

MEMORY AND IDEOLOGY IN THE PRISON MEMOIRS OF ROMANIAN COMMUNISM

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DOI: 10.35923/AUTFil.62.14

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This study explores the ideological and rhetorical differences between two types of memoirs written by individuals imprisoned under Romania's communist regime. Most of these memoirs focus on documenting, from a personal standpoint, the shared experience of suffering in communist prisons, with an emphasis on exposing the injustices of the regime and preserving the dignity of those who endured repression. In contrast, memoirs by former members of the Legionary Movement are a unique case; they depict suffering through a spiritual and mystical lens, framing it as a form of martyrdom. These texts often recast the prison experience as a religious act, elevating it beyond mere physical suffering and aligning it with core tenets of Legionary ideology. This study contrasts these two memorial approaches, emphasizing the risk of ideological distortion in portraying historical trauma. While the first type of memoirs aims for reconciliation and understanding, the latter mythologizes suffering to reinforce extremist ideologies, thereby shaping contemporary political and cultural narratives in Romania.

Keywords: *prison memoirs; communist repression; Legionary Movement; martyrdom; ideological distortion of memory*

Introduction

This study explores the relationship between memoir writing and ideology in the accounts of imprisonment in communist prisons, focusing on how these narratives influence collective memory. The memoirs of communist detention, a literary genre in which former prisoners recount the suffering they endured in camps and prisons, experienced a natural surge after 1990¹, following the collapse of the communist regime and the reopening of public

¹ For insight into the scale of this surge, see Cesereanu 2018.

space for direct testimonies about oppression. In this context, memoirs became not only a source of historical documentation but a space for the expression of the living memory¹ of Romanian communism, but also a battleground for ideological confrontation.

A particular case is represented by writings related to the Legionary Movement. These texts, which often frame the prison experiences in mystical and martyr-like visions, raise essential questions about the instrumentalization of suffering for political purposes and the legitimization of figures associated with extremist ideologies. The ideological distortions present in Legionary memoirs, which glorify suffering through a Christ-like pattern and transform the prisoner into a martyr of faith, have a profound impact on the collective memory of post-communist Romania, generating ethical dilemmas related to the authenticity of the narrative and its influence on public discourse. This issue is crucial, especially at a time when these texts are becoming reference points for contemporary political movements, contributing to the resurgence of illiberal and anti-democratic political views.

Communist detention in Romania was among the most brutal forms of political repression in Eastern Europe, profoundly marking the post-1945 period when the communist regime consolidated its power with the support of the Soviet Union. During this time, political repression primarily targeted the interwar elites, members of democratic and monarchist political parties, intellectuals, clergy, and other regime opponents, as well as members of the Legionary Movement, who, due to their violent past, were also persecuted under the communist regime. The first significant waves of arrests began in 1947, following the dissolution of political parties and the elimination of opposition. With the establishment of the People's Republic of Romania, repression intensified, leading to the arrest of tens of thousands of individuals on charges of 'plotting against the state' or 'spying for imperialism.' According to estimates, between 1948 and 1964, the communist regime sent approximately 600,000 people to prisons and forced labor camps, many of whom were subjected to torture and forced labor under inhumane conditions without access to a fair trial (Tismăneanu 2007²). Among the most notorious prisons of the communist system was Pitești, where the infamous 'reeducation' experiment took place between 1949 and 1951—an experiment in psychological and physical torture unique in Eastern Europe. Other examples of places where political prisoners endured particularly harsh treatment include Jilava, Gherla, Aiud, Sighet, and the labor camp at the Danube-Black Sea Canal.

The persecution of legionnaires in communist prisons was a continuation of the repression they had suffered during the Ion Antonescu regime. After the defeat of the Legionary Rebellion in January 1941, many

1 For the meanings of the phrase "living memory," see Tucan 2024. Living memory is the immediate memory of those who directly experienced historical events and is expressed through everyday communication between successive generations. It remains active and alive as long as the survivors of the traumatic event are still present to transmit it directly.

2 See also Deletant 2019, 232, who estimates the number of arrests to be between 500,000 and 750,000.

legionnaires were arrested and imprisoned by Antonescu's regime, as they were considered a threat to the state (Clark 2015: 232-235). Under the communist regime in Romania, the persecution of legionnaires intensified to eliminate any ideological or organizational opposition. After 1945, legionnaires were regarded as a danger due to their fascist and nationalist past, and they were perceived as both a political and social threat. Between October and November 1944, authorities arrested 972 legionnaires, many of whom were imprisoned under extremely harsh conditions (Clark 2015: 236), especially in Aiud prison. In an attempt to protect themselves from the increasing persecution, some legionnaires tried to join the Communist Party, hoping this would help them avoid repression. However, even these individuals were later targeted by the regime, being labeled as "fascist elements" that needed to be eliminated.

Meanwhile, another group of legionnaires chose to join anti-communist resistance movements, but this opposition was largely ineffective. Both categories of legionnaires – those who sought to align with the new communist power and those who actively opposed it – were subjected to continuous persecution. Many were arrested en masse, imprisoned, and subjected to brutal treatment in prisons such as Aiud and Pitești.

The genre of concentration camp memoirs

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, concentration camp memoirs experienced a significant surge in Romania, coinciding with the opening of archives and the regained freedom of expression. Many former political prisoners began publishing testimonies about their sufferings, making the memory of communist repression a central part of public discourse. This "borderline literature" aimed both to reclaim the traumatic memory of Romanian communism and to offer moral restitution by bringing to light the "exemplary destinies" of those persecuted and marginalized under the communist regime. These writings are valuable not only for their documentary significance but also for incorporating the "small histories" of individuals who were victims of the regime into the broader "grand History," thus recovering both individual and collective experiences in a more significant effort to remember those who were silenced (Tucan 2018: 287). Thus, prison memoirs are not merely a recording of facts but also a reflection on suffering and resistance to the human condition in the face of oppression and degradation.

Prison memoirs emerge from what Ricœur calls a "memory effort" (2001: 18), a process of reconstructing the past through factual and emotional imprints. Memory serves as a bridge between personal experience and historical events, and recording these memories is not simply about documenting the past but also about conveying a message for both the present and the future. The tension between past suffering and the present act of remembrance enables the re-interpretation of experiences, with the authors gaining a clearer understanding of the past through the distance of time, providing moral validation of their struggle. Memoirs are not merely confessions; they represent a reflective process that should be driven primarily by an ethical impulse—encouraging

a critical and reparative reflection on the past and offering lessons on courage, suffering, and dignity in totalitarianism.

In this process, the “narrative structure” and the way the story is crafted¹ become crucial elements with a significant ethical dimension. This involves not only the choice of specific representational tools – such as tone, explicit and implicit evaluations, narrative perspective, or style² – but also the deliberate selection and organization of what is included: what is told, how it is told, and, most importantly, why it is told. Memoirs, therefore, go beyond being simple records of events; they become acts of representation and interpretation. The author-narrator, as the central agent of “remembrance”, who controls the narrative elements, offers a “personalized” view of the past, woven into the larger framework of History, understood as the chronological narrative of humanity’s collective memory.

In this sense, memoirs can be seen as a potential tool associated with microhistory³, that technique of historical reconstruction which focuses on the human, emotional, and affective dimension of the past, where the primary aim is the three-dimensionality of the detail capable of conveying the image of authentic human experience in context. Microhistory, by “reducing the scale of observation to a microscopic level” (Levi 2001: 99), offers a more anthropological perspective on history and allows nuanced interpretations, sometimes complementing and at other times undermining monolithic versions of panoramic views on epochs or events. Similarly, memoirs, viewed as “personal” documents, offer valuable insights into how the lived experience of history is represented.

Memoirs, Memory, and Ideology

An overview of Romanian communist concentration camp memoirs reveals two distinct categories, each reflecting an essential function: the first is ethical, focused on preserving memory and fundamental human values by documenting suffering and passing on a moral lesson to future generations. The second is mystical, interpreting suffering as a form of purification and resistance through faith, emphasizing the transcendental aspects of the repressive experience and its role in reinforcing a collective spiritual identity. These two

1 “The narrative configuration,” “storytelling,” or “emplotment” (“mise en intrigue”), as Ricœur would have said (2001: 107, 289 and following).

2 Bogdan Ștefănescu (2022) argues that the portrayal of concentration camp experiences involves more than a simple recounting of events; it entails the selection of specific discursive frameworks shaped by the author’s ideological and psychological positions. He adopts a subjective constructivist approach, emphasizing the role of discourse in constructing both subjectivity and representations of the world. According to Ștefănescu, memories of traumatic experiences from the communist era are structured not just through facts but through “discursive matrices.” These matrices are heavily influenced by “master tropes,” a concept he borrows from Hayden White, referring to rhetorical figures that define the author’s perspective. This discursive shaping of memory is a fundamental aspect of what Ștefănescu terms “traumawork” (Traumaarbeit), where traumatic experiences are simultaneously processed and encoded within factual and literary registers from the outset.

3 For more on microhistory, see Levi 2001: 97-119, Ginzburg 1992.

major categories are represented, on one hand, by texts with a “legionnaire” ideological charge and, on the other hand, by those without an explicit ideological dimension or with an open, pro-democratic vision¹. The latter tend to focus more on the factual aspects of the prison experience, emphasizing an awareness of suffering, the recollection of details and human figures to save them from being forgotten, and the need to survive to witness what happened. The protagonist in these narratives is often portrayed as a survivor rather than a martyr, and the experiences recounted are varied, encompassing spiritual, intellectual, and human aspects (such as friendship). These works can be classified within the broader genre of “testimonial literature” (cf. Tucan 2018), which highlights historical facts and the emotional and symbolic dimensions of memory. The suffering endured by the victims of totalitarian regimes, whether it be the experiences of the Holocaust or communist imprisonment, is represented in a manner that goes beyond the simple chronology of events, offering the reader a subjective and emotional experience. Testimonial literature thus serves as a means of accessing personal memory, which takes on significance for the entire community, transforming individual suffering into a symbol of collective trauma. In this form of writing, the ethics of narrative construction must be stressed, where authenticity and faithfulness to events are crucial despite the limitations often imposed by traumatic memory’s fragmented and subjective nature. The testimonial value of these texts ensures that the human dimension of historical trauma is not forgotten and that the moral lessons derived from those experiences continue to resonate with future generations. At the core of this discourse, defined by its testimonial value, is the figure of the “moral witness,” a unique agent of collective memory, the one who bears witness (Margalit 2002: 147-182). The “survivor,” in their ethical role as the moral witness, takes on the responsibility of being the “voice of all those who were killed, reviving the memory of their vanished names” (Assmann 2014: 42).

The memoirs of legionnaires about communist imprisonment stand out due to a set of defining elements that reflect both the ideological framework of the Legionary Movement and how these experiences are conveyed in their narrative. These traits not only distinguish these texts from other memoirs about communist detention, but they also significantly influence collective memory and public perception of both the communist era and extremist ideologies. Analyzing these characteristics shows how suffering is often instrumentalized to reaffirm specific values and practices of the Legionary Movement.

¹ Many memoirists, such as Ion Ioanid, even though they find the “sense of superiority over others” irritating, admire the legionnaires’ detachment from the “trivialities of life,” their group unity (Ioanid 2013, I, 69), and their “dignified demeanor” (68). An explanation for this admiration can be found in Nicolae Steinhardt’s observation that prison life and shared suffering bring prisoners closer together, regardless of their political affiliations: “At first, Zionists and legionnaires, peasants and intellectuals, liberals and Cuza supporters, communists and social democrats, Carlists and Antonescu supporters eyed each other suspiciously and looked at one another in wonder. How could you be Persian? Eventually, the wear and tear of cohabitation renders obsolete the lenses that narrow your perspective, and you begin to realize that everyone has a certain degree of truth, and that it is entirely possible that you too could be Persian” (Nicolae Steinhardt 1999: 401).

Books such as those by Virgil Maxim (*Imn pentru crucea purtată*), Ion Ianolide (*Întoarcerea la Hristos, Deținutul profet*), Dumitru Bordeianu (*Mărturisiri din mlaștina disperării*), and Nicolae Purcărea (*Urlă haita... Pitești, Canal, Gherla, Jilava, Aiud*) are some of the most well-known and widely disseminated works. These memoirs have contributed to the creation of the cult of the “saints of the prisons,”¹ a hagiographic movement that seeks to reclaim the group of legionary mystics from Aiud as “moral” reference points, many of whom are among the authors mentioned². Over the past thirty years, this movement has gained spiritual endorsement from certain Romanian Orthodox Church clerics³ and today fuels not only the fundamentalist tendencies within Romanian Orthodox spirituality but also the political revival of legionary ideas in a profoundly anti-democratic form, linked to the broader global wave of illiberalism⁴.

What are these defining elements? A key characteristic of legionary memoirs is their **exalted and mystifying rhetoric**, which turns the prison into a “theophanic space.” In this rhetoric, imprisonment is no longer seen merely as a physical and psychological ordeal but is transformed into a sacred act of purification and spiritual elevation. This approach creates an idealized portrayal of imprisonment that not only records the brutal experiences endured by prisoners but also imbues them with an absolute spiritual significance. The prison, in this sense, becomes a privileged place of transfiguration, where suffering purifies the legionnaire and brings them closer to divinity.

This mystical perspective is more than just a rhetorical device; it serves as a means for the Legionary Movement to position itself as a spiritual movement deeply tied to Orthodox Christian values⁵. By dramatizing these

1 For a detailed analysis of the dynamics behind the formation of this movement and a discussion on the instrumentalization of the movement in a contemporary religious key, see Biliuță (2018). For an analytical perspective on the effects of this movement on the contemporary memorial and spiritual debate space, see Ciobanu (2018).

2 This refers to a group of legionary prisoners, with the “martyr-like” figure of Valeriu Gafencu at its center, including Traian Trifan, Anghel Papacioc, Marin Naidim, Virgil Maxim, Nicolae Mazăre, and Ioan Ianolide. Some of these individuals also wrote memoirs. Among the hagiographic books written by supporters of Orthodox fundamentalism with legionary leanings, we can mention Monahul Moise, *Sfântul închisorilor. Mărturii despre Valeriu Gafencu adunate și adnotate de Monahul Moise* (2017) and *Mărturisitorii din Închisorile comuniste. Minuni. Mărturii. Repere* (2011).

3 Among those who endorsed these volumes, through prefaces or introductory notes with a blessing-like aura, we can mention His Eminence Andrei, Archbishop of Alba Iulia (Monahul Moise, *Sfântul închisorilor*), Justinian Chira, His Eminence the Archbishop of the Diocese of Maramureș and Sătmar (*Mărturisitorii din închisorile comuniste*), and Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa (Ianolide, *Întoarcerea la Hristos*), who himself was a former legionnaire and political prisoner (including Pitești prison during the “reeducation” period).

4 For the relationship between legionary ideology and today’s populist political formulas, see Gheorghiu, Preisler 2022.

5 This also represents a renunciation of the “political” dimension of the Legionary Movement, aiming to make the ideological-mystical framework of these recollections more acceptable to contemporary audiences. For example, in *Imn pentru crucea purtată*, Virgil Maxim (2002) reflects on what he considers to be the fundamental mistake of the Legionary Movement. According to Maxim, the critical error of the movement was its shift away from its spiritual foundations towards an excessive focus on political and material power. He laments that

mystical visions, the memoirs create a narrative in which suffering becomes a pathway to transfiguration, and the legionnaire is depicted as a martyr of the faith, enduring not only the hardships of the communist regime but also suffering for a higher ideal. In this way, suffering takes on a sacred meaning, and the prison experience is elevated to an act of sacrifice, regarded as an absolute value.

Another defining feature is the emphasis on **suffering as a form of transfiguration and martyrdom**. While suffering is a central theme in prison memoirs, its portrayal in legionary accounts differs significantly from other narratives of communist imprisonment. In legionary texts, suffering is not depicted solely as a dehumanizing physical and psychological ordeal intended to inspire terror. Instead, it is framed as a path to spiritual purification and a reaffirmation of faith. These writings do not present suffering as humiliating or degrading but as a means for the legionnaire to assert their faith, thus demonstrating their loyalty to the Legionary Movement¹.

Another key element in legionary texts is **using a Christ-like model to depict experiences of suffering**. Legionnaires are portrayed as “hero-martyrs” who follow in the footsteps of Christ’s suffering and those of other legionary leaders like Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. This Christ-like pattern is not coincidental; it elevates the legionnaires’ suffering into a sacred act of martyrdom, lifting them to a higher spiritual status aligned with the spiritual leaders of the movement’s past. This pattern creates a stark, dualistic worldview, where the struggle is framed as a battle between the “satanic forces” of communism and the legionary “hero-martyrs” sacrificing themselves for “faith.” This dual vision reinforces the belief that suffering is not merely a part of human life but a necessary sacrifice for salvation and spiritual purification. In legionary memoirs, the legionnaire is not simply a political prisoner suffering for resisting the regime; they are depicted as martyrs enduring hardship for a noble cause that goes beyond political resistance, reaching a higher, spiritual plane.

The asceticism described in these texts is not merely a spiritual practice but a **form of ideological reaffirmation**. These memoirs glorify the past of the Legionary Movement, using suffering to legitimize its ideology. This raises ethical concerns, as the elevation of suffering into an act of purification and heroism not only rehabilitates the movement but also contributes to an idealized portrayal of it. Rather than providing a critical reflection on the past, these accounts use the experience of imprisonment to reinforce the movement’s values and principles. Suffering thus becomes a tool for ideological propaganda, with the memoirs functioning as platforms that present the movement’s ideology as legitimate and even superior to others. This approach is problematic, perpetuating myths and stereotypes that distort historical truth and shape

the movement, initially rooted in Christian Orthodox values and spiritual purity, became increasingly entangled in political violence and power struggles. This deviation from its spiritual ideals, in his view, corrupted the movement’s mission and led to its ultimate failure

1 There are, in fact, spiritual dimensions present in the works of non-legionary memoirists as well, such as Richard Wurmbrand, Nicolae Steinhardt, or Nicole Valéry-Grosu. In their writings, faith is experienced in personal, natural rhythms, along with the need to create a spiritual space for individual survival.

contemporary perceptions of the movement and extremist ideologies.

Two opposing examples: Florin Pavlovici and Ioan Ianolide

Tortura pe înțelesul tuturor [*Torture Explained to Everyone*] is a memoir written by Florin Constantin Pavlovici (2011), a former political prisoner at Jilava, Gherla, and the labor camps of Salcia and Periprava (in Balta Brăilei and the Danube Delta). First published in 2001 and awarded the debut prize by the Romanian Writers' Union, the book was praised for its unique style and its lack of pathos in addressing a harrowing subject. This book represents a significant example of testimonial literature, characterized by a focus on the factual recounting of experiences and the emotional and symbolic dimensions of memory. This type of literature not only documents the historical facts but also transcends them, offering readers a subjective and emotional experience that reflects the collective trauma of a whole community. In this context, Pavlovici's memoir is an individual testimony of survival and a reflection on the dehumanizing effects of totalitarian regimes. The central figure in his narrative is not portrayed as a martyr but as a survivor – a man who endures extreme physical and psychological suffering but manages to preserve his humanity and inner moral compass.

One of the key characteristics of *Tortura pe înțelesul tuturor* is its focus on the minute details of prison life. Pavlovici recounts daily routines, interrogations, the brutal treatment of prisoners, and the absurdity of the accusations brought against him and others. For example, the author details his arrest, the humiliating body searches, and the long, senseless interrogations, where the charges against him often seem arbitrary or exaggerated. The memoir vividly portrays the harsh realities of prison life, with Pavlovici providing a meticulous description of the physical environment, from the layout of cells to the conditions of forced labor camps. However, beyond this factual recounting, there is a constant underlying theme of human resilience and the struggle to maintain dignity amidst extreme suffering. The memoir also reflects the broader experience of many political prisoners during the communist era, emphasizing that while the circumstances of their imprisonment were often unjust and arbitrary, their desire to survive and bear witness to these events was a powerful motivator.

Pavlovici's writing is not limited to the objective recounting of events; it is deeply infused with subjective reflections on the emotional toll of imprisonment and torture. He speaks of his emotional response to the trauma, as well as the coping mechanisms he and his fellow prisoners developed. For instance, one striking aspect of the memoir is Pavlovici's use of humor as a coping mechanism. Despite the horrific conditions, there are moments of dark humor throughout the text. Pavlovici often mocks the absurdity of the communist authorities and their methods, turning moments of extreme violence and humiliation into occasions for bitter laughter. This element of humor serves a dual purpose: it underscores the absurdity of the situation while also functioning as a survival strategy. Pavlovici's laughter is not an indication

of happiness but a defiance of the dehumanizing effects of torture. The humor is deeply ironic, directed at both the torturers and the tortured, revealing the moral complexities and contradictions of life under an authoritarian regime.

Pavlovici's memoir focuses on the small acts of resistance and survival that allowed him to endure the extreme conditions of imprisonment. He emphasizes the importance of maintaining hope, even in the most desperate circumstances. For Pavlovici, survival is not merely a physical act but a moral and intellectual one. Throughout his memoir, he reflects on the ethical choices he and his fellow prisoners had to make – whether to collaborate with the authorities, whether to betray fellow prisoners and how to maintain one's dignity in the face of dehumanization.

The memoir also delves into the spiritual and intellectual aspects of survival. Pavlovici describes how prisoners found solace in their thoughts and memories, using their intellect as a refuge from the physical and psychological pain inflicted on them. Pavlovici highlights the significance of the bonds formed between prisoners. These relationships provided emotional support and a sense of solidarity in an otherwise hostile environment. The memoir presents the human spirit as resilient and capable of finding meaning even in the most degrading and painful experiences.

Pavlovici's memoir goes beyond the individual experience to address the collective trauma of an entire generation subjected to the horrors of communist repression. The account is not just a personal story but a representation of the suffering endured by countless others who were imprisoned, tortured, and silenced by the regime. The testimonial aspect of the memoir is particularly evident in Pavlovici's emphasis on the duty to remember and bear witness. Throughout the text, there is a clear sense that he is writing not just for himself but for all those who cannot tell their own stories. His memoir becomes a form of resistance, a way of preserving the memory of those who suffered and ensuring that their experiences are not forgotten. In this sense, *Tortura pe înțeleșul tuturor* serves as both a personal and collective narrative, transforming individual suffering into a symbol of trauma.

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The documents that became the volume *Întoarcerea la Hristos. Document pentru o lume nouă* [*The Return to Christ. A Document for a New World*] by Ion Ianolide (2006) were written in the early 1980s, and after the author's death in 1986, they were taken to and hidden at Diaconești Monastery, where they were organized and published in 2006. The author was arrested in 1941 by the Antonescu regime for his involvement in the Blood Brotherhoods¹ and was imprisoned continuously until 1964. The book is a testimony of the years

1 "Frățiile de Cruce": youth organizations associated with the Legionary Movement in inter-war Romania. These groups were essentially the youth wing of the Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail (Legion of the Archangel Michael), a fascist and nationalist movement founded by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. The Blood Brotherhoods aimed to indoctrinate young people with the movement's ideals, promoting ultra-nationalism, Orthodox Christianity, antisemitism, and militant anti-communism. They played an important role in preparing and mobilizing future members for the Legionary Movement's political and paramilitary activities (see Clark 2015).

spent in communist prisons in Romania, combining accounts of the physical and psychological sufferings of detention with typical legionary reflections on Christian faith and opposition to the communist regime. Ianolide's *Întoarcerea la Hristos* is a significant work within the context of prison memoirs from the communist era, especially those authored by individuals linked to the Legionary Movement. This memoir serves not only as a testimony of suffering and survival in Romanian communist prisons but also as a reflection on the ideological and spiritual transformation of the author. It belongs to the broader category of 'legionary prison memoirs,' which often depict imprisonment as a form of spiritual asceticism and martyrdom. For Ianolide, the prison becomes a space of profound theophany where the suffering endured by himself and others is portrayed as a path to spiritual purification and closeness to Christ. This perspective aligns with the mystical and ideological exaltation of suffering typical of 'legionary' literature, in which the author's trials reaffirm not only his personal faith but also the broader ideological struggle against the 'satanic' forces of communism. In this context, Ianolide's narrative demonstrates a recurrent human typology, where the suffering of the prisoner is modeled on the Passion of Christ. The memoir intertwines descriptions of brutal physical conditions with spiritual reflections, highlighting the transformative power of faith. Ianolide frequently portrays his fellow prisoners, especially those from the legionary ranks, as heroes-martyrs undergoing sanctification through their suffering. This portrayal, however, often treads the line between personal religious epiphany and the broader ideological justification of the legionary cause. A relevant example is his portrayal of Valeriu Gafencu. Ianolide describes Gafencu's spiritual transformation, portraying him as a deeply religious figure whose suffering in prison serves both as a personal journey toward Christ and as a symbolic reaffirmation of the Legionary ethos of martyrdom and sacrifice. Gafencu is depicted with a Christ-like reverence, with Ianolide attributing to him a near-saintly status: "I am happy to have seen a man in whom Christ lived, thought, smiled, existed, and triumphed: Valeriu Gafencu" (Ianolide 2006: 221).

Ianolide's work also reflects deeply on the notion of the "apocalyptic present," where the trials faced by prisoners are part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil. In recounting the experiences of fellow prisoners, Gafencu emerges as a central figure embodying Christian virtue and martyrdom. Known as "The Saint of Prisons," Gafencu is portrayed as the ultimate hero-martyr whose sacrifice carries redemptive value for the collective sins of the Romanian people, echoing the veneration of other Legionary martyrs like Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.

While *Întoarcerea la Hristos* does not explicitly engage in overt political rhetoric, its spiritual and ideological dimensions are clearly rooted in the context of the legionary ideology. Ianolide frames the communist regime as a manifestation of satanic forces, a view that echoes many legionary writings that saw communism as the ultimate enemy of the Romanian nation and Christian values. Ioan Ianolide frames communism within an antisemitic, "Judeo-Bolshevism" paradigm, a common perspective in legionary and far-

right rhetoric of the time (Tucan, Pașcalău 2024). He suggests that communism is not merely an atheistic ideology but one deeply intertwined with Jewish interests and influence, a claim reflecting both antisemitic and conspiratorial views. Ianolide writes that “Jews created historical materialism, led the Soviet revolution, and unleashed persecution against the Christian Church and all those who refused communization”(2006, 170). This statement underscores his belief that Jewish figures were central to the communist movement and its atheistic, anti-Christian goals. Throughout the book, Ianolide expresses pervasive antisemitic views that echo the antisemitism of the Legionary Movement. His text reflects religious antisemitism, portraying Jews as enemies of Christianity and instigators of anti-Christian persecution. Additionally, Ianolide’s economic and political antisemitism links Jews to both capitalism and communism, suggesting that Jewish influence dominates global financial systems and political ideologies. This multifaceted antisemitism permeates the book, serving to justify his ideological and spiritual opposition to communism by positioning it as part of a broader, alleged Jewish conspiracy. These views reinforce the narrative of the Legionary Movement’s ideology, depicting communism as an enemy not only of Romanian nationalism but also of Christianity. This Judeo-Bolshevik framework is consistently used to cast the Legionary cause as a spiritual and political resistance against what he perceives as a global Jewish conspiracy controlling both communism and capitalism.

The memoir is rich in its reflections on the spiritual life within the prison, but it also carries with it an implicit apologia for the Legionary Movement, portraying its members not as political actors but as spiritual warriors fighting against the atheism and moral decay represented by the communist regime. The prisons Ianolide recounts passing through are themselves significant sites within the narrative. He describes his time in Aiud, Pitești, and Târgu Ocna, among others, as spaces where the soul is tested and refined through suffering. These prisons become places of spiritual growth for Ianolide and his companions rather than merely sites of repression. In particular, his description of Târgu Ocna, where Gafencu died, emphasizes the role of the prison as a locus of martyrdom, transforming the brutal conditions of imprisonment into opportunities for spiritual victory.

In summary, *Întoarcerea la Hristos* fits the mold of “legionary” prison memoirs by transforming the experience of incarceration into a spiritualized narrative of martyrdom and resistance. While, on the surface, it reflects on the trials of imprisonment, it carries a more profound ideological message that continues to valorize the legionary ethos, portraying the suffering of its members as part of a larger, divinely ordained battle between good and evil. In doing so, Ianolide’s memoir legitimizes the ideology of the Legionary Movement, framing its beliefs and actions within a context of spiritual struggle and redemption.

Conclusions

The memoirs of imprisonment during Romania's communist regime can be seen as having at least a dual dimension, each with its own ideological and cultural implications, offering different perspectives on the traumatic experiences of that period. On the one hand, there is the testimonial approach to memoir writing, which focuses on bearing witness to human suffering in communist prisons, aiming to preserve the memory of those who endured persecution, to record the cruelty of an inhumane regime, and to promote ethical values. This approach seeks to document injustices alongside memorial recovery of those who faced repression, striving to expose the atrocities of the regime and to provide a foundation for reconciliation and a better understanding of the past. In this sense, testimonial memoirs serve a civic and educational role, contributing to the construction of an anti-totalitarian consciousness, so crucial in the face of future dangers.

On the other hand, legionary memoirs tend to mirror suffering through religious rhetoric, assigning it a spiritual and mystical role in which pain is viewed as a purifying act and the only authentic form of anti-communist resistance, capable of leading to a higher form of existence. In this narrative, suffering becomes a sacrifice that transcends mere physical resistance, transforming into a deeply ideologized collective salvation. Legionary memoirs promote the idea that, through suffering, one can attain moral and spiritual purity, essential not only for anti-communist resistance but also for preserving the nation's traditional and spiritual values, aligned with the mystical principles of fundamentalist Orthodoxy, characteristic of the doctrinal core of the Legionary Movement.

Thus, memoirs about Romanian communism oscillate between two distinct models: one that documents suffering to pave the way for reconciliation and understanding of the past, and another that sanctifies suffering, viewing it as a central element of ideological and spiritual resistance. This duality underscores the complexity of collective memory and the risks involved in transforming historical experiences into myths of heroic suffering, demonstrating that memory is not merely a record of the past but also a battleground for shaping the meanings and narratives of the future.

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