'cohabiting nationality' in Romania. To sustain these claims, Cristian collected and reported a long list of alleged misdeeds committed by Gheorghe.

These actions included: questioning the validity of the official statistical data regarding the number of the Gypsies and preferring fieldwork at the county and local levels to official data or to an officially-sanctioned research project. Also, during his fieldwork Gheorghe focused on successful cases, such as Gypsies in leadership positions, rather than exposing what were classified as 'parasitic' life-styles. He developed a survey among the Gypsies and involved foreign researchers in this work. In Bucharest he had private relationships with employees of the American Embassy; he attended the American library, kept contacts with foreign doctoral students coming from capitalist states, and even joined them on their field research. With the opportunity of a Romanian-American joint colloquium held in Cluj-Napoca in August 1979, Gheorghe reportedly 'took advantage of his contact with Samuel Beck from the USA' making a provocative presentation entitled: *Is there a Gypsy Problem in Romania? (Există o problemă țigănească în România?)*.⁵ "While the title does not give the answer the content of the paper wanted to show that there is such a problem." – concluded the note.⁶

This denunciatory note conveys the depressing socio-political atmosphere of the period. It shows the staged outrage of the author because of the 'abuse' of a colleague, who apparently accessed resources and information illegitimately, and carried out a self-interested inquiry rather than following the institute's plan and pursuing the 'common good'. The reported practices are undermining the official image of the country as promoted by the state apparatus to which the research centre should be subordinated. In this way, the author of the note

⁴ In this text I translate the term 'țigan' as Gypsy, even if I am aware that there are important differences in their use in Romanian and respectively in English. Where necessary, I will use the original terms in order to reproduce their nuances as much as possible. Generally, I use the term Roma as ethnonym for the population referred.

⁵ We do not have the original text of their presentation. Subsequent publications contain elements of the arguments (Beck, 1984; 1985).

⁶ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 40–41 f-v, 42, (published in Marin, 2017a, vol. 2: 149–151).

is not only blaming Gheorghe for his actions, which we would consider as part of a normal scientific practice today, but also throwing a bad light on the leadership of the research centre for allowing and supporting such activities within a socialist institution.

It is not difficult to identify that the main motivation behind the note is personal envy and political opportunism of the colleague. Still there is one additional element which can be detected – the utter rejection of the research topic pursued by Gheorghe and the hostility towards the participants in his research: 'the Gypsies' and 'their problem'. The author of the note speculated that since the authorities asserted that no such problem existed or even could exist, Gheorghe's preoccupation with the Gypsy issue can only be based on the researcher's hostility towards the regime rather than any scientific evidence. Doing research on Roma in socialist Romania was seen as a self-interested practice, therefore useless in the best case, or worse, he was suspected of pursuing foreign interests and hostility towards the general social well-being of the citizenry. By using the term 'problem' Gheorghe challenged a taboo, since defining 'problems' in relation to any subject was a privilege of power-holders during that period. Lower ranked researchers were only allowed to discuss 'aspects' of some phenomena. Doing this in a joint presentation with a foreigner was also risky.⁷ From this perspective, with his work among the Roma and his ties with foreign researchers, Nicolae Gheorghe assembled a potentially dangerous alliance with enemies of the regime, both domestic and from abroad.

In this paper, I seek to describe and interpret how the authorities of the late socialist Romania tried to prevent such alliances from succeeding. I will look into how the secret police tried to control and suppress activities which were aimed at elucidating and improving the conditions of a large (more than one million) and rather marginalized population, the Romanian Roma. My argument is that the official denial of the existence of 'the Gypsy problem' (namely: the lack of cultural and political recognition, the everyday racism to which Roma were subjected, and the persistence of their socio-economic marginality) led authorities to associate the existent activities among and on behalf of the Roma with activism against the state or even 'Gypsy nationalism', which they then tried to suppress.

In order to render the issues affecting the Roma as non-existent, the Securitate discovered a substitute problem, that of the 'nationalists among the Gypsies', a group whom they then immediately started to isolate and control. By doing this, they ended up with a fuzzy category, including intellectuals and

⁷ Sam Beck recalls that he feared for Gheorghe at that time because he was exposing himself working with an American (personal communication).

artists with Romani roots, some of whom advocated the recognition of the Romani culture. Others in this 'nationalist' group were religious leaders and social activists only intended to preach or sing in the mother tongue of the Roma, or simply focused their activities on the hardships Roma faced day by day. Any pre-occupation with the Roma was therefore assumed to be 'nationalist' and therefore threatening.

The archival sources presented in this paper were collected, edited, and published in two hefty volumes by Manuela Marian (2017a). She also wrote an introduction to the collection highlighting the sources' main topics (including the documents focused on the 'nationalists') and the context in which they appeared, interpreting the actions described as elements of *everyday resistance* (Marin, 2017b: 39). My approach is somewhat different. My focus is on the role of the state and its secret service as actors in identifying and suppressing Roma-related activities. I interpret these attempts as a form of perverse recognition of an ethnic minority. To frame this study theoretically I revisited my previous work on Romani nationalism (Fosztó, 2003) and the religious activism among the Roma after the fall of the socialist regime (Fosztó, 2009). I start by reviewing the available literature and then turn to interpreting some of the newly published sources.

State policies toward Roma

There is a growing number of studies analysing state policies towards Roma in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union during the socialist period (Lemon, 2000; Stewart, 2001; Donert, 2017; O'Keeffe, 2013), and collections of archival documents (Nagy, 2015; Nagy, 2017) that complement the scarcity of ethnographic approaches available from that period (for important exceptions see: Kaminski, 1980; Stewart, 1997). Socialist Romania's policy toward its Romani citizens is a lesser explored terrain. There are few studies reflecting on the years 1945-1989, even if compared to other periods. We know more details about the enslavement or the deportations during World War II than we know about the more recent period. Based on important studies by Viorel Achim (2004: ch 6; 2018) and Petre Matei (2016a; 2016b), we came to understand that the Romanian authorities chose a rather different but certainly no less-repressive line in dealing with the Romani communities if compared to other socialist states. From the beginning, communist governments denied any requests for the recognition of the Roma nationality (Achim, 2018). Still, as Petre Matei suggested (2016b: 700), even in the absence of legal recognition and formal organisational structure, there are signs of emerging Romani activism during the 1970-1980s due to the raising educational level of an increasing segment of Romani population.

There is a recent initiative to write an oral history of the Roma in Romania.⁸ The first results of this project started to be published, such as a thematic volume (Stan, 2015), a detailed case study (Marin, 2016), and an edited collection of archival documents (Marin, 2017a) which offers a glimpse into the perspective of the authorities. Reading these documents, one obtains a sense of the priorities of the policies in different periods of the Romanian socialism. For example, during the 1950s, settling 'the nomads' and registering them was the priority of the authorities in order to enrol them as regular citizens. This was not always an easy task, since many nomadic Roma still had vivid memories of the deportations during the Antonescu regime and tried to evade state control in ingenious ways. Later, the concerns of the authorities shifted towards eradicating illiteracy and including the Roma into the workforce. These processes could involve in some cases breaking the resistance of school headmasters, who did not want Roma children in their school. By the mid-1970s the demographic growth of the Roma population became an issue for the socialist authorities, and only during the 1980s did issues of Roma being targeted by the 'propaganda of the sects' and the appearance of 'nationalism' among Roma leaders become perceived as problematic.

When members of the UMass Romanian Research Group started their fieldwork in Romania it was a relatively relaxed period regarding the presence of foreign scholars in the country but the regime turned increasingly repressive and xenophobic by the early-to-mid 1980s. The initial approach was inspired by their teacher John Cole, who proposed a distinct form of 'Anglophone anthropology of Europe' (Cole, 1977). He viewed the rise of nationalism in South-eastern Europe as part of a global process connected to the demise of empires, state building, and integration into larger structures of the world system. He noted that ethnic antagonism inherited from the imperial period hindered the construction of socialism in the region (Cole, 1981: 132). Others, like the Hungarian-American Michael Sozan⁹, having close ethnic allegiance, have seen the mere existence of these communities threatened by the 'ethnocide' committed by Romanian authorities in the name of socialism (Sozan, 1977). This contrast in views about ethnicity and socialism took the form of a polemical exchange of commentaries in the pages of *Current Anthropology* (The Romanian Research Group 1979; Sozan, 1979). In this debate, the members of the Romanian Research Group wrote a joint essay; however, looking at the work of the team there were considerable differences between how each member approached socialism and in particular the role of nationalism within it. This essay had not touched upon issues related to Roma.

⁸ For details about the project "The Untold Story. An Oral History of the Roma People in Romania" visit: <http://istrom.granturi.ubbcluj.ro/en>.

⁹ Michael Sozan immigrated to the USA from his native Hungary after the Revolution in 1956.

Under the conditions of the Romanian version of the existing socialism, which aimed to downplay the significance of cultural diversity within the state, it is hardly surprising that there were virtually no scholarly studies published about any aspect of the Romani life.¹⁰ A few studies were published abroad, most of these stemming from this anthropological fieldwork and in particular under the influence of the collaboration with Nicolae Gheorghe (Beck, 1984; Beck, 1985; Gheorghe, 1983; Gheorghe, 1985).¹¹ In his later work, published after the fall of the regime, Sam Beck reconstructed the experience of his collaboration in dialogical form (Beck, 1993). Their joint work started in 1979, and due to the focus on such sensitive topic, they came under the scrutiny of the police and secret police almost instantaneously (Beck, 1993: 169). Remembering to their joint work, Sam Beck emphasised that starting from their joint presentation in Cluj their intent was not only to liberate Roma from racial oppression, but to also liberate the majority Romanians from their racism. It was never aimed as an attack on the Romanian state.¹²

Five years later, in 1984, Beck was denied entrance to the country and no official explanation was given. A few years later, reflecting on this episode, he meditated:

I thought to myself, the role of the scholar is precarious in carrying out research in a country like Romania. I could have carried out neutral research. I had asked for trouble looking at Gypsies. I could have lied about my work and secured an extended possibility of carrying out research in Romania. However, such a priority prevents scholars from voicing their opposition to human rights violations or just plain disregard for people and their lives. (Beck 1992: 127)

The practice of anthropological fieldwork and publishing results about Romania was an increasingly difficult endeavour under the burden of these ethical and theoretical concerns. Bringing human rights and 'the people and their lives' into central focus signals a shift, or an enhancement, of the political-economic analysis of ethnicity, promoting a more humanistic approach. Gheorghe and Beck made the historical development of racism a key part of their analysis of the enslavement of the Roma (Beck, 1989; Gheorghe, 1983). This analysis later fed into their discussion of more recent process of racialisation (Beck, 1993). The emphasis on problems of racism and the

¹⁰ The domain of oral and musical folklore collection can be seen as a partial exception since there were folklorists who collected materials and published them as part of Romanian and/or Hungarian folk culture. These phenomena deserve a separate discussion, which cannot be part of this article.

¹¹ See Sam Beck's contribution to this thematic issue.

¹² Personal communication by Sam Beck.

violations of human rights became a central part of the vocabulary of the post-socialist period, and has continued well into the present under the conditions of the enlarged EU (for critical review see Pulay, 2018).

There is also a body of literature which emerged in the same period focusing on the concept of nationalism as a source for solidarity and a tool for gaining recognition (Hancock, 1988; Hancock, 1991). This approach stands in opposition to the colloquial understanding of nationalism as generally exclusionary and retrograde. Here nationalism is described in terms of its positive aspects and its emancipatory potential (Hancock, 1981; Hancock, 1988; Hancock, 1991). Ian Hancock's contributions provoked an exchange of letters in the pages of the journal *Nationalism Studies* in 1993. The main issue discussed was the status of the Romani nationalism, which Hancock claimed has its roots in Eastern Europe (Fosztó, 2000).

In the context of the Cold War Eastern Europe and the USA were on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. In some cases anthropologists were involved in intelligence activities (Price, 2016). However in the Romanian context these accusations remained unsubstantiated (Verdery, 2018). Still the Securitate viewed anthropological work as akin to spying in particular if some anthropologist ventured to study populations (such as minorities) or persons (ex. intellectuals) who were suspected of 'disloyalty' to the regime. Being declared a *persona non grata* was far from a comforting perspective for a foreign anthropologist doing fieldwork in Romania. Moreover it was not simply unpleasant but damaging for an academic career based on fieldwork abroad. Their local collaborators could not hope for a much better treatment from the socialist authorities, and in many cases harassment of local acquaintances continued. In the next part of this article, I analyse some examples of 'home grown enemies' of the regime.

Who could be counted as a loyal citizen?

From the reports which became available about the actions of the Securitate regarding some of the American anthropologists and their local collaborators we cannot reconstruct the events in full details (Marin, 2017a).¹³ However as recent works by Katherine Verdery (2014; 2018) demonstrate, the task to look through these reports is not hopeless. Keeping in mind that they represent a partial and undoubtedly biased version of the reality, these reports can still reveal fragments about lives and ways of operation of the authorities

¹³ Manuela Marin transcribed, edited and published a selection from these documents. In this analysis I rely on her work. I included reference to the original fond of the ACNSAS (Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității) adding a citation to the published form.

which aimed to influence these lives. We can reconstruct a provisional narrative which is subject to change, as new documents or oral accounts will undoubtedly surface in the future.

In 1982, more than two years after the note briefly presented at the beginning of this article, an operative order was issued by the Securitate to conduct systematic surveillance on Nicolae Gheorghe under the code-named 'Ganea'. According to documents from this file, his regular surveillance started on 26 June 1982. There are reports prepared before that date signifying that he had already attracted the attention of the authorities and their informants.¹⁴ However, opening this individual file of surveillance (*dosar de urmărire informativă - DUI*) signified a new level of attention and, accordingly, dedicated resources.

The surveillance methods employed were: a network of informants (*rețeaua informativă*), opening the personal correspondence (*sursa 'S'*), intercepting his phone and his conversations at home (*mijloace tehnică operativă - T.O.*), and occasionally also his conversations in public places (*filaj*). In spite of all the efforts, surveillance reportedly had severe limitations because Gheorghe used coded forms of communication with his key contacts and spoke foreign languages during conversations.

The decision tightening surveillance at this point was not unrelated to a protest letter pseudonymously signed by Alexandru Danciu (having Gheorghe as author). This letter was sent to a French journalist and was also read on the Romanian language broadcast of Radio Free Europe in early 1982. There are several variants of this letter. Manuela Marin published a longer and a shorter Romanian version (Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 19-24 and 25-28) and an English version was kept by Sam Beck.¹⁵ The following paragraphs are taken from this English version (mistakes in the original):

The Gypsy population represents one of Romania's largest ethnic minorities, the official census reports 230.000 and unofficial estimates range as high as one million. But in spite of this figures and of Romania's proclaimed tolerance and respect of all "cohabiting nationalities", the very existence of this ethnic groups is rarely mentioned. Reference to Romania's Gypsy population is made only in criminal incidents or as "social parasites". Such rumors are tolerated and stimulated by state officials who try to divert the attention of the population from the increasing difficulties of an authoritarian economy and state.

¹⁴ There is a report already about the American-Romanian conference in Cluj attended by Gheorghe and Beck in 1979. This report ended up mixed with documents on Steven Sampson due a strange coincidence: one of Sampson's code name in his Securitate files is 'Samy', which led to confusion with the activities of Sam Beck (personal communication by Steven Sampson).

¹⁵ Beck donated this letter together with other documents and his field photographs to the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities in April 2016. The documents are stored in the institute's archive.

This prejudice also attempts to justify illegal and discriminatory practices toward the Gypsies. In 1976-1977 the police received "dezlegare" (or permits) which allow to beat Gypsies as a "civilizing" technique against their "deviant behaviour". Local Gypsies population [*sic*] in different regions are regularly assaulted by armed policemen assisted by dogs. Early in the morning police often violate Gypsy homes, beat the children and the women and take the young and adult men to police headquarters where they are forced to confess the crimes they do not commit. Every summer these so called "parasites" are gathered together under the pretext of "military exercises" and sent to agricultural camps or construction sites, such as the canal Dunăre-Marea Neagră, to work as free labor. In many cities Gypsies are forbidden to enter the better restaurants, especially when accompanied by their women sporting [*sic*] vividly coloured dresses.

To many officials, and even common citizens, the limitation of these practices to Gypsies is acceptable. However, such a "dezlegare", encouraging violent and abusive practices toward a minority population is difficult to control. This ethnically nurtured suspicion toward a "deviant" minority is only a small part of a rather generalized suspicion toward differences from the "official line". It is so that anyone who expresses criticism of the regime is suspects of not being a "good Romanian" and subject to the treatment and abuse commonly practiced against the Gypsies.

It is the duty of those in the free world and of the free press to challenge these repressive measures used in Romania and to speak out against prejudicial treatment of this minority population.
(Alexandru Danciu, 1 March 1982)

The author self identified as a member of the Romani community, and the tone of the letter was clearly critical towards the state authorities, in special the police forces and other officials who found acceptable scapegoating members of an ethnic population in order to disguise the growing problems on the Romanian society.

The concerns which motivated the surveillance were confirmed during the first review of the file (June-September 1982).¹⁶ Gheorghe kept 'non-official' relations with foreigners, some of them having suspicious preoccupations, being monitored by the Securitate. Another member of the UMass Romanian Research Group, Steven Sampson, was also suspected of 'intentions of collecting and tendentiously exploiting data about the Gypsies in Romania' and, like Sam Beck, was deemed persona non grata in 1984.¹⁷ According to the reports, the list of

¹⁶ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff.113 f-v, 114 v. (Published in Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 159-161).

¹⁷ He was suspected of being a CIA cadre, as was John W. Cole (personal communication by Steven Sampson), and his name also appears in the file misspelled as 'Steve Sampsolo'. Sampson was officially declared undesirable in December 1984 'for a period of five years' (personal communication).

unwelcomed foreigners interested in collecting ‘materials with hostile content’ (*date cu conținut ostil*) was long, and included not only fellow anthropologists such as David Kideckel, but also researchers like Mozes Heinsink and Rüdiger Vossen, and several prominent Roma leaders from Europe.¹⁸ Gheorghe’s continuous engagements with issues related to Roma were confirmed. In particular his involvement with foreigners associated in the International Romani Union were noticed and his attempts to join efforts with domestic Roma leaders, particularly with Ion Cioabă in order to advocate for the recognition of Roma as a nationality in Romania. So, on the one hand Gheorghe developed close links with foreign scholars along professional lines, on the other hand he created and reinforced alliances with local groups of Roma and their leaders. This dual strategy attracted the disapproval of the authorities, who were rather preoccupied with the problem of not allowing ‘hostile data’ to be sent out of the country or disseminated.

At his workplace, Gheorghe enjoyed the support of the directors who approved his interest regarding the Roma. Between 1975 and 1980 he was even encouraged by important scholar-politicians outside the Centre for Sociological Research to pursue his research topic.¹⁹ However some of his colleagues nurtured more hostile attitude towards him. One of these colleagues commented on his personal changes:

From the point of view of his behaviour, it is notable that one or two years ago, Nicolae Gheorghe had not maintained publicly that he is a Gypsy, nor that he has ties to the Gypsy problems. After 1982, he let his moustache grow, he often speaks the Gypsy language on the phone, and sometimes states that he is unsatisfied how the Gypsies are treated (they are not encouraged to education, to culture, leadership positions etc.).²⁰

A recurrent issue of the reports is Gheorghe’s attempts to obtain approval to travel abroad. He was invited to different international events in Europe and America, or even to India. He regularly petitioned the authorities to get permission to leave the country but with very little success. In relation to his request to attend an UNESCO seminar organised in Oslo in 1983 among the documents of his file there is even a positive recommendation:

¹⁸ I will not discuss details of Gheorghe’s involvement in the international Romani movement and the involvement of the Securitate (Marin, 2016).

¹⁹ The director of the centre was I. Drăgan at the time the report was filed (1983). Ioan Matei, the previous director, is also listed as supportive, as well as Ștefan Costea, from the Academy of Social and Political Sciences. Henri H. Stahl, the doyen of Romanian sociology at that time, considered Gheorghe a talented sociologist (Rostás, 2000: 187).

²⁰ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, f. 98 f-v. (Published in Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 157–158).

Personally I believe that his presentation – on the content of which I will consult with him, and I assume responsibility for a positive talk –, would be in the benefit of presenting the situation of the Romanian Gypsies favourably. Contrarily, if there will be appointed someone else to speak about the situation of the Gypsies in Eastern Europe there is a risk of a distorted presentation (in special since problems related to 'cultural ethnocide' will be discussed and very likely there will be invited a Gypsy from Hungary). I believe it is my duty to warn about this.²¹

This unnamed benefactor of Gheorghe tried to play the nationalistic game of the authorities, probably also in consultation with Gheorghe, promising to ensure a loyal and friendly talk as opposed to the presumably fierce accusations of ethnocide which one can expect from a 'Hungarian Gypsy' who will not have any sympathy toward Romania. There is no indication in the file that the trick would have worked.

There are numerous rather clear cases of refusals to allow him travelling. For example, in 1983 Gheorghe wanted to take up a Fulbright grant in the USA. His rather neutrally entitled research programme: 'National reality and the types of social research' was awarded the grant as part of an academic exchange program and he would study urban development in Kentucky and the development of Bucharest within a comparative frame. Additionally, he could follow up some of his studies regarding Roma and have exchanges with two American researchers whom he knew from their stay in Romania.²² The review by the Securitate concluded: 'The checks resulted that he is not presenting any guarantees of loyal activity during his trip to the USA. His travel request received a negative visa.'²³

The repeated refusals to allow trips abroad had two justifications. On the one hand the authorities surmised that Gheorghe would not follow the official line when being abroad. They suspected that his portrayal of the situation of the Roma in Romania would not be 'loyal'. Of this they were certainly correct. On the other hand, they also wanted to 'teach him a lesson' in order to change his 'general attitude' forcing a behavioural change on him. This intention is clear from their evaluation of the effectiveness of the actions: "After a period of apathy (due probably to the refusals to grant travel permissions to Sweden and India) comrade Gheorghe displays a moral recovery."²⁴ Therefore, the officer noted that this is a sign that the applied measures have the expected impact and resulted in positive attitude changes.

²¹ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, f. 144 f-v. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 165–166).

²² ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 148–150. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 167–170).

²³ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 174–175 f-v. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 171–173).

²⁴ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 242–244. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 183–184).

But most likely this was a temporary change or might have been included in the report just in order to please some of the higher ranked officers. In other places, Gheorghe was described as a rather difficult target for surveillance:

[T]he objective became more suspicious lately, he is manifested as an element of ability, keeps permanent checks whether he takes the public transport or visit the homes of his relations. Similarly, when using the post he avoids writing his name on the letters he sends abroad in order to evade of being intercepted or he is giving the letters to his relationships who travel abroad. When speaking on the phone, he uses a coded language or speaks the dialect of the Căldărar Gypsies.²⁵

For periods he joined efforts with his Căldărar connections in Sibiu and rather than keeping a low profile, they ‘intensified their Gypsy activities’ (*activitatea țigănească*). Gheorghe and Ion Cioabă, the leader of the Căldărar Roma, had an intricate relationship: Gheorghe acted as a personal secretary for Cioabă, drafting documents for him, but at the same time he also tested some of his theoretical ideas in practice during their joint initiatives. The relationship was complicated by the fact revealed recently that Cioabă was an under-cover collaborator of the Securitate (Marin, 2016) which tried to use him in order to moderate Gheorghe or discourage him from pursuing his interest in research and activism among the Roma.²⁶

Through the interception of their domestic conversations between Gheorghe and his wife, the Securitate identified that Gheorghe had written and sent abroad documents which testified to his disloyal attitude to the regime. The surveillance became stricter and as a consequence: “the ‘Ganea’ couple are very disturbed by the measures which were taken towards them. They seek different ways to mislead our officers about the reality of the deeds they committed.”²⁷ The continuous presence of the officers provoked both Gheorghe and his wife to manifest an ‘improper attitude’ (*poziție necorespunzătoare*) towards the Securitate agents. So the Securitate made more efforts to employ collaborators from their personal environment.

²⁵ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 135–136 f-v, 137. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 164–184).

²⁶ Gheorghe never ceased keeping relations with Ion Cioabă. We need to consider the limitations and bias of the archival sources in describing the personal relationships. According to the memories of Sam Beck, Cioabă remained a loyal friend. In any case, even after the fall of the socialist regime, Gheorghe and members of the Cioabă family continued their friendly relations.

²⁷ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 230 f-v, 231. (Published in Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 180–182).

By the second half of the 1980s, the surveillance became more personalized since the Securitate managed to find the informants they needed to control Gheorghe more closely. From the reports, there are two main informants who substantially contributed: 'Florescu' (code name for Ion Cioabă) and 'Ionescu', a trusted relative or close friend of Gheorghe who was best man at his wedding.

According to available reports, Ionescu was particularly active in talking to Gheorghe in order to convince him that his ideas about the 'Gypsy problem' were misguided and that all his good intentions were being wasted on a non-existent issue, or even worse, that he was only damaging possibilities of the social inclusion of the Roma. Another recurrent aspect of the reports is Ionescu's concern about the tensions between Gheorghe and his wife, the informant reportedly trying to help Gheorghe rebuild his domestic life.²⁸ The reports are rather articulate and conceptually elaborated, and it is difficult to judge how much of the content has been discussed between Gheorghe and Ionescu in confidence.

Their exchanges were most intense in the period of 1986-87, and it is rather unlikely that Ionescu could have kept his collaboration with the Securitate hidden from his friend. In any case, the reports wanted to show that Gheorghe gave in to the persuasion, and he is portrayed by Ionescu in a 'favourable light' emphasising the 'positive' development of his attitudes.

After he practically wasted his material sources, energy, time, intellectual capacity, and destroyed his family by his repeated absences from home and his disinterest in the practical challenges of family life, it seems he realised that the only possible way was to integrate the Gypsies in the society, not to separate them even more from it.²⁹

Apparently, Gheorghe also gave up on his own ethnic association with 'the Gypsies': "from what Gheorghe said, it became clear that the problems of the Gypsies do not interest him anymore, he even stated that he might not be Gypsy but having Turkish origins."³⁰

The denial of the association with the Roma probably was the ultimate result the Securitate expected. Undoubtedly Gheorghe made such a statement tactically to escape further persecution. It is also possible that Ionescu included this 'confession' in order to show how successful his work as a collaborator for

²⁸ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, f. 262. / f. 263 f-v. / f. 275 f-v. / ff. 279 f-v, 280. / ff. 286 f-v-287. /f. 292 f-v. / ff. 293 f-v-294. / f. 295 f-v. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 185-205).

²⁹ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, f. 275 f-v. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 194-195).

³⁰ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, f. 262. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 187-188).

the Securitate was. The officers have not taken at face value such a change in ethnic autoidentification. The reports continued to refer to Gheorghe as a 'Romanian citizen of Gypsy nationality' (*cetățean român de naționalitate țigan*).

The last report of the 'Ganea' surveillance file is dated April 1989.³¹ This report contains the proposal of closing the surveillance file, since the main objectives were achieved. A list of the 'positive' and 'preventive' interventions was given: his requests for travelling abroad were rejected (*avizare negativă*), people who were his professional relations were informed about his activities in order to moderate and discourage his actions (*temperare și descurajare*), he was warned not to keep non-official relations with foreigners. The report noted that as a consequence of these measures, Gheorghe's attitude became more 'realist'. He gave up totally with his 'preoccupations with the problem of the Gypsies'. His relationships with foreign citizens also changed in line with the expectations: he limited his correspondence abroad and started to avoid contacts with foreigners. The crisis of his personal life reached a point when he and his wife separated, and began the process of divorce.

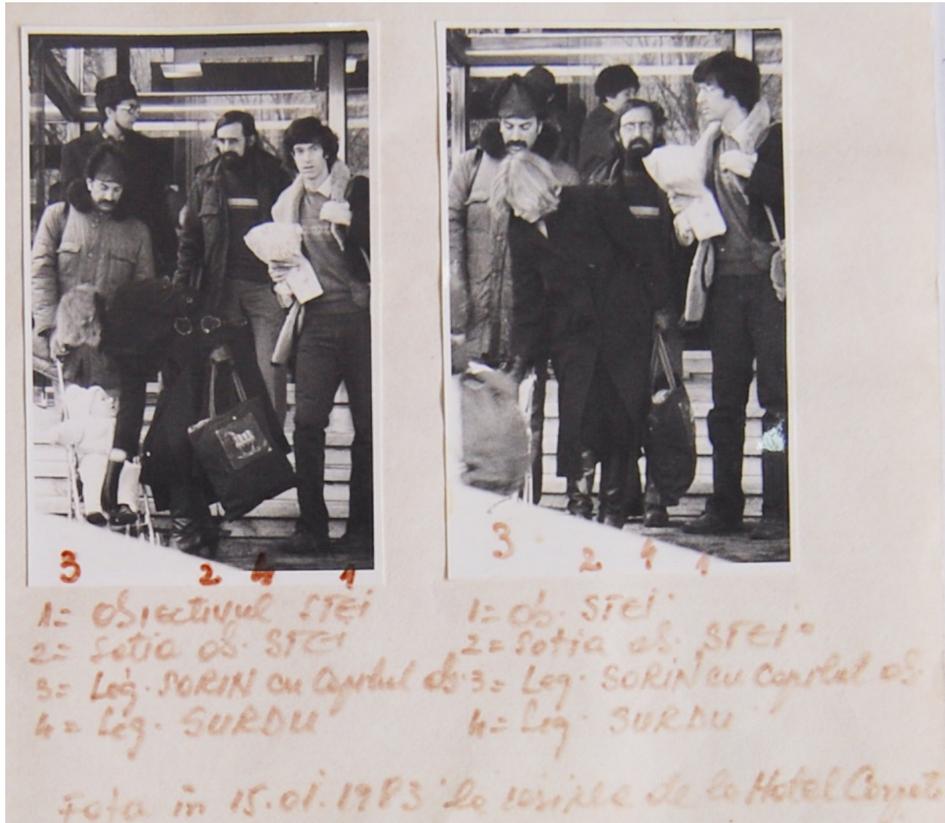
Finally, the case officer considered that having these changes achieved, the Securitate could initiate a dialogue with Gheorghe in order to attract him into a 'future collaboration' with the services. For lack of evidence, we can only assume that this collaboration has not materialised (Marin, 2017b: 53). There are indications that Gheorghe was under pressure to report about his collaborative pursuits with foreigners and Roma leaders from Romania or abroad. For example, one report indicates 'Ganea' as its source. It is dated from the same period when his surveillance file was closed (April 1989). It was filed separately among a set of reports targeting Romani leaders and organisational structures. It reads as a fragment of a research material or policy paper describing principles of support for Romani organisations in European states (the Federal Republic of Germany, Yugoslavia, and Hungary) in the context of international organisations such as the Council of Europe or the United Nations. The report concludes:

The resolutions of the international organisations, it is known, have indicative character, being 'recommendations' without having mandatory character for the national states. The commissions, assemblies etc. which adopt such resolutions follow up the way the recommendations are put in practice in the different countries. In this context the social and cultural policies adopted towards the Gypsies in one or another country can be presented as experiments or "examples" of compliance with the resolutions of the international organizations acquiring propagandistic value for more complex interests (*dobândind astfel valoare propagandistică pentru interese mai complexe*).³²

³¹ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 320 f-v-321. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 209–211).

³² ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar 144 vol. 13, ff. 28–35. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 293–301).

This form of reporting seems to rephrase earlier petitions or letters sent to national authorities or to the 'free world'. It is uncertain to whom Gheorghe intended to submit this material originally, but the argumentation suggest that he hoped to convince some authorities to subscribe to more positive policies towards the Roma population within Romania.³³



Nicolae Gheorghe, Vintilă Mihăilescu, Steven Sampson (Poiana Brașov, 1983).
Sampson was on a private visit to Romania with his wife and baby daughter.
Source: Steven Sampson's Securitate file, personal archive.

³³ In this context the case of Imre Mikó, a prominent Romanian Hungarian intellectual, is worth mentioning: Stefano Bottoni explored in details how Mikó tried 'talking to the system' (Bottoni, 2017). In spite of major differences (Imre Mikó was clearly a collaborator of the Securitate) the political intentions and intellectual efforts to influence the oppressive regime 'from within' show some striking parallels.

What makes a nationalist?

During the time these events unfolded, I was a teenager growing up in a Hungarian (Szekler) community in an Eastern Transylvanian town. I remember vividly how my parents, particularly my mother, trained me to avoid any actions which might be interpreted that I was a nationalist in school or any other public place. She also worried about my father, that he might be seen a nationalist while attending the pub and starting to sing some 'banned songs'. A crucial part of my childhood socialization in this domain was to recognise the dangers of the social environment and act accordingly, to conform and dissimulate when needed, and maintain a dual vision of the world, which part is 'ours' and which is controlled by 'them'.

The division has not followed clearly the ethnic lines, since there were numerous Hungarians with whom one had to be careful. One could be fully honest only when trusted Romanians or Roma were present. But the very idea that one will be seen as a nationalist if allowing himself/herself the luxury to speak openly, tell a joke (and there were many jokes to tell), or refer to a historical event made me acutely aware that we live in a world infused by nationalism. Still we thought it was 'their nationalism', the official view on our world, which caused us the blame; we learned the Romanian authorities were nationalists and that was why they saw us, Magyars, as nationalist. Reading the reports coming from the archive of the Securitate made me wonder how this worked in the case of other ethnic communities during the same period.

There are reports in which reveal that Roma were accused, not directly because of their own 'nationalism' but rather because they enabled ostensibly nationalist and irredentist actions of others. As an example: In the summer of 1978, a 'Magyarised Gypsy' (*tigan maghiarizat*), the lead violinist of a band from the village of Sic/Szék in Cluj county, was denounced because during a village celebration, he performed songs considered 'nationalist-irredentist and fascist'. Some of the songs were even recorded on tape by a member of the revelling crowd. The musician ended up being summoned to the local police station and in the presence of the local mayor, he received official admonition. After admitting his error, he promised to 'adopt a correct attitude' in the future.³⁴

Singing and playing nationalistic songs were rather regular activities during that period, and similar events might take place today, maybe with a different repertoire of songs. We cannot reconstruct which songs were played by the violinist, but they were certainly performed in order to entertain the local Hungarians. So his only fault could have been that he did his job as a professional

³⁴ ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar 18306 vol. 10, f. 69 f. (Published in Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 53–54).

musician performing at the request of his clients. This was certainly recognised by the authorities, which may explain why he only received a warning. The peasants involved in the musical incident 'remained in the attention' of the Securitate. They were identified as the true enemies of the state. It made sense to blame the Hungarian villagers who were notorious about their noisy disloyalty to the regime.

In another case, reported in the files about 'nationalists', a 'Hungarian Gypsy' called László Máthé from Covasna county, came to the attention of the Securitate in 1976 because he was unsatisfied at not being employed as a singer by the 'Vadrózsák' (Wild Roses) dance ensemble, which functioned as part of the local House of Culture. After being rejected repeatedly, he decided to flee to Hungary, where he thought he could valorise his musical talent better than in Romania. He was caught attempting to cross the border without documents, warned of the illegality of such acts, and sent back to his place of origin. After returning home, he started submitting long letters in Hungarian to the authorities advocating for the emancipation of the Roma during the early 1980s.³⁵ Many of his ideas (the education of children, ensuring full employment, etc.) were well in line with the official policies. However, his case was included among the files of the 'nationalists', indicating that his discourse was not seen as legitimate. The authorities did not trust him and isolated him, because of his history of 'disloyalty' in trying to escape from the country.

Unexpected nationalists

While officers of the Securitate routinely interpreted the behaviour of Hungarians as inspired by nationalism or irredentism, they seemed to be less prepared to see Roma turning 'nationalist'. In a report targeting Gheorghe's relationship with other Roma leaders an officer scribbled:

The ties between "Ganea" and the others can turn dangerous. I don't like how the action is unfolding. We have a slow pace and we lose important operative moments. We should be careful with our relationship with Burtea. He might play double. We have been misled by the Gypsies twice. They are more nationalists than we think.³⁶

³⁵ ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar 144 vol. 12, ff. 340–344 f-v. (Published in Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 266–276).

³⁶ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 257–258 f-v. (Published in Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 523–525).

In this subsection I will turn briefly to another category of social actors who became suspected of nationalism during this period: the Romani Pentecostal religious leaders. There is a consistent part of reporting on the issues related to small churches or so called 'sects', most notably of Pentecostal denomination.

In Romania and Central Europe historical churches are most commonly associated with national identity or nationalism. Small evangelical churches, however, are most often seen as cosmopolitan or trans-ethnic denominations. There are clear historical reasons behind this, since in Romania following 1918, the nation state-formation was characterized by government attempts to reinforce the hegemony of the Orthodox Christian and Greek Catholic Churches, as *national churches*, while offering a legal framework for other '*minority denominations*', such as Roman Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans, and Unitarians, as well as to the Jewish population, Muslims, Turks and Tatars. Smaller denominations, many connected to foreign missionaries, were suppressed as '*sects*', because they were seen as subverting the national culture.

Pentecostal assemblies emerged in the western part of Romania before World War II along with other small denominations, and they suffered increased persecution by the state which culminated during the fascist regime of Ion Antonescu (1940-44). Antonescu planned to deport believers who refused to convert to Orthodoxy to Transnistria (Achim, 2013). They ultimately escaped deportation, but some of the religious leaders suffered imprisonment and forced labour (Andreiescu, 2012a; Andreiescu, 2012b; Bălăban, 2016). Their persecution continued during the socialist years (Vlase, 2002) but none of the historians of this denomination mentioned that ethnic Romanian Pentecostals would have been persecuted *because they were considered nationalists*.

The case of the Romani Pentecostals was rather different. Religious activities, in particular preaching or singing in Romani language, was categorised as a sign of 'Gypsy nationalism'. Attempts to get permission for initiating Roma only religious assemblies or building prayer houses for a Roma religious community were discouraged. Moreover, there were religious leaders who were actively seeking to get equal treatment not only as members of a religious denomination but also as a 'cohabiting nationality'. Their petitions and protest letters kept the Securitate on guard (Marin, 2017b: 58-63).

An example of such leader was Iancu Gabor (b. 1929) the traditional leader (*bulibaşa*) of the Gabor Roma in Bihor county. In 1987 he succeeded to agree with the authorities:

[T]o create a cooperative for craftsmen (*cooperativă meșteșugărească*) in order to work with his family and prepare tin objects. He is also preoccupied to obtain from the local authorities permission to open a prayer house for the Pentecostal

Gypsies. He motivated his plan for separation that some of the Gypsies are careless with their clothing and bodily hygiene therefore are not properly received by the 'Romanian believers'.³⁷

While the cooperative for his craftsmen could be opened a separate church for Roma was not allowed. The 'nationalist' character of such organisation was evident in spite of Iancu's attempt to disguise it under the stereotypical perception of 'the dirty Gypsies'.

The Securitate suspected him because in 1986 he received the visit of a missionary, named John Rarusca, an immigrant living in the USA, originally from Oradea. On his return visit, Rarusca 'urged all the Gypsies to join the Pentecostal Church, he praised the Western life-style, instigated Gypsies to emigrate, and promised his support for them.'³⁸ Additionally Iancu was not only head of his family and the Gabor Roma in Bihor, a successful craftsman, and religious leader. He was also part of a network of 'nationalists' who plotted to set up a country-wide committee to represent Roma domestically and abroad. His surveillance file was opened with the code name 'Graur' due to his intention to attend the congress of International Romani Union where he planned to discuss the issues of 'Gypsies joining the Pentecostal church', their recognition as 'national minority in the state' (*minoritate națională în stat*) and to have representatives in the state apparatus.³⁹ While these pursuits remained unfulfilled until the end of the socialist regime, the Gabor Roma in Bihor - having their self-controlled economic activities (within and outside the cooperative) as well as practicing their own religious rituals (even in the absence of their own prayer house) - contributed to the maintenance and even development of the Romani identity.⁴⁰

Conclusions: the unintended recognition

In her introductory study to the collection of documents about the Roma, Manuela Marin frames the actions of 'Gypsy nationalists' as expressions

³⁷ ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar 144 vol. 13, ff. 227-228 f-v. (Published in Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 81-83).

³⁸ ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar 144 vol. 11, f. 223 f-v. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 1: 410-411).

³⁹ ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar 144 vol. 13, f. 215 f-v. (Published in Marin 2017a, vol 2: 72-73).

⁴⁰ It is significant that Gheorghe himself was experimenting with creating or joining alternative / voluntary associations which would enable the maintenance of social groups and identities autonomously from 'national' or the state structures. One of the reports describes a failed attempt to register a Roma association (22.01.1986), but Gheorghe proceeded with posting his membership fee to 'the treasurer' of a Roma 'neighbourhood association' (*vecinătate*). The '*vecinătate*' or '*Nachbarschaft*' is a non-formal cooperation characteristic for some Transylvanian villages. (ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar 234356, ff. 252 f-v. / Published in Marin, 2017a, vol 2: 185-186).

of *everyday resistance* (Marin, 2017b: 39). This interpretation accords well with many of the actions reported by the Securitate. Some of them are similar to what the original concept coined by James C. Scott (1985) would suggest, i.e., using strategies of hidden and underground resistance, avoidance of being noticed, or other strategies of the powerless. Yet in other cases, the reports reveal that the actors were not hiding at all, but actively seeking recognition. This observation stands at the basis of an alternative interpretation, suggested by Petre Matei (Matei, 2016b: 700), that a Romani movement could emerge in Romania even without Roma being legally recognised or allowed to organize into formal associations during the 1970-1980s. Concluding this article, my emphasis is on a third aspect: I argue that the intensified surveillance and suppression by the repressive organs (Securitate and Miliția) played an important role during this period. The Securitate contributed in a paradoxical way to the recognition of the Roma as a national minority long before they could achieve this recognition legally themselves, after the fall of the socialist regime.

This *de facto recognition* could happen because the authorities themselves employed an 'ethnic model of repression'. It was based on categories that made many aspects of Romani cultural practice – language use, rituals, religious practices, singing, etc. – visible only as 'Gypsy nationalism', comparable to the 'nationalism' or ethnic expression of other, officially recognized, national minority groups.

There were clear limitations to this unintentional recognition. Firstly, it was not a positive identification of cultural difference but an intended act of erasure and denial. It was an attempt to suppress any possibility of a public Romani identity. So those Roma who became visible through their ethnic characteristics and/or activism were seen as threats to the regime, therefore they were expected to change their behaviour in order to disappear from sight again. Secondly, the social circle of identified Roma was rather restricted in spite of being very heterogeneous. The categories created by the authorities do not include the large numbers of Roma who kept their cultural differences out of the official public scenes. They continued to be seen as a social group which would eventually assimilate into the majority society. Anthropological fieldwork among this 'unseen' Roma population was potentially disruptive to the attempts of the Securitate to isolate and silence 'Gypsy nationalism'. Therefore, identifying and rupturing relationships between Roma and foreigners, among them American anthropologists doing fieldwork in Romania, became a part of this ethnic repression process.

After socialism had collapsed in 1989, a new, post-socialist, chapter started in the Roma and pro-Roma activism in this country. Nicolae Gheorghe, the main character of this study, continued to be a central figure in this new chapter.

Escaping from the suffocating surveillance of an oppressive state, he could freely develop his ideas and activism on European scale.⁴¹ His thinking during the post-socialist years about the dynamic relationship between the institutional forms and the development of collective identities was continuous with his earlier ideas. His last publication is a testimony of his rich intellectual and practical involvement in doing research and activism among the Roma. He remained self-reflective and open to rethinking his own identity. Retrospectively, he admitted that his younger self was a believer in the capacity of communism to create equality and emancipate the disadvantaged, including the Roma. Recalling the 1970s, the years of his intellectual formation, he voiced his old commitment: "I also embraced the internationalism – or cosmopolitanism – and anti-nationalism of those times" (Gheorghe and Pulay, 2013: 50).

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⁴¹ Gheorghe died at the age of 66 in August 2013. The journal *Roma Rights* dedicated an issue entitled 'In Search of a Contemporary Roma Identity' to his memory (Bițu, 2015) and the first volume of the Romani Studies book series initiated by Sam Beck was dedicated to him (Beck and Ivasiuc, 2018).

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