

Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu

„A Life is Not a Display Window”. Balancing Voice and Silence in Post-Communist Women’s Life Writing

Abstract: Against the background of research carried out in recent years in the area of female memoirs, (auto)biographies, diaries (and all the subgenres under the umbrella term of life-writing) and departing from the author’s previous research on female life-writing in 20th century Romania, and in particular on the inflation or “boom” of women’s Post-Communist narratives about their lives in Communism, the current article is interested in the concepts of silence, speechlessness, erasure versus the consciousness of collective legacies and memory transmission. The paper focuses on the selection of memories these women writers voice in their accounts versus the silences and self-censored episodes, tackling the ambivalence between the intention to display the memory of what was hidden, forgotten or untold, in order to give a voice to a silenced category, and the intentional silences, the cracks and lapses which these female authors choose to include in their memoirs as form of coping with trauma and the healing process or, in other cases, as a form of conveniently rewriting the story.

Keywords: Romanian Life-Writing; Trauma Studies; Gendered Memory; Post-Communism; Silence; Censorship; Self-Censorship.

ANDRADA FĂTU-TUTOVEANU

Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
andrada.pintilescu@ubbcluj.ro

DOI: 10.24193/cechinox.2026.50.19

1. Introduction. Defrosting Gendered Silence. A Life-Writing “Boom”

“Why is autobiography the most popular form of fiction?”¹ The demise of the Communist regime triggered a surge of memoirs, diaries, and correspondence, together with biographies, autobiographies of different personalities, either newly written or retraced from previously censored or self-censored writings. This inflation of ego-documents, which started in the early 1990s and has continued since, has served in many cases as a compensation to decades of state-mandated censorship and institutional surveillance. Thus, the major regime shift in 1989 initiated more than a political transition; it was followed by a life-writing or a “memory boom”² on the Romanian literary market. This Romanian life-writing “boom” is not merely a quantitative increase in publications, but also a phenomenological shift, in an international context favouring such an approach. “The field of life-writing genre has been exponentially developing during the twentieth century, reaching the forefront of main literary tendencies in the twenty-first

century.”³ This fascination, or infatuation, as it has been called⁴, with narratives based on true characters and events, with all its varieties and spectrum of subgenres, from biographies to biofiction and from memoirs to heterobiographies or autotopographies⁵ has led to a “cult of memory”⁶, especially in the post-totalitarian societies where transitional justice and the need to come to terms with a repressive past were involved in the process of retracing details of collective memory. In Romania, the phenomenon, which has continued since, with an increase in the number and significance of gendered accounts, has allowed both victims and perpetrators to articulate previously (self) censored stories and to offer their own version of the “truth”, unstable as this term is. In the cases where the Securitate archives offered politicised portrayals of these authors, their life narratives came to contest the official portrayals and thus impact on the public image of those involved.

In terms of gender, we can talk of a major phenomenon: while early 1990s life-writing accounts were centred around high-profile male intellectuals or historical figures, the post-2000 period saw a “feminisation” of the genre particularly since late 2000s. However, the transition from the “frozen” silence of the totalitarian experience to the fluid testimonies of the Post-Communist era is neither linear nor transparent. Thus, women’s life-writing – comprising memoirs, diaries, correspondence, and all the associated subgenres – has revealed their parallel histories/herstories or, with Maza’s concept, “micro-histories”⁷. Women’s narratives often bypass the “grand political history” to focus on personal microhistories or a selection of microstories, of episodes that can or

have to be unsilenced, while they decide to maintain others private. This article explores precisely the tension between the ethical necessity to “defrost” the past and the sovereign right of the life-writing author to be discreet about certain personal details. Departing from a perspective suggested by Riri Sylvia Manor⁸ in an interview she granted to me and which will soon be published, I argue that a memoir is not a “display window” designed for public voyeurism. Rather, it is a curated “paper time machine”⁹, a concept I employ to describe the relation of the life-writing author with their past, as well as a narrative puzzle where intentional omissions, cracks, and lapses serve as essential tools for resilience and healing as well as, in other cases, for a reconstruction of the public image of the author of the ego-document. All this because the “creative process, known as life-writing genre play is a never-ending intriguing constructive dialogue between fact and fiction.”¹⁰ Ultimately, the current study argues that the “life-writing boom” is not a move toward total disclosure but a sophisticated balancing act between the enunciated and what remains private. By analysing the “eloquent silences”¹¹ and the “veiled speech”¹² inherent in these texts, we can discern a narrative strategy that seeks justice and communicate their side of the story through voice while protecting other people or details through silence. In the Post-Communist discursive paradigm, resilience is sometimes found not in the total transparency of the “display window,” but in the power of the witness to decide what remains behind the curtain.

I shall discuss the phenomenon of (selectively) unsilencing such narratives, employing tools from Memory and Trauma

Studies, as some of these accounts serve as therapeutic testimonies, transforming individual suffering into a collective sense of identity and remembrance and being responsible of either important testimonies as traces of memory or "silence legacies"¹³. Within this context, personal narratives – particularly those by women – emerged as a primary site for the "politics of memory." (Halbwachs, 1950; Nora 1989; Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003, etc.). Hodgkin and Radstone argue that memory is a "contested terrain", a site of struggle (Duncan Bell also defines this as the "realm of conflict,"¹⁴ where various groups compete to define the "truth" of a traumatic era). Memory, in this approach, is always produced in the present, and silence and forgetting are part of the mnemonic process where power is exercised and resisted. They suggest that the act of remembering is always a "present-day" activity, shaped by current political stakes¹⁵. That is why, for instance, in one of the case studies below, Nina Cassian re-annotated her diaries in several meta-textual layers, as she was contesting the "frozen" image of her younger self to fit a new political reality. While Cassian utilizes the "plasticity" of the diary to perform a retrospective "myth-making" of her public persona, Blandiana grapples with the "fading ink" of an archive that threatens to disappear into erasure. To "defrost" these images is an act of mnemonic justice, yet as the cases of Nina Cassian and Ana Blandiana demonstrate, this process involves a complex identity and agency negotiation.

As Duncan Bell (2006) argues, memory in the wake of political trauma is inherently malleable, plastic, an unstable terrain where various actors compete to establish governing myths that provide

social cohesion and individual identity¹⁶. Bell discusses the concept of memory as being, similarly with that of identity, with which it has deep connections, malleable and subject to construction and negotiation. He also highlights that identities, both personal and collective, are shaped and reproduced through memory, which is often selective and simplified. Communal memories, Bell emphasizes, are contestable and subject to conflict, which underscores their plasticity and adaptability in different contexts¹⁷. In post-war Romania, the "life-writing boom" serves as a compensatory mechanism. After decades of state-mandated silence and the "erasure" of individual subjectivity, these narratives – particularly by women – emerged as "parallel histories" that challenged the official Socialist hagiography. As Bell notes, memory is often "refracted" through the needs of the present; these writers do not just record the past, they re-evaluate it to regain a collective sense of identity.

Collective memory – or one of its many cognate terms, including social and cultural memory – refers, again in a general sense, to widely shared perceptions of the past. It shapes the story that groups of people tell about themselves, linking past, present and future in a simplified narrative. It is what keeps the past – or at least a highly selective image of it – alive in the present. This does not, of course, have to be an accurate and verifiable account: "Memory ... is knowledge from the past. It is not necessarily knowledge about the past". The literature on memory subsumes several different practices that are analytically

separable, although they frequently combine.¹⁸

In cases of extreme carceral trauma (like the Pitești or Sighet prisons), memory often undergoes a process of “encystment.” According to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok¹⁹, when a trauma is too shameful or painful to be integrated into the ego, it is “buried alive” in a secret “crypt” within the psyche. For Cold War Romanian women, this “crypt” was not just psychological but social, especially as we are speaking of a generation educated with bourgeois values and reluctance to speak about the body or of shameful experiences such as sexual violence. Moreover, during the regime, speaking of the “cell”, of torture or the political compromise they had to make in order to acquire freedom, was a political crime. The (partial) “defrosting” of frozen trauma within the life-writing narrative is, for some, the literal breaking open of this internal crypt. The memoir is the space where the “encysted” memory is finally allowed to flow into a narrative, becoming part of the person’s history, even if in some cases the boundary between facts, fiction or selectiveness of memory is blurred.

2. “The Paper Time Machine”. Dealing with the Past

“Memory seems impossible to escape”²⁰, writes Marija Krsteva in her recent work on a theory of life-writing (2023). Memory is also never a neutral retrieval of the past, but an active, conflict-ridden process shaped by the power dynamics of the present²¹, and impacted by the needs, fears, and discursive paradigms of the present rather than the past²², while

the latter is a reconstruction made from the perspective of the present. If we address Post-Communist life-writing covering the recent past and especially the silences and lapses in these narratives, a main issue to focus on is how they are shaped by collective (and, in many cases, individual) traumatic history. Karin M. Fierke discusses physical, psychological and political trauma as components of a “politics of trauma”, with implications on the identity and agency of the members of the traumatized community, also arguing that “to speak of trauma, the most individual of experiences, is to bring it into a political world.... Political trauma is larger than the sum of traumatized individuals in a context”²³.

Trauma is ubiquitous in life and not restricted to any particular age or developmental stage. Trauma (*τραυμα*) is the Greek word for “wound”, “injury”, but also for “defeat”. Accordingly, trauma in our life can leave small wounds, on a spectrum of calamities, or a series of repeated wounds as in cumulative trauma, with total disorganization and manifestation of pathology. Responses to such events constitute a deeply subjective experience that can shape as well as break us. ... Trauma can be caused either internally, growing out of intrapsychic conflict, or externally in response to catastrophe, violence, or calamities. Traumatic impacts are associated with cognitive regression, emotional storms, helplessness, and leave physical vulnerability and emotional scars.²⁴

Coming to terms with this collective political trauma encounters in life-writing

an adequate terrain for manifesting the complex spectrum of experiences, emotions and revelations, with all the factual and also subjective nuances, blurred areas and lapses specific to the "transitional space between memory and forgetting. They arise from faint memories, memories not to be trusted. Life-writings often emerge from a traumatic core, occupying a space between two parallel universes: daily life and trauma. In real life, it is dangerous for these universes to touch. In writing, they must converge."²⁵ Another possible interpretation in discussing the significance of coming to terms with the traumatic political past would be that by writing, the authors of life-writing accounts, especially women are turning a political shock into a restored social bond, marking a transition from trauma, experienced in isolation and silence, to verbalizing and sharing collective grief which takes often the shape of gender solidarity. "Trauma ... is more of a 'dislocation' accompanied by an inability to mourn or speak of the trauma. They are also distinguished by the reference to a larger community and a shared language as opposed to isolation, meaninglessness and silence."²⁶ Especially in prison experience, the community, the group, the "sorority" becomes the only stable support and the life-writing accounts both verbalize and protect this bond, extremely solid behind its apparent frailty. This highlights a specifically female resilience – one rooted in relational care, empathy, and the preservation of internal dignity due to gendered group solidarity.

By "defrosting" these images of frozen trauma and silence, the writers perform a dual act: in some cases justice to the dead, by providing the "only grave" their

memory will ever have, and healing for the living, by integrating fragmented "flash-back" memories into a coherent life story. There is an urge to speak, to ask for justice for those victims that can no longer speak for themselves (see Oana Orlea's or Mihaela Ghițescu's accounts on prison), while silencing in a protective gesture the details that could be considered too harmful or personal. Moreover, the urge to speak can build an intergenerational bond, offering a cultural and experiential legacy to the next generations, to avoid a phenomenon I call "myopic memory"²⁷, the blurred generational memory that needs historical and microhistorical anchors to retrieve and understand the collective and traumatic past.

Looking at women's works of Life Writing as enclaves of experiential testimony from an eventful, scarring, and unstable century ... in a conflict-ridden territory (Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe). In interpreting these works, we gauge the social progress that the twentieth century as a "century of women" has achieved against all odds (women's agency), the depth of the traumatic experience that women have overcome or are still working through (women's persistence), and the recovery (both in the sense of personal psychic healing and of salvaging cultural memory) that is going on or is still left to do (women's legacies). ... we see in Life Writing an essential component of cultural memory, with a unique ability to create an archive of counter-voices to official memory cultures.²⁸

In the larger framework of dealing with the past as coping with trauma and as building cultural legacy against the “myopic memory”, the Romanian book market has adapted to this request for the “autobiographical genre” and has extensively (and successfully) published “ego documents”²⁹. Moreover, the therapeutic function of such recoveries is primordial, as they are what we call trauma documents on a collective traumatic past. What we call a memory or life-writing “boom” has deep implications regarding the author’s agency, converting the former victim into the author who communicates their version of the narrative, who reshapes and validates their identity. These testimonies also challenge the official narrative(s), mainly of the Securitate documents. This perspective challenges the Post-Communist demand for the “truth” as total disclosure. The cracks and lapses in the life-writing accounts are not (only) failures of memory; they are acts of agency. In a totalitarian state that sought total transparency (surveillance), the right to keep a secret is the ultimate form of resilience. These women provide a selective version of history – in some cases to protect others but in general to protect themselves, either in terms of privacy or of omissions of inconvenient details. By selecting what to voice, they reconstruct an identity that is “defrosted” yet still protected from the voyeuristic “display window” of the public market.

Ultimately, the “defrosting” of silence in Romanian women’s life-writing is a testament to the “paper time machine’s” ability to bridge decades of erasure. These works do not merely record history, they perform the essential cultural labor of turning a problematic past into a usable, though painful, heritage.

3. Silence, Speechlessness, Erasure

The multiple 20th century historical traumas, wars, repressive dictatorships, genocides, imprisonment in political prisons and camps and torture have led to a double silence or speechlessness, of both traditional historiography (in search for more authentic sources such as genuine testimonies, in life writing or oral history) and the subjects of trauma. “In late 20th century Western culture, trauma emerged as a paradigmatic discourse for defining the catastrophic, calamitous ... for attributing blame and accountability, and for organizing subjectivity and identity. The traumatic has also become a metaphor for characterizing the historical epoch of the present”.³⁰

Silence has many layers and nuances in relation to historical and political trauma. Censorship and self-censorship involve an externally imposed silence, compensated on the early 1990s book market by a first boom in life-writing accounts, mainly biographies and memoirs of previously marginalized political and historical personalities. A second type of silence is more deeply connected to trauma, as a “traumatic aphasia”, an internal speechlessness connected to the psychologic mechanisms of “frozen” memory (such trauma often becomes a “chronic condition... hidden and intangible, relegated to secrecy”³¹). A third type appears in the case of perpetrators in connection to certain inconvenient details or facts. While there is a separate discussion on censorship and self-censorship, as mechanisms specific to totalitarianism, the relation between trauma and silence, respectively the “defrosting” of the frozen trauma memory is extremely interesting the current analysis. Life-writing is a field

in which negotiations of identity, privacy and agency are more specific and become more significant through this mechanism or balancing silence and testimony.

While exploring the anatomy of silence in relation to memory and gender we can identify aspects of the so called "gendered silence"³² and "silent memory"³³, concepts that can be transferred, together with the above mentioned "frozen image" from Holocaust studies to ego-documents focusing on other types of traumatic pasts, such as Cold War life-writing, proving useful tools to approach these gendered accounts. "Whether the issue is personal, communal, or national silence, well-being is thought to be contingent on the liberation of voice. It is asserted that ... logocentric readings have led to a neglect of the phenomenon of silence as a medium of expression, communication, and transmission of knowledge in its own right"³⁴. Kidron employs the concept of "matrix of silence" in the intergenerational trauma and tales of survival.

Among these approaches previously applied to the Holocaust but which also prove extremely useful for the study of life-writing referring to other forms of political collective traumas, a key one is that where Dori Laub³⁵ conceptualizes this speechlessness, "muting or loss" of the traumatized individual or community. The historical and personal trauma can be approached with the term "erasure", discussing generically the traumatic event as an "absent experience" and its memory labelled as a "frozen image". "Frozen" in silence, speechlessness, erasure, the historical trauma experience started to be defrosted, even if fragmentarily, in life writing, increasingly abundant following the demise

of the abusive regimes and triggering disclosures, even if never complete, about these historical traumas. The "defrosting" process is the act of turning this "hidden and intangible" trauma³⁶ into a public discourse- a transition from the "whisper" to the explicit voice.

4. Voicing Silences. Key Studies

As discussed above, the Post-Communist memory or life-writing boom comes to unsilence the previously silent or frozen memory of the political traumatic past, gendered accounts contrasting gendered silence. Anticipated or misunderstood by some as important milestones for the recovery of the past, especially when the authors were involved in political events, these accounts offer not so much the access to History, but to personal histories and microhistories, with their significance laying precisely in their subjectivity and personal version of the events. Hodgkin and Radstone even argue that personal memory (subjectivity) often stands in direct opposition to "official" or "national" History. With these personal accounts, such as the case studies below of Ana Blandiana and Nina Cassian, we are entering gendered terrains of memory, dangerously personal and which should be approached with care: "hic sunt leones". Gendered because these women's memories are structured, if we follow Hodgkin and Radstone's analysis, around different spaces (the domestic, the body) compared to men's "grand" political memories. Thus, women's life-writing provides "parallel stories" that focus on the micro-politics of survival, with their "speechlessness" often a result of their stories being deemed

“unimportant” by traditional patriarchal historiography.

By writing diaries and memoirs or hybrid life-writing accounts, women writers are not just “telling stories”, but assert their agency and offer their version of the narrative by a selection of what is spoken versus what fades away in the (intentionally or not) blurred memory. I departed in this case study analysis from the interesting agency metaphor used by Riri Sylvia Manor, “life is not a display window”. The author of life-writing is not a passive recording device but an active agent who decides how much of the “trauma” and personal details to put on display. Thus, reticence and selectiveness is a form of agency and these gendered accounts are drawn on a thin line between remembering and forgetting, between unsilencing inconvenient truths and “the fading ink” metaphor of the past. This metaphor is used by Blandiana (a significant yet ambivalent literary figure both during Communism and Post-Communism), when discussing an old diary she recovers. The personal document she writes about is not only difficult to read due to literally fading ink but also because the content looks strange and remote. She comments that many episodes seemed totally distant. “I simply forgot about them...”³⁷. In Ana Blandiana’s case, the life-writing is wrapped in multiple layers of voiced and silenced memories, both complex and problematic and therefore worth inquiring. Blandiana’s recent work³⁸, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul* (2023) (interestingly titled “more than the past” and thus suggesting additions), serves as a case study for erasure. The physical decay of her notebooks – the “fading ink” of a fading archive that need at least fragmentary rescuing – cannot escape

reinterpretation and mirrors the “disturbing capacity of the human mind to forget, to elude, erase, as life progresses, what was lived before.”³⁹ Blandiana also explicitly states that “memory is a form of imagination.”⁴⁰ This aligns with Bell’s argument that “memory is not a literal recording of the past”⁴¹. Her silence regarding certain episodes is a form of strategic avoidance, creating a “convenient version of the facts”. By including “cracks and lapses,” she performs a politics of the fragment – showing that memory is incomplete and fragile, which paradoxically makes her narrative feel more “authentic” to the post-communist reader. Recovering the notebooks of the old diary, needing to decipher as well as recognize the text, which was barely legible, the ink disappearing made the content look remote and even fictional, due to implausibility. The erasure is not just physical, literal, some things are “lost” to memory because they cannot be integrated into the current social identity. Her intentional silences are a way of managing the contested boundaries of her own public image, while forgetting and silence are constitutive of memory. Ion Buzași describes *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul* as an “anamorphic novel”⁴², which brings fiction and fragmentation to the description of the volume. Buzași argues that as an anamorphic image is distorted unless viewed from a specific angle, her life under surveillance was a series of distorted reflections. The Securitate file on Blandiana in the 1980s was “anything but slim.” The “defrosting” of memory in her 2023 diary is an attempt to recover her “authentic self” from the distortions of the epoch. The “fading ink” she mentions is a powerful counterpoint to the “immortal” bureaucratic files of the state. While the

official memory is preserved in impressive folders, the victim's memory is physically fragile, threatening to disappear before it can be "voiced."

Concerning Nina Cassian's multi-layered diary, *Memoria ca zestre* (2003–2005), this illustrates what Bell calls the "myth-making"⁴³ aspect of memory. By revisiting and annotating her diaries from the 1940s through the 1980s, Cassian⁴⁴ engages in a discursive paradigm change. She is not just revealing, but revising, texts, details and public image. Similarly to Blandiana, the author has the opportunity to reshape and redesign their public image, erasing or explaining inconvenient political associations. Their diaries (actually hybrid life-writing accounts, with added interpretative layers) prove that life-writing "cannot avoid fiction."⁴⁵ The gaps and reinterpreted episodes are intentional "cracks" used to cope with the trauma of a shifting political persona. In Cassian's account, the contextualized meta-layer speaks of memory as a present-day production, while in Blandiana's case, despite the label "diary", the memory is not recovering an old self, partially lost in the "fading ink", but memory proves inevitably "contaminated" by the realities of the writer today and therefore producing a new persona. In Cassian, successive memory "thaws" or "defrosting" happen because the (then) current political climate allows (or demands) it. The three layers of Nina Cassian's diary are a prime example of the "paper time machine" working through different historical temperatures: the immediate layer (1940s–80s), the raw, often fearful or ideologically struggling recording of events, followed by the 1970s rereading, a first "thaw" where she adds observations, reflecting a shift in

political perspective, and, finally, by the post-1985/post-exile layer. Written in the US, free from the "self-limitation" of totalitarian fear. This layer represents the full "defrosting," where she can finally analyse her "visual personae" and the "shadow-self" created by the regime. While a diary like Nina Cassian's records her internal journey and disillusionment, her extensive Securitate file records a "parallel life" constructed by others. In the Cold War Eastern European context, the secret police functioned as a perverted "biographer," creating a shadow-narrative of the subject that often competes with the author's own "defrosted" testimony. Securitate officers frequently "standardized" their practice of rewriting events. They would change details to cast the victim in an unfavorable light, creating a "fictionalized biography" that the writer must now confront and "erase" through their own life-writing. The Securitate used personal diaries as incriminating evidence. This forced writers into a state of "preventive fear," where they self-censored their own private notes, knowing the "State Biographer", external, voyeuristic, punitive might be the ultimate reader⁴⁶.

However, these later annotations also mean "contesting" memory and "contesting" the self in a way, and using Hodgkin and Radstone's framework, we can refine the analysis of Nina Cassian's *Memoria ca zestre* by discussing the annotated diary as a site of contestation, although the documentary⁴⁷ based on Cassian's confrontation with older political footage of interviews or propaganda, reveal not a contestation but a nuanced acceptance of her past⁴⁸. In *Contested Pasts*⁴⁹, memory is seen as a way for individuals to reclaim agency. Cassian's act of revisiting her diary and publishing her

diaries with new annotations, means that she contests or rather interrogates the contextualized past and the political surveillance and uses her private “paper time machine” to provide a subjective context in an act of strategic disclosure. For Nina Cassian, the publication of *Memoria ca zestre* (2003–2005) was not merely an act of retrieval but a present-day intervention into her own legacy. By re-reading her diaries under the gaze of a new era, she illustrates that memory is a site of conflict. Her annotations act as a thaw that actively contests the official “frozen” reports of the Securitate. Memory is a battleground against erasure. However, this selective “defrosting” – where certain memories are voiced and others remain veiled – proves that the survivor’s resilience lies in her power to curate the past. As Riri Sylvia Manor suggests, the display window is never fully open; it is a site of negotiation where the writer decides which version of the past will serve the identity of the future.

Finally, as the intention was to analyse different cases of silent memory versus unsilencing the past in women’s personal narratives on the traumatic Cold War, we should return to what I anticipated in the introduction concerning the urge to verbalise inconvenient truths. The motivation is not just for personal justice, but also as a form of justice to the victims who were permanently silenced by death and as a form of legacy to the “myopic” generation. Oana Orlea represents perhaps best this responsibility to remember. Orlea struggles with “speechlessness” under the gaze of a younger generation that lacks memory. To analyse the shift from victim to agent, we must contrast two opposing “contracts” of truth. In the Cold War era, the Securitate imposed a confessional pact: a violent,

forensic demand for “total transparency” during interrogations. This pact was characterized by the erasure of the self; the subject was forced to provide a narrative that served the state’s punitive goals. Drawing on Rae Langton⁵⁰, what remains silent is “eloquent.” It is a “reverent silence” that pays tribute to the victims whose details only her testimony can rescue from absolute erasure.

5. Conclusions. “Legacies of Silence”

The “legacies of silence” (Sujo, 2001) are not easily dissolved in a post-totalitarian state, where “post” implies a long term political trauma and its consequences. Even in a “boom” of publication, gaps remain, either due to intentional selections, or to unintentional fragmentation or memory lapses. Post-Communist gendered life-writing voices gendered memory, but in the same context there is an ongoing “defrosting” process of “frozen memory” caused by political trauma, and it is a slow thaw rather than a sudden thaw. These authors’ “eloquent silences” could be labelled as active strategies of the authors to cope with political trauma or, in other cases, to reshape the identity projected within the public image. Drawing on Sujo’s concept of “legacies of silence,” we must conclude that silence in these Romanian women’s life-writing is never fully eradicated; rather, it is transformed, from absence to palpable presence. There are ethical boundaries, as well as the author’s agency to decide what remains “behind the curtain.” This refusal to perform a “total display” of trauma is, in itself, an act of reclaiming the privacy that the totalitarian state sought to destroy. The transition from the “frozen” silence of Cold War Romania to the fluid testimonies of

the post-communist "life-writing boom" represents more than a literary shift; it is a profound restoration of mnemonic sovereignty. As this study has demonstrated through references to the works of Ana Blandiana, Nina Cassian, and Oana Orlea, the act of "defrosting" political trauma is a multifaceted process of negotiation— one that balances the ethical duty to testify with the somatic need for privacy. Departing from Riri Sylvia Manor's assertion that "a life is not a display window," we conclude that the post-totalitarian "autobiographical pact"⁵¹ does not demand total transparency. Instead, it offers a renegotiated trust. In a landscape of "contested pasts"⁵², the woman witness establishes sincerity not through exhaustive disclosure, but through the honesty of her own "cracks and lapses." This curated silence— far from being an "erasure"— is, sometimes, an act of resilience. It protects the "healing process" from a voyeuristic eye and ensures that the author remains an agent of her own narrative, rather than a passive object of forensic inquiry. Also, following Duncan Bell's framework on the "politics of memory," the article has shown that life-writing is a site of mnemonic plasticity. Whether through Nina Cassian's retrospective annotations or Ana Blandiana's struggle with "fading ink," these writers engage in a necessary "myth-making." By re-evaluating their past "visual personae" and "veiled speech," they bridge

the gap between the "speechless" victim of the 1950s and the "voiced" citizen of the 21st century. This "defrosting" is not a literal recovery of the past but a "present-day production" that transforms "chronic trauma" into a usable cultural legacy. Finally, the "life-writing boom" serves as a "paper time machine" that facilitates a "delayed thaw" for the collective Romanian consciousness. By replacing the state's "confessional pact" with a voluntary "autobiographical pact," these women have effectively performed an archival exorcism, rescuing their subjective truths from the bureaucratic secrecy of the Securitate.

The "post-communist life-writing boom" is not a transparent window but a palimpsest. As Duncan Bell's framework suggests, these narratives are "parallel stories" that compete with official history. Ultimately, "defrosting silence" is an act of courage. These women authors prove that resilience lies in the balance. A life is not a display window; it is a "paper time machine" that brings back only what is necessary to survive the present and secure the future. I decided to conclude with the concept of "legacies of silence," arguing that this legacy persists. The "thaw" of Post-Communist life-writing does not fill gaps in history; it creates a space where the personal experiences are integrated into the community narrative, ensuring that the traumatic experiences are never erased.

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3. Marija Krsteva, *Towards a Theory of Life-writing: Genre Blending*. Routledge, 2023, p.1
4. Duncan Bell, *op.cit.*, p. 25
5. Marija Krsteva, *op.cit.*, p. 2
6. Duncan Bell, *op.cit.*, p. 25
7. Sarah Maza, “Biography or Microhistory?.” *Central European History* 53.1 (2020): 213-220
8. An author of both life-writing accounts and literature, among which *Bucuria de a nu fi perfectă* (2016) stands out as extremely relevant for the Romanian women’s life-writing or “memory boom”, is a key representative of the Post-Communist female authors of personal narratives
9. The concept, new to life-writing analysis, has been employed in different contexts, such as a photo album by Wolfgang Wild and Jordan Lloyd (published in 2017 and which offered colorized versions of black and white pictures) or a volume on boardgames, critical game design and historical board games by Maurice W. Suckling, 2024.
10. Marija Krsteva, *op.cit.*, p.2
11. Rae Langton, “Disenfranchised silence.” *Common minds: Themes from the philosophy of Philip Pettit* (2007): 199-214.
12. Han Baltussen and Peter J. Davis, eds. *The art of veiled speech: Self-censorship from Aristophanes to Hobbes*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
13. See Glenn Sujo, *Legacies of silence: the visual arts and Holocaust memory*. New Age International, 2001.
14. Duncan Bell, *op.cit.*, p. 5
15. Hodgkin, Katharine, and Susannah Radstone, eds. *Contested pasts: The politics of memory*. Routledge, 2003, p. 1
16. Duncan Bell, *op.cit.*, p. 24
17. *Ibidem*, p.5
18. Duncan Bell, *op.cit.*, p. 2
19. Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel*. Vol. I, Edited and translated by Nicholas Rand. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994; Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok. *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Translated by Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
20. Marija Krsteva, *op. cit.*, p. 1
21. Hodgkin, Katharine, and Susannah Radstone, eds. *Contested pasts: The politics of memory*. Routledge, 2003, p.
22. Duncan Bell, *op. cit.*
23. Karin M. Fierke, “Whereof we can speak, thereof we must not be silent: trauma, political solipsism and war.” *Review of International Studies* 30.4 (2004): 471-491, p. 482
24. Maria Ritter, “Silence as the Voice of Trauma.” *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 74.2 (2014): 176-194, p. 179
25. Gabriele Schwab, “Writing against memory and forgetting.” *Literature and Medicine* 25.1 (2006): 95-121, p. 95

26. Karin M. Fierke, *op. cit.*, p. 472
27. A concept I consider applicable to the study of life-writing. I has been previously used in relation to a criticism of capitalism by Danny Pilkington, "Myopic memory: Capitalism's new continuity in the age of AI." *Memory, Mind & Media* 3 (2024): e24.
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29. See Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, *Personal Narratives of Romanian Women During the Cold War (1945-1989): Varieties of the Autobiographical Genre*. Edwin Mellen Press, 2015.
30. Kelly McKinney, "Breaking the conspiracy of silence: Testimony, traumatic memory, and psychotherapy with survivors of political violence." *Ethos* 35.3 (2007): 265-299
31. Gabriele Schwab, 2006, 96
32. Takashi Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds. *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War (s)*. Duke University Press, 2001.
33. Carol A. Kidron, "Toward an ethnography of silence: The lived presence of the past in the everyday life of Holocaust trauma survivors and their descendants in Israel." *Current Anthropology* 50.1 (2009): 5-27.
34. *Ibidem*, p. 6-7
35. Dori Laub, "From speechlessness to narrative: The cases of Holocaust historians and of psychiatrically hospitalized survivors." *Literature and medicine* 24.2 (2005): 253-265.
36. Gabriele Schwab, *op. cit.*
37. Ana Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul: Jurnal, 31 august 1988-12 decembrie 1989*. Humanitas SA, 2023.p. 6-7
38. With her life-writing accounts *Fals tratat de manipulare (2013)*, *Soră lume (2020)*, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul. Jurnal: 31 august 1988-12 decembrie 1989 (2023)*, in addition to other personal accounts in anthologies, interviews etc., Ana Blandiana is a significant representative of what could be labeled as women's life-writing boom or "memory boom" on Romanian book market in the last decade and a half.
39. *Ibidem*.
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43. Duncan Bell, "Mythscapes: memory, mythology, and national identity." *The 202British journal of sociology* 54.1 (2003): 63-81.
44. For more on the interesting case of Nina Cassian see Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, "The Electric Mirror. Memory, Self-Fiction, Postures and Poses. The Distance Between Me and Me (2018)." *Dacoromania litteraria* 8.1 (2021): 18-29.
45. Liana Cozea, *Confesiuni ale eului feminin*, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2005.
46. See Simona Mitroiu, *Women's Life Writing in Post-Communist Romania: Reclaiming Privacy and Agency*. Vol. 35. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2022.
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49. See Hodgkin and Radstone, *op.cit.*
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