

(p. 116). But the double occupation happened when “like the Nazis, the Soviets began from the assumption that the Polish state created in 1918 had no right to exist and so could be eliminated” (p. 124).

Forgotten stories of survival and resistance emerge and complete Snyder’s view on the Holocaust. “Almost every Jew who survived had some help from non-Jews, of one kind or another” (p. 251). “The most effective rescuers were, and had to be, people who had good contacts with assimilated Jews, who, in their turn, had further contacts with other Jews” (p. 270). “Among the thousands of individual Polish Roman Catholics who chose to help Jews, many explained their motivations by the same reference, inexact but unmistakable: the duty to ‘help a neighbor’” (p. 297).

Chapter 12 of Snyder’s book, “The Righteous Few,” offers some amazing stories of rescuers while admitting that “it is very hard to speak of the motivations of the men and women who risked their lives to rescue Jews without any anchor in earthly politics and without any hope of a gainful future with those whom they rescued” (p. 314). These incredible stories mean, today—more than ever, hope in humanity. In fact, this is the main purpose of the volume, as Timothy Snyder writes in his Conclusion: “understanding the Holocaust is our chance, perhaps our last one, to preserve humanity” (p. 344).

Based on new sources from the archives of Eastern Europe and forgotten or new testimonies of Jewish survivors, Timothy Snyder presents in *Black Earth* an updated explanation of the great atrocity of our recent history. *Black Earth* is an analytical book, with a message that needs to become more familiar to all readers. Since it offers an extensive list of archives, a well

documented bibliography, a very useful index, and many well explained notes, Snyder’s book is indispensable both to the academic community (professors, students, researchers) focused on Holocaust and genocide studies, World War II and related topics, including European and Russian studies, and also to the readers interested in the history of Europe.

□

MIHAELA GLIGOR

ARISTINA POP-SĂILEANU

**“Să trăiască partizanii până vin americanii!”: Povestiri din munți, din închisoare și din libertate**

(“Long live the partisans until the Americans come”: Stories from the mountains, prison and freedom)

Interview by LIANA PETRESCU, preface by ROMULUS RUSAN

Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, Istorie orală, no. 10, 2008

**T**HE BOOK is an epic tale of the partisans from the Mountains of Maramureș as told by Aristina Pop-Săileanu, one of the last survivors of the anticommunist rebellion in Romania. The particularity of this work is that almost every character of her story is portrayed by written and photographic documents selected by the editors from the Archives of the International Center of Communism Studies within the Civic Academy, the Sighet Memorial.

Aristina Pop-Săileanu, born on 13 May 1931 in Lăpușul Românesc, the daughter of the forester Nicolae Pop from Lăpușul Românesc, who led the group of rebels from the Țibleș Mountains, is one of the last witnesses of the rebellion from the

Romanian mountains. She lived for four years as a refugee in the Țibleș Mountains, in the vicinity of Lăpuș and Sighet, together with her father, Nicolae Pop the forester, her brother Achim, and a large number of partisans coming either from the Greek Catholic group persecuted for their religion or from among the youngsters refusing military conscription in the labor brigades.

The stories told by Mrs. Pop-Săileanu as interviewed by Liana Petrescu are included in a volume from the oral history collection of the Civic Academy Foundation. Remarkably, the confessions are completed by a very comprehensive documentation concerning the characters of the narration, coming from the archives of the International Center of Communism Studies, whose coordinator was the writer Romulus Rusan. The footnotes, photographs and prison files were selected by Virginia Ion. The author describes the strict prison regime the former partisan had to face in the penitentiary of Miercurea-Ciuc, as she was sentenced in 1953 to 20 years of detention. The prison regime was made more bearable by the spiritual solidarity of inmates coming from the top social categories.

The work is actually an interview with the person who, at the early age of 18, fled to the mountains because her family had helped some partisans. At 22, she was arrested and spent the next ten years as a political prisoner. The first part describes the initial horrors of the new communist regime: summary executions in the backyards, the beatings of all those suspected of helping partisans, robberies, deportations to labor camps in the Bărăgan. The second part is the story of the painful prison experience, with names and tales about the persons she

met there. In the third part she speaks about life after the release from prison.

The interview responds to the idea that a synthetic study is needed in order to offer an overview upon female memorial output in Romania, drawing on general and personal historical data by recovering the details of the social, political, cultural and personal events directly experienced by the protagonists.

The work has a solid theoretical foundation and provides information on female detention in a multidisciplinary context. Thanks to the publication of experiences which are, in some cases, singular testimonies of exceptional destinies, we get information on the political configuration of that time.

Without claiming that this is a comprehensive list, we can say that the female literature about communist detention includes the contribution of authors such as Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, Nicole Valéry Grosu, Oana Orlea, Anita Nandriș-Cudla, Lucreția Jurj, Elisabeta Rizea, Lena Constante, Sabina Wurmbrand, Annie Samuelli, Adriana Georgescu, Ioana Berindei, Dina Balș, Ana-Maria Marin, and Micaela Ghițescu.

In this work, as well as in the case of each of the abovementioned authors, we can notice that, after setting up a theoretical framework in order to analyze the underlying causes of the inquiries, generally they proceeded with a thematic analysis of the confessions, selecting some of the recurrent themes that define the condition of women in solitary confinement—the self-portrait that emerges in the memoirs, political activism, the recourse to faith, the reconstruction of a destiny—as the object of the current research, seeking to draw on the experiences of the authors of the memoirs in question.

A better understanding of the phenomenon requires an analysis of the general conditions underpinning the communist detention of women, a requirement which this study could not disregard. Thus, it also refers to aspects regarding the consolidation of the regime through the dissolution of political parties, the nationalization of economic assets, and the forced collectivization which started in 1949, against peasant opposition.

What emerges from the tales told by the main character, Aristina Pop-Săileanu, is the general perception of state institutions about the role of detention camps and prisons, namely, the re-education of inmates. Similarly, in his work *Black Gate: Writers and Prison* (2013), Mircea Angheliescu also mentioned that “the prison was meant to re-educate and correct the behavior by means of work and learning.” Even if in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the modernization of the Romanian society led to the improvement of detention conditions, the communist period transformed the prisons into places of repression and terror.

Among the literary themes and motifs that emerge from this literature we find the opposition between victim and executioner, the specific solitary confinement conditions in prisons, the experience of the labor camps or of the confinement cells of the Securitate. This is the case of novels such as *Fețele tăcerii* (Sides of silence) by Augustin Buzura, *Cunoaștere de noapte* (Night knowledge) by Alexandru Ivăsiuc, or even *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* (The Earth’s most beloved son) by Marin Preda. Real anti-utopias can be identified in novels such as *Biserica neagră* (The black church) by A. E. Baconsky, *Perimetrul zero* (Zero perimeter) by Oana Orlea, or

*Viața pe un peron* (Life on a platform) by Octavian Paler.

Produced in solitary confinement, the poetry of the communist prisons came to exhibit ingenious features: the texts were written on the plaster of the walls, on the sole of one’s boot, on the lining of coats, or transmitted orally via Morse signals. From among the authors of prison poetry we considered the cases of Radu Gyr, Andrei Ciurunga, Ion Caraion, or Nichifor Crainic. Obviously, there are common themes related to life in prison found in lyrical texts: prayer, the symbolism of iron, the confined space, hunger, the animal condition, cold and humiliation. Oana Orlea, arrested during her adolescence, highlighted in her later published memoirs the important function of poetry. Her poems, sewn on the back of the pajamas, are real survival exercises. The hostile space, the misery and suffering are highlighted in poems such as “Shooter,” “Friends,” “Christmas,” “How Long.”

In the case of Aristina Pop-Săileanu, suffering is often camouflaged under the acceptance of the condition of inmate or by a constant resistance against the principles of the prison system. The resilience acquired through faith, the spiritual refuge, are the only way of escaping for the inmates. Faith is considered a “psychological weapon,” crucial in the struggle with the tormentors. Thus, the accepted suffering is turned into happiness because of the strong desire to overcome. This acceptance of obliviousness, of loneliness and of one’s own destiny is a form of resilience, of spiritual ascension. Resistance is proved to be necessary against depression and the attempts at re-education, against suicide and the danger of insanity, in order to strengthen the moral structure of the tortured indi-

vidual and to overcome the investigators' brutality. Beyond the psychological data, the heroine of this book is also an exceptional witness and confessor. Her story is simple, clear and bright. The book is a tribute to those who tried and succeeded to resist communism in the Romanian mountains, at the cost of a ruined life.

From a documentary point of view, her testimonies show us the greatness of those who resisted communism, as well as of those who filled the prisons. Seeing themselves released from the commitments signed when released from prisons after the fall of communism in Romania, relieved from the fear of terrible repercussions on their families, the former political prisoners step up and begin to create a new history. Thus, "without the constraints of the communist political power, the present testimony is a deposition about the crimes of communism." If some people wrote their memoirs by themselves, others have been helped to recount their past through the journalistic method of the interview.

Aristina Pop-Săileanu seems fascinated, in her stories, by the lesson in humanity she learned behind bars from her fellow female prisoners and from the doctors who treated the serious illness she was suffering from. Her testimony is that of a human being who, after having defended her freedom gun in hand, learned over time to defend her inner freedom with the weapons of spirit and faith.



(Translated by ARISTINA POP-SĂILEANU)

MIHAI BURZO

**GHEORGHE HOBINCU**

**Memorii. Vol. 1, Frumoasele zile din**

**Aranjuez. Vol. 2, Omul sub vremuri**

(Memoirs. Vol. 1, The beautiful days of Aranjuez. Vol. 2, A poor man under the rule of the times)

Ed. LAVINIA SEICIUC, introduction by RADU FLORIAN BRUJA

Granada: El Genio Maligno, 2017–2018

**E**NVISAGED AS a fragment of memory, attitude and perspective of the *autobiographical detention literature* (Hobincu 2: 241), also known by its less fortunate name, that of *prison literature* (*ibid.*), the book written by the physician from Fălticeni, Gheorghe Hobincu, is much more than that, it represents the ample expression of a committed generation, the only one that assumed the destiny of its own people, becoming, in fact, a true "river of anger" (Hobincu 1: 121), subsequently latticed, discouraged and annihilated by "our enclosure" (Hobincu 2: 201 sq.), in which "the days passed one after the other, gray and sad" (*ibid.*, 158). It means passing "with elephantine steps and a bent body as if it carried all the pains and the weight of the world" (*ibid.*, 143), even though it maintains the "features of a literary discourse in which the author's voice reduplicates in a permanent oscillation between the mature writer, marked by the spiritual scars of suffering, and the character of his own memory, caught in an emotional swirl, sometimes optimistic, sometimes despairing, never defeated" (*ibid.*, 241).

To all this, thus to the late revisitation, the notoriety of the epoch is appended, not always true, but launched as propaganda rumors of the time and inherited