

**MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION
„1 DECEMBRIE 1918” UNIVERSITY ALBA IULIA
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOLOGY**

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-Summary-

Scientific coordinator:
Univ. prof. dr. Mircea Popa

Ph.D:
Melania-Elena Vrabie

**Alba Iulia
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**FEMALE MEMOIRS OF COMMUNIST
IMPRISONMENT
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Keywords: memoirs, communism, detention, female literature, torturer, resistance, deportation, investigation, testimony, prison, search, conviction, partisan, confession, isolation, solidarity, Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, Nicole Valéry Grosu, Oana Orlea, Anița Nandriș-Cudla, Lucreția Jurj, Elisabeta Rizea, Lena Constante, Sabina Wurmbrand, Annie Samuelli, Adriana Georgescu, Ioana Berindei, Dina Balș, Ana-Maria Marin, Aristina Pop-Săileanu and Micaela Ghițescu.

The paper *Memorialistica feminină a detenției comuniste* responds to the idea of the necessity of a synthesis study to provide an overview on the production of women memoir in Romania, capitalizing general history data and personal history by recovering social, political, cultural and personal facts details with which the authors faced directly.

The chosen topic is based on a varied theoretical foundation that is brought to their notice about the female detention in a multidisciplinary context. Authors whose writings form the subject of the present research belong to different generations and are part of diverse social backgrounds, fascinating through its originality, but also by many political and cultural concerns. It is a series of female figures with important role in social, political and cultural during the establishment of the communist regime, but also some more modest condition. They are being rediscovered nowadays with the publication of experiences, which for some of them act as singular testimony of some exceptional destinies, providing information about policy configuration time.

Without having the intention of an exhaustive analysis, we aim to provide an overview on the female memoirs of the communist prison,

bringing in attention fifteen authors of memoirs: Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, Nicole Valéry Grosu, Oana Orlea, Anița Nandriș-Cudla, Lucreția Jurj, Elisabeta Rizea, Lena Constante, Sabina Wurmbrand, Annie Samuelli, Adriana Georgescu, Ioana Berindei, Dina Balș, Ana-Maria Marin, Aristina Pop-Săileanu and Micaela Ghițescu.

Within the „Argumentului” I justified the theme by establishing evidence to show the novelty and originality of approach. After fixing theoretical guidelines analysis of the causes that led to the investigations generally have opted for a thematic analysis of the evidence, selecting some of the recurring themes that define the provided femininity in the prison space - elements of self-image formation in writing memoirs, instances of political activism, the invocation of divinity, restoring destiny - which is the subject of current research aimed to capitalize memorialist experiences. Also, in research were also utilized era documents without literary value (informative notes, tracking files, warrants, indictments), which are coming to complete the overall picture of the phenomenon of detention and the analyzed authors personalities.

In the first chapter of the paper, *Condițiile social istorice, politice și culturale ale perioadei de după cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial*, were established several coordinates of the establishment of the socialist system which influenced many fields of Romanian society. Cultural side allegedly was among the most affected by accepting the idea of totalitarianism and worship party interests. The new ideology be considered the abdication of aesthetic principles in order to impose new popular democracies. Focusing on the model of Soviet literature, Romanian literature was imposed perception of contemporary reality. Politically, the Security of Romania kept a list of former Legionnaires

after the Second World War, many of whom were recruited as informants, many being sent to prison. It is presented the period after the removal from power of Ion Antonescu, King Micael's abdication in 1947 and installation of a regime that was to end in 1989. This culminated in waves of deportations among intellectuals, soldiers, politicians and peasants. In the field of literature, values such as intelligence, talent and culture are disowned before the belief of writer's descent among workers, to support the class struggle and equality.

The second chapter of the paper is entitled *Comunism și detenție. Accețiuni istorice și literare*. To better understand the manner in which they were interpreted the testimonies of *Memorialistica feminină a detenției comuniste*, I felt needed some information on the historical context of the imposition of the communist system. I identified the onset of the regime in connection with the coup of 23 August 1944, which sought to remove the dictatorship of Marshal Ion Antonescu and the removal of Romania out of the alliance with Nazi Germany, the country falling under the Soviet sphere. Next, I conducted a brief *Introduction to the history of Romanian detention*, with the proposal to submit, in general, features of *detention literature*.

To understand and analyze the conditions that led to the detention of communist women, of this study can not dispense without, I referred to issues on strengthening the people's democratic regime, by dissolution of political parties, nationalization of businesses, forced collectivization started in 1949, in which compensated peasants resisted. Making a foray into prison history, I have established correspondences in mythology, in the context of punishment for those who aroused the wrath of the gods, a good exemple being the case of the titan

Prometheus who was chained to the Caucasus Mountains for daring to have stolen fire from the gods of Olympus to bring it to people.

Mircea Anghelescu mentions in his paper *Poarta neagră. Scriitorii și închisoarea*, that the prison was intended to re-educate and correct behavior by labor and education, and idea that originated in the philosophy of lights, when the human being was considered capable of change. Penalties were the toughest in the Middle Ages and in the XVIIth century in Romanian countries the most common form of detention was the prison. Even though in the second half of the XIXth century the modernization of Romanian society led to improvement of detention conditions, the communist period transforms the prisons in spaces for repression and terror. The most popular forms of physiotherapy in the spirit of the 50s can be revealed by analyzing the „Pitesti Phenomenon” which require the operation of „flushing” the brain.

Regarding universal literature concentrationary in Romania, I have considered prose (context in which I analyzed the case *Paul Goma, Romanele „obsedantului deceniu”, Antiutopii și Represiunea comunistă în proza de după 1989), Poezia în spațiul carceral* and *Memorialistica de detenție*. In the prose of detention literature I have identified features of the opera of Paul Goma, the most known writer of the communist dissidence. Because he has been arrested since student years, the author presents the Romanian concentrationary universe in novels such as *Patimile după Pitesti* and *Ostinato*. „Obsedantul deceniu” reveals novels that can be read in the form of political allegories and parables of human condition from the 60s. Among them can be found literary themes and motifs such as: the opposition between the victim and executioner,

specific decorations of the prison environment which are illustrated in prisons, Canal or Security dungeons. Is the situation of the novels *Galeria cu viță sălbatică* by Constantin Țoiu, *Fețele tăcerii* by Augustin Buzura, *Cunoaștere de noapte* by Alexandru Ivăsiuc and *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* by Marin Preda. True anti utopias can be identified in novels such as: *Biserica neagră* by A. E. Baconsky, *Perimetrul zero* by Oana Orlea or *Viața pe un peron* by Octavian Paler.

In prison space, poetry of communist prisons is individualized through ingenious particularities: texts were written on the plaster of walls, the boot sole, the lining of clothes or transmitted orally by Morse signals. Among the authors of poetry of prisons we have considered several cases such as Radu Gyr, Andrei Ciurunga, Ion Caraion or Nichifon Crainic. Are obvious the themes common to life in prison to be found in the lyric texts: prayer, iron symbolism, enclosed space, hunger, animal condition, cold and humiliation. Oana Orlea, retained during adolescence confesses in memoirs published later the important function of poetry. Her texts, lyrics sewen with thread behind the pajamas, represent actual survival exercises. Hostile space, misery and suffering are outlined in poems such as: *Pușcărișul*, *Prietenii*, *Crăciun*, *Dar până când...*

The subchapter *Memorialistica de detenție* aims notions about the autobiographical „genre”, ways of manifestation of the autobiographic, confessional text functions, and features of the prison memoir literature. Part of the frontier literature, autobiographical genre, defines the writer’s condition by authenticity and originality. In the paper *Literatura subiectivă*, Ioan Holban highlighted the intersection of several temporal indices in exposing of an autobiographical text by

correlating factors such as reading, writing, remembrance and its transposition. Personal approach is reflected in memories as well as in autobiographies.

Also in the case of autobiographical literature we find correspondences since Antiquity, when historic events such as wars and revolutions were the starting point for memoirists. Autobiographical literature is continued in the medieval period by organized chronicles at the biographical limit, for evoking historical figures: kings or warriors. During social evolution, at the end of the XVIIIth century, the biographical writings are secularized, the model being the one of the Saints life. Following the 1950s, autobiographical writings can identify the experience of the Second World War, in the concentration camps or deportations which inspired the memorialistic works discovered after decades.

Among the functions of prison memoirs, can be mentioned the need of confession , self-knowledge, therapeutic function, healing through writing of prison trauma, but also pedagogical function, with educational and constructive value, when the authors intend to transmit to future generations testimonies of the era.

The third chapter of this paper, entitled *Femei în închisorile comuniste*, captures references about the camp as manifested in the communist Romania. For a more complex understanding of the environments in which the women were imprisoned in the communist regime, we identified and presented some *Isolation Topographies*. Within this framework were presented prisons with permanent regime (Arad, Botoșani, Dumbrăveni, Miercurea Ciuc, Mislea, Oradea and Târgșor), survey centers and transit prisons (Jilava, Ghencea,

Malmaison, Văcărești), but also labor camps (Danube-Black Sea Canal and Roșia-Pipera Farm).

In communist Romania the concentrationary universe meant in the first place imprisonment and sending in prisons or labor camps, but the phenomenon itself is much more complex and must be mentioned other forms of detention, as well as deportation or compulsory residence. Also, a subchapter was devoted to anti-communist resistance in the mountains.

For each presented prisons I have appealed to legal documents and also the testimonies of former detainees, focusing on women memoirs. In terms of experience in labor camps, women remember that they were made to work either in tailoring workshops, farms or field growing vegetables, but many of them have experienced life in the camp at the Danube-Black Sea Canal, enduring hellish conditions of work and life, without sex differences.

In the context of deportation, we analyzed the experience of Anița Nandriș-Cudla, who has spent twenty years of her life with three children, deported to Serbia, far from home and her household. About deporting Romanians in Bessarabia we find testimonials from Margareta Cemârtan-Spânu, Teodosia Cosmin and Tamara Oală-Pleşca. All remember the pangs caused by Siberian cold and inhumane living conditions. Massive deportations of people under the influence of the Soviet order is a generalized destruction. In the event of deportation in Bărăgan, the population was moved within the country, people were assigned to work on farms to survive. Resistance in the mountains is characterized by anti-communist business activity, by manifestation of small groups where former officers, students, pupils, peasants and

intellectuals have assumed the status of fighters. Among women who developed anti-communist resistance in the mountains can be called Lucreția Jurj, Elisabeta Rizea, Aristina Pop Săileanu, Marina Chirca or Maria Plop. In most cases, women are motivating their resistance through solidarity to their husbands or families which joined groups of partisans.

The fourth chapter of the thesis includes *Female testimonies of detained communist*, from an overview, in the form of literary medallions defining the biography of former prisoners.

Fragments from this part of synthesis about the female detention illustrates the experience of each memoir as exposed to the public and how it is reflected in the mirrors critics in the form of direct testimony, diary or interview. The case studies provide a detailed picture of the particular experiences of female detention, reflected in the individual testimonies of different authors. For this purpose we analyzed the memories that are meant to convey following generations the traumatic experience that the authors have encountered, being equally documents with documentary value, but having, in many cases, also literary virtues.

Marioana Cantacuzino (writer Oana Orlea) hardly cope with detention, the environment is incompatible with her aristocratic lineage. For membership in a subversive group, in the file „Pătratul Roșu”, a Xth grade student is charged with an adolescence stolen by the system. Aspazia Oțel Petrescu is investigated and sentenced to ten years of hard labor because during the college made contact with the legionary movement „Cetățuia”. Adriana Georgescu, granddaughter of Prime

Minister Nicolae Radulescu and his secretary were arrested, just as young under the charges of belonging to the group „young liberals”

Lena Constante, recognized personality for personal exhibitions of paintings, was sentenced to 12 years of hard labor for the crime of high treason, because it would be activated in the counterrevolutionary group led by Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. Nicole Valéry Grossu is also paying for blood kinship with Iuliu Maniu because he inherited the love of nationalist-peasant doctrine. Pastor's wife, Sabina Wurmbrand recounts the experience which she lived in the 1950s in the communist prisons and labor camps, because of her religious beliefs. Annie Samuelli gets 20 years of hard labor for spying for England and America. Other cases are Ioana Berindei, daughter of Ioan Hudiță, who has known the experience of motherhood in prison; its mother Dina Balș, who follows her husband in prison; doctor Ana Maria Marin who is convicted of husband's membership to the legionary magazine „Axa”, but also Micaela Ghițesc, who is convicted and is forbidden to exercise the teaching profession because she attended the French Institute.

Chapter V establishes *Main themes of the writings of detention*, common reasons that dominates female experience: the dehumanization hunger, hygiene issues, executioners figures, portraits of colleagues, occupations in prison, releasing seen as a form of rebirth and faith. Resistance in detention is a form of self-defense, a universe created by the prisoners to cope with the despicable, inhumane living

The camouflage of the suffering is often achieved by accepting the conditions of detention or continued opposition to the principles of concentrationary system. It may be noted the strength gained through faith, spiritual retreat being the only way out for prisoners. Faith is

considered a „psychological weapon”¹, indispensable in the fight against torturers. Thus, the accepted suffering is translated into happiness, due to the strong desire to win. This acceptance of forgetfulness, loneliness and their own destiny is a form of resistance, of spiritual ascension.

Adriana Georgescu acquires resistance in prison by scaring the fear in facing the obsession over the idea of torture. Patriotism and tenacity, but also family infine love are resistance factors for former inmates like Lena Constante, Elisabeta Rizea or Anița Nandriș Cudla. Rediscovering Faith becomes a survival strategy for Nicole Valery Grossu: „For me, the direction of the prison, investigators, guards, as ministers and security generals were just actors in a play where the main role was played by Jesus, who seeks the missing sheep.”² In the same spiritual way, Aspazia Oțel Petrescu appreciates the prison experience as sacrifice that worships the diety, the result of her own destiny.

Under the guise of refuge, Lena Constante creates its own world, a utopian space: „It’s har work. Painful. As if, permanently and voluntary, I stick in my brain a bit.”³ Escape from prison space becomes possible by occupations that affect the recovery of bits of glorious freedom: imagining stories, tales, plays, composition of poems, drawing and even making dolls. Assuming death is seen as a last means of survival which feeds the thought of suicide. Despite this, the desire to rescue acquires compensatory meanings: „Sadness makes you weak.

¹ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gulagul în conștiința românească*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2005, p. 244.

² Nicole Valery Grossu, *Nicole Valery Grossu, Binecuvântată fii, închisoare...*, 2002, p. 62.

Anger, stronger. I chose resistance. I decided not to complain again and I never complained. To admit hope and I exceeded hope. In me was installed trust. Certainty that I will find freedom, joy, my own.”⁴ Escape into fantasy is reinforced by aesthetic escaping through which are hidden reactions and feelings, are exceeded otherwise states. In the event of Lena Constante, not proven effective the mental or faith escape, memoirs even „avoid this route, because, as most suffering, faith and individual solution seems selfish and indecent.”⁵

On another memorialistic plan, Annie Samuelli organize her testimony as a summary illustrating „psychological reactions of women of different generations, nationalities, classes and special faith, which all led their existence under the same conditions, long years of captivity, pressed of constant fear.”⁶ For memoirist, resistance in prison can be assimilated by memorizing lessons, by desire not to go crazy and love: „even in prison, women do not forget to love and be chic.”⁷ Communication through Morse language is another form of externalization when inmates leave that imaginary world that they create: „In every cell of women can say that there are an equal number

³ Lena Constante, *Evadarea imposibilă*, Bucharest, Editura Humanitas, 1993, p. 12.

⁴ Lena Constante, *Evadarea tăcută*, Bucharest, Editura Humanitas, 1992, p. 201-202.

⁵ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *op.cit.*, p. 260-261.

⁶ Annie Samuelli, *Gratiile despărțitoare*, Bucharest, Editura Fundația Culturală Memoria, 2001, p. 17.

of men invisible, whose physical and moral qualities, always amplified, is subject of absorbing the entire conversation.”⁸

To overcome the adverse effects of solitude, many of the prisoners resorted to continuous training of the mind.

Resistance appears to be necessary before the depression and rehabilitation attempt, in front of the danger of suicide and madness, to strengthen the moral structure of the individual tortured and to overcome hardness threshold of the investigator. Ruxandra Cesereanu associates the prison with a „school of live, will, discipline and patience, it changes the perspective of values and deepens. Even if it were intellectually gifted, the prisoner is judge by indoor criteria, Christian and moral.”⁹

In the *conclusions* were highlighted current research results, analysis of direct testimonies, diaries and interviews that are know the female experiences of detention, forgotten by contemporary generation.

Exemplification of feminine feelings is attested by the existence of documentary material, found in the *Annexes* of this paper. Even if the testimony is not impressive through aesthetic quality, captures the reader by giving precise reasons that triggered these feelings, underpinning the convictions, records which mean more than any literary expression.

⁷ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *op.cit.*, p. 261.

⁸ Annie Samuelli, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

⁹ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *op.cit.*, p. 249.