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Silenced Loyalties: Memory, Ambiguity and Intergenerational Resilience in a Romanian Family under Surveillance

Abstract: *This article explores the intergenerational transmission of political trauma and morally ambivalent positioning within a Romanian family marked by repression, surveillance, and forced silence under communism. The Pușchilă family – comprising three generations of architects – serves as a microhistorical case study of how state violence, surveillance, and forced silence affected not only individuals but also family dynamics, identities, and vocational choices. The patriarch, Ioan Pușchilă, was imprisoned between 1949 and 1956, in the aftermath of the establishment of the communist regime. His wife, Marcela, and later his son, Ion, were both formally approached and recorded as recruits in Securitate paperwork; however, in the archival record examined here, there are no documentary traces of sustained informant activity (e.g., informative notes, reports of meetings, operational outputs) that would allow a substantiated assessment of the content or effects of such recruitment. This study refrains from moral judgment, focusing instead on the contexts of constraint, fear, and negotiation that shaped these ambivalent positions. Drawing on archival documents (criminal, surveillance and informant files from the CNSAS, and a long-form interview with Ana Pușchilă (daughter and keeper of the family memory), the article analyzes how silence, not speech, became the main vehicle of trauma and loyalty. It engages with theoretical frameworks such as postmemory (Marianne Hirsch), the ethics of care (Carol Gilligan), and microhistory (Ginzburg, Levi), proposing a multidimensional understanding of what it means to survive – ethically and emotionally – under authoritarian control. Ultimately, the Pușchilă case suggests that key moral and affective dispositions are transmitted less through explicit narration than through tacit communication rules, everyday risk-management practices, and patterned forms of family cohesion under surveillance.*

Keywords: *political repression; postmemory; intergenerational trauma; family ethics; Securitate archives; silent practices; microhistory.*

Introduction

This study proposes an analysis of political and family memory in postwar Romania through a family history marked by repression, morally ambivalent positioning, and professional reconstruction. The

Pușchilă family – three generations of architects trained and active under communism – serves as a heuristic case for understanding how political repression and state surveillance infiltrate individual biographies and the affective structures of family life. The study does not aim merely to describe suffering, but to examine the mechanisms through which silence, loyalty, fear, and adaptation shaped dispositions, practices, and rules of transgenerational communication. The objective of this article is to show how silence functions simultaneously as a protective practice and as a mechanism for transmitting trauma within a surveilled family. The central argument is that under conditions of constraint, silence does not automatically indicate guilt or complicity; it can function instead as a practice of relational protection and risk management.

By bringing institutional archives into dialogue with oral memory, the case becomes intelligible as a “grey history,” in which ambiguity is not a deficit of evidence but a structural effect of surveillance. The article follows the tension between what is recorded institutionally and what is transmitted domestically – through omissions, restrained speech, and tacit rules – treating inconsistencies not as errors to be eliminated but as analytically meaningful traces of constraint.

The father, Ioan Pușchilă, was sentenced in 1949 in a group of intellectuals detained around the architect Constantin Joja and released in 1956. After imprisonment, he resumed his work in architecture, maintaining a professionally recognized continuity within institutional settings, in a family that would again be exposed to regime pressure. His wife, Marcela Pușchilă, was recruited by the Securitate (Romanian secret police) in the early 1950s under conditions of extreme vulnerability, and the youngest son, Ion Pușchilă, likewise signed an undertaking in 1989, shortly before the collapse of the communist regime. In both cases, the recruitment episode should be understood as a situation of constraint and risk management; within the available corpus there are no documentary traces of sustained informant activity (notes, meeting reports, assigned tasks) or elements that would support robust inferences about the content and effects of these contacts. Accordingly, this study distances itself from any form of retrospective moral judgment, opting instead for a contextualized analysis of constraints, forms of silence, and zones of moral ambivalence.

Methodology

The ethical dimension of this inquiry is matched by a methodological one: the sources used – criminal, informative, and network files from the CNSAS archive, complemented by an extended interview with Ioan Pușchilă’s daughter, Ana Pușchilă – are treated as institutional and narrative traces that require contextualization, internal verification (consistency, documentary genre, purpose), and triangulation across source types. The interview, conducted in 2011 (Bucharest) and used here as a recorded oral source, offers an intimate perspective on the ways in which repressed memory circulates within the family and is transmitted across generations. The interview was conducted with the interlocutor’s consent for academic use; in the article, information is handled with caution where it could expose third parties, and refusals to identify individuals are preserved as such. Operationally, triangulation is applied as follows: (1) the files are read to reconstruct institutional expectations and language; (2) the interview is used to identify tacit rules of speaking/not speaking and to establish a domestic chronology; (3) inferences are formulated only where the two registers corroborate each other, while non-corroboration and absence are treated explicitly as analytical results (silences, omissions, fragmentariness).

Theoretical framework and literature review

Along these lines, the perspective on traumatic family memory is shaped by Marianne Hirsch’s work, which introduces the concept of “postmemory” to describe the way subsequent generations come to live their parents’ traumatic experiences as if they were their own memories – deeply internalized even though they did not experience them directly. In the case of the Pușchilă family, the concept of “postmemory” is used to describe the affective transmission of a traumatic experience that is not narrated directly, but is internalized through rules of communication, prudence, and silences (Hirsch, 1997, pp. 22-24). The fact that all three children became architects can be discussed, without forcing a causal relation, as an indication compatible with a form of familial continuity and biographical stabilization under conditions of stigmatization and surveillance; it is not treated, however, as evidence of a demonstrable causality between parental trauma and professional choice. Here, the emphasis falls on observable mechanisms: thematic absences, avoidance gestures, the selection of what can be said, and the effects of these constraints on identities and family loyalties.

Access to sources and documentary asymmetry

This research took shape gradually, through a process of affective and documentary reconstruction carried out over several years. The Pușchilă family – comprising Ioan and Marcela, together with their three children, Ion (b. 1942), Ana (b. 1944), and Maria Marcela, known as Manorica (b. 1945) – became accessible in an uneven and fragmentary manner. Ana Pușchilă was the only one who agreed to contribute directly, providing an extended interview in 2011 and maintaining an intermittent but essential dialogue in the years that followed. Her willingness to speak was not immediate, but the result of a relationship of trust built over time, in a context in which family memory was marked by prudence and restraint. Her siblings were not involved: Ion emigrated to the United States after 1990, while Manorica settled in Switzerland in the early 1980s, later showing no willingness to engage in a biographical discussion. In this context, Ana remains the only one who attempted – despite difficulties and hesitations – to articulate a coherent memory.

The consultation of archival sources (the family members' criminal, informative, and network files) proceeded, in turn, in successive stages. Relevant information emerged gradually over the course of the research, progressively refining the biographical profiles reconstructed here. The overall approach was shaped both by the precariousness of the documentary record and by the ethical limits of an inquiry in which what can be said is not always what ought to be disclosed. In an illustrative instance, Ana noted that, at the time of her father's arrest, one of the members of the Securitate team was an architect known to the family, yet she refused to disclose his identity. Likewise, although she personally completed the administrative procedures required for the construction of memorials dedicated to the victims of the Danube–Black Sea Canal – projects initiated by her father – she declined to attend the inauguration, avoiding any public association with these monuments to suffering.

Accordingly, this research offers not only an analysis of a family history marked by repression, but also a reflection on the methods and difficulties of accessing memory under conditions of silence, exile, and fragmentation. Ana's voice is not merely an oral source but also an expression of a tense memory in which what remains unsaid plays a decisive role in shaping historical understanding. The Pușchilă family functions here as a case study of how surveillance generates both biographical fragmentation and familial rules of communication (what is

said/not said), with lasting effects on identities and professional trajectories.

The article is structured around three major lines of inquiry: a biographical reconstruction of the father during detention and social reintegration; an analysis of the forms of collaboration attributed to the wife and the son, treated as sources for understanding mechanisms of pressure rather than as acts implying culpability; and, finally, a reflection on how silence becomes a vehicle of trauma, a medium of affective transmission, and a strategy of family cohesion under surveillance.

Conceptually, the article employs three operational notions intended to capture observable mechanisms at the intersection of surveillance, memory, and family communication. By “negative witness” I refer to the actor who can attest to an event precisely through the refusal (or inability) to narrate it coherently, thereby making visible the thresholds of communicability. “Blocked memory” designates affective transmission without a stable narrative – atmosphere, avoidance rules, anxieties – with consequences for self-presentation and loyalties. Finally, “domestic complicity” names the everyday micro-adjustments through which the family minimizes risk (what is said/not said, to whom, when), maintaining functionality under surveillance; the term is used in a strictly descriptive sense and does not imply culpability.

Within this affective cartography, silence appears as a social practice and a relational strategy with simultaneously protective and disciplinary functions. It is not merely the absence of speech, but an implicit regime of communication shaped by the anticipation of risk and by the control of exposure. In Agamben’s reading, there exists a threshold of the “uncommunicable” that marks the limits of testimony and of representing trauma; this limit does not cancel meaning, but reconfigures it through absences and narrative discontinuities (Agamben, 1999, pp. 144-148). Applied to the Pușchilă family’s memory, this framework allows silence to be treated as a practice of risk management and exposure control rather than as simple “forgetting.” Methodologically, the aim is to describe what kinds of information circulate (or do not circulate) within the family, through which rules, and with what observable effects on self-presentation and life choices –without turning silence into a virtue or into a univocal symptom.

Finally, the article aligns with the theme of the Balkanistic Worlds (2026) special issue, *Generations – Memory, Dialogue, Conflict*, more specifically with the section *Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters*. The study offers a theoretical and empirical contribution to

understanding how political trauma, surveillance, and strategies of silent loyalty shape intergenerational relations in families marked by repression, collaboration, and biographical reconstruction. What emerges is not a univocal history, but a description of constraints and incongruences between administrative status and documentable conduct, in which one family's trajectory becomes a microhistorical indicator of a society subjected to a regime of diffuse control and suspended memory.

Analysis and Discussion

Ioan Pușchilă: repression, detention, and post-carceral reintegration

Ioan Pușchilă (1909–1995) is used here as a case study for tracing the effects of repression and surveillance on a professional career and on family dynamics. His trajectory spans distinct institutional episodes (interwar years, war, detention, reintegration, post-carceral surveillance), and the analysis insists on a careful separation between administrative status (files, classifications) and documentable conduct.

Pușchilă established himself in the interwar period as one of the active professionals of his generation, training and working from his student years in the offices of established Romanian architects such as Octav Doicescu. From 1937 he worked on several projects together with the architects Constantin Joja and Nicolae Goga, gradually being drawn into the orbit of a nationalist organization; the group's primary concern – among whose members were several architects, sculptors, and painters – was its artistic orientation¹.

Between October 1940 and January 1941, he served as mayor of Cernavodă during the period of Legionary rule. Yet, despite the frequent association between this office and political radicalization, his 1941 criminal file compiled by the Antonescu authorities points to a different reality: during the Legionary Rebellion he was arrested, tried, and acquitted, with several witnesses testifying in his favor and stating that he did not take part in violence or ideological excesses. This acquittal – at a moment when the Antonescu regime was intent on purging radical Legionary elements – is compatible with a non-militant administrative conduct and a more technocratic form of involvement. His subsequent trajectory suggests the continuation of a professional career

¹ ACNSAS, Informant Network Fund, file no. 367749, f. 10. Ioan Pușchilă, autobiography, dated 6 April 1957.

without documentable signs of re-radicalization or militant public exposure.

Significantly, in 1942 – thus under the Antonescu regime – Ioan Pușchilă, together with his friend Nicolae Goga, received an honorable mention in the architectural competition for the National Cathedral in Odessa. This official professional recognition, granted by an authoritarian regime in the midst of war, is consistent with an administrative conduct oriented toward technical competence and a distancing from ideological radicalisms. Within the economy of the argument, the episode indicates professional continuity rather than any form of documentable ideological activism.

After the end of the war, Ioan Pușchilă rapidly reintegrated into the architectural landscape of postwar Bucharest. Between 1945 and 1948 he was responsible for supervising the conversion works at the Infantry School, as well as for major projects such as the Army Theatre in the Uranus neighborhood and the restoration of the Bulandra Theatre in Bucharest. In parallel, he pursued sustained independent activity: between June 1947 and January 1948, he carried out interior transformations of the Central Post Office building, executed works for the Trade Union Houses of the Ministry of Agriculture and for the Savings House on the seaside, and designed the wooden velodrome of the “Viforul Dacia” club, the future Dinamo Bucharest. His achievements were institutionally acknowledged: in June 1948, he received official congratulations “for the fine success obtained in the P.T.T. Ploiești competition” and was invited to contribute actively to the promotion of architecture in the new republic. In the same year, he won first, second, and third place in the competition organized by Domeniile Bucovina with three different projects – an achievement that attests not only to his talent but also to a high level of professional output under an increasingly constraining political context. This intense and publicly recognized activity precedes his arrest in January 1949 and shows that, up to that point, Ioan Pușchilă was not only professionally integrated but even officially valued – an element that underscores the arbitrary character of the repression that followed.

In the same period, Ioan Pușchilă became involved in an informal network of civic solidarity together with other architects (Constantin Joja, Nicolae Frâncu, Nicolae Goga, among others). Its purpose was to support the families of those already arrested for political reasons by providing food, clothing, and money. Although framed as material assistance to families, the action was reinterpreted by the new communist

authorities as “clandestine Legionary assistance” – a charge frequently used to remove individuals deemed ideologically inconvenient. Pușchilă was thus arrested and sentenced to seven years of correctional detention by the Bucharest Military Tribunal, alongside the other colleagues in the “Joja group.”

During his years of detention, Pușchilă was imprisoned in the Jilava and Aiud penitentiaries, but he served most of his sentence in the forced-labor colonies at the Danube–Black Sea Canal. There, in a situation relatively rare for a former political prisoner, he was assigned to the technical office, where he worked on design tasks, site supervision, and the coordination of teams of specialist detainees. The testimonies used here indicate that, in this position, he intervened frequently to protect those under his authority from the excesses of the penitentiary administration, shielding them from the heaviest labor or from disciplinary sanctions². In the account of the former detainee Aurel Vlad, this stance appears as a recurrent practice of protecting those under his authority (avoiding the heaviest labor, reducing exposure to sanctions). In this article, the significance of the episode does not lie in a moral verdict, but in describing a repertoire of “micro-decisions,” attested in testimony, through which solidarity is exercised discreetly under constraint. In the archival record examined here, there are no indications supporting the idea of collaboration with the penitentiary administration in the sense of obtaining benefits by compromising others; on the contrary, the corroboration of file notes with the available memoir testimony outlines a prudent conduct in which solidarity manifests primarily through protective micro-decisions rather than through demonstrative gestures.

The following memoir excerpt is used here not as a neutral description, but as an indicator of cultural capital and everyday ethos in detention:

He lectured in favor of a return to a specifically Romanian architecture, preserved unaltered in the sub-Carpathian regions of Muntenia and in Maramureș, both for the functionality of construction and, above all, for a return to nature. He had much to object to in the modern architectural currents initiated by Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Oscar Niemeyer, and he also criticized – rightly so – the aberrations of Soviet architecture: the Lomonosov University in the USSR capital, the ministerial buildings in Moscow, and edifices such as Casa Scânteii in Bucharest. Mr. Pușchilă also had a vast musical culture; stretched out

² Interview with Aurel Vlad, former political prisoner, member of the stadium stone-carving team, conducted by the author in Bucharest, 28 August 2013.

on the bunk, with his hands under his head and his eyes closed, he would sing to himself (while we listened in), in falsetto, dozens of famous arias from the great operas and operettas of the universal repertoire. He was familiar with the behind-the-scenes political maneuvers of the 1930s and with King Carol II's grave mistakes in domestic and foreign policy (Zugravu, 2005, p. 259).

Within the economy of the argument, the excerpt supports only two points: (a) the role of culture as a resource for maintaining the self in detention, and (b) the “non-declarative” form of solidarity (through presence, gestures, and practices), without allowing inferences about political attitudes beyond what the source explicitly states.

After his release in 1956, Ioan Pușchilă resumed his professional activity in architecture, managing to reconstruct his career within a social and institutional context deeply hostile to former political prisoners. He worked within state design institutes, where he coordinated urban and collective-housing projects both in Bucharest and in provincial towns. It is significant that, despite his carceral past, he managed not only to be accepted within the professional milieu but also to assert his technical competence within a system that, as a rule, discreetly yet effectively marginalized those with “problematic” political biographies. This return to professional activity was neither symbolic nor merely formal: Pușchilă signed large-scale projects ranging from housing ensembles to industrial constructions and public institutions. Recognized by colleagues for his professional rigor, he is consistently described as discreet, within an institutional climate marked by conformism. Even the personnel departments of the various institutions where he worked expressed appreciation, deeming him very well trained professionally and noting that all the works entrusted to him were executed exceptionally, while also emphasizing that “he can be relied upon to hold the position of Head of Technical Service, provided that he is kept under permanent supervision” [sic]³.

In the early 1960s, he was assigned to design the hospitals in Medgidia and Constanța, projects completed between 1962 and 1965 within the County Design Institute. During the commissioning of the Constanța hospital, Nicolae Ceaușescu – on an official visit – remarked on the project’s efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Later, in the context of the national campaign to build new headquarters for the county party committees (beginning in 1968), a directive from Cabinet I stipulated

³ ACNSAS, Informative Fund, file no. 263899, f. 29. Memorandum, dated 7 May 1959.

that in Constanța the appointment should go to “the one who built the hospital”⁴.

Regardless of the motivation behind this decision, the episode suggests that institutional evaluation foregrounded technical competence rather than political biography—an element that worked in Pușchilă’s favor, opening the way toward a series of Party-commissioned projects. This involvement, however, is not accompanied in the sources examined by indications of political affiliation or ostentatious ideological exposure: he did not become a Party member, did not adopt an ideological discourse, and did not engage in networks of doctrinal loyalty. He worked exclusively as a professional, in a contractual rather than ideological relationship with power. The project for the County Party Committee headquarters was completed in 1969, and Ioan Pușchilă received the Architects’ Union award. The sum of 100,000 lei granted by the Party, however, did not reach him, being diverted by the local leadership⁵. In the same year, he was appointed chief project architect for the Venus resort, a role in which he encouraged and promoted young architects. Until retirement, he completed the Sailors’ Dormitory in Constanța, the Party Dormitory, the Sibioara farm, and, in his final year of activity – after returning to Bucharest – he worked within the Approval Directorate of the Ministry of Health.

His post-carceral trajectory can be described as a gradual professional reintegration within an institutional framework that remained hostile to former political prisoners. In place of any declarative “rehabilitation,” the sources point to a reconstruction through practices: undertaken projects, technical rigor, discretion, and the avoidance of ideological exposure. In Veena Das’s terms of violence’s descent into the ordinary, the emphasis falls on the reconstitution of everyday order after trauma, without converting it into a public discourse of suffering (Das, 2006, pp. 87-91).

This reintegration, however, was accompanied by constant surveillance and repeated attempts to draw him into collaboration with the Securitate. Files from the CNSAS archive indicate two episodes of formal recruitment, in both cases the undertakings were signed under pressure but without concrete effects. The first attempt occurred relatively

⁴ Interview with Ana Pușchilă, conducted by the author in Bucharest, 29 January 2013.

⁵ Ibid.

soon after his release from prison. Whereas in March 1957 a report proposing recruitment was approved⁶, in November of the same year the abandonment of the agent was also approved. Among other points, it was noted that the meetings were rare, that Pușchilă tried each time to evade them, and that he repeatedly insisted that he could not provide information⁷. A few years later, a second recruitment attempt took place, employing coercion on the basis of compromising material⁸. An initial characterization note of the agent states, among other things, that he provided information of a value below his potential, that he missed some meetings, and that at one of them he claimed the Securitate sought to compromise him and send him back to prison⁹. Not long afterward, it was stated that the level of his output was low and inadequate in relation to Pușchilă's training and presumed informational potential¹⁰, with similar evaluations recurring in subsequent years. The architect was dropped in 1966, when it was noted, among other things, that the results had been unsatisfactory: in the final year he provided only a single note of no importance, and it was concluded that there was "no prospect of his becoming a useful collaborator"¹¹.

This trajectory indicates a distinction between formal compliance and actual conduct. In the sources examined, recruitment episodes are followed by institutional evaluations that insist on his "lack of usefulness" and low performance, suggesting a strategy of reducing involvement and avoiding the delivery of informational outputs. The case is useful for describing the intermediate zone between coercion and agency: administrative acceptance does not automatically equate to operational cooperation. In Scott's terms, the "public transcript" denotes conformist discourse and conduct produced under constraint and oriented toward the interlocutor of power, whereas the "hidden transcript" takes shape in protected relational spaces (family, close circles) through allusions, omissions, and codes of prudence. In this article, the distinction is operationalized as a triangulation tool: the files are read as traces

⁶ ACNSAS, Informant Network Fund, file no. 367749, f. 2. Report proposing the recruitment of Ioan Pușchilă as an agent, dated 13 March 1957.

⁷ Ibid., f. 19. Report proposing the removal of agent Pușchilă Ion from the informant network, dated 16 November 1957.

⁸ ACNSAS, Informant Network Fund, file no. 195133, f. 7. Memorandum on the recruitment procedure, dated 11 July 1962.

⁹ Ibid., f. 21. Characterization note, dated 22 April 1963.

¹⁰ Ibid., f. 25. Characterization note, dated 18 August 1964.

¹¹ Ibid., f. 30. Analytical note on informant activity, dated 20 September 1966.

of the public/institutional transcript (formularies, classifications, evaluations, expectations), while the interview – together with its thresholds of saying – is treated as indirect access to the hidden transcript (avoidance rules, affective costs, the selection of information). Accordingly, the “mismatch” between archive and memory is not treated as a source error, but as a structural effect of surveillance (Scott, 1990, p. 183).

In the 1990s, far from historical turmoil, Ioan Pușchilă designed two memorials dedicated to the victims of the Danube–Black Sea Canal – an act of public inscription of a memory that had until then been kept in the private register. Although he drafted a few pages of personal memoirs for the family, they entirely bypass the experience of detention. This omission is methodologically significant: a man who was imprisoned, humiliated, and coerced did not wish to convert his own suffering into narrative capital. It can be discussed as an effect of a threshold of communicability specific to traumatic memory: what is lived as a limit is not necessarily verbalizable, and verbalization itself may be experienced as risk (exposure, instrumentalization, reactivation). For the present argument, what matters is the observable fact that detention does not become “narrative capital” in his family memoirs, which strengthens the claim that silence functioned as a stable rule of communication within the family rather than as an accident. Ioan Pușchilă is used here not only as a former political prisoner and a professionally reintegrated architect, but as an actor who managed constraint through a repertoire of prudence, exposure control, and professional continuity. From his acquittal in 1941 to the memorial projects after 1990, he traversed regimes, suffering, and pressures without documentary indications of operational collaboration and without ostentatious ideological exposure.

Ioan Pușchilă’s case, though relatively singular in its combination of professional status and documentable patterns of prudence, fits within a broader phenomenon previously analyzed (Mitric-Ciupe, 2013). Like others from the group in which he was sentenced or from informal networks of intellectual solidarity, Pușchilă was sanctioned severely not for violent acts but for a form of professional and moral cohesion interpreted by the communist regime as potentially subversive. Unlike radicalized or publicly exposed figures, his profile falls within the category of “discreet technocrats,” condemned for gestures of civic solidarity or for mere membership in a network of loyalties. This typology is crucial for understanding the repressive logic of the period: a

system that punished not only declared opposition, but also prudent silence, professional coherence, and personal loyalty.

Marcela Pușchilă: coerced recruitment and domestic survival

Marcela Pușchilă, Ioan's wife, traversed – like other women living in the proximity of major historical traumas – a biography that resists easy classification. The mother of three children and the spouse of a political prisoner, she restructured her life in her partner's absence, within a climate of surveillance, pressure, and material vulnerability. Her husband's arrest occurred in a context of uncertainty and coercion, in which the Securitate knew that the men targeted in the group were in hiding. In the Pușchilă case, the home search yielded no result, and pressure shifted to his wife. A later testimony by the wife of a colleague from the same group describes the psychological brutality of the moment: the heating was cut off in the house; the three children remained inside under supervision while the perimeter was controlled by soldiers; and Marcela was taken to the Securitate, where she was told she would return only after declaring where her husband was hiding. In the end, she yielded, torn between her duty as a mother and as a wife¹². For years, she reproached herself for this, even though all those close to her sought to reassure her, telling her that she had chosen correctly, in the name of her children. Ana Pușchilă recalls this moment with lucidity and empathy, stating that her parents had agreed that if the mother were pressured, she should tell the truth. The children, however, felt the devastation at home—an atmosphere of tense absence, a climate of fear and muffled crying in which, suddenly, they were left without a father. For years, they knew only that he was working on a secret construction site somewhere in the country.

During this period, Marcela Pușchilă was exposed to a form of insidious pressure that the available archival record does not capture explicitly, but which her daughter's memory preserves clearly: informal interrogations and visits by unknown individuals urging her to divorce, under implausible pretexts. At times, someone would knock at the door and the children would be sent to their room, hearing only: "What do you want, sir? Why should I divorce? Who would take me, with three children?" Pressure continued even through school staff: at one point Ion asked his mother why she wanted to divorce, "because that's what the teacher said." The Securitate thus acted through "intermediaries" as

¹² Interview with Marcela Grigorescu, conducted by the author in Bucharest, 19 April 2013.

well, inserting anxiety into the domestic space itself and into everyday relations of trust. Confronted with this reality, Marcela adopted a strategy of silence. She consistently refused to burden her children with the weight of the truth, preferring protective fabulation to crude transparency. Only a year before the father's release did the children learn fragments of the reality, following the visit of a former fellow detainee who had been released from prison and who told them that he was well and that he would soon come home as well.

Within such a climate, Marcela Pușchilă was approached by the Securitate and signed an undertaking to collaborate¹³. The network file – extremely sparse in any case – indicates a hasty recruitment, without following the required methodological steps. An internal note by the officer who decided to archive the material records that the informant did not produce the expected results and was therefore dropped¹⁴. It should also be noted that the documents contain no informative notes, as well as the fact – rather rare in Securitate archives – that a personal file explicitly states: “The grounds for her recruitment: she was blackmailed on the grounds that her husband is imprisoned”¹⁵.

The case must be understood within the logic of everyday terror, moral ambiguity, and desperation. In the documentation available here there are no traces of informant activity (notes, meeting reports, assigned tasks), and the internal note indicates the failure to meet operative expectations; under these conditions, the episode can be described at most as a formal recruitment/an attempt at enlistment at a moment of vulnerability, without a documentary basis for claiming operational collaboration. In a reading attentive to constraints and to the logic of domestic survival, Marcela Pușchilă emerges as an example of domestic functionality under pressure: what can be stated with caution, on the basis of the sources examined and Ana's memory, is the persistence of a strategy of “functionality under pressure” (work, childrearing, maintaining ties, avoiding exposure), rather than any clearly documentable profile of operative collaboration. She worked, raised her children, and when possible sent parcels and attended prison visits—an episode recalled with emotion by Ana: “it was a large wooden enclosure, hunting-style tables, two detainees and two empty chairs for visitors... you were

¹³ ACNSAS, Informant Network Fund, file no. 3653, f. 5. Marcela Pușchilă, undertaking/declaration, dated 28 October 1949.

¹⁴ Ibid., f. 3. Memorandum, dated 12 July 1951.

¹⁵ Ibid., f. 4. Memorandum, dated 12 July 1951.

allowed a six-kilogram parcel, weighed at the entrance”¹⁶. These meetings were rare, but charged with meaning, in a world of separation and repression. Viewed retrospectively, Marcela Pușchilă is significant as a study in domestic survival under pressure: maintaining household functionality, protecting children through informational control, and the continuous negotiation of exposure. Rather than inviting a moral typology, the case allows for the description of a pragmatic repertoire of care, avoidance, and risk calibration.

Marcela can be analyzed as a central actor of an “ethics of care,” in the sense that the protection of the vulnerable is achieved through situational decisions – what is said, when, to whom, and above all what is not said – within an environment dominated by risk and asymmetrical power relations (Gilligan, 1982). Within this framework, silence does not function as moral absence, but as a technique of protection: an economy of exposure that avoids escalating costs for others and shifts the “possible good” from the register of declarations to that of everyday practices (organization, care, discretion, continuity). Accordingly, the analytical stake is not the attribution of an ethical aura or an exoneration, but the description of a repertoire of minimal actions through which a family preserves functionality and limits damage under a regime of surveillance. In the article’s terms, this kind of “care” explains simultaneously silence, communicational discipline, and relational stability as forms of adaptation under constraint, without retrospectively projecting intentions or merits that are not documentable.

Children and transgenerational effects: silence, profession, and dispersed memory

For Ana, Manorica, and Ion Pușchilă, childhood was not merely a developmental stage but a formative context in which fear, deprivation, and uncertainty became everyday reference points, with lasting effects on family communication and life choices. For years, the three children were not told the truth. Their mother protected them through silence, wrapping reality in reassuring formulas. The children did not ask, did not challenge – but they understood that something profoundly was not in order. As one of the girls later recalled, “we were well-behaved children. We would look at one another, and keep silent. We didn’t even talk about him among ourselves.” The memory of the day of the arrest remains foundational; Ana Pușchilă recalls that moment

¹⁶ Interview with Ana Pușchilă, conducted by the author in Bucharest, 29 January 2013.

with concrete detail: “the morning was like any other. Until we saw black boots entering the house. Then crying. The neighbors were crying, my mother was crying... And us, not understanding why.” Terror, then, manifested not only in explosive forms, but also through confusion, absence, silence, and a disconnection from reality.

After Ioan Pușchilă’s release, the family was reconfigured, but the wounds did not close. The children, already adolescents, were raised in an atmosphere of discipline, self-control, and avoidance of sensitive topics. The father spoke about nothing, and the mother even less. Ana describes this period as a “return without return”: “he was there physically, but he was not truly back. Something kept him elsewhere, and we did not know how to bring him back.”

The education of the three children was shaped by discipline, self-control, and the avoidance of sensitive topics, within a family environment in which communication about detention remained limited. The choice of architecture by all three siblings can be interpreted, cautiously, as a strategy of biographical stabilization: an investment in competence and professional continuity in a context in which the family’s past remained stigmatizing. In terms of transgenerational analysis, psychoanalytic literature has discussed profession as a space for symbolically organizing an unspoken past and for managing the effects of silence on identity. In the Pușchilă family’s case, the empirical relevance of this hypothesis does not lie in attributing verifiable “unconscious” intentions, but in the observable fact that the profession functions as a resource of order, predictability, and social respectability. Thus, architecture appears here less as a “metaphor” and more as an institutional practice through which descendants negotiate their place in a society in which the family’s political label had not disappeared.

Ion Pușchilă: a late-socialist recruitment file and post-1989 distancing

Ion Pușchilă, the eldest son, was only seven years old at the time of his father’s arrest. The trauma of that day and the years that followed imprinted a form of precocious maturation in which silence became not only protection but also an instrument of adaptation. Between 1960 and 1965 he completed his studies at the Faculty of Construction Engineering, and later at the Institute of Architecture in Bucharest, at a time when the family past still weighed heavily on professional trajectories. He worked in several design institutes, in a career characterized by ri-

gor, discretion, and the absence of any public visibility. He was a respected professional without being promoted to key positions; the available sources do not allow the establishment of causality, but the biographical context and the persistence of surveillance may constitute relevant factors to consider. He was medically retired from 1983 until February 1989, when he was re-employed as a museum curator at the Village Museum in Bucharest.

In the same year – only a few months before the fall of the Ceaușescu regime – Ion Pușchilă appears to have been formally recruited by the Securitate. More precisely, the CNSAS archive currently contains a network file comprising only four pages. The first document is a brief form bearing the note “PS. Traian no. 24.212/ of 30.05.1989”¹⁷, followed by two personal record forms. The last document is an undated undertaking, signed by Ion Pușchilă, who – under the pseudonym “Traian” – commits to supporting the Securitate authorities “for the prevention, discouragement, and liquidation of crimes directed against the security of the state, and for combating any manifestations that affect the interests of our socialist order”¹⁸. In the file consulted, there are no documentary traces of informant activity (notes, meeting reports, assigned tasks), so the episode remains at the level of an administrative formalization. The file is extremely sparse (forms plus an undated undertaking), and the absence of any operative outputs does not allow a verifiable reconstruction of the recruitment context, nor any inferences regarding its content or effects.

Methodologically, the episode is treated strictly as a minimally documented formal recruitment, useful for capturing the climate of diffuse pressure in the regime’s final months, without allowing inferences regarding its content or effects. On the personal level, Ion Pușchilă’s life underwent a major rupture in the early 1980s, when, following a divorce, his wife and their two children emigrated to the United States. After the December 1989 Revolution, he too left Romania permanently, settling in the same space. This biographical ending may be noted as an indicator of post-1989 distancing, but the documents used here do not allow firm inferences regarding personal motivations. At this point, the episode matters primarily as part of family fragmentation and the re-configurations after 1990 (exile, dispersion, silence), which affect access to memory and testimony.

¹⁷ ACNSAS, Informant Network Fund, file no. 82244, f. 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., f. 4.

Ana Pușchilă: secondary witnessing and the work of family memory

After 1990, Ana Pușchilă became the principal keeper of family memory. The interviews conducted with her offer an intimate perspective not only on suffering, but also on the difficulty of narration. Her account is not confessional, but reflective and retrospective – matured and critically articulated. Her discourse is structured by prudence and retrospective reflection: she describes family relations, silences, and constraints without producing accusations or exonerations. This kind of affective and silent transmission was also theorized by the psychoanalyst Nicolas Abraham, who, together with Maria Torok, speaks of the “crypt” and the “phantom” – mechanisms through which unexpressed family secrets become inherited phantasms for descendants (Abraham & Torok, 1994, pp. 171-176). In their framework, parental silence can produce indirect effects on the next generation, including anxieties and avoidance rules that are transmitted further without a stable narrative. In her account, Ana Pușchilă appears aware of this tension: she was raised with love and discretion, but also with an unarticulated guilt that shaped her identity discourse and professional loyalty.

Her narrative offers concise formulations that signal affect, prudence, and avoidance rules at once: “My mother held together. I don’t know how. She worked, cried, wrote. She kept us afloat.” About her father: “He had a silence that filled the room. He was present, but he wasn’t. And we knew we must not ask him.” This “pedagogy” of silence can be described as the internalization of rules of communication and risk avoidance, with observable effects on the next generation’s narration and self-presentation. She grew up in an environment marked by fear and a discipline of discretion, internalized as a norm of communication and conduct. Under these conditions, Ana Pușchilă becomes a secondary witness who, although not a direct target of repression, internalizes its entire affective geography. As Avishai Margalit argues, the ethics of memory involves not only recalling facts, but also assuming a moral mourning for what could not be said (Margalit, 2002). To bear witness to silence is, in this sense, a particular form of responsibility: not to repair the past, but to frame it correctly within a system of meaning. Ana does not formulate accusations; rather, she organizes a family memory under the condition of prudence. For analytical purposes, what matters is that her account functions as a secondary source of silence: it indicates the limits of communicability, thresholds of questioning, and the logic of avoidance, without producing an exhaustive narrative.

In an episode relevant to the dynamics of communication under constraint, Ana describes one of the visits in the forced-labor colonies: “there were long tables, guards, two detainees and two visitors. My mother held our hands. I looked at him. He looked at me. And I said nothing.” The episode indicates the role of silence as a form of interaction: what is not said becomes a sign of risk and affective discipline, and the parent–child relationship is mediated by this implicit rule. The Pușchilă children transformed the family experience of surveillance into a set of practical dispositions: discretion, discipline, and investment in professional competence. In this sense, the study suggests that survival under authoritarianism can generate “non-spectacular” forms of adaptation that nonetheless remain significant for the social history of the professions. In conclusion, the analysis suggests that family trauma is transmitted primarily indirectly – through rules of speaking, affective atmosphere, and everyday disciplines – and that these mechanisms can be described historiographically without turning them into a moral thesis about “resistance.”

Conclusions

The Pușchilă family provides a particularly suitable framework for analyzing the intergenerational transmission of political trauma and ethical ambiguity. The father, Ioan Pușchilă, an architect trained in the interwar period, was sentenced in 1949 in the “Joja group” following the reinterpretation of a network of civic solidarity as “clandestine Legionary assistance,” and he underwent the experience of detention. Once released, he attempted professional reintegration, while the memory of detention was later transmitted to his children in indirect forms – through silence, allusions, and rules of communicational self-control. In the post-1964 period, his children – architects in their turn – confronted a regime of surveillance and professional pressure in which compromise or withdrawal became modes of survival. The proposed case is not exceptional in its facts, but in the discreet complexity of the trajectories involved – an instance of “grey” history in which not heroic resistance but prudent adaptation, and not explicit betrayal but negotiated silence, become the true points of tension.

From an ethico-political perspective, the analysis shows how the constraints of the communist regime operated not exclusively through physical violence, but through an engineering of loyalty: transforming the family into a site of pressure and collaboration into a symbolic act of discipline and loyalty control. The signing of undertakings – in two

distinct episodes in the father's case, and in one episode each in Marcela's and Ion's case – is not, in itself, a sufficient criterion of evaluation; it becomes intelligible only through the coercive context, through the (non-)documentable effects, and through the tensions it generated.

On the psychological and social plane, the study describes family trauma as an everyday infrastructure of silence: informational control, the avoidance of exposure, and the maintenance of domestic functionality under pressure. Within this framework, Marcela's gestures can be discussed as practices of relational protection (care, organization, risk reduction for children) without turning them into a normative thesis or an essentialized gender attribute. In the same sense, Ioan's silence in his memoir pages is treated as a threshold of communicability and as a stable rule of family communication, not as a "gap" or as a demonstrative moral gesture.

Along the axis of generational memory, this family's history is instructive for what specialized literature calls "traumatic transmission": not a story told, but an atmosphere absorbed. Ana Pușchilă becomes here not only a witness, but also a curator of a forbidden memory: a mediator between a generation that remained silent and one that attempts to understand. In this case, the reconstruction of family identity is achieved not through repair, but through critical discernment.

From an archival perspective, the CNSAS documents reveal a regime of representation that cannot be taken at face value. The network file is better understood as an institutional projection than as a factual account. Consequently, historiographical work cannot passively reproduce the grammar of repression: it must translate it, delimit it, and interrogate its effects and silences. This principle is essential for any responsible reconstruction of collaboration – otherwise, one risks reproducing a punitive logic under the guise of research.

Epistemologically, the study calls for a shift in frame: from retrospective judgment to contextual hermeneutics. In place of binary grids (guilty/innocent, victim/perpetrator), it proposes an analytical apparatus capable of working with contradictions, ambivalence, and forms of ambiguous loyalty. Terms such as "collaborator," "informant," and "refusal" are, in this context, umbrella terms that must be nuanced and rethought. Only then can microhistory fulfill its genuine critical function: not to deliver moral sentences, but to restore proportion. This type of reading fits within a broader theoretical direction defined by Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi, proponents of Italian microhistory, who

propose a “hermeneutics of detail” as a method for working with histories of silences and fragments (Ginzburg, 1989, pp. 10-15; Levi, 1991, pp. 93-113). In this model, what is unwritten, implicit, or seemingly marginal becomes central to the reconstruction of meaning. The Pușchilă family history is compatible with this interpretive grid: not through spectacular facts, but through minor details, small gestures, and partial refusals, an entire universe of implicit rules, prudence, and intermediate conduct comes into view.

The Pușchilă case shows that between declared opposition and productive collaboration there exists a broad zone of intermediate conduct, in which minor gestures, avoidances, and silences serve both a practical function of survival and an analytical function for today’s historian. Within this interval, formal recruitment is not equivalent to informant activity, and the absence of “proof” (in the sense of the absence of informant outputs in the network documentation) cannot be translated automatically into the absence of pressure or of internal cost. The utility of microhistory here is therefore not verdict, but proportional calibration: what can be stated documentarily, what remains ambiguous, and how this ambiguity operates as an effect of surveillance.

The study also has several structural limitations. First, access to family memory is mediated almost exclusively by Ana Pușchilă’s perspective, given the unavailability of other family members for interview; this asymmetry inevitably affects the comparative density of the reconstruction. Second, the CNSAS files used in this article are treated as institutional artefacts, and their fragmentary character (especially for the regime’s final years) limits the possibility of inferences about intentions, contexts, and effects of formal recruitment episodes. Third, the article does not pursue a systematic comparison with other families of a similar profile, which limits the generalization of conclusions beyond the heuristic value of the case study. Future research could extend the analysis through (a) additional interviews (where this becomes possible), (b) supplementing the documentation with parallel institutional sources (personnel records, professional correspondence, contextual memoir literature), and (c) integrating the case within a comparative sample of family microhistories of surveillance.

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The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Archival references are provided in the notes; interview materials are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and the protection of third parties.

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