

CULTURAL LIFE IN BANAT AND COMMUNIST CENSORSHIP ANALYZED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORAL HISTORY

Mirela TĂRĂBÎC

Abstract: Beginning in 1948, Romanian society underwent profound transformations modelled after the Soviet system, which significantly impacted the country's political, economic, legal, cultural, and religious spheres. These changes included the abolition of private property and its replacement by state ownership, the suppression of political pluralism and freedom of association, the establishment of a one-party dictatorship, the dismantling of civil society and indigenous structures, and the decimation of the interwar elites—cultural, political, administrative, and otherwise. The reorganization of cultural life at the national level was carried out under the strict supervision of communist authorities and in alignment with their ideological objectives. Consequently, only a few cultural institutions from the interwar period were able to continue their activity post-1948, while others were dissolved for promoting "bourgeois mentalities" and replaced by institutions that endorsed communist ideology. Moreover, both nationally and regionally—in Banat—communist authorities actively targeted the Romanian intellectual elite from the interwar period, especially those opposing the Marxist-Leninist totalitarian ideology.

For any community, recovering its past is essential, as national identity is built around a collective memory that must be preserved and cultivated. The interviews conducted with two prominent figures in the cultural life of Banat—Professor Deliu Petroiu and Professor Damian Vulpe—provide vital testimonies about cultural and artistic life in Banat during the communist regime. These oral accounts complement written documentary and narrative sources.

Engaging with individual or collective memory is particularly important given that the historical discourse during the communist dictatorship was significantly distorted. For this reason, the recovery of memory forms a foundational aspect of oral history. Historiography in various capitalist countries shows a marked interest in oral history, recognizing it as a crucial means of recovering the past—especially in nations where totalitarian regimes have falsified history and collective memory. Prominent historians such as M. Finley, P. Chaunu, E. Renan, and H. Bergson have emphasized memory as a tool for recording, systematizing, analyzing, and reconstructing past events. Whether individual or collective, memory must serve justice—it should not be imprisoned by the past but should instead be harnessed in the service of the present and future, without inciting hatred or revenge.

Keywords: communist regime, cultural life, Banat, individual or collective memory, oral history, communist ideology.

Introduction

The complete seizure of power by the communist regime in 1948 had profound repercussions on Romania's political-ideological and literary-artistic life. The oldest and most prestigious cultural institutions established during the interwar period were either forced to cease their activities or were dismantled and restructured according to the Soviet model. This was done deliberately to sever ties with the past and ensure absolute loyalty to the single-party system and its ideology. The first step in the campaign against the Romanian intellectual elite was the destruction of cultural institutions.

This article aims to analyze—drawing on specialized literature, documentary sources, and testimonial interviews—the manner in which the communist regime reorganized cultural life in the Banat region after the Second World War, following directives issued by the communist authorities in Bucharest. The testimonies collected through interviews, or oral sources, are regarded as lived history and can serve as both alternatives and complements to traditional historical sources. In contemporary times, appealing to individual or collective memory is both vital and urgent, as time passes quickly, witnesses vanish, and memory itself becomes susceptible to distortion or alteration. The role of individual or collective memory is to preserve the past in such a way that it serves the present and the future—not to incite hatred or revenge. Memory must serve justice without becoming imprisoned by the past.

Following August 23, 1944, Romania entered a period commonly referred to as the "witch hunt," characterized by denunciations, blacklists, and the arrest of all those who opposed the Marxist-Leninist totalitarian ideology. Simultaneously, a cultural restructuring took place, consisting of state intervention into the "intimate laboratory of conception and artistic creation, with its various components: themes, motifs, techniques, purpose, message, role, meaning, and finality" (Selejan, 1993, p. 247).

Among Romania's intellectual elite, the primary targets of the totalitarian regime were cultural figures. This was due to the regime's belief that "foreign influences infiltrate most easily into the ideological sphere, into literature, art, and science. Therefore, the ongoing ideological struggle against imperialist influences, against admiration for the decaying culture of capitalist countries, and against reformist and revisionist trends in theory and politics, represents a critical task of our party" (Selejan, 1993, p. 247).

One of the most important cultural institutions in the country, the Romanian Academy, was dissolved. On its foundation, by Presidential Decree No. 76 of June 9, 1948, signed by Dr. Petru Groza, the Academy of the People's Republic of Romania (Academia R.P.R.) was established. This decree altered the institution's Statute and Rules of Procedure, leading to its internal reorganization in alignment with Marxist-Leninist ideology. As the president of the R.P.R. Academy, Professor

Traian Săvulescu, stated: “The Academy of the People's Republic of Romania will always look to the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., which serves as the model of an active Academy.” Thus, the institution's entire scientific, literary, and artistic activity became the property of the people.

The reorganization of Romania's most significant cultural institution was conducted in full accordance with the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Through the activities of the Academy of the People's Republic of Romania, the communist authorities sought to impose a dogmatic, proletarian culture and to carry out a broad process of ideological control over cultural and spiritual life.

Mass Media and Literary Activity in Banat after the Establishment of Communism

After the union of Banat with Romania in 1919, the region's literary life began to develop under Romanian administration. Between the two World Wars, various literary, cultural, and artistic periodicals gained recognition in Banat through their cultural activities.

The establishment of the communist regime in Romania had negative consequences on Banat's cultural life. These included the imposition of censorship, the purging of prominent intellectuals labeled as part of the “intellectual bourgeoisie,” the creation of the so-called homo sovieticus—an intellectual indoctrinated with Marxist-Leninist ideology who was not allowed to deviate from the official line—as well as the rise of proletcultism.

Despite this, some literary journals such as *Vrerea*, *Făclia*, *Viața Bănățeană*, and *Temesvar Zeitung* continued to exist. Beginning in September 1944, new publications were launched, such as *Luptătorul Bănățean*, the official organ of the Banat Regional Committee of the Communist Party, and in 1946, the daily *Banatul*, led by Professor Ilie Murgu. That same year also saw the publication of *Făclia Banatului*. In 1947, a magazine affiliated with the Teachers' Union, *Școala Bănățeană*, began circulation. These publications highlighted the so-called “revolutionary” and “democratic” achievements of the Communist Party, although they also included a few pages dedicated to the “new literature.”

After August 23, 1944, Romanian cultural journalism lacked genuine public debate. Readers of the press encountered not open polemics, but orchestrated press campaigns that quickly silenced dissent. These campaigns included “culture for the masses” versus the “ivory tower” (1944–1945), accusations of intellectual betrayal (1946), attacks on Crețianu and his followers (1946–1947), the implementation of Soviet cultural models (1947–1948), and finally, the targeting of “enemy writers of the people” (1947–1948). The goal was to enforce a single ideological direction in literature, achieved through young critics, ideologues, and party propagandists backed by the Union of Artists, Writers, and Journalists' Unions (U.S.A.S.Z).

The year 1948 marked the consolidation of communist dictatorship, the domination of the proletariat, and the institutionalization of so-called “mass culture,” a form of culture based on ideological conformity. That year, following

instructions from the leadership of the Romanian Writers' Society, writers were sent to industrial and agricultural worksites—Apaca, Salva-Vișeu, Ana Pauker, Agnita—where they produced “worksite literature.”

At the national level, literary critics played a significant role in cultural ideologization. Critics such as Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu (*Contemporanul*, *Revista Literară*), Ion Biberi, Al. I. Ștefănescu, Mihai Petroveanu (*Contemporanul*), Paul Cornea, Radu Lupan (*Revista Literară*), and Mihail Cosma (*România Liberă*) were actively involved in denouncing “decadent” foreign literature and promoting a new literature grounded in realism and social engagement.

By 1947, cultural policy was no longer confined to party newspapers. Cultural magazines such as *Contemporanul* and *Revista Literară* were repurposed to serve ideological functions, while *România Liberă* and *Scânteia* (primarily a political newspaper) also included cultural sections aimed at popularizing officially sanctioned literature.

Beginning in 1948, the communist regime introduced class struggle into the cultural domain. Writers were expected to turn their pens into ideological weapons. That same year, the Romanian Writers' Society (S.S.R.) was renamed the Society of Writers of Romania, with Zaharia Stancu appointed as its head. He emphasized that the new society would promote progressive literary creation, support ideological struggle against imperialism, combat artistic decadence, establish Marxist-Leninist literary criticism, and ensure writers lived and worked among the laboring masses.

In the spring of 1949, under the auspices of the party and state, a branch of the Writers' Union was founded in Timișoara. Its members were encouraged to reflect the life and struggles of the working people in their writings. In August 1949, the literary journals *Scrisul Bănățean*, *Banater Schrifttum*, and *Bánsági Írás* were launched in Timișoara to support the regime's vision for a “new literary creation.”

Scrisul Bănățean, later renamed *Orizont*, became the official publication of the Writers' Union, publishing fiction, poetry, drama, and translations of world literature by authors such as Franyó Zoltán, Lucian Blaga, A. Buteanu, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Vladimir Bârna, George Bulic, V. Ardelean, V. Birou, C. Bogdan, S. Dima, O. Metea, and Th. N. Trîpcea.

Literary criticism, theory, and history were cultivated by academics from Timișoara such as Gh. Ivănescu, V. Iancu, E. Todoran, Gh. Tohăneanu, N. Pîrvu, St. Munteanu, S. Mioc, V. Vintilescu, and Lucia Atanasiu. Other notable names include A. Lillin, Tr. L. Birăescu, N. Ciobanu, S. Dima, S. Foarță, and N. Tirioi.

Local party press in Banat was represented by publications such as *Drapelul Roșu*, *Neue Banater Zeitung*, *Szabad Szo*, and *Banatske Novine*, all official Communist Party media. From 1970 onward, monthly publications such as *Forum Studențesc*, *Orizont*, and *Neue Literatur* also emerged. All publications were subject to strict party control, which limited press freedom and kept journalist numbers low. The 1956 census recorded only 111 press workers in Timișoara; by

1977, the number had increased to 228, including those in the print and film industries.

In the mountainous regions of Banat, such as Caraș-Severin County, the local press was also subordinated to the party after 1944. In Reșița, the newspaper *Stavila* was published from November 1944 to April 1945. On August 11, 1946, the first issue of *Carașul Liber* appeared—an organ loyal to the Romanian Communist Party that promoted the Bloc of Democratic Parties (B.P.D.) during the 1946 elections. Following the elections, the paper ceased publication.

The successor to *Carașul Liber* was *Flamura Roșie*, whose first issue was published on December 30, 1948, as the official press organ of the Communist Party. In the town of Bocșa, *Drum Nou* was published between 1923–1938 and then from 1946–1947. In the same locality, *Curentul Nou* appeared between 1935 and 1947, describing itself as an “independent political publication” defending the interests of the people.

In Caransebeș, *Uzina și Ogorul* was launched after August 23, 1944, and in Oravița, the local publication was *Junimea*.

On November 22, 1951, the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party (P.M.R.) notified the Banat Regional Committee that several local newspapers—officially party publications—had violated state discipline and ignored press laws specific to the popular democracy. Unauthorized papers and bulletins, such as *Siderurgul* (Câmpia Turzii), *Cătunele Păcii* (Petroșani), *30 Decembrie* (Arad), and *Flacăra* (Piatra Neamț), were published without approval from the General Directorate of Press and Printing, the only authority allowed to issue publication licenses. Regional and district committees were ordered to verify compliance, and state authorities were warned that any breach would be met with severe punishment.

In conclusion, after the installation of the communist regime, democratic-oriented newspapers in Banat were banned. Press topics were tightly controlled and censored, with free thought and democratic expression suppressed. Renowned Banat journalists such as Sever Bocu, Aurel Cosma, and Petru Sfetcă were arrested and imprisoned or sent to labor camps.

As for broadcast media, *Radio Timișoara* began broadcasting in 1955, airing six hours daily in Romanian, German, Hungarian, and Serbian. In 1985, the communist authorities shut it down, and it resumed operations only at the end of December 1989.

The Activity of the Committee for Culture and Socialist Education of Timiș County

In addition to literary and artistic activities, mass media, publishing houses, and educational institutions, during the totalitarian years in Banat, other cultural institutions also operated under the directives of the Communist Party. These included libraries (at the county, municipal, communal, and village levels), Houses of Culture, Cultural Centers, the Committee for Culture and Socialist Education,

the Writers' Union – Timiș Branch, the Romanian Academy – Timiș Branch, the Banat Museum, cinemas, and others.

After 1944, responsibilities related to art and culture were assigned to the Ministry of Culture, which initially became the State Committee for Culture and Art, and later the Council for Culture and Socialist Education. At the county level, this functioned first under the name Inspectorate for Education and Culture, and from 1982 onwards, it was restructured as the Committee for Culture and Socialist Education. It had dual subordination: centrally, to the two aforementioned committees, and locally, to the Regional People's Council, and from 1968, to the County Council.

Ideologically, the activity of the Committee for Culture and Socialist Education of Timiș County was guided by the Propaganda Section of the Timiș County Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. Under its supervision operated various institutions of art and culture, including: the Romanian National Opera in Timișoara, the National Theatre of Timișoara, the German State Theatre, the Hungarian State Theatre, the Puppet Theatre of Timișoara, the Banatul Philharmonic, the Banat Museum, the County Library, local and village libraries, municipal and city Houses of Culture, the Timișoara House of Creation, the Popular School of Art, the Union of Visual Artists – Timișoara branch, the socio-political magazine *Orizont*, the Timișoara Printing Enterprise, Facla Publishing House, bookstores, the Timiș Cinematographic Enterprise, the Composers' Union – Timișoara branch, and various associations such as the Philatelists' Society, the Numismatists' Society, and the Amateur Photographers' Society.

Visual Arts in Banat during the Communist Period

In the final decades of the 19th century, Timișoara experienced a genuine ascent in its theatrical life. A city with a longstanding theatrical tradition, Timișoara was among the few Romanian cities to host a permanent theatre (Ilieșiu, 1943, p. 247). In 1920, the lyrical theatre "Maximilian-Leonard" opened its season in the old theatre building in Timișoara, but its activity was soon interrupted when the theatre building caught fire. Reconstruction began in 1923 and was completed in 1927.

In 1928, the theatre in Timișoara reopened with a performance by the National Theatre of Craiova. Between 1930 and 1939, theatrical life in Timișoara flourished, marked by remarkable performances from the National Theatre of Bucharest, the National Theatre of Cluj, and again from the National Theatre of Craiova. In 1934, A. Nicolau attempted, without success, to establish a permanent theatre in Timișoara. In this context, Maria Cinsky Nicolau reported in the journal *Generația Nouă* (no. 26, 1934) that the plan was to organize a mixed troupe dedicated to drama, comedy, comic opera, and operetta (Munteanu & Munteanu, 2002, p. 335).

During the Second World War (1940–1945), the National Theatre of Cluj, in exile in Timișoara, gained recognition through five theatrical seasons. In the

same period, amateur artistic ensembles emerged, including those affiliated with institutions like C.F.R., I.E.T., and Prima Banat.

In 1945, a permanent and stable theatre was officially established in Timișoara under the name “The Workers’ People’s Theatre,” later renamed “Matei Millo” Theatre. Over time, this theatre staged works by prominent Romanian playwrights such as I.L. Caragiale, V.I. Popa, M. Sebastian, T. Mușatescu, A. Kirițescu, G. Ciprian, V. Eftimiu, A. Baranga, M. Lovinescu, A. Mirodan, and M. Ștefănescu. It also presented plays by local playwrights such as Radu Theodoru, D.R. Ionescu, and M. Adam. From the international repertoire, performances included *Haiti* by W. Dubois, *The Bedbug* by Mayakovsky, and works by Chekhov, Brecht, Goldoni, Ibsen, Nušić, Racine, Schiller, Shaw, and Shakespeare.

After 1945, Timișoara’s theatres gained visibility, particularly in other communist states such as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the People’s Republic of Poland, the German Democratic Republic, the People’s Republic of Korea, the People’s Republic of China, and the Soviet Union.

During the communist regime, visual artists from Banat exhibited their work in cultural magazines such as *Contemporanul*, *Előre*, *Scrișul Bănățean*, *Tribuna*, and *Utunk*.

Banat’s musical life had already distinguished itself before the First World War through the existence of long-established musical ensembles in Timișoara, Chizătau, Arad, Reșița, Sânnicolau Mare, Orșova, Bocșa, and Lipova. The region’s musical culture was enriched by the work of prominent local figures such as I. Vidu, Sabin Drăgoi, Tiberiu Brediceanu, Iosif Velceanu, Alexandru Mocioni, Liviu Tempa, N. Popovici, Trifu Lugojanu, Timotei Popovici, Ioachim Periam, and Zeno Vancea (Munteanu & Munteanu, 2002, p. 335).

In 1940, as a result of the Second Vienna Award, the Cluj Opera relocated to Timișoara, where it delighted audiences with its performances. After the opera returned to Cluj in September 1945, discussions began about establishing a State Opera in Timișoara. The institution was officially founded in March 1946. On April 27, 1947, the Timișoara State Opera inaugurated its first season with Verdi’s *Aida*.

Also in April 1947, the “Banatul” State Philharmonic was established in Timișoara, marking a significant milestone in the city’s musical development. In 1951, the Philharmonic’s choir was founded under the direction of conductor Mircea Hoinic. The enduring success of the Philharmonic over the decades can be attributed to a series of distinguished conductors, many of whom also served as directors of the institution. These included George Pavel, Mircea Popa, Paul Popescu, Nicolae Boboc, Mircea Hoinic, and Ion Românu. The Banatul Philharmonic collaborated with a number of prominent soloists and conductors, including George Georgescu, Alfred Mendelson, Dumitru D. Botez, Mircea Basarab, Iosif Conta, P.H. Rogalski, Radu Aldulescu, Ion Voicu, Ștefan and Valentin Georgescu, and Dan Iordăchescu (Munteanu & Munteanu, 2002, p. 348).

At the end of the Second World War in 1945 and in the following years, several distinguished artists devoted themselves to the stage of the “Workers’

People's Theatre" in Timișoara, which was later renamed the "Matei Millo" Theatre. Notable contributors included Lilly Bulandra—actress and professor at the Conservatory—director and first manager of the theatre Dem. Moruzan, Gh. Damian, Dan Nasta, Gh. Leahu, and Ștefan Iordănescu. After the Communist takeover, the theatre's actors, directors, and stage designers were obliged, in addition to their regular performances, to participate in various state celebrations, national events, and so-called socio-educational activities.

In 1953, in addition to the Romanian State Theatre in Timișoara, German and Hungarian-language sections were established. By 1956–1957, these two sections of the "People's Theatre" became independent institutions, each with its own administrative leadership.

Alongside the thriving theatrical scene, the city was also home to the State Opera, the "Banatul" Philharmonic, the Faculty of Music and the Music High School, as well as the local branch of the Union of Composers. Banat's musical culture continued to flourish, enriched by the contributions of prominent local figures such as I. Vidu, Sabin Drăgoi, Tiberiu Brediceanu, Iosif Velceanu, Alexandru Mocioni, Liviu Tempa, N. Popovici, Trifu Lugojanu, Timotei Popovici, Ioachim Periam, and Zeno Vancea (Vancea, 1957, p. 28; Filaret Barbu, 1942, pp. 67–68).

Regarding the activity of Banat's visual artists, Professor Deliu Petroiu, a distinguished art historian and academic, offers insightful reflections:

"To begin with, it is important to note that the communist regime can be divided into distinct phases: the 1950s, often referred to as 'the obsessive decade'; the 1960s, which mark the final years of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's leadership and the early years of Nicolae Ceaușescu; and finally, the post-1971 period, following Ceaușescu's return from China, characterized by a tightening of control over intellectual life.

I was not in Timișoara during the first period, but the situation was likely similar to that in the rest of the country. In the 1960s, during the so-called 'thaw,' there was a relative relaxation of the strictures imposed by the regime. It was during these years that artists and writers in Timișoara began turning their attention to the Western world. There was significant experimentation, and by the end of the decade, a new attitude among many artists began to crystallize. A notable example is the exhibition held by Timișoara artists in Novi Sad and Belgrade—cities already enjoying closer contact with the free world. That marked the beginning of a new phase, and throughout the next decade, several painters and sculptors from the region held exhibitions in Central and Western Europe, invited by foreign galleries.

In this context, official vigilance began to subside. It had become a widespread phenomenon, increasingly difficult to restrain. Of course, there were some well-known artists who complied with party commissions. As a result, artworks emerged depicting the struggle for peace, industrial landscapes, and official visits by political leaders. Portraiture of party figures also flourished. After 1989, in conditions of complete freedom, some artists—such as Diodor Dure—

hesitated to reappear publicly, feeling guilt over works created on commission for the regime.

There was no formal censorship in place, even though propaganda secretaries expressed opposition to neo-expressionist and especially abstract influences. A major moment of national significance was the grand exhibition at the Dalles Gallery in Bucharest, which showcased the new face of Timișoara's art scene." (Interview with Prof. Dr. Deliu Petroiu, 2005, Timișoara – TM)

When asked about Banat artists who may have sympathized with the totalitarian regime through their work, Professor Deliu Petroiu responded:

"It is difficult to speak of genuine sympathy, but in order to exhibit their more daring works, artists often had to include in their repertoire scenes depicting workers, collectivists, pioneers, members of the Union of Communist Youth (UTC), and heroes of socialist labor.

In each county, the person directly responsible for ideological compliance was the Secretary for Propaganda. In addition to this official, others were also tasked with ensuring adherence to communist ideology, including the County Committee for Culture, editors and directors of newspapers and journals. These individuals sometimes modified or appended short passages to texts in order to better align them with the ideological expectations of the publications. There were cases in which the author of a controversial article was not allowed to publish a rebuttal or defense against press criticism. However, such instances were relatively rare, in part due to the widespread practice of self-censorship.

Official institutions generally did not encourage exhibitions abroad. Approval was granted only when invitations came from prestigious associations or galleries. For exchanges with other socialist countries, artists were either selected or granted permission to participate in workshops, creative camps, or experience exchanges.

From Timișoara, sculptors such as Gaga, Xenia, and Leon Vreme, among others, had established connections with institutions in Italy (Modena) and Switzerland. Constantin Flondor participated in the well-known meetings held as part of Documenta Kassel, a prominent contemporary art exhibition in Germany. Some artists had the opportunity to establish contacts with galleries and studios in Paris, such as painter Vasile Pintea, who worked in the Atelier La Courrière.

Artists typically exhibited their work in the galleries of the Fine Arts Fund (Fondul Plastic) or in other public venues in county seats. Exchanges between cities were also common, and there were instances where three regional branches were invited to showcase their works at the Dalles Gallery in Bucharest.

In principle, artists were free to choose their themes. However, during national holidays or the birthdays of political leaders, the party leadership would issue general thematic directives. These were often seen as a form of tribute, in exchange for which artists were then allowed to present other types of work. In general, the Party also recommended other subjects such as historical figures and scenes, the "happy life" of peasants in agricultural cooperatives, portraits of communist fighter-heroes, socialist labor heroes, industrial landscapes, and more.

For monumental art, works had to be submitted as models or sketches to a central commission. For instance, in the case of the decorative-monumental art planned for the new university building, multiple sessions were held in which improvements to proposals were discussed. A particularly unfortunate example is that of painter Ștefan Szönyi, whose project initially passed the commission's review but was later rejected by the Ministry of Education, which imposed a new thematic framework altogether." (Interview with Prof. Dr. Deliu Petroiu, 2005, Timișoara – TM)

Regarding the activity of Banat painters who gained prominence after the Second World War—Romulus Nuțiu, Gabriel Popa, Aurel Brăileanu, Traian Bona, Leon Vreme, and Constantin Flondor—Professor Deliu Petroiu noted:

"I have spoken and written extensively about this group over the years. It is difficult to define the specific character of their art in just a few lines. However, I would mention that Traian Bona was a physician who, owing to his exceptional skill in watercolor, was accepted into the Fine Arts Fund (Fondul Plastic) but not into the Union of Visual Artists. Among those listed in your question, most also served as professors at the Faculty of Arts, with the exception of C. Flondor, who was teaching at the Art High School in Timișoara at the time." (Interview with Prof. Dr. Deliu Petroiu, 2005, Timișoara – TM)

When invited to speak about himself and his distinguished career as a teacher and art critic, Professor Deliu Petroiu, with characteristic modesty, shared the following:

"As for myself, I taught Art History as a full-time faculty member at the Faculty of Philology in Timișoara. For several years during the 1970s, I also taught art history on a supplementary basis at the Faculty of Arts in the same city. Additionally, I was invited to deliver elective courses at other faculties, including the Polytechnic and the Faculty of Medicine. Like all my colleagues, I was required to participate in political education programs as part of my teaching role. Professionally, I spent two weeks in a specialization program under Professor Vătășeanu at the University of Cluj.

I was also very active at the Students' Cultural Center (Casa de Cultură a Studenților), where I had access to a more comprehensive range of illustrative materials. My courses were supplemented by slide projections and documentary art films, which I borrowed from the cultural departments of various embassies in Bucharest—France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Japan. I maintained a regular column on visual arts criticism for a time in *Orizont* magazine, and later in the newspaper *Drapelul Roșu*. I frequently wrote exhibition prefaces and spoke at exhibition openings, not only in Timișoara but also in other major artistic centers such as Arad, Reșița, Lugoj, Oradea, Cluj, Iași, Bârlad, Bucharest, Craiova, and Drobeta-Turnu Severin.

I participated in creative camps such as the one in Oravița, delivering lectures and later publishing my reflections. I also wrote brief monographs and prefaces for art catalogues, and I spoke at exhibitions featuring foreign artists visiting from France, Germany, Hungary, and the United States. Alongside fellow

painters and graphic artists, I supported the amateur art circle that later became the Romul Ladea Association, with which I also attended artistic retreats.

After 1989, I was invited back to the newly established Faculty of Arts as one of the few specialists in aesthetics—a subject that, during the communist era, had been excluded from academic curricula because aesthetics was considered part of the social sciences. I subsequently taught general aesthetics at the Faculties of Music, Architecture, and Acting. I explored the entire landscape of artistic creation in my lectures and writings, addressing topics such as folk art, naïve art, and children's art.

From 1990 onward, for approximately seven to eight years, I taught at the private Tibiscus University in Timișoara, at the Faculty of Design, and for a time at the Faculties of Journalism and Philology.” (Interview with Prof. Dr. Deliu Petroiu, 2005, Timișoara – TM)

During the communist regime, Banat’s visual artists exhibited their works in cultural journals such as *Contemporanul*, *Előre*, *Scrisul Bănățean*, *Tribuna*, and *Utunk*. These platforms provided one of the few remaining spaces for artistic visibility, even as creative freedom was constrained.

We can conclude that, in Banat—as in the rest of the country—cultural life after the Second World War was thoroughly reorganized in line with the ideological objectives imposed by the communist authorities. While some cultural institutions and organizations were allowed to continue their activities after 1945, others were dismantled because they evoked “bourgeois mentality and culture.” New institutions were established with the explicit aim of promoting communist ideology. In this process, all the foundational values of a democratic culture were systematically undermined and ultimately destroyed.

Among the acts that led to the destruction of Banat’s traditional cultural values, one of the most significant was the “hunt” orchestrated by local communist authorities against cultural figures from western Romania—writers, journalists, professors—who had formed the intellectual elite of Banat during the interwar period. The methods used by the communist regime to dismantle these elites included physical and psychological violence, manipulation, isolation, corruption, and imprisonment. Cultural figures were the primary targets, as the regime believed that foreign influences could easily infiltrate the ideological domain, especially through literature, art, and science. For this reason, the communists strongly advocated for the ongoing ideological struggle against imperialist influences.

Through the activities of the Academy of the People’s Republic of Romania, the communist regime aimed to enforce a dogmatic, proletarian culture and to carry out the systematic ideologization of cultural and spiritual life. To achieve this goal, many of Romania’s most prominent cultural figures—philosophers, historians, writers—were expelled from the Academy, arrested, and imprisoned. In their place, based on Decree No. 1454 of August 12, 1948, the regime appointed active and honorary full members to the Section for the Science of Language, Literature, and Art, including George Călinescu, Gaal Gabor, Geo

Bogza, Emil Isac, Iordan Iorgu, Alexandru Rosetti, Mihail Sadoveanu, Alexandru Toma, Gala Galaction, and Victor Eftimiu.

Under the program titled “Science, Literature, Art and Their Servants in the People’s Republic of Romania,” presented by the Academy’s president, Professor Traian Săvulescu, all members of the institution were formally committed to serving the Romanian Workers’ Party, contributing to the ideological transformation of culture, and assisting in the “reorganization of the new Soviet-type human being.”

The Communist Party closely monitored, controlled, and intervened in all cultural activities and manifestations, directly contributing to the ideological distortion of their content. Cultural acts themselves were subjected to censorship throughout the totalitarian period until 1989. For instance, according to the Resolution of the Plenary Session of the Composers’ Union held on February 4–5, 1952, musicians were tasked with the “thorough adoption of the method of socialist realism” and with opposing the “liberal and tolerant attitude toward the influences of bourgeois ideology” (*Scrisul Bănăţean*, no. 6/1952, p. 157).

In June 1960, during the Congress of the Romanian Workers’ Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej emphasized that all cultural creators had “the duty to produce works that meet the Party’s high artistic and ideological standards” (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1962, p. 187).

As for literary life during the totalitarian years—namely, the era of proletcultism—it was deeply shaped by the dogmas of communist ideology, which left a lasting imprint on literary production. In Timișoara, literary activity during this period was primarily concentrated within the city’s major cultural institutions, including the Timișoara branch of the Romanian Writers’ Union, the journal *Scrisul Bănăţean* (renamed *Orizont* in 1969), and the Faculty of Philology. These institutions operated under the strict control and censorship of local communist authorities, who followed directives issued from Bucharest.

The interviews I conducted with two prominent university professors—Prof. Dr. Deliu Petroiu and Prof. Dr. Damian Vulpe—stand as significant testimonies that enrich our understanding of cultural life in Banat during communism. Their recollections, as components of lived history, play an essential role in revealing historical truth, especially as they bridge the gap between personal memory and documented history. Following the events of 1989, the reconstruction of contemporary and near-contemporary historical events became a priority for historians, who increasingly turned to the testimonies of participants. These oral sources offer substantive insights into what we now refer to as lived history.

During the totalitarian period, Banat—like the rest of Romania—faced what Virgil Ierunca described as a cultural crisis: a crisis of individual freedom, a crisis of the poet’s right to be a poet, a crisis of the critic’s freedom to be critical, a crisis of the artist’s freedom to speak on behalf of the people, and not least, a crisis of the right to confront imposture. All the transformations imposed by the communist regime on Romanian society—political, economic, legal, cultural, and religious—resulted in a radical rupture from the interwar Romanian tradition.

The utopia of communism, centered on the belief in building a new society and a “new man” atop the ruins of civil society, morality, and religion, proved to be dangerously seductive for nations underdeveloped in terms of capitalism and liberal democracy. At the same time, its ultimate consequences were tragic—marked by failure, dehumanization, and social decay.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Barbu, Filaret, (1942). Portativ Bănăţean, Lugoj.
 Direcţia Judeţeană a Arhivelor Statului Timiş, fond Comitetul Regional al P.C.R. Banat, Secretariat, dosar 1/1951, fila 247.
 Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, (1962). Articole şi Cuvântări, Bucureşti, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură Politică.
 Ilieşiu, Nicolae, (1943), Timişoara, monografie istorică, vol. I., Timişoara, Editura Planetarium.
 Interviu cu prof. univ. dr. Damian Vulpe, 2004, Timişoara – TM.
 Interviu cu prof. univ. dr. Deliu Ptroi, (2005), Timişoara – TM.
 Munteanu, Ioan, Munteanu Rodica, (2002). Timişoara. Monografie, Timişoara, Editura Mirton.
 Selejan, Ana, (1993). Reeducare şi prigoană. România în timpul primului război cultural (1944-1948), vol. II, Sibiu, Editura Thransib.
 „Scriul bănăţean”, nr. 6/1952, p. 157
 Vancea Zeno, (1957). Temeliile tradiţiei muzicale bănăţene. Opera de stat din Timişoara, 10 ani de activitate, Timişoara.

Note on the author

Lecturer **Mirela TĂRĂBÎC**, Tibiscus University of Timişoara
 Fields of interest: History; Latin language (Latin legal terminology).
 PhD in history obtained in 2008, at the Faculty of History - Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, coordinator: prof. Doru Radosav. PhD thesis title: "Aspects regarding the establishment of communism in Banat (1945-1965) reflected in the collective memory".