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**TATTOOED SOULS: THE VOCABULARY OF
SEXUALITY AND TRAUMA IN WOMEN’S MEMOIRS
ON ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PRISON EXPERIENCE**

We would be nothing without our memory.
(Annie Bentoiu)

Writing is a journey into our memory and soul.
(Isabel Allende)

Life Writing on the Post-Communist Romanian Book Market

While Life Writing as an umbrella genre became incredibly popular on the Romanian book market in the 1990s, following the demise of the Communist regime, it took more than one decade for women’s personal narratives, including memoirs, diaries or correspondence, to get the same attention. However, since 2009–2010 female Life Writing accounts have become increasingly present or even dominating on the Life Writing niche market in Romania, as a natural and long-expected compensation of historically silenced voices. Authors like Ana Blandiana, a famous poet and civic activist, interested in building remembrance projects like the Sighet Memorial and in the legacies of anti-Communist resistance and prison memory, published with great success books that cover the different subgenres we associate with Life Writing¹. Similarly, if the authors could no longer publish them personally, their successors did so (see, for instance, Monica Pillat or Dorli Blaga publishing their parents’ correspondence or diaries), considering the cultural legacy they contributed to. Additionally, personal narratives published by Romanian authors but previously not available in Romanian (like Raluca Sterian-Nathan’s memoir, published in French, Ana-Maria Callimachi’s, published in English, or Olimpia Zamfirescu, whose memoir in English was in manuscript in the British archives for decades) were finally translated in the recent years.

Publishers have grouped these accounts into anthologies or collections related to the Life Writing genre such as those published by the Humanitas Publishing House and named “Memorii/ Jurnal” [“Memoirs/ Diaries”], the Corint Publishing House (“Istorie cu blazon” [History with a Coat of Arms]) and by Polirom

¹ The most recent, Ana Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul. Jurnal, 31 august 1988 – 12 decembrie 1989* [*More-Than-Past. Diary, August, 31, 1988 –December, 12, 1989*], București, Humanitas, 2023.

Publishing House, which creatively titled the collection “Ego-grafii” (a pun combining “ego” with the Romanian word for ultrasound scans – *ecografii*). Interestingly, this label points at the process of exploring the self and its intimate mechanisms, with a therapeutic purpose. The description of these collections is aimed explicitly at the variety of the Life Writing subgenres, containing diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, all uncensored and revealing untold stories. Critics and audiences, as well as the publishing system have all shown constant or even increasing interest in the genre. I believe this consistent, significant and, in terms of women’s Life Writing, growing interest of both publishers and readers shown during Post-Communism can be explained on the Romanian book market through a need for recovering a silenced past and making visible the previously censored or self-censored confessions (the so-called “literatură de sertar” [literally “drawer literature”])²:

Ideas of restitution and reparation, evoking both financial or political justice and more abstruse compensations such as recognition of wrongs done, or readiness to hear and acknowledge hidden stories, all draw on a sense that the present is obliged to accommodate the past in order to move on from it (itself, of course, a historically specific way of thinking about history)³.

The reasons behind the phenomenon of what I call a Life Writing boom on the Romanian market (female writing being a significant segment, most relevant in the last two decades) range from aiming at offering a cultural legacy to, more importantly, regaining a collective sense of identity, but all these under the umbrella of therapeutic testimonies⁴ of collective memory and remembrance:

Memory is not only individual but cultural: memory, though we may experience it as private and internal, draws on countless scraps and bits of knowledge and information from the surrounding culture, and is inserted into larger cultural narratives. This is a relationship that goes both ways, of course. If individual memories are constructed within culture, and are part of cultural systems of representation, so cultural memories are constituted by the cumulative weight of dispersed and fragmented individual memories, among other things⁵.

As a form of compensation for decades of censorship and self-censorship, of untold stories, of individual and collective traumas, these voices are finally heard. On the other hand, for the readers the living interest in discovering a truth that was

² Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, “The Post-Communist Romanian Book Market – Recovering Politically Censored Literature in the 1990s. Case Study: Petru Dumitriu’s Works”, *Donauraum*, 2010, 3–4, p. 368.

³ Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, “Introduction: Contested Pasts”, in *Memory, History, Nation*, London, Routledge, 2017, p. 1.

⁴ Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, *Personal Narratives of Romanian Women during the Cold War (1945–1989): Varieties of the Autobiographical Genre*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2015.

⁵ Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, “Introduction”, p. 5.

“out there” but left untold is also the concern in recovering as many pieces as possible of a historical jigsaw and therefore to understand the events that had perhaps shaped their lives or those of their parents or family and of an entire nation. It is, eventually, a need for understanding, an essential human search for meaning, in this case by appealing to direct testimonies: “The person who remembers, in this model, is able to know and tell the truth of the event, because s/he was there at the time. Experience is the guarantee of certainty”⁶.

However, the very nature of life-writing is “uncertain”⁷, ambiguous, with intentional or unintentional blurring of the thin line between fiction and non-fiction:

The appeal to memory in determining the truth of the past, then, is widespread. But it is also problematic: both ‘memory’ and ‘truth’ here are unstable and destabilising terms. To privilege memory as a tool of truth, through which the statements of authority may be subverted or contradicted, we must assume a direct correspondence between the experience and how it is remembered⁸.

Thus, the Romanian book market (and, more recently the film industry, but only with attempts that can be seen as shy in comparison with the Communist historical movies, grand epics and biopics) has adapted to this request for the “autobiographical genre”⁹ and has extensively (and successfully) published “ego documents”¹⁰. Moreover, the therapeutic function of such recoveries is primordial, as they are what we call trauma documents on a collective traumatic past:

Trauma theory [...] has become an explanatory apparatus through which to apprehend and analyse the past. [...] It is worth noting that, while this conceptualisation of the relation between the traumatic event and its subsequent representation has been hugely influential in the two particular instances of childhood sexual abuse and the holocaust, it is striking how seldom the main concerns of trauma theory appear in other historical or national contexts. Other massacres and genocides,

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁷ Jochen Hellbeck, “The Diary between Literature and History: A Historian’s Critical Response”, *The Russian Review*, 63, 2004, 4, p. 621.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁹ Following the concept used by Liana Cozea, *Confesiuni ale eului feminin [Confessions of the Female Ego]*, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2005, p. 12.

¹⁰ The term was inspired by its use in previous instances such as in the Dutch Historian J. Presser’s “Memoires als geschiedbron” [“Memoires as a Historical Source”] (in *Winkler Prins Encyclopedie*, VIII, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1958, pp. 208-210), the German “Ego-Dokumente”, in Winfried Schulze, “Ego-dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte?” [“Ego-Documents: An Approach to Human History?”], in B. Lundt, H. Reinmoller (eds.), *Von Aufbruch und Utopie. Perspektiven einer neuen Gesellschafts geschichte des Mittelalters [On Beginnings and Utopia. Perspectives on a New Social History of the Middle Ages]*, Köln – Weimar – Wien, Geburtstages, 1992, pp. 427-451. See also Winfried Schulze, “Ego-Dokumente” in Winfried Schulze (ed.), *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte [Ego-Documents: An Approach to the Human Being in History]*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1996, pp. 319-325.

other experiences of violence, loss, suffering, displacement, are either little studied, or studied in other contexts than that of traumatic memory¹¹.

However, in the case of female authors, this recovery is even more significant in terms of testimonies and legacies because we are dealing with a category that, both as political prisoners and as a “secondary people”¹² or “secondary nation” and gender, were silenced and it took longer than in the case of male authors (with a twenty years delay if we consider the female Life Writing publishing boom after 2010) to make themselves heard. These

personal narratives, seen as reflections of female experiences and interpretations of events, represent a key object of analysis for gender-focused studies.... I consider this connection between *gender* and *the genre*¹³ [of life-writing] extremely relevant mainly because these narratives are not and cannot be, critics consider, neutral from the gender perspective¹⁴.

Once accepted the ambiguity of the personal narrative genre in relation to the truth, which often remains untold or fragmented, the focus here will be on the manner in which Life Writing is constructed to balance testimony and silence in this type of narrative. These accounts refer to isolation in imprisonment but also to collective imprisonment, during which the sharing of one’s “narrative reserves” was essential in a regime of confinement that banned writing and reading. Memory served, therefore, a vital function in the exercise of survival. In this context, but also after the imprisonment experience, the story has strong therapeutic functions and creates a magic, protective circle around the narrator, thus re-establishing a traditional aspect of oral storytelling. In prisons, in the absence of access to the actual tools of writing, this process was actually experienced as a re-enactment of the ancestral oral storytelling practice. Later, the accounts on collective and/or personal crises have been associated with both the use of narratives as form of survival and resilience and as a consequence, in trying to tell/share the story of trauma and find coherence, put order into chaos. The personal narrative remains most prominent in these traumatic contexts, probably as it has to do with the internal survival and with the preservation of mental health. It can also be connected with the justification of a sort of internal resistance and schizoid thinking in relation to the external intrusion of the political.

¹¹ Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, “Introduction”, pp. 6-7.

¹² See Călin Morar-Vulcu, *Republica își făurește oamenii. Construcția identităților politice în discursul oficial în România, 1948–1965* [*The Republic Builds its own Citizens: Constructing Political Identities in the Romanian Official Discourse, 1948–1965*], Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2007, p. 411.

¹³ See Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, “‘Gender and Genre’: Women’s Diaries and Memoirs”, in *Personal Narratives*, pp. 11-18.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

This need for order and coherence is intertwined – in personal narrative writing and reading – with a search for establishing the “truth”, Quixotic as it may seem due to the nature of both “memory” and “truth”¹⁵. History, in the form of official narratives (which, stable as they may seem, are also subject to changes, whether enriched over time with new, additional information or, on the contrary, politicised, mystified, distorted) coexists at the level of personal histories or herstories with the perspective of the individual (famous or anonymous), with his/her version of the blurred or fragmented – but nonetheless first-hand – experience.

Besides the search for the truth – which sometimes makes the author compare his/her story with the official sources (as the author Annie Bentoiu does as a rule), history books, newspapers archives, other memoirs – this search for meaning and coherence has to do with one’s own identity and evolution. Thus, diving into memory, as Victor-Ieronim Stoichiță¹⁶ or Micaela Ghițescu¹⁷ do, becomes equivalent with a recovery of one’s “Bildungsroman”, a hero/heroine’s journey in which the books they read are the “helpers” and “mentors” essentially necessary in the process of transgressing the challenges of a totalitarian regime.

Gender, Sexuality and Trauma. Women and Communist Repression – Inquiries and Interrogatories

Typically for totalitarian regimes, Romanian Communist dictatorship utilised repression as a form of control, political prison, torture and sexual violence being some of the extremes. The presence of women in prisons as political prisoners was relevant for a more precise characterization of the regime and the formulas it applied for the “liquidation” of some social categories: “the imprisonment of teenage girls, young students, mothers, pregnant women, but also grandparents with hair bleached by time and age, their humiliation and torture hang heavily in the judgment of history”¹⁸. This type of repression involved all of the aspects listed here, as well as more gender-focused, sexual violence or intimidation (the so-called verbal rape).

Quoting Daniel P. Mannix, Ruxandra Cesereanu discusses the sexualisation of torture (*algolagnia*), exercised directly or indirectly, as having ancient roots in the

¹⁵ See Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, “Introduction”, p. 2.

¹⁶ Victor-Ieronim Stoichiță, *Despărțirea de București* [Leaving Bucharest]. Translated by Mona Antohi, București, Humanitas, 2015. In the French original the title is *Oublier Bucarest*.

¹⁷ Romanian translator, a political prisoner in her early 1920s.

¹⁸ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Martore fără voie: fostele deținute politic și memoria comunismului în România* [Unwilling Witnesses: Women Former Political Detainees and the Memory of Communism in Romania], Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2021, p. 212.

Colosseum massacres, either involving the gladiators or the Christian martyrdom¹⁹. Cesereanu observes that in the witch trials organised by the Inquisition the victims were also subject to sexual violence and creates a parallel to the 20th century political torture exercised on the female body²⁰ and characterised by or including sexual violence. In this context, Cesereanu notes that the rape, in the form of “dominating rape”, combined with “sadistic rape” and “punitive rape” is a double form of torture, as both aggression and supreme humiliation²¹. This form of physical violence is more politicised and organised than one might believe and therefore not a spontaneous form of abuse. In 20th century political torture, sexual violence was considered a duty for the person performing it and a political measure or “political objective”²². In this respect, a perfect case in point would be Oana Orlea quoting a guard, who also became a prisoner and who said: “It’s hard for you too, but it’s not easy for us either”²³. To this confession, Orlea adds the comment: “Hell in the mirror. With strict distortions”²⁴, thus suggesting that violence, sexual violence included, was not spontaneous or instinctive but politicised and organised.

What is extremely relevant here is the female authors’ reluctance to use explicit references to sexual violence or intimidation and their effort to organise the narrative in a manner that would avoid uncomfortable references to it. These women, who grew up in the interwar middle class, educated not to discuss vulgar or abject matters, but to cultivate their femininity, discretion and modesty and to take care of themselves²⁵, found it difficult or chose not to describe intimate aspects in the prison universe. These women,

socialized in a bourgeois environment and therefore shaped by its values, tried to manage not only the body itself, but also its representation in discourse. For a woman from the interwar middle class, talking about her own body was considered inelegant, being perceived as a humiliation and a social degradation²⁶.

Moreover, “[a]t home they talked academically and there was a kind of taboo for everything related to sex”²⁷. Therefore the dilemma of these personal accounts lies, for a whole generation of female authors, socialised in the 1930s and/ or

¹⁹ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Panopticon. Political Torture in the Twentieth Century*, București, Institutul Cultural Român, 2006, p. 199.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 204.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 205.

²³ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, interviu realizat de Mariana Marin [*Cantacuzino, Take Your Rags and Move!*, interview conducted by Mariana Marin], București, Compania, 2008, p. 77.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Martore fără voie*, pp. 236-237.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

²⁷ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 17.

1940s in the middle class society mentioned above, between the importance of their testimonies as historical and cultural legacy and also as a form of justice to the voices of fellow prisoners silenced forever (see Micaela Ghițescu's account on a very young friend, Mariana, who died in prison due to tuberculosis²⁸) and the reluctance to speak the unspeakable, to express in words the humiliating and painful experiences, especially the intimate ones:

I find it difficult to speak, especially under the gaze of the generation that I represent. [...] However, here I am talking. I can think of two reasons for doing it. The first: an entire generation in Romania has no memory. [...] The second reason: it seems unfair and, in a certain way, dangerous to look at the dead. For many of them, our memory will be the only grave²⁹.

The result is a subtle form of balance between explicit details from prison and interrogatory experience and suggestions, oblivions, gaps when something is unspeakable and translated into the refusal to remember the traumatic experience (they prefer to remember the fellow prisoners' solidarity, stories and songs they shared etc.), sometimes avoiding mentions of the body altogether³⁰:

the body, beyond its reality, is a symbolic, social and cultural construction. ... However, I was surprised to find that the women interviewed by me rarely mentioned the experiences related to the body, intimacy and ignored biological needs in their narrative³¹.

An interesting detail, observed by researchers of Romanian female prisoners and their Life Writing narratives is that they did not talk to their former fellow prisoners (although they kept in touch) or to their family about what happened "out of fear but also out of modesty"³². Their "inhibition, trauma, humiliation, but also the belief that others had tougher experiences or that they told stories better led my informants to conceal its details"³³. There are exceptions of episodes of sexual violence, such as those mentioned by Raluca Sterian-Nathan³⁴, who experienced it during interrogatories, where she was regularly taken for intimidation (but not as a political prisoner).

²⁸ Micaela Ghițescu, *Între uitare și memorie [Between Oblivion and Memory]*, București, Humanitas, 2012.

²⁹ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 4.

³⁰ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Martore fără voie*, p. 234.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 234-235.

³² See the Ghițescu-Dobre interview, in Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Fostele deținute politic și Securitatea. Studiu de caz [The Former Political Women Prisoners and the Security Service]*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2023, pp. 201-229.

³³ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Martore fără voie*, p. 169.

³⁴ Raluca Sterian-Nathan, *Suflet tatuat [Tattooed Soul]*, București, Humanitas, 2010. In the French original, the title is *L'âme tatouée*.

Some researchers believe that, in the case of Romanian political prisons during Communism, sexual violence was not the dominant practice (Grațian Cormoș, for instance, argues that “unlike other concentration areas, Siberian Gulag, South American political prisons, here sexual abuse in the form of rape remained unrepresentative”³⁵) and, some testimonies acknowledge, even punished: “sexual assault was pretty firmly repressed, at least during my time [in prison]”³⁶.

Nonetheless, in all cases, sexual harassment, aggression and sex-related torture were current practices, especially as a gender-related form of intimidation but also extending to male prisoners in form of verbal sexual references and innuendos, expressing domination and appropriation of the last possession of the victim, the body. The uniform of the guardians (a symbol of power and authority) was opposed to the vulnerable nudity of the prisoner (“there was a tension in the air, with all the guardians who always saw us naked in the shower or the toilet”³⁷). The situation took the form of a symbolic pre-rape, based on domination and humiliation: “In the majority of detention testimonies, sexual aggression was limited to verbal harassment, voyeurism and, more rarely, took the form of physical touching”³⁸. In this approach, verbal violence or the “verbal rape” were ubiquitous as a form of constant threat and intimidation, in order to weaken resistance:

I stayed there for about two months. In addition to slaps, handcuffs and endlessly repeated questions, the investigations were accompanied by swearing. [...] It was the first time in my life that I heard such complicated swear words. The banter was current, the rudeness – deliberate, “I’m going to do it to you” and “I’m going to do the other thing to you...”. Not to mention “fuck you” and other swearing about God... They worked in the classic pair: the evil, brutal, thwarted investigator, and the good and humane one. “But you can’t... Look, she’s a child, you can’t do that to her”³⁹.

This practice of the alternating hard and soft methods was a classic, indeed, mentioned by all of the victims. Micaela Ghițescu, investigated for 13 months at Uranus⁴⁰, writes that she suffered no physical violence but she felt fear nonetheless:

My main investigator was relatively decent. [...] He didn’t beat me, nor did he touch me, although nearby I could hear screams of pain... The actual investigator was

³⁵ Grațian Cormoș, *Femei în infernul concentraționar din România (1945–1989)* [*Women in the Romanian Prison Inferno (1945–1989)*], Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006, p. 53.

³⁶ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 17.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Grațian Cormoș, *Femei în infernul concentraționar din România*, p. 53.

³⁹ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Uranus was initially a military prison in Bucharest, later a centre for interrogatories and, finally, since 1961, a penitentiary used temporarily for prisoners before taking them to other prisons.

doubled by another. [...] The one I was really afraid of [...] he spoke threateningly, raised his voice. [...] I was really afraid of him⁴¹.

However, we do not know whether this verbal harassment was the actual limit of aggression or the testimonies refrain from describing more than the “verbal rape”, out of reluctance and solidarity, a sort of silent agreement between the fellow prisoners or a pact of silence. The violence of language that was the first and most ubiquitous form of intimation towards these women, most of them young and unaccustomed through education with this type of communication, can best be described through the concept of “linguistic vulnerability” coined by Judith Butler⁴², whose arguments can describe the power of this form of “verbal rape”:

When we claim to have been injured by language, what kind of claim do we make? We ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the objects of its injurious trajectory. We claim that language acts, and acts against us, and the claim we make is a further instance of language, one which seeks to arrest the force of the prior instance. [...] The problem of injurious speech raises the question of which words wound, which representations offend, suggesting that we focus on those parts of language that are uttered, utterable, and explicit⁴³.

In the case of these women prisoners, the sexual references, also suggesting power and violence, were those meant to hurt and intimidate, prior or instead of physical brutality. In contrast to the violence of language suggested by the author, the modesty of these women socialized in the interwar space, in the bourgeois environment and with the modesty to talk about the body. Memories are marked by silence or (intentional?) memory gaps: “I forgot”⁴⁴.

A certainty is, nonetheless, the confiscation of the body by the authority and the control of all its aspects, from hygiene to food, as a symbol of an attempt to total control and, respectively, loss of identity. Testimonies reveal that this was not achieved eventually because the system could not hold captive the minds (despite attempts, such as in Lena Constante’s case, to weaken this also, through total isolation or other practices). The women prisoners, especially as they were educated to take care of their bodies and appearance, described this appropriation of body related practices (“confiscated” body) as humiliating. Ioana Berindei describes the need to preservation of femininity as a form of resistance and dignity⁴⁵, while Oana Orlea speaks of the humiliation of being denied the right to hygiene:

⁴¹ Micaela Ghițescu, *Între uitare și memorie*, p. 100

⁴² Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, 2nd edition, Abingdon, New York, Routledge, 2021, p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ Interview with Ioana Berindei, in Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Fostele deținute politic*, pp. 282-306.

Of course, they took our shoe laces, watches, rings, bras, but that was unimportant besides the lack of a comb, a toothbrush, a towel. I had nothing. Only the skirt, the torn blouse and, on the feet, the sandals. I didn't even have a handkerchief to wipe myself with. It is unimaginable how much I can suffer due to the lack of these trivial objects! And they know it. Everything is perfectly controlled. To go into the investigation dirty, without combing your hair [...] it is so humiliating, and resistance weakened⁴⁶.

However, if the body was no longer their own or exclusively their own, these women prisoners managed to find strength in their minds: in telling stories, in narrating to each other books, films or in reciting poems or singing songs, and in a sense of sisterhood, preserved after their return from prisons in personal networks relying in prison solidarity and friendship.

As partial conclusions of this research that is still in progress, we have to mention the significance of sexual violence and sexual language in practices related to political prisons throughout recent history, in close relation with political torture, especially when women prisoners were concerned. In this context, the female prisoner is made even more vulnerable by the (usually male) dominating investigator or guardian, who has unconditional access to the victim's body, sexual violence being in political interrogations or wars a form of exercising power, domination and control. Although sexual violence is not extremely visible in Romanian Life Writing authored by women, language violence (verbal rape), and intimidation is mentioned by all the authors. We also have reasons to believe that we are dealing with omissions, silences and intentional memory gaps ("I forgot") because of the victims' education in interwar middle class or aristocratic families, where the body and sexual issues were taboo. Also, these silences and omissions could be due to their own feeling of humiliation or because of some silent pact between the fellow victims to keep some intimate aspects of the trauma as private. Still, from what is spoken, we see that the body and the sexual aspects were very important in the case of political prisoners and even more so in the case of women. The body, the last stronghold of the prisoners, was humiliated and tortured even through continuous voyeurism and hygiene issues, hence the need to take refuge in a cultural dimension (readings, foreign languages, films, etc.), religion, as well as in friendship and solidarity. Therefore, the authors of these Life Writing accounts try to narrate their prison experience for the next generations but at the same time trying not to have their intimacy even further violated.

⁴⁶ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 16.

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TATTOOED SOULS: THE VOCABULARY OF SEXUALITY AND TRAUMA
IN WOMEN'S MEMOIRS ON ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PRISON
EXPERIENCE

(Abstract)

Departing from extended previous research on Romanian women's Life Writing covering the Cold War and Romanian Communist dictatorship, the paper focuses on trauma and sexual intimidation within the context of political investigations and interrogatories described by female victims in their memoirs. The paper focuses on the manner in which trauma and more precisely sexual trauma is approached by these authors, with a special interest for their vocabulary options. The article discusses the perspective of Life Writing as documenting trauma for the generations to come but also as a discourse with a therapeutic function. Regarding sexual violence, language violence (verbal rape) and intimidation are mentioned by all the authors. In contrast to the violence of language suggested by the authors, these women authors, socialized in the interwar period, in the bourgeois environment, show a reluctance to talk about the body and sexual violence. Therefore, I am largely interested in the oblivions, gaps, omissions, silences but, at the same time, in the mechanisms through which the silenced and previously unheard voices of women, traditionally perceived as a "secondary people" or nation (Morar-Vulcu 2007), become more prominent in the last decade.

Keywords: trauma, Romanian literature, political prison, torture, sexual violence.

SUFLETE TATUATE: VOCABULARUL SEXUALITĂȚII ȘI AL TRAUMEI ÎN
MEMORIALISTICA FEMININĂ DESPRE EXPERIENȚA ÎNCHISORILOR
COMUNISTE DIN ROMÂNIA

(Rezumat)

Pe fondul cercetării derulate de autoare în ultimii ani în zona memorialisticii și a diaristicii feminine (sau, în termeni mai largi, *life-writing*) ce acoperă perioada comunistă, articolul studiază tema sensibilă a traumei și a intimidării de tip sexual în contextul anchetelor și interogatoriilor politice. Mai precis, lucrarea urmărește maniera în care trauma în raport cu sexualitatea este abordată de către autoarele volumelor de memorialistică, cu o focalizare specială pe aspectul opțiunilor de vocabular. Articolul pornește de la mai multe volume ce relatează istorii personale din perioada comunistă și, mai ales, din perioada „obsedantului deceniu”. Mă interesează abordarea *life-writing* din perspectiva povestirii „egografice”, ca document al traumei, dar unul cu funcție terapeutică (nevoia de coerență, de sens, de „adevăr”), precum și didactică, anume transmiterea a „ceea ce s-a întâmplat”. Deși violența sexuală reiese din memorii ca fiind nereprezentativă pentru cazul romanesc, violența de limbaj (violul verbal), ca formă a intimidării, este menționată de toate autoarele. În contrast cu violența de limbaj, aceste femei socializate în spațiul interbelic, în mediul burghez, manifestă pudoarea de a vorbi despre corp. Așadar, mă interesează mai ales aspectele indicibile, ceea ce este omis, tăcerile, dar, în același timp, și demutizarea, verbalizarea, vocile feminine, vocile neauzite ale unui „popor secundar” (Morar-Vulcu 2007), care devin mai proeminente în ultimul deceniu.

Cuvinte-cheie: traumă, literatură română, închisoare politică, tortură, violență sexuală.