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## **Lucreția Jurj: Female Partisan and Model of Ethical Behaviour**

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**Abstract:** This essay analyzes the destiny of an anti-communist partisan woman in the Romanian mountains (Apuseni, Transylvania). Her name is Lucreția Jurj, and she lived between 1928-2004. Lucreția was a partisan for four years, then captured by the Securitate troops, and politically detained for another ten. After her release from prison, she intentionally forgets her past, which she recovers, however, after the fall of the communist regime, becoming one of the most important eyewitnesses of anti-communist resistance and political detention practices.

**Keywords:** Anti-Communist Resistance; Romanian Mountains; Lucreția Jurj; Female Political Prisoner; Memory; Testimony.

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The anti-communist resistance in the Romanian mountains was a taboo in communist historiography. Historians either avoided discussing it altogether, or portrayed it exclusively in a negative manner. Even so, it occasionally appeared in official literature, such as in the so-called ‚novels of the haunting decade’. Between 1945-1962, an active anti-communist resistance operated in the Apuseni mountains. It consisted of small groups of armed fighters – often led by former military officers – which included peasants, students, intellectuals, and priests persecuted by the communist regime. Rather few in number and scattered across the mountains, these opponents were trying to build an infrastructure of anti-communist resistance.

The term ‘partisans’ is not an accurate description for these people, who fought an armed struggle against the communist regime the Soviets had imposed in Romania. However, it has become officially an accepted term, even though it risks being confused with the concept of ‘partisans’ given to anti-fascist fighters. Many of the anti-communist partisans were essentially fugitives who had retreated into the mountains to avoid arrest. Their actions were defensive, and aimed at anti-communist

propaganda. These people were seldom organized as punitive commandoes against the communists and collaborationist officials who terrorized the villages. Like other political prisoners, the fugitives learned to be partisans from experience, without prior initiation. Helped by their “hosts” – a majority of whom were peasants – they play an active role in shaping up the worldview of Romanian peasants.<sup>1</sup>

The active anti-communist resistance in Romania took three main forms: 1. the activities of mountain partisans, along with the parachuting of Western-trained liaison agents; 2. the subversive activities of clandestine agents who, while hiding in cities, managed to print and distribute anti-communist and anti-Soviet manifestos, and even to organize student protests, such as the anti-Russian and anti-communist demonstration in Timișoara in October 1956; 3. spontaneous uprisings, mostly in isolated villages, against abuses committed by the communist regime.

Internal documents belonging to the infamous Securitate – the communists’ Secret Service – published after the regime’s collapse in 1989 show that the authorities were programmatically investigating anti-communist organizations in the mountains. Special commandos were part of this strategy, including strategists, tacticians, psychologists and those involved in direct offensive action. Their zealous efforts to capture anti-communist fighters may have been due to a kind of institutional hubris, but the fact that several Securitate officers had been killed in clashes with the partisans – sometimes defensively, and sometimes by mistake – also played a significant role. The Securitate maintained detailed files documenting the moral, physical, and

psychological profiles of the fugitives, as well as the history of partisan groups. As it took more than ten years in some cases to capture the fighters, the Securitate developed special measures not only to intensify the pursuit and liquidation of partisan groups, but also to strengthen the information networks with collaborators recruited from the villages at the foot of the mountains. The Securitate worked to strengthen information networks among shepherds, villagers, and forestry workers. Their aim was to capture the partisans mainly by means of denunciation and internal espionage.

Sometimes, to catch anti-communist partisans, the Securitate organized real theatrical set-ups, disguising their officers and agents as tourists, shepherds, forestry workers, or even as fake partisans. The latter, however, were often unmasked by the real fighters. The capture of mountain fighters relied on informants recruited from the villages. The informants practiced at times a double game. Yet at other moments, being either forced (tortured) or enticed, they betrayed the partisans, luring them into places where they were vulnerable, and could be captured.

The anti-communist partisans were grouped according to their places of origin: their excellent knowledge of the local terrain and of the peasants living in the villages at the foot of the mountains became a natural advantage when faced with the relentless pursuit and harassment by Securitate agents. The quality of these mountain fighters and of their resistance relied upon four main factors: 1. the existence of one or two leading figures who were determined to oppose the communists with weapons in hand; 2. the support system surrounding

the fighters, including the people who provided food, shelter and useful information; 3. the existence of a mountainous or wooded region, in which such partisan groups could operate; and 4. the monitoring of certain villages and small cities, where these fighters could exert their anti-communist influence.<sup>2</sup>

The clashes between the Securitate agents and the anti-communist partisans, as well as the creation in Romanian villages of entire networks of informants, represented one of the worst forms of fratricide in communist Romania.



Archived Romanian memoirs from that period include not only the testimonies of male mountain fighters, but also that of a woman partisan who lived in the mountains for four years before being detained for ten. Lucreția Jurj (1928–2004) is one of Romania's most notorious female partisans, along with Maria Plop (1927–1962) and Maria Jubleanu (1910–1951), the latter two being part of the Arnăuțoiu group in the Făgăraș Mountains. Maria Plop died of tuberculosis while in prison, after being captured by the Securitate together with Ioana, her two-year-old daughter who had been born in the mountains, Maria Jubleanu perished in a Securitate ambush. The Securitate files include the names of other brave women who had joined the partisans, but these three are the best known because they had lived in the mountains with groups of male fighters.

Lucreția Jurj is one of the few women who survived and was able to recount her experience in an oral history book edited by historians Cornel Jurju and Cosmin

Budeancă: *Suferința nu se dă la frați. Mărturia Lucreției Jurj despre rezistența anticomunistă din Munții Apuseni, 1948–1958/Suffering Is Not for Brothers. Lucreția Jurj's Testimony on the Anti-communist Resistance in the Apuseni Mountains, 1948–1958*.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, her testimony is essential for understanding how women resisted alongside anti-communist partisans in the mountains. The Teodor Șușman group was the subject of analysis in several research books, such as: *Rezistența anticomunistă din Munții Apuseni. Grupurile "Teodor Șușman", "Capotă-Dejeu", "Cruce și Spadă". Studii de istorie orală* (2003); *Rezistența armată anticomunistă din România. Grupul „Teodor Șușman” (1948–1958). Mărturiile* (2004); and *Șușmanii. Epopeea anticomunistă din Apuseni, 1948–1958* (2025)<sup>4</sup>.

From 1950 to 1954 Lucreția Jurj was a female partisan in the Teodor Șușman group in the Apuseni Mountains, more precisely in the Vlădeasa Mountains. She chose this path because her husband, Mihai Jurj, persecuted by the Securitate, had joined the Șușman group. At the same time, she was afraid that, under torture, she might divulge either the names of those who helped the partisans, or the fighters' hiding places in the mountains. The partisans in the Teodor Șușman group did not have a carefully planned strategy. They had taken refuge in the mountains to avoid arrest and detention, and did not intend to confront the Securitate agents, but to avoid them. This choice was supported by their belief that the communist regime was short-lived, and that Romania would be saved by Western military intervention. Initially, Lucreția Jurj was merely a courier, like Elisabeta Rizea from the village of Nucșoara. She brought the partisans food,

while at the same time trying to see her husband. Pressured by the Securitate, Lucreția decided to take refuge in the mountains. Her love for Mihai Jurj was a decisive factor in her choice, but it was not the only one. Lucreția Jurj knew that her husband would have made his way down to the village to see her, therefore risking his life and freedom.

The Șușman group was comprised of eight men. The men split up in fall, each seeking shelter during winter in one of the friendly villages, and then reuniting in spring. The group welcomed Lucreția with some reluctance, fearing that a woman would be a burden for the partisans, and that she would hinder them in their eventual confrontations with the Securitate. In the end, however, Lucreția Jurj was accepted by the men, due in part to her stubborn nature and insistence in remaining by her husband's side.

As a female partisan, Lucreția Jurj was not necessarily dressed like a man. She did wear trousers, but she also wore a skirt with a cloak, and even carried a gun on her shoulder, even though she would never use it. According to her, the partisans' mission was to turn the villages against the communists and seize power once the Americans (Western troops) arrived in Romania to overthrow communism. This is why the fighters were armed with a variety of weapons: grenades, rifles, and pistols. Lucreția Jurj was in charge of maintaining and cleaning the weapons. In the mountains, the members of the Șușman group were not cut off from society and politics. For two years, between 1950 and 1952, Lucreția Jurj had a radio station where the Șușman group listened to Radio Free Europe, the Voice of America, and the BBC.



Fig 1. Lucreția Jurj before her arrest by the Securitate (Archives, Memorialul de la Sighet/ Sighet Memorial)

The partisans sheltered in huts made of branches, at the foot of large trees with hanging branches, on shepherds' huts, in holes covered with branches, in shelters dug in the snow or in the host peasants' huts. They generally had food supplies from the villages, sometimes they hunted or were fed by the shepherds, sometimes they starved themselves to death eating spruce bark and bramble. They carried with them tin plates and cutlery which they washed in the river. The peasants helped them with clothing and food. During the long hours when they had nothing to do, they would read from the Bible – of which



Fig. 2. Lucreția Jurj, captured and wounded by the Securitate troops, after four years in the Apuseni Mountains as a female-partisan<sup>5</sup>

they had several copies – played cards and told stories.

The members of the Șușman group may have consisted of level-headed peasants, but they were often pessimistic. Among other things, Lucreția Jurj described the despair that had engulfed the group, with the men having lost all hope of surviving their predicament. Lucreția Jurj's role in the group, as she herself admitted it, was to encourage them to persevere. With the exception of Teodor Șușman senior, who had lost his faith, the fighters devoted many hours to prayer. At one point however they collectively decided to commit suicide, should they risk being captured by the Securitate.

The mountain fighters of the Șușman group escaped several encirclements. At times, the pursuing soldiers spotted them, but avoided engagement, lest there be a direct armed confrontation that would have resulted in casualties on both sides. Lucreția Jurj believed that providence itself had rescued several times the Șușman partisans. However, situations of extreme mental strain became more and more frequent. In the end, Teodor Șușman senior committed suicide, believing his fate to be doomed. He had lost his home, his land, and his family. Before the communist takeover, he had been a respected village mayor and peasant, and had become a partisan as a result of the reprisals he had suffered at the communists' hands. Later, his two sons, surrounded by Securitate troops, were burned to death in a barn, although though it is assumed that the sons voluntarily shot each other to avoid capture. In the end, the rest of the group was captured through treachery: it was not for ransom or due to other financial benefits, but because the peasants were systematically harassed and tortured, which is why Lucreția Jurj does not condemn them.



Women who were imprisoned in the Romanian Gulag (1945-1964) have left behind different types of testimonies: some were confessional testimonies, others journalistic, others turned out to be true records of the suffering undergone inside the communist repression system. For Romanian detention memoirs, the story of Lucreția Jurj is as important as the story of Elisabeta Rizea from Nucșoara. In a

similar way to Elisabeta's story, Lucreția Jurj's narrative has freshness, spontaneity, and a captivating oral style.

The women imprisoned in the Romanian Gulag, from Elisabeta Rizea, Anița Nandriș-Cudla, Lucreția Jurj or Marhiolița Huzum to Lena Constante, Adriana Georgescu, Dina Balș, Annie Samuelli, Oana Orlea, Aspazia Oțel-Petrescu, Nicole Valéry-Grossu, Sabina Wurmbrand, Júlia Visky, Nina Moica, Galina Răduleanu, do not posture as heroines, but they show their audiences how they learned prison survival skills. In most cases, the women who testified about the Gulag could be categorized as "crusaders": impetuous and vocal like Elisabeta Rizea, or more introverted like the aesthete Lena Constante and Adriana Georgescu. Lucreția Jurj's voice is more introverted and discreet, but nevertheless still one of a "crusader-woman".

Lucreția Jurj understands the importance of remembrance and memory, particularly for Romania's recent history. This is one of the reasons why her testimony is meant to be straightforward, lacking stylistic embellishments and tropes, simply aligned with the historic truth. Even in her discreet way though, Lucreția Jurj still understood how necessary it had become to speak about the pain she and those who did not survive endured, and to recount their joint suffering.

Lucreția Jurj, a straightforward and courageous soul, admitted that some of the feelings that had inspired and fueled her resistance were: patriotism, her Christian faith, and love for her husband. In her case, there were no shades of gray, only the assumed resistance of a tenacious peasant woman, courage, and a remarkable modesty.



Fig. 3. Lucreția Jurj after 10 years of prison<sup>6</sup>



Lucreția Jurj meant a lot to me. I had a direct connection with her, after the publication, in 2002, of her admirable book of testimonies, the latter recorded and transcribed by historians Cosmin Budeancă and Cornel Jurju. The book was republished in a revised version in 2022.

Lucreția Jurj was a guest during my course on *Prison Memoirs*, held at the



Fig. 4 Lucreția Jurj together with renowned French historian Stéphane Courtois (Archives, Memorialul de la Sighet/ Sighet Memorial)

Faculty of Journalism, Babes-Bolyai University, from 2002 to 2004. I even organized a documentary trip to the museum section of the Gherla prison, and to the Sighet Memorial. Lucreția Jurj accompanied us, sitting on the same bus together with my students. She is also a character in my fresco novel *Un singur cer deasupra lor! A Single Sky Above Them*<sup>7</sup>; the first chapter of the novel is a story about the brave woman Lucreția Jurj (the chapter is entitled “Lucreția”). I republished this chapter as an independent short story

in a collective book coordinated by the college teacher Monica Onojescu (*Mică istorie a unui secol mare / Small History of a Great Century*)<sup>8</sup>. Later, an animated sequence based on my story portrayed Lucreția Jurj as a character in a 2-minute-long animated movie for children and high school students. If she were alive today, Lucreția Jurj would enjoy all of this. I can imagine her smiling.

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## NOTES

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