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*Morfologia (ne)vinovăției: alfabetul detenției feminine în comunism* [The Morphology of (Un)guilt: The Alphabet of Women's Detention during Communism] brings together the result of a group project, with the aim of responding, through research into Romania's recent history, to the role "of restoring the facts of the past, in as many of its nuances as possible" (p. 19). The book was published with the support of the Institute for the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (ICCMER) and reunites chapters written by consecrated scholars in the field of Communism studies. The authors provide an overview into the universe of women's imprisonment and undertake an extensive, often difficult, and meticulous work, outlining not only the portraits of women in prisons, but also a panorama of the political and social context in which their arrest, sentencing, and detention took place. This research confirms that political imprisonment during the years of the Communist regime still arouses a lively interest in Romanian society (p. 15), while also motivating the younger generation to become aware of and come to terms with the country's recent past.

The entire book is centred around a specific topic, namely the detention of women in Communist Romania, although this reality is covered in its various facets. By choosing a single thematic aspect of detention, the authors operate what literary critics would call a *semiotic cut*, focusing their research strictly on the cases of female victims, without neglecting, however, broader approaches to certain realities that interfere with this theme.

Without claiming to be an exhaustive bibliography of the subject, the publication is enriched by a preface by Doina Jela, which confirms the authors' attempt to outline, through their research, *an alternative history*, as is always the case also with memoirs concerning the years of Communist detention. Just like in the case of memoirs, their work is founded on an ethical stake and claims to be rooted in an unhealed trauma, a history defined in terms of a "past that does not pass" (p. 15). The foreword written by Constantin Vasilescu and Clara Mareş explains, very briefly, not only the hypotheses and the objectives of the research but also the structure of the project, thus providing an orientation guide for study and reading. The two parts of the book correspond, in fact, to its title. Thus, *Morfologia (ne)vinovăției* features a series of nine thematic studies, conceived as a panoramic view of the subject, dealing with the authors' research concerns. These are studies that help the general public to contextualise the realities of the time, and in particular the environment of the prison system, thus allowing a deeper and more complex understanding of the situation of the victims of Communist repression. Of these, the first three studies deal with more general topics, while the last six are more specialised. Their common denominator is the *women-prisoners* – this is the leitmotif of the research, the thematic core around which the discourse coheres, regardless of the perspective from which the prison experience is approached. Precisely because they address various aspects of imprisonment/prisoners, the studies in the first part of the book bring together names, events, and historical realities that add novelty and richness to the scientific discourse. The women prisoners are observed in the turmoil of history, with everything that it entailed, against the broader background of the many realities that were touched by repression. Although all these women share the condition of being prisoners, the causes, the accusations, the (un)guilt turn out to be very different, while resistance and human, moral, or spiritual strength become decisive aspects of their destinies.

The first chapter explains the research methodology and provides a reading grid for the famous penal record sheets, analysing their entries and pointing out their possible inconsistencies. One highlight of this chapter is the statistical analysis of women's imprisonment, focusing on issues such as their place of origin, social background, educational

level, occupation, political affiliation, etc. Chapter two suggests an overview of the prison system in Communist Romania, thus a more general analysis of the reality of detention and includes both a statistical and a human dimension of this particular experience, while the third chapter entails a reconstruction of the different steps of detention, together with some considerations on the prisoners' reintegration into society after their liberation. The key stages of detention are thus discussed: the arrest, the investigation, the court trial, the detention itself – on which the author focuses in greater detail, not only in its “administrative” aspects (for example, in the section about *Cohabitation*, “re-education”, isolation), but also in its human aspects (in sections talking about *Instinct*, *Feeling and Motherhood*, or *Faith and Reason Against Despair*), following with the liberation and a freedom which has often been translated in terms of a “burden”.

From the fourth chapter onward, repression is approached from specific viewpoints. This study assumes that many of the women's penal records included in the second part of the book list some charges as ‘war crimes’, ‘crimes against humanity’, or ‘crimes against peace’ and explains the law behind these charges and the nuanced situations these victims have experienced, providing relevant case studies. Chapter five deals with the situation of legionary political prisoners, a delicate subject, providing insight into various prisoners' situations (e.g. Elena Codreanu, Sofia Borobar, Aspazia Oțel, Simona Catargi, Oltea Manoliu, and others), while the sixth chapter focuses on the legislation of the collectivisation of agriculture and its victims. A broad, general overview (e.g. in the section regarding the *Dynamics of the Collectivisation Process*) is completed by several case studies (when focusing on portraits of women who fought against collectivisation: Maria Dragu and Paulina Chircă, Cristina Kedveș, Saveta Plavia, Maria Filimon, Varvara Bartok, and others).

The seventh chapter discusses freedom in the context of the temptation to cross country borders. The legislation on illegal border crossings and some statistics are followed by case studies concerning women accused of this charge (e.g. Ghecz Elena, Aurelia Moraru, Margareta Bercovi, Ana Ploder, and others). The eighth chapter deals with the cases of abused women who, after their release, ended up in medical units for people with psychiatric disorders. Although the chapter includes

case studies, they are presented rather anonymously, as the names are given only by initials (E.B., M.C., M.P., C.B., etc.), precisely because the subject is a very sensitive one.

The last study, reported in chapter nine, begins with some general aspects concerning the women who wrote about their imprisonment and with an inventory of memoirs relating to the subject. The author then discusses the “faces of guilt”, i.e. the various accusations levelled at “educated women in Romania in the 1940s and 1950s” (p. 294): for example, the Samuelli sisters, Elena Pătrșcanu and Lena Constante, Lya Popescu, Micaela Ghițescu and Smaranda Chehata, Ecaterina Bălăcioiu-Lovinescu, etc. Among the prisoners who were held in administrative detention, i.e. women arrested without legal forms and without ever having been sentenced, three cases are documented: Maria Ioana Cantacuzino, Alice Voinescu, and Olga Caba. The research concludes with a case study of Nicole Valéry-Grossu, a writer famous for her memoirs about the years spent in prison.

The second part of the book, *Alfabetul detenției feminine în comunism*, includes 3,753 microbiographies of women prisoners. The structure of these records is explained in Chapter I of the first part of the research (p. 23). Their greatest merit is to bring all these names together, creating – or re-creating – a different kind of “gallery of portraits” in a way that complements the one suggested by memoirs, which almost always include such portraits of prisoners (others than their authors) as a leitmotif of every prison experience. Regarding the prison records, the researchers warn that aspects like doubtful spelling, incomplete or contradictory data, or even the absence of known political prisoners are just some of the major difficulties in copying and researching them (pp. 19-20). They nevertheless represent an extremely useful tool for those who want to look for a name and, moreover, behind the name, to find a *person*: “In addition to its historiographical usefulness, the meaning of this part is a profoundly ethical one of remembrance and homage to women who suffered under Communism” (p. 23).

Finally, an important aspect is the authors’ intention to discover and include in this volume biographies of little-known women from the realm of Communist repression and thus provide new names and dates (p. 24). We find them in the first chapters, for example, which discuss the cases of lesser-known prisoners, without neglecting those who

are already famous for their testimonies. The research thus achieves a welcomed and necessary balance. Another meritorious aspect is the rigorous and meticulous documentation, since the sources of the research are primarily documents (p. 21): for the first part of the book, the prison records in the ANP archives, and for the second one, the research work in the CNSAS archives, many of which offer unpublished archival material, together with consultation of other files found in the custody of the National Archives of Romania. Interviews, memoirs, and volumes of oral history are added to these primary sources. The research includes a rich bibliography, of great interest for specialized and non-specialized readers, and is followed by a collection of archival photographs, portraying faces of woman prisoners in Communist Romania. The research work undertaken by the authors of *Morfologia (ne)vinovăției: alfabetul detenției feminine în comunism* is immense and meritorious. Each such contribution sheds new light on the country's recent history. Together, such research can (re)configure a picture as complete and as detailed as possible of the historical realities in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and get closer, precisely through the richness of their diversity, to the common ambition of memoirs and history when facing the past: a pursuit of truthfulness.

