Alternative Religiosities in the Soviet Union and the Communist East-Central Europe: Formations, Resistances and Manifestations

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Documentary Film and Magic in Communist Romania

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Abstract: The current paper is concerned with the ways that delegitimized forms of spirituality in communist Romania found unexpected ways of circulating their knowledge. Because of state control, especially during the repressive cultural revolution of the 1970s, magic practiced by Romanian Orthodox believers (as opposed to magic done by practitioners in other faiths) was practiced underground and was not a desirable topic of engagement for public figures and scholars. Conducting research on the topic of ritual magic was difficult for social scientists working in state institutes, and could only be done in secret. The current article explores one aspect of the politics of the communist regime against magic. In the late 1960s to early 1970s, a Romanian ethnographer shot and produced a documentary on ritual magic using the state's technical and social tools. I investigate how the methodological problems faced by Romanian social researchers illuminate their research on ritual magic as a space of resistance.

Keywords: Communism, Romania, Magic, Documentary Film, Ethnography

1 Introduction

In a broader sense, my analysis uses the lens of Romanian Orthodox ritual magic to examine the way national politics and ideology influenced ethnographic fieldwork during the Romanian communist era, focusing specifically on the 1960s to 1970s[1]. Thus follows the central question of my project: why did some social scientists choose to conduct research on Romanian Orthodox magic at a time when the political regime was going through a process that opposed spiritual practices? How does this complicate the ways we understand the dynamics of the state, magic and modernity?

I contextualize the topic in the larger political context of the time, by exploring how social research on magic was possible during the late 1960s, but not before or after. Furthermore, it is important to understand what social research meant for ethnographers throughout the world in the context of the Cold War[2]. I present the case study of a Romanian ethnographer, Radu Răutu, who, making use of numerous state institutions, conducted research on ritual magic practiced by Christian Orthodox believers during the late 1960s. Răutu was one of renowned ethnographer Mihai Pop's young researchers, who Pop took to a field school in the Maramureș, northern Romania, area, in 1968. While working with Pop, Răutu was introduced to a witch living in Vadul Izei, a nearby village. After talking to her a few times, Răutu suggested they make a documentary recording one of her rituals. He recalls:

1 Knox, "Russian Society", 26.
2 Bernstein, "Religious Bodies", 34.

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> In the summer of 1968, Professor Mihai Pop had an initiative, which was valuable for us, as researchers, as well as for the history of Romanian folklore and research. He created an interdisciplinary research group that conducted fieldwork in the Maramureș area, the region of the country closest to his heart. There, we met with the famous graphic artist Vasile Kazar who was summer vacationing in Vadul Izei. After having lunch together, and him learning of our purpose there, Kazar told us he knew a woman in the village of Vadul Izei, who was awfully good, whom he knew because she brought him antiques, and suggested he should introduce us. I went to see her the next day.
>
> I stayed at her house till late in the night, and our first audio recording was three hours. After that, I would go to see her every day, and she would tell me something new every time (...) Eventually, after about a week, she told me about this wonderful ritual, unbinding. I told her we should make a documentary about it. I asked her if she agrees, and she was super happy. This film happened, so we were there first in July and then we came back with a professional film crew in September. They were from Sahia Film, the official film studio[3].

Because of the fact that the only film studio he could use was Sahia Film Studio in Bucharest, a state-controlled institution, Răutu had to find ways to frame his project in line with the communist ideology. The 50-minute film came out in 1971 and was named "A popular medical practice as old as time: Unbinding"[4]. The narrative of the film is linear. The film follows a day in the life of Ana Herbel, a witch from Vadul Izei, whose voice we first hear, together with a traditional song, while the camera is panning over a wheat field.

The camera then follows Ana, the witch, in her house, where she starts moving things around, so as to symbolize doing cleaning work and reorganizing. In the following scene, the documentary shows Ana Herbel in her tiny, village house, welcoming a neighbor, who, in this particular case, came to ask for healing. They are both wearing formal traditional clothing, what would normally be thought of as "Sunday clothing". The women greet each other, Ana Herbel asks what brought the woman to her, and the villager goes on to tell Ana about all her symptoms (unexplainable nausea, head aches, vertigo), which helps Ana diagnose that the woman has been *bound*, thus requiring Ana to perform the unbinding ritual.

Răutu recollects interacting with the concept of unbinding for the first time:

> When I first talked to her, and she mentioned unbinding, I asked: What is that? What does it mean? And so she told me how it sometimes happens that someone feels jealousy or envy towards one of their neighbors – these sort of things tend to happen between women, who are more vulnerable and more receptive to this traditional ideology. The ritual counterpart of binding is unbinding, meaning there are magical means by which a physical act is reversed through a magical act. What is interesting here is that the woman falls ill, she can no longer get out of bed, she seeks different cures, she goes to the doctor and his medicine doesn't help, and so eventually she ends up seeing one of these all-knowing women.[5]

This dialogue sets the scene for the entire film's focus of documenting the unbinding ritual. Ana, the witch, follows her diagnosis with going around the house to gather all the tools she needs for the unbinding ritual – coal, knives, dried herbs, a raspberry cane. The viewers see her tiny house is graced with extremely numerous and valuable Orthodox Christian icons, as well as beautiful dowry carpets and embroidered cloths, specific to the region, and held in what is traditionally called "the good room". The witch arranges all the objects to be used during the unbinding ritual in a certain order.

3 Răutu interview, 2014.

4 Several other visual materials have been produced and archived from Radu Răutu and Ana Herbel's encounter with the professional film crew at Sahia Film Studio. They have only been circulated internationally after 1990. Sanda Golopenția at Brown University has recorded one on the website Romanian Love charms, which documents charms from all over Romania. Link to the *De adus ursitul* (To Bring the Fateman, 1971) video: http://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/romanianCharms/mov/01_de_adus_ursitul.php. All videos and films have Vasile Mânăstireanu, a videographer at Sahia, as screenplay and director.

5 Răutu interview, 2014.

Fig 1. Scene from "A popular medical practice as old as time: Unbinding". The woman suffering from binding is laying in bed, telling the witch Ana Herbel about her symptoms.

Fig 2. Scene from "A popular medical practice as old as time: Unbinding". The witch, Ana Herbel, gathering the tools she needs for the unbinding ritual.

This investigation is divided into five sections: 1) *Introduction*, where I present the general setup of the documentary film discussed, as well as the general hypothesis of the article; 2) *Historical and socio-political context 1960s-1970s*, where I analyze the national and international ideological factors surrounding social research and ethnographic film in the late 1960s and early 1970s; 3) *Ethnography, film, research and religion*, where I discuss intersections of religiosity and ideology at the Sahia Film Studio, the only state-authorized film studio in Romania during communism; 4) *Communist Romanian ethnography and delegitimized practices*, a chapter where I discuss my interviews from 2014-2017, focusing on the experience of one ethnographer who made the only documentary film to encompass a full magic ritual that came out of Romania in the late 1960s and early 1970s; followed by a brief 5) *Conclusion*.

I hypothesize that ethnographers conducting research about ritual magic faced ideological challenges imposed by the Communist Party. The pressure for social researchers to be members of the Communist

Party was extremely high[6]. To put it briefly, one could not work in an academic or research facility without being formally affiliated with the Communist Party and abide by the formal regulations. Furthermore, the social, political and economic climate of the early 1970s pushed the Socialist Republic of Romania towards a set of drastic changes in its cultural and ideological policies[7]. As actors in the process of forming, revealing and creating historical values, ethnographers were one of the first groups to receive strict directions on how their work practices and ideology should change to best fit those of the Party.

As revealed in my interviews (2014-2017) with Răutu and ethnographers working at the Constantin Brăiloiu Ethnography and Folklore Institute, as well as researchers for the Center for Anthropological Research of the Romanian Academy, the restrictions faced by social scientists during communism came at a time when political figures engaged with, resisted and mobilized the occult for their own individual and political ends. This set of conflicting events informs my broader current research. The literature reveals that beliefs in the supernatural are socially constructed[8] and used to attain political power[9].

The involvement of magic in politics is not a new topic in social research. Daniel Jütte suggests that Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist definition of magic (outlining magic as an esoteric practice meant to solve everyday problems) is not enough to mirror the experience of premodern elites, for whom magic offered a substitute for the political action to which they did not have access[10]. Elsewhere, contemporary local and regional contexts in Guyana and Venezuela have incorporated the occult in regional and national politics by way of shamans leading political groups prior the colonial encounter. Having a cosmology in place, with certain elements already established, it is very important for local forms of government and administration to keep their structure in the advent of new national and international political constituencies. My project thus builds on Jack Goody's definition of religion[11] as the body of beliefs and practices directed at supernatural beings and powers, to understand a belief in magic as inherently religious. Goody's definition allows researchers to bridge both beliefs accepted by official religious institutions and equally, those deemed as superstitious, and thus delegitimized.

The Enlightenment brought with it convictions that much of what has failed in modern European history is due to secret societies and their occult practices[12]. Concerns with the use of secrecy in the 20th and 21st century are often located in discussions surrounding the Cold War[13], which is helpful as we try to think about magic in a global, 'modern' context. At the same time, the post-Cold War context offered unrivaled opportunities for ethnographers, who could think about magical continuities and new paradigms in the wake of new relationships between states, colonies and socialist states[14].

At a local, Romanian level, my focus is on the strategies employed by ethnographers, to conduct their research relatively unbothered, navigating the ideological and political landscape. Secondarily, my work hints at the Communist Party and the Securitate (the Romanian secret police), both of which grew increasingly obsessed with controlling the public sphere in the 1970s. The latter is particularly important, as Romania was a significant site of collaboration among Western and Eastern ethnographers - causing the regime to become paranoid about what was being shared[15].

In the early 1970s, a major, visible focus in the Romanian Communist Party was the opposition towards research topics dealing with spirituality and religiosity, as they were no longer seen as agreeable to the Party's new ideological direction[16]. This created a particular way of going about the study and interrogation of delegitimized forms of medicine or spirituality in the Romanian social sciences, modes that did not

6 Hedeșan, "Doing Fieldwork", 22.
7 Verdery, "Truths and Secrets", 14.
8 Lienhardt "Divinity and Experience", 36; Pedersen "Not Quite Shamans", 81.
9 Bok, "Secrets: On the Ethics", 142.
10 Jütte, "The Age of Secrecy", 65.
11 Goody, "Religion and RItual", 144.
12 Ledeneva, "Russia's Economy", 64.
13 Masco, "The Nuclear Borderlands", 137.
14 Verdery, "Truths and Secrets", 55.
15 Kaplan, "In Europe's Shadow", 13.
16 Deletant, "Romania under Communist", 73.

change completely and abruptly in 1989 with the fall of the Communist Party[17]. Communism established and maintained a particular type of scholarly climate, which remained in place, and is still visible in the training of new generations of scholars.

Religious and spiritual practices became one of the first targets to be reformed under communism[18], the goal being their elimination from public life. This happened during several attempts: first inspired by the Stalinist model, then reflecting the moral Puritanism[19] that Ceaușescu became so enthusiastic in exploring after his 1971 meetings with the Chinese and North Korean officials. The North Korean model provided Ceaușescu with a model in his autarkic fight for independence from the Soviet Union[20]. Ceaușescu's visits to Asia in the early 1970s were themselves a statement about Romania's growing independence from the Kremlin. However, despite the high-level policies towards moral Puritanism, at the local level, the police and magic practitioners collaborated.

In my conversations with Răutu, a Romanian ethnographer who conducted research on magic during the late 1960s, he recounted how the notoriety of Ana Herbel created a memorable episode. After being filmed by the ethnographic team and becoming known at a regional scale, the woman became frightened by repercussions of this newly-found fame:

> After the film was shot and produced, it gained so much resonance in the village and in the region, that she became notorious as a fortuneteller and witch and many rich women from the urban society requested her services. Even more interestingly, there was this woman once who came to see her, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, according to Ana, who probably had a marital issue of sort and visited asking for her services. Ana woke up one day with a black car on her unpaved alley, as she used to call it, and she kept trying to hide in fear that they would take her away and throw her in prison. Turns out the rich woman was there with good intentions. For Ana.[21]

Such linkages between ritual magic and politics continue today, as evident in contemporary research[22]. Similar to the practices of Romanian communist politicians, ethnographers studying magic faced formal prohibitions against conducting research on this topic, especially in the 1970s. In practice, many research projects could be framed under acceptable topics and managed to still serve their purpose.

Doing (meta) research on how the anthropology of magic came to life for Romanian ethnographers in the 1960s and 1970s not only illuminates the transitions to post-communism, but also helps explain the course of the discipline. Using film as a research tool to show its role in this cultural history is very important, especially with recent scholarly interest in Romanian written and visual archives[23]. In this sense, I am particularly interested in investigating how the ethnographers navigated the system, especially in the times when they collaborated with Western researchers on Romanian field sites.

2 Historical and socio-political context 1960s-1970s

During the communist era, state secularization became a priority twice. The first time was represented by attempts to stay in line with Stalinist policies and ideology in the late 1940s and early 1950s[24]. The second started in 1971, after Nicolae Ceaușescu visited China and North Korea and, upon return, started developing policies meant to reflect his new vision of a cult of personality, similar to what he had seen at Kim Il Sung[25]. He rapidly developed what Linden and Weber call 'a patrimonial state', one in which the power is in the hands of one man, rather than shared between Party members[26]. Prior to 1971, there were three events that

17 Buroway, "Afterword to Uncertain Transitions", 73.
18 Tismăneanu, "The Devil", 140.
19 Almond, "The Rise and Fall", 320.
20 Verdery, "Truths and Secrets", 32.
21 Răutu interview, 2014.
22 Pop, "The Wizards", 160.
23 Brădeanu, "Romanian Documentaries", 45.
24 Tismăneanu, "The Devil", 121.
25 Almond, "The Rise and Fall", 320.
26 Linden, "Khrushchev", 57.

made the national context conducive to such a change. First, during 1965 and 1968, Ceaușescu formed the Secret Police for surveilling and eliminating opposition. Denis Deletant describes how the Secret Police slowly but surely violated human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion[27].

Secondly, in 1968, Ceaușescu denounced the Warsaw Pact and established a new political position for the country. The national identity proved to be a good tool for social control and Ceaușescu started personalizing power towards establishing an autarkic regime. Thirdly, in 1971, Ceaușescu and his wife visited China and North Korea, to meet Mao and Kim Il Sung. Ceaușescu was inspired by and implemented aspects of the Asian communist regimes. New policies included banning and delegitimizing certain traditional customs, while at the same time, trying to create new customs that would work towards the form of ethnic nationalism that he envisioned for Romania[28].

Thirdly, Ceaușescu's trips to Beijing and Pyongyang happened at the end of June 1971. By July 7th 1971, the Romanian leader was already handing the Executive Committee of the Communist Party copies of a set of propositions meant "to improve the political-ideological activity of the Marxist-Leninist education"[29]. These propositions were published in the *Scîntiea* magazine and came to be known as the July Theses, projected to fuel a cultural revolution and the construction of a new national identity. At the same time, his North Korean visit added Korean elements to the many megalomaniac institutions and establishments he was erecting.

The main foci of the July theses were (1) to centralize the control of culture and education (here is where ethnographic research and film are both used and affected), (2) to develop cultural propaganda for the masses and more importantly, (3) to create a synthesis of Marxist-Leninist ideology combined with Romanian nationalism, that would infuse all media and culture production (here, again, social sciences would undergo major changes). The cultural and educational ideological alterations created a form of ethno-nationalism[30].

At the same time, a large part of Ceaușescu's project was concerned with speeding up industrialization[31], based on a model that Daniel Chirot called 'corporatism'[32]. Ceaușescu's ideological direction was focused on the purification of Romanian culture from cosmopolitan influences (interestingly, understood more and more as *Soviet*). New policies discouraged customs and practices that did not bode well with the new moral conditions of Puritanism. Delegitimized practices, such as magic, were among the customs to be ideologically criticized and rejected the most. Ethnographers were the social actors responsible for creating a septic cultural space, appropriate for the protochronism (imagined national history) that Ceaușescu had planned[33]. As such, they were not to engage in any academic interest other than providing 'scientific evidence' to support protochronism and certainly not to engage in the studies of magic and other such "superstitions". My interviews reveal that junior and senior scholars were asked to come to the bureau of the Secret Police and were told that certain research projects would no longer be signed off under the new ideology.

3 Ethnography, film, research and religion

Capitalist affinities were understood to be linked to the Romanian documentary film tradition and could be subversively expressed in things such as opening titles[34], which made Romanian documentary film a potential tool for experimenting and exercising freedom of speech. Pârvulescu notices how opening titles

27 Deletant, "Romania under Communist", 36.
28 Deletant and Ionescu, "Romania Under the Warsaw", 51; Durandin, "Histoire de la Nation", 43.
29 *Scînteia* anul XL, nr. 8812, 10 iunie 1971.
30 Roth, "The Effect of Ethno-Nationalism", 275; Bergdahl, "Seeing Otherwise", 18.
31 Verdery, "Truths and Secrets", 65.
32 Chirot, "Social Change", 468.
33 Verdery, "Truths and Secrets", 87.
34 Rosenstone and Pârvulescu, "Post-Heroic Revolution", 64.

would often express an oppressed or overt ideological affinity in Romanian documentary film. This is possible because title sequences and even opening body sequences of fiction films had more latitude from established conventions. While this has been broadly discussed in fiction film, my research hints here at potential new scholarly topics in the study of non-fiction film. The film era from the late 1940s to the late 1950s was characterized by the Soviet production practices and Socialist Realist content, where the Soviets did not necessarily see film as a form of art, but rather as a way to reach the masses and create propaganda[35].

The Romanian Communist Party started using film[36], to better promote the socialist way of life among Romanian citizens – which was aided by the enthusiasm with which the proletariat was watching television. The promotion of the socialist way was no longer promoted through film towards the end of the regime, when film was mostly used to promote the image of the leader[37]. State-controlled filmmaking denied the film director her authority, as this authority was considered a sign of bourgeoisie[38]. This made it easy for state-sponsored films to spread the Party's ideology freely. Individual style and artistic form, as dictated by film directors, were considered secondary issues. The main purpose of the film was to shape the worldview of the proletariat. Film was to be a socialist endeavor: made by a group - for a group - where individual authorship had no place. In other words, style *did* matter, but not in terms of expressing individual artistic vision. Socialist Realism is an important aesthetic and style, even if realized differently in different contexts.

The period of socialist-realist films in Romania ended around 1956, when the country denounced Stalinist ideology and increasingly developed an autarkic state, after looking towards the West for values in the social sciences and documentary film. In the scholarly field, this was the time when social science schools incorporated structuralist anthropology and replaced much of the Soviet literature in academic courses, even though this structuralism had many affinities with Soviet anthropological theory of the time. In terms of film, the notion of de-politicization became increasingly popular and the state-directed film industry left room for less prescriptive productions. From the late 1970s to 1989, when the regime fell, directorial authorship became more and more important.

However, we should not forget that the Cold War and post-Cold War period were drastically affecting ideology and policies everywhere in Eastern Europe[39]. Documentary film was no exception to the rule. Ceaușescu's new interest in exploring moral Puritanism after 1971 meant that topics such as sex and violence were censored in media and that documentaries could not be made unless they aligned with a certain type of state-ideological, moral and cultural Romanianess. At the same time, as film director authorship grew in importance during the Cold War era, Romanian films were sent to international venues and festivals, mainly to serve the political goal of antagonizing and relativizing Western audiences[40].

The documentary film experience of the period often represented the tension between individual and institutional memory, where censorship and negotiation were always present. Films that expressly focused on a topic such as magic became good tools when thinking about the complicated dynamics between delegitimized practices and the state. The meaning of documentary changed in the late 1960s. Ceaușescu and the Communist Party decided to start a series of historical films, in part to appear more empathetic with people's desire for national reenactment, rather than just be perceived as the authority asking for high productivity from the masses[41].

Documentaries seemed to be a useful tool for this – however, historical documentaries produced propaganda at another level. The films were focused on national history and had strong elements of ethno-nationalism, showing how Romanians perpetually defeated their oppressors throughout history – this is a form of the protochonism mentioned earlier. One can see how deep this cultural imaginary was in these films – although film was no longer the privileged vehicle for producing these arguments. The discourse created through these socialist films is still reproduced many generations later. For example, this is visible in

35 Căliman, "O Istorie", 34.
36 Ionescu, "Communism in Rumania", 124.
37 Brădeanu, "Romanian Documentaries", 45.
38 Rosenstone and Pârvulescu, "Post-Heroic Revolution", 64.
39 Deletant and Ionescu, "Romania Under the Warsaw", 53.
40 Rosenstone and Pârvulescu, "Post-Heroic Revolution", 88.
41 Ibid., 127.

2016, when one reads social media reactions to the Syrian refugee crisis, in which Romanians still represent themselves as the champions of Christianity who crush Muslim invaders once again, this being part of their historical responsibility to Europe.

The only state-approved Romanian documentary studio, Sahia Film Studio was started in Bucharest in the 1950s and its main purpose was to produce the news program on TV[42]. The studio was extremely important for the regime, as the main way to inscribe visual memory in that era, and give the regime the main venue to present issues that were of ideological importance to The Socialist Republic of Romania and its leaders. Furthermore, it meant that Sahia Film Studio gained importance during the 1970s, and that the topics of their films were highly controlled and censored. Delegitimized practices such as ritual magic were not, as can be imagined, on the priority list.

According to Adina Brădeanu, "Sahia functioned as the ideologically-correct mascot of the domestic film industry, always paraded whenever proof was needed of the good political behavior of the film community" [43]. The film studio would produce everything from propaganda films, to health-and-safety films and sometimes would lend its tools and people to independent projects[44]. The team of the Sahia Film Studio grew, from 1950, when it was established, to almost 450 employees in the early 1980s. As the only documentary studio in communist Romania, it had many projects to accomplish (although most of them were state-directed and owned). By the time the communist regime collapsed in 1989, the Sahia Film Studio was producing many newsreels, authored documentaries, propaganda films and small sub-genres, like health-and-safety films, touristic or educational productions. Some of the propaganda films focused on the megalomaniac buildings and neighborhoods that defied any previous urbanism efforts complete with his systematization plans. The films also helped towards the country's goal to appear more urban, more industrial, in a shorter time (yet this image and resource investment happened only in urban spaces)[45]. Once again, the ideology that opposed alternative religiosity is visible here.

The frustration among documentary filmmakers was often voiced about the fact that the filmmakers were not given sufficient freedom to work professionally. A common joke was "What is Documentary Film?" the answer to which was "it is a film in which you shoot documents"[46]. This was an oblique referral to the ideological texts and campaigns of the Communist Party that the filmmakers were often reduced to work with, instead of producing creative or social projects. The Sahia Film Studio created a large number of propaganda films that centered on the personality of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, as well as the great (theoretical) achievements of the regime, done through the union and happiness of people, which was, in practice, less and less true, but at the same time embedded in Ceaușescu's ethno-nationalism[47].

Together with the documentary studio, all spaces where culture was supposed to be created – such as museums, art galleries, libraries and even the two hours of daily television programming - were filled with productions and reproductions of Nicolae Ceaușescu and the greatness of Romania, which became increasingly a phantomatic distraction to the millions of impoverished and hungry people.

In a time when filming a documentary did not have the technological ease it does today, Romanian ethnographers who wanted to film a documentary had to go to The Sahia Film Studio to lease (very big) cameras, accessories and a film crew. In going through the paperwork, one needed to specify the purpose of the project, and, more often than not, interventions from someone in the Communist Party elites were needed, especially in the case of junior researchers. However, as I will further explain, censorship did not apply as harshly to independent projects. Still, censorship took a far more serious turn in the 1980s, when living conditions in Romania became unbearable and any material documenting the any aspect of this was absolutely prohibited[48].

42 Solomon, "What is Documentary", 2.
43 Brădeanu, "Romanian Documentaries", 46.
44 Verdery, "Truths and Secrets", 83.
45 Chirot, "Social Change", 475.
46 Solomon, "What is Documentary", 2.
47 Roth, "The Effect of Ethno-Nationalism", 279.
48 Cernat, "In Căutarea", 62.

4 Communist Romanian ethnography and delegitimized practices

As early as the 1950s, the communist regime had started to impact ethnography. Research topics dealing with the village were considered to be too national and divergent from the political focus of Soviet internationalism, and research that focused on the peasantry was problematic, since peasantry, as a group, was not understood as similar to the proletariat. At an even more practical level, research in villages was made almost impossible by deportation of wealthy peasants or "chiaburi", ideological censorship and forced collectivization[49]. As such, the idea of social research itself, as it had been formulated until then, was pressured to adapt to the ideological direction of the Communist Party. The Constantin Brăiloiu Ethnography and Folklore Institute was started in 1949 and it initially hired almost exclusively musicologists, claiming that folklore is a form of art and thus, ideologically striping it of its identity as a social science – alternatively, "creation houses" were created in 1953 for the sole purpose of producing new folklore, that would better fit the ideological aspirations of the Communist Party. Interdisciplinary work was no longer feasible under this strict task compartmentalization and fieldwork had mainly become "data gathering" in a very strict gather-and-archive sense[50].

The Romanian ethnography school's two pre-1989 important moments are: 1) the Gusti school (1930s-1940s), somewhat influenced by fascism, but also American social sciences, and 2) the Pop school (1960s-1970s). During his ethnographic fieldwork with Professor Pop in the late 1960s, Răutu worked with the Sahia film studio to produce the only documentary film coming out of Romania of the time to record a full magic ritual. Răutu went in the field with equipment and crew from Sahia and filmed Ana Herbel who worked with healing magic as she reenacted a ritual.

As a young researcher in the Pop school, Radu Răutu's research and visual material were made possible by the fact that Pop chose certain field sites in places where his former students gained important political functions, such as Maramureș (an area that was also his birth region). The work produced by Răutu in 1968-1971, in the form of archival work and documentary film, was similarly highlighted through Pop's institutional connections. While the topic of witchcraft in research was prohibited, Pop and Răutu worked with the head of the county's Health Department, who made a public statement that every medic had to know popular medical practices in detail in order to control them[51]. As a consequence, the health Department agreed to pay all costs related to the film, which was now considered a valuable scientific document for medical staff, and the film premiered in the county's main hospital.

Social research was first connected to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party in the 1950s, as the institution was then training researchers in the field of rural sociology, political sociology and the sociology of management. At this point, research on delegitimized practices such as ritual magic was only accepted at an official level in a very particular sense, as it was seen as part of the working class mentality and thus useful for the state to understand[52]. Research on magic, "the handling of herbs and the treatment of animals and healing in general"[53] was the first to be neglected. The research importance of delegitimized "spiritual" practices became marginal, as the state (theoretically) became secularized, with respect to the ways it produced policies. These practices came to be considered increasingly superstitions, and, therefore, having only retrograde value in post-WWII society[54]. After 1965, the number of research topics increased. However, they were all mostly focused on the sociology of labor and industrial enterprise, leaving matters of spirituality significantly under-researched.

As Ceaușescu was planning rapid industrialization of the country, urban planning became important for the massive urbanization necessary to get the labor force into the factories[55]. During this period, urban areas became the locale for a complex number of institutions, hospitals included, while the rural areas were

49 Tismăneanu, "The Devil", 146.
50 Hedeșan, "Doing Fieldwork", 23.
51 Ibid., 28.
52 Bîrlea, "Metode ce cercetare", 16.
53 Răutu interview, 2015.
54 Bubociu, "Folklore and Ethnography", 297.
55 Jowitt, "The Romanian Communist", 40.

mostly neglected[56]. Consequently, the state had little reason to fund research on delegitimized practices and healing in rural areas. This made room for the main interest of the Communist Party - social research on youth, the proletariat, labor, and the industry. The little that was still left of social research interests in the rural areas dealt mostly with technical progress and labor organization there[57]. As Laszlo Kürti confirms, "customs, folklore and other ‚traditional elements' carried by such groups are viewed by native ethnographers as essential remnants of the nation's past, to be collected and preserved"[58]. At the same time, foreign researchers during Ceaușescu's regime became interested in Romania because of its rich folklore and its countryside[59].

Radu Răutu's film is a reenactment, necessary because of the lack of technical tools and means to own technology during communism. To explain this more, while the film does document an actual ritual, the victim of witchcraft presented in the film was not bewitched at the time the crew was filming, yet had been an actual client of the healer. According to Nichols documentarists of the time had little problem with filming such reenactments:

> Reenactments, the more or less authentic re-creation of prior events, provided a staple element of documentary representation until they were slain by the "verite boys" of the 1960s (...), who proclaimed everything except what took place in front of the camera without rehearsal or prompting to be a fabrication, inauthentic.[60]

Radu Răutu's reenactment is necessary because these rituals are only performed if someone is unwell. Since no one had been the victim of binding and magic at the time Răutu was in the field, Ana Herbel asked one of her clients, who had undergone this treatment before, to sit in for his film team and do things as they normally would if she had been bewitched at the time they shot the documentary. Răutu reflects on this issue:

> I should say something about this film and its plot. The film is supposed to be an authentic documentary, but it could not truly be that, because it is a reenactment, in a way, although the protagonist is an old patient of hers, who agreed to take part in our filmmaking. So from this point of view, there was no way around it, it was extremely complicated to make a professional film somewhere with the technical means we had then. It was impossible.[61]

The black and white film presents an old woman, the witch Ana Herbel, greeting another woman, the patient, who came to see her. The patient explains she has been having physical symptoms, to which the healer responds with a diagnosis (binding) and reassurance that everything will be well. While the voiceover continues the dialogue, the viewers are given glimpses of the two women talking in the healer's house, then the video switches to nature shots and back to their meeting. The ritual then starts. The film presents the entire ritual, but there is no voiceover or text to help us understand the technical aspects of what is going on. The healer moves alternately between the patient's body, which she touches with different intensities and for different amounts of time, to gathering herbs and objects for her ritual from where they are stacked in her tiny house. This entire time, the healer utters special words during the ritual. She addresses both the devil and the bad spirits harming her patient, as well as all the objects and herbs, from which she asks for help in ailing her patient's suffering. An interesting point in the ritual is when the healer has the patient fully undress and go through a raspberry cane circle naked. This nudity is, in Radu Răutu's words, an aid to the patient's healing, recalling the moment of birth, purity and beginning:

> When the ritual happens live, after the client goes through the unbinding she has to go through a magical raspberry cane circle and she has to be naked. The nudity is what participates in the healing. The nudity recalls the moment of birth, the emergence of the embryo, and later on, of the newborn. The fact itself that she has to pass through that magic circle gives her the vitality of a new beginning, of a new life.[62]

56 Chirot, "Social Change", 463.
57 Bîrlea, "Metode ce cercetare", 53.
58 Kürti, "Homecoming", 12.
59 Hedeșan, "Doing Fieldwork", 28.
60 Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment", 72.
61 Răutu interview, 2014.
62 Ibid.

Fig 3. Scene from "A popular medical practice as old as time: Unbinding". The woman suffering from binding is being undressed by Ana Herbel, to the pass through the magic raspberry cane circle.

The film ends abruptly after the ritual has been fully reenacted, and the film goes to credits. Because the ritual is not considered to have any malevolent effect, the reenactment itself, for the purpose of video recording, is not considered harmful for either the healer or the patient. That being said, we notice some gestures being done solely with a demonstrative purpose. There is much repetition in her utterrances – with many chants and gestures - and during the handling of the objects throughout the ritual. For most ritual work, especially in the Christian world, the three-time repetition of an utterance or a gesture mirrors the Holy Trinity and is believed to enhance the healer's power and help the patient. However, in the reenactment of the reenacted ritual, we see the healer only repeating the gestures twice or one-and-a-half times (in this latter case, instead of crossing a piece of charcoal on the body two full times, she crosses it once, then just re-draws a vertical line). This is an important aspect of ritual reenactment in magic – and shows the healer trusts the real effects of her actions, and does not want to disturb the balance of the world through conjuring the full force of the ritual at a time when it is not actually needed.

5 Conclusion

The role of ethnographers in the communist regime was particularly important in creating a form of nationalism that was increasingly autarkic, such as Ceaușescu was trying to build[63]. Răutu's documentary film produced in the late 1960s was not promoted as much as the other Sahia Studio products, because of the Communist policies and the June Theses that Nicolae Ceaușescu created after his visit to North Korea. The film can be seen as a subversive tool to oppose communist ideology and moral Puritanism, as it was showing nudity and elements of peasant life that the state ideology did not want to acknowledge and promote.

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63 Behr, "Kiss the Hand", 6.

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