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## BEYOND TABOO AND STIGMA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN 20<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY RURAL HUNGARY AND TRANSYLVANIA

It's been twenty-three years since the first Hungarian comparative folklore study on female life writing was published. The author, Imola Küllös suggested that the shared aspect of peasant women's lives was unfulfilled marriage and the presence of an alcoholic, aggressive father or husband<sup>1</sup>. Patriarchal peasant society and women's socialization did not allow for narrating or preserving female stories<sup>2</sup>. The transformations in gendered social norms and the change in researchers' interest were essential to disclose this side of spousal or parent-child relationships. In Hungarian speaking areas this process began in the 1970s, when ethnographers and social scientists opened up space for women's life narratives. Parallel with the second wave feminism in West Europe, researchers discovered the analytical value of individual life narrative and started to collect and publish women's testimonies.

This study aims to underscore the conversions in violence concepts (rape, wife beatings, child abuse) textualised in autobiographies. By addressing the main questions of violence against peasant women, the study provides a path toward the inclusion of the rural as a geographic and socio-cultural dimension in the studies of women's writing. How did these women retrospectively narrate their experiences? What type of contemporaneous interpretations existed in expert analysis and community assessment? The separation of these connotations potentially results in understanding the diversity of the problem. Re-reading autobiographies and rethinking the analytical prospects provides a chance for emphasising the historical continuity of domestic violence and exposing the circumstances that permitted the abuse of vulnerable groups, predominantly women and children.

The shared characteristic of violence against women is shame, which prevents the narration, therefore, in most cases, the violence and its consequences remain almost imperceptible, hidden inside the female body. A potential approach to these records is exploring how the act of narration and writing can be interpreted beyond trauma processing. Why have these stories been told, while others remained

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<sup>1</sup> Imola Küllös, "A női önéletrajzok folklorisztikai vizsgálatának néhány tanulsága" ["Lessons Learned from the Folkloristic Study of Women's Autobiographies"], in Géza Balázs et al. (eds.), *Folklorisztika 2000-ben. Tanulmányok Voigt Vilmos 60. születésnapjára* [Folkloristics in 2000. Festschrift in Honor of Vilmos Voigt], Budapest, ELTE BTK, 2000, pp. 134-163.

<sup>2</sup> Olga Nagy, *A törvény szorításában. Paraszti értékrend és magatartásformák* [In the Grip of the Law. Peasant Values and Behaviours], Budapest, Gondolat, 1989.

silenced? I examine these accounts of violence as coping strategies that transform former victims into actors. Based on the concepts of resilience and agency, I attempt to disentangle the stories of women who have experienced domestic violence from indescribability and shame by suggesting a possible approach beyond taboo and stigma. Women who came out with their stories could subsequently become agents instead of victims.

I analyse eight women's life paths that shed light on abuse in the marriage or in the family. The sources cover a diverse time frame from the turn of the century to the late state socialist period. The narratives were exclusively recorded under socialism, between the mid-1950s and 1990. Six reports are from women living in Romania – Bukovina (1) and Transylvania, Cluj and Mureş counties (5) –, and two from Hungary (Heves and Somogy counties). In terms of methodological differences in collection, there are three oral history accounts and five life narratives based on manuscripts among the sources. The biography published under the pseudonym Mrs Sándor Varjú was collected by Ilona S. Dobos in Sztálinváros (Fejér county, Hungary) in 1956. The name covers the storyteller Julianna Horváth (Mrs József Tóth Szőke, b. 1901–?), a poor peasant woman from Somogy county (Hungary), whose account included regular, physical abuse by her first husband. After the death of her second husband, she moved to Sztálinváros with her children and became a worker<sup>3</sup>. The Transylvanian-Hungarian journalist and folklorist Olga Nagy (Ernei, 1921 – Sfântu Gheorghe, 2006) had collected Hungarian-speaking Transylvanian peasant women's oral life narratives from the 1950s when she encountered the gendered discrepancies of the genre. She was the first Hungarian ethnographer who legitimized the female life narrative as a proper subject within the field of folklore studies and examined it from a broader social perspective.<sup>4</sup> Her collection *Asszonyok könyve* [*Book of Women*] was the first Hungarian language volume presenting women's life narratives. One of her key informants, Zsuzsanna György from Cojocna (Cluj county, Romania), mainly recalled childhood abuse<sup>5</sup>, while in the stories of Mrs Ferenc Bakó from Neaua (Mureş county, Romania) her husband's aggressiveness dominated<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Mrs Sándor Varjú, "Egy parasztasszony élete. Elmondta Varjú Sándorné 55 éves somogyi asszony", ["The Life of a Peasant Woman in the Narration of Sándorné Varjú, a 55-year-old Woman from Somogy], in Ilona S. Dobos (ed.), *Szegényember vízzel főz. Életrajzi vallomások* [*Poor Man Cooks with Water. Biographical Testimonials*], Budapest, Magvető, 1958, pp. 93-136.

<sup>4</sup> Olga Nagy, *Hagyományörző népi kultúra. Társadalomnéprajzi vizsgálat Széken* [*Traditional Folk Culture. Socio-ethnographic Studies on Sic*]. Edited by Vilmos Keszeg, Cluj, Exit Kiadó – Asociația Etnografică Kriza János, 2016. On emancipation and political thought in state socialist Romania see Adela Hincu, *Accounting for the "Social" in State Socialist Romania, 1960–1980s: Contexts and Genealogies* (PhD dissertation), Budapest, Central European University, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Zsuzsanna György, "Kapálóban" ["In the Field"], in Olga Nagy (ed.), *Asszonyok könyve. Népi elbeszélések* [*Book of Women. Folk Narratives*], Budapest, Magvető, 1988, pp. 279-283; Zsuzsanna György, "Kifogyott a víz a kancsóból" ["The Jug Run out of Water"], in Olga Nagy (ed.), *Asszonyok*

The Transylvanian folklorist, Anikó Salamon, edited the biographies of Amália Botos (1907–?), a young woman from Târgu Mureş and Borbála Csobot (Mrs Albert Dávid, 1880–1971) from Bukovina. At 50, Amália Botos started to write diary-like, non-chronological notes about her life, which she intended to burn because of their personal nature. Her life was marked by violence, both psychological and physical, which resulted in a suicide attempt in 1922, caused by her childhood suffering<sup>7</sup>. Borbála Csobot, a poor peasant woman, began writing her memoirs after the death of her husband and completed them in 1963 when she was bedridden. During their 58 years of marriage, she had 14 children and was forced to work and even abused by her aggressive husband while pregnant<sup>8</sup>.

The autobiographies of Klára Győri (1889–1975) from Sic (Cluj county, Romania), Erzsébet Zsigmond (1937–?) from Aluniş (Mureş county, Romania), and Rozália Berényi (1887–1973) from Tarnabod (Heves county, Hungary) were published in separate volumes. Klára Győri was a storyteller and, encouraged by Olga Nagy, composed her life story in three attempts, continuously redrafting her previous manuscript. Her work was kept in secret while her husband was alive<sup>9</sup>. Erzsébet Zsigmond's autobiography consists of two parts: her memoirs from 1977 and her diary-like entries written between 1988 and 1990, after the death of her child. She was controlled by her husband and was regularly abused physically and emotionally<sup>10</sup>. Rozália Berényi grew up in a family of day labourers in Jászság (Upper Great Plain, Hungary), and worked as a maid and a servant all her life. She published her writings from the 1950s onwards. In 1967, she was involved in the volunteer ethnographic collector movement and finished her autobiography as an in-patient<sup>11</sup>.

### *Gendered Life Writing: Theoretical Frameworks*

In feminist academic scholarship, gendered life writing is considered to be an inclusive term that obliterates generic boundaries to overcome the masculine

könyve, pp. 289-293; Zsuzsanna György, "A hazugság büntetése" ["Punishment for a Lie"], in Olga Nagy (ed.), *Asszonyok könyve*, pp. 293-299.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs Bakó, Ferenc, "Ma már nem tűrnék én se" ["Now I Wouldn't Bear It Either"], in Olga Nagy (ed.), *Asszonyok könyve*, pp. 102-110.

<sup>7</sup> Amália Botos, [Untitled autobiography], in Anikó Salamon (ed.), *Így teltek hónapok, évek [Months and Years Passed by like This]*, Cluj, Kritérium, 1979, pp. 78-191.

<sup>8</sup> Mrs Albert Dávid (née. Borbála Csobot), [Untitled autobiography], in Anikó Salamon (ed.), *Így teltek hónapok, évek*, pp. 9-40.

<sup>9</sup> Klára Győri, *Kiszáradt az én örömem zöld fája [The Verdant Tree of My Delight Has Drained]*, Cluj, Kritérium, 1975.

<sup>10</sup> Erzsébet Zsigmond, *Sirató. Életem panaszos könyve [Lament. The Plaintive Book of My Life]*. Edited by Vilmos, Keszeg, Cluj, Asociația Etnografică Kriza János, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Mrs. András Berényi, *Nagy Rozália a nevem [My name is Rozália Nagy]*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1975.

concepts of canonical autobiographies. The diverse forms of women's self-representation derive from the gendered differences of experiences, thus requiring a broader analytical framework<sup>12</sup>. To overcome the hindrances of the term female life writing, Caren Kaplan suggests the "out-law genre" in cases of non-canonical pieces of life narratives. These testimonies can be assumed as a form of resistance, and have the potential to challenge the hierarchy of ethnographers and informants<sup>13</sup>. Another recommended term is "marginalized counter-histories" by Susannah Radstone, to express that these pieces of self-representations have been neglected by professionals and, therefore, might open up new space for analysis<sup>14</sup>. These life narratives are more likely to be fractured, as women – especially in rural areas – did not have the "room of their own" to develop a coherent autobiography, like their male peers might have done. One example of this phenomenon are the female stories of the Neaua (Havadi) narrative collection by the folklorist Olga Nagy. This volume consists of non-canonical pieces of folk narratives, fragmented "peripheral stories" that did not fit in with the interviews about folktales. The most important outcome of Nagy's examination of seemingly unimportant narratives is that while men's stories ended happily, women's stories lacked any form of happiness or any sense of success<sup>15</sup>.

Apart from gender specificities, the question of extensibility occurs: whether the peasant self-images in these autobiographies can be considered typical or rather exceptional<sup>16</sup>. The individual life paths textualised in the sources represent both a subjective (personal) and a universal (communal) experience. The contradiction between ordinary and exceptional stories and their representativeness can be resolved by scrutinizing communal experiences via individual stories. The anthropologist Péter Niedermüller suggests that autobiographies register the values and norms of a community, and also spotlight

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<sup>12</sup> Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson (eds.), *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1998; Louise O. Vasvári, I-Chun Wang, "Introduction to Life Writing and the Trauma of War", *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 17, 2015, 3, <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2915&context=clcweb>. Accessed on November 20, 2023; Louise O. Vasvári, "Életírás, társadalmi nemek, és Trauma" ["Life Writing, Gender and Trauma"], *Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszciplináris eFolyóirat*, 6, 2016, 2, pp. 150-197.

<sup>13</sup> Caren Kaplan, "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects", in Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 115-138.

<sup>14</sup> Susannah Radstone, "Autobiographical Times", in Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism & Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods*, London, Routledge, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Olga Nagy, *Világgá futó szavak – Havadi beszélgetések [Words Flowing into the World – Neaua Conversations]*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Tamás Mohay, "Egyének, életutak" ["Individuals, Life Paths"], in Sárkány Mihály, Miklós Szilágyi (eds.), *Társadalom. Magyar néprajz nyolc kötetben VIII [Society. Hungarian Ethnography in Eight Volumes VIII]*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2000, pp. 771-773.

the most significant events of individual life<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, the unique memoirs of these peasant women correspond to the local, female experience of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

On interpretation, we must also anticipate that the authors may have been somewhat alienated from the peasant lifestyle and mentality at the time of the text formation. Accordingly, the representation and subsequent life-course (re)assessment already occurred after a mentality shift<sup>18</sup>. The analysed texts are marked by liminality, meaning that the characteristics of conservation and elimination of the archaic social system are present simultaneously. Social control and fear of neighbours' judgment can still be observed in the narrations, but there are already signs of transformation, such as social and physical mobility, a divorce, or widowhood. Moreover, the act of writing and the publication of memoirs is also a transformational marker.

Women's and gender studies have, from the outset, focused on researching violence against women and abuse, but seldom scrutinized the experiences of rural women, unlike people living in urban poverty. Ethnographic studies incorporated women's experiences in their analysis for it was essential to the understanding of everyday life and the inner structure of communities. However, these studies applied a normative approach without criticism: gender roles were present as subjects, but not as an analytical tool or a category for interpretation. Another substantial circumstance is that many authors of life accounts scrutinized in this paper belong to the Hungarian ethnic minority in Transylvania. Therefore, their testimonies are marginalized on multiple levels.

The first peasant autobiographies date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the third and final stage in the history of memoirs<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, life stories written by peasant women only appeared around the 1970s<sup>20</sup>, following the narrative or linguistic turn and the academic institutionalization of women's history<sup>21</sup>. At that time, the research interest of folklorists turned towards the individual and emphasized the personal experiences of narrators. The *performer-centred approach* allowed for a more profound examination of the narrators' lives, personal habits, and emotions.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Péter Niedermüller, "Bevezetés" ["Introduction"], in Péter Niedermüller (ed.), *Életsorsok Zsombón* [*Life Courses in Zombó*], Budapest, MTA Néprajzi Kutató Csoport, 1982, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Tamás Mohay, "Egyének, életutak", p. 773.

<sup>19</sup> Viktor Gyenis, "Emlékirat és parasztkrónika" ["Memoirs and Peasant Chronicles"], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 69, 1965, 2, pp. 152-171.

<sup>20</sup> Mihály Hoppál, Imola Küllös, "Parasztönéletrajzok – paraszti írásbeliség" ["Peasant Autobiographies – Peasant Literacy"], *Ethnographia*, LXXXIII, 1972, 2-3, pp. 284-292.

<sup>21</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988; Andrea Pető, Judith Szapor, "The State of Women's and Gender History in Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary", *Journal of Women's History*, 19, 2007, 1, pp. 160-166.

<sup>22</sup> Linda Dégh, *Narratives in Society: A Performer-centered Study of Narration*, Helsinki, Folklore Fellows Communications, 1995; Mihály Sárkány, "Hungarian Anthropology in the Socialist Era:

Over the same period, the topics of domestic violence and violence against women made their way into the social and political discourse of Western Europe as part of the feminist, human, and civil rights discourse. These social, political, and academic circumstances allowed the articulation and amplification of stories of violence that had been silenced for centuries.

The history of Hungarian peasant autobiographies has been reviewed several times<sup>23</sup>, and the existence of gendered differences has also been underscored<sup>24</sup>. In these analyses, the feminine attributes of female narratives were emphasized such as passivity and focus on the family. These features however are inseparable from socialisation and traditional gender roles, therefore stories of women who voiced both painful and intimate events carried feminine attributes. Yet, by writing and publicly acknowledging their sufferings, they disrupted the traditional image of passive peasant women. In this way, it is unsurprising that negative criticism suggested that their fate and experiences are marginal, not representative, and therefore cannot be considered “traditional peasant lives”<sup>25</sup>.

According to Imola Küllös, the motivation for writing could be the transmission of personal knowledge, education, rebelling against social norms, artistic self-expression, or serving the community<sup>26</sup>. Life narratives can be externally encouraged or spontaneously created texts, retrospectively generated autobiographies that intend to conceptualize and evaluate the stages of one’s life course, or diaries written in the course of everyday life. Each portrays their creator in a different way<sup>27</sup>. Küllös suggested that writing as a method of passing on and transmitting knowledge and values was atypical, and this fact explains the negative criticism of peasant female life writing. On the other hand, as the cornerstone of peasant society was work, providing information to ethnographers or historians, collecting local artefacts, story-telling, or writing increased the social and communal esteem of elderly people, as these activities were realized as labour by the community<sup>28</sup>.

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theories, Methodologies and Undercurrents”, in Mihály Sárkány, Chris Hann, Peter Skalník (eds.), *Studying Peoples in the People’s Democracies: Socialist Era Anthropology in East-Central Europe*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 2005, pp. 87-108.

<sup>23</sup> For example, see Mihály Hoppál, Imola Küllös, “Parasztönéletrajzok”; Tamás Mohay, “Egyének, életutak”.

<sup>24</sup> Krisztina Frauhammer, Katalin Pajor (eds.), *Emlékek, szövegek, történetek. Női folklór szövegek [Memories, Texts, Narrations. Women’s Folklore Texts]*, Budapest, Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 2019; Küllös, Imola, “A női önéletrajzok”; Olga Nagy, *Asszonyok könyve*.

<sup>25</sup> Olga Nagy, “Hagyományörző népi kultúra”, pp. 100-102.

<sup>26</sup> Imola Küllös, “A női önéletrajzok”, p. 425, 431-434.

<sup>27</sup> See, Gergely Kunt, “How Do Diaries Begin? The Narrative Rites of Adolescent Diaries in Hungary”, *European Journal of Life Writing*, 2015, 4, pp. 30-55.

<sup>28</sup> Imola Küllös, “A női önéletrajzok”, pp. 432-433.

*Conceptualising Sexualised Violence in Times of Social Change*

The concept of violence and its communal and individual apprehension vary historically, and it has been interpreted differently by each social layer and local community. In this section I aim to underline the core elements influencing the perception of violence against women: historical period, locality, war and alcoholism. To uncover how sexualized violence was understood in different periods and communities, it is essential to observe by what means authorities and people considered physical violence. Corporal punishment and physical violence have been socially accepted sentences for centuries and used by both clerical and secular authorities, but customs have also authorized the beating of children and women. Law enforcement bodies penalized certain forms of violence, yet in other cases, they used physical retaliation<sup>29</sup>.

Since peasant society subordinates human connections to labour, in the patriarchal socio-economic system the father and then the husband decide upon the position of women in the work organization and everyday life. Young girls were socialized by their mothers and female relatives to tolerate the patriarchal norms, in this way a cycle developed from which women could not and did not necessarily want to get out. Except for brutal cases (violence against pregnant women and infants), domestic abuse was not considered to be “authentic” violence<sup>30</sup>. Hierarchy was also an important aspect of relationships outside the family, such as the unequal position between landlords, male servants, and female maids. And the vulnerability of those in a subordinate position included the risk of physical and sexual violence. Excluding abuse with serious consequences (physical mutilation, extramarital pregnancy), these cases were not subject to any particular sanction, primarily because the perpetrators were considered socially superior to the victims.

Regional differences also characterized peasant society despite its homogenous image in historiography. Olga Nagy developed a model of local cultural patterns indicating that each Transylvanian village has different customs and attributes: Sic (Szék) has individualistic and archaic features, while Neaua (Havad) is austere and

<sup>29</sup> See Mónika Mátay, “The Adventures of Dispute. A Marriage Crisis”, *Hungarian Historical Review*, 2014, 3, pp. 159-189; Eleonóra Géra, “‘Mulier Imperiosa’: The Stepfamilies of Eva Elisabetha in Buda in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century”, *Hungarian Historical Review*, 8, 2019, 4, pp. 789-811; Gabriella Erdélyi, *Negotiating Violence: Papal Pardons and Everyday Life in East Central Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Lajos Balázs, *Amikor az ember nincs es ezen a világon. Paraszti nemi kultúra és nemi erkölcs Csíkszentdomokoson* [When a Person is No Longer in this World. Peasant Sexual Culture and Morality in Sândominic], Miercurea Ciuc, Pallas – Akadémiai Kiadó, 2009; Sándor Balázs Kovács, “Válás a sárközi paraszti társadalomban”, [“Divorce in Rural Sárköz”], in Attila Gaál (ed.), *A Wosinsky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve 27* [Yearbook of the Wosinsky Mór Museum], Szekszárd, Wosinsky Mór Múzeum, 2005, pp. 259-296; Olga Nagy, “A törvény szorításában”.

puritan in morality<sup>31</sup>. Speaking of domestic violence in rural society, differentiation is required between the perpetrator's and the victim's points of view; the reaction of the village or neighbourhood; the assessment of the researcher or collector; and the evaluation of posterity. Moreover, the analysis is hindered by women's apprehension who considered violence legitimate. Growing up in a hierarchical social system, subjugation, and female cultural patterns did not allow the legitimacy of physical punishment to be contested in most cases<sup>32</sup>.

The norm of physical punishment was only challenged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a consequence of modern childrearing practices, the institutionalization of child protection<sup>33</sup>, the recognition and extension of human rights, and the feminist and civil rights movements<sup>34</sup>. These discourses have transformed the way we think of violence against women and also problematised the issue of domestic violence in the public discourse. Whilst transformations at the beginning of the century had a greater influence on the lives of urban citizens, we cannot disregard that the morals and customs of the peasant society were also affected by the First World War and its aftermath, and by the influences that commuters (seasonal workers and maids) mediated<sup>35</sup>.

Among the consequences of WWI on family life, the beating of wives and the murder of women were reported in the press. The Feminists' Association (Feministák Egyesülete) published several reports on the invisible suffering of women and children in the hinterland, the murder of wives, and the intensification of domestic violence after the war<sup>36</sup>. On the other hand, quantitative research on the thematic distribution of articles in Hungarian feminist journals (*A Nő és a Társadalom*, *A Nő*) outlined that violence against women and the "maid question" closely connected to prostitution enjoyed negligible publicity compared to the topics of suffrage or labour. Middle-class families, who provided the financial

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<sup>31</sup> Olga Nagy, "A törvény szorításában", pp. 19-30.

<sup>32</sup> Kata Jávör, "A magyar paraszti erkölcs és magatartás ["The Hungarian Peasant Morality and Behaviour"]", in Sárkány Mihály, Miklós Szilágyi (eds.), *Társadalom. Magyar néprajz nyolc kötetben VIII*, pp. 601-692.

<sup>33</sup> Zita Deáky, „Jó kisfiúk és leánykák”. *A kisgyermekkor történeti néprajza Magyarországon* ["Good Little Boys and Girls". *Historical Ethnography of Early Childhood in Hungary*], Budapest, Századvég, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will. Men, Women and Rape*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Gábor Gyáni, *Women as Domestic Servants: The Case of Budapest, 1890–1940*, New York, Institute on East Central Europe, 1989; Ágnes Fülemile, "Social Change, Dress and Identity: Observations on the Disintegration of Peasant Culture as Exemplified by Rural Women's Clothing in Hungary from the First World War to the End of the Kádár Era Socialism", *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, 65, 2020, 1, pp. 107-186.

<sup>36</sup> Judit Acsády, "Diverse Constructions. Feminist and Conservative Women's Movements and Their Contribution to the (Re-)construction of Gender Relations in Hungary after the First World War", in Ingrid Sharp, Matthew Stibbe (eds.), *Aftermaths of War. Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918–1923*, Boston – Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 309-332.

security of the Feminists' Association, regarded these matters inappropriate for their daughters, and the Association had to consider their moral values.<sup>37</sup> Although militarism and the trauma of war experienced by men may have contributed to the escalation of domestic violence, it does not in itself explain the existence of abuse, as marital violence has been present throughout history. WWI and its aftermath, the temporary disintegration of norms, may have contributed to the expansion of violence against women, but it is alleged that not all soldiers abused their wives and not all abusers were soldiers.

Another ground for intimate partner violence was men's alcohol consumption. Alcoholism as justification for violence also echoes in 20<sup>th</sup> century biographies and literary works. The correlation between men's alcohol consumption and domestic violence can also be observed in the increasing number of divorces<sup>38</sup>. These justifications implicitly exonerate the perpetrator, as the influence of trauma or alcohol diminishes personal accountability to some degree. To this end, domestic violence cannot be treated exclusively as a "women's issue", for effective action against the problem is not possible without thematising the role of the perpetrators<sup>39</sup>.

Life writings are immensely significant, since in retrospect, women transcribed experiences that were unspeakable heretofore. Accordingly, I interpret the representation of domestic violence in self-narratives as a transgressive act. Nevertheless, women whose stories corresponded to the textualization of 20<sup>th</sup> century female life courses contributed to the transformation of social norms through their narrative act. Subsequently, the emphasis is largely on the power and the limitations of abuse narratives.

#### *Uncovering Violence Against Women: From Shame to Agency*

Concerns about publishing abuse stories enclose the questions of shame, trauma, and agency. The sense of shame prevented the stories of domestic violence from being narrated and publicized, in this way violence and its consequences remained almost invisible, enclosed into the female body<sup>40</sup>. Patriarchy and the subordination of women as a social group contribute to the elusiveness of shameful stories. In rural society, shame is a fundamental emotion in the

<sup>37</sup> Dóra Czeferner, *Polgári-liberális, feminista nőszervezetek és sajtójuk az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchiában (1907–1918). Egyesületek, periodikák, tartalomelemzés [Civil-liberal, Feminist Women's Organizations and their Press in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1907–1918). Associations, Periodicals, Content Analysis]* (PhD dissertation), Pécs, University of Pécs, 2020, p. 185, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Olga Tóth, *Erőszak a családban [Violence in the Family]*, Budapest, TÁRKI, 1999, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> Krisztina Morvai, *Terror a családban. A feleségbántalmazás és a jog [Terror in the Family. Wife Beating and the Law]*, Budapest, Kossuth, 1998, pp. 237–254.

<sup>40</sup> Andrea Pető, "Shame Revisited in the Memory Politics of Illiberal States", in Ernst Van Alphen (ed.), *Shame! and Masculinity*, Amsterdam, Valiz Publishing, 2020, pp. 103–113.

socialisation of girls. In the grip of various taboos and prohibitions, the moral aspect of shame comes to the fore. The gendered sense of shame dominated women's views on sexuality and marriage. The political environment is again substantial as memory policy influences the way stories are told or tabooed. The narration of domestic violence is restrained by the state discourse based on ideological familism. Treating the family as an exclusive unit obscures its internal relations and dynamics, thus making male-female conflicts silent<sup>41</sup>.

I argue that women's stories of violence can be interpreted as coping strategies that transform former victims into actors. Building on the concepts of resilience and agency, I attempt to reframe violence narratives beyond the framework of indescribability and shame, thus proposing a possible approach beyond taboo and stigma. A significant but disputed notion in this process is "overcoming trauma". While analysing narratives of distressing events, Agatha Schwartz used the term "vocabulary of rupture" referring to overcoming the trauma of wartime sexual violence. Schwartz conceptualized rape as a traumatic event associated with a specific vocabulary and expressions<sup>42</sup>. Correspondingly, Suzette A. Henke mobilizes trauma theory in reframing women's autobiographies as a space for coping strategies. "Scriptotherapy" is perceived as a process for reconstructing the traumatized self: an activity through which a former victim can create her narrative of the violence she has experienced, thus transforming past events into present actions<sup>43</sup>.

Surprisingly, the Communist takeover also contributed to uncovering past taboos. The Hungarian ethnographer Judit Morvay published the first women-centered village monograph in 1956<sup>44</sup>. Her investigation of the patriarchal family structure and female life experiences was possible because it fitted in with the communist scientific policy. The suppression of women could be framed as a reflection of the failures of the old, bourgeois system, not the general subordination of women in society. Nonetheless, this "equivocal emancipation" allowed for women to reveal their experiences. Writing provides women a chance to find their voice and their own story. Repositioning events in a discursive space equips survivors with an agency and an opportunity for action to form a coherent self-image beyond trauma. However, in addition to finding a functional vocabulary, women also had to deal with the lack or rejection of potential

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<sup>41</sup> Csaba Dupcsik, Olga Tóth, "Feminizmus helyett familizmus" ["Familism Instead of Feminism"], *Demográfia*, 51, 2008, 4, pp. 307-328.

<sup>42</sup> Agatha Schwartz, "Creating a 'Vocabulary of Rupture' Following WWII Sexual Violence in Hungarian Women Writers' Narratives", *Hungarian Cultural Studies*, 10, 2017, pp. 82-95.

<sup>43</sup> Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1998.

<sup>44</sup> Judit Morvay, *Asszonyok a nagycsaládban* [Women in the Joint Family], Budapest, Magvető, 1956.

audiences, so a letter, a diary, a memoir, or an autobiography could evolve as the scene for the re-creation of events.

*Negotiating Intimacy: Cold Relationships and Marital Rape*

In addition to dysfunctional marriages, the unhappiness of sexual life, and the fear of unwanted pregnancies, the problem of domestic violence appeared in Lajos Balázs's monograph on Sándominic (Csíkszentdomokos). Balázs traced the cognitive elements of local society on sexual morality<sup>45</sup>. In the case of marital sex, women often obeyed the will of their husbands in the hope of shorter intercourse. Others, fearing physical punishment, did not dare to resist. Nor should we forget that women were economically dependent on their husbands, accordingly divorce was not a real possibility. Furthermore, the atmosphere of everyday life in the family was important to the wives. That is why subtle influences such as everyday verbal abuse challenge our notions of sexual violence. A recurring element in women's narratives is obligation. Female imprints of socialisation and internalised expectations have more than once resulted in a situation where it is the abused wives who protected their husbands from being persecuted. Elements of self-blame imply they have "provoked" the violence with their perceived or actual behaviour, and even the assumption of deserving to be beaten<sup>46</sup>. After the wedding, peasant women moved to their father-in-law's house, where they were outsiders and integration into their new families brought unexplored conflicts to the marriage. Despite considerable humiliating and painful situations reported by women, these actions did not count as unambiguously violent behaviour by local standards<sup>47</sup>.

The evaluation of violence and its approval is exemplified by an extreme case when the husband beat and then raped his wife during the postpartum period. Because of the man's brutality, the wife had to be taken to the hospital, for she was heavily bleeding. Despite being severely injured she did not dare to tell the doctor what had happened at home. The wife justified her action by protecting their children and the honour of the family. This kind of brutality was condemned by the neighbourhood and was evaluated unquestionably as domestic violence<sup>48</sup>. We can again see that protecting the family has triumphed over the protection of women's physical safety. In this case, it was the abused wife who contributed to the silencing of domestic violence, which can be explained by social expectations.

The autobiography of Klára Győri (1899–1975), a peasant storyteller from Sic (Szék), is possibly the most prominent piece of its genre in the Hungarian-

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<sup>45</sup> Lajos Balázs, "Amikor az ember nincs es ezen a világon".

<sup>46</sup> Krisztina Morvai, "Terror a családban", pp. 98-103.

<sup>47</sup> Lajos Balázs, "Amikor az ember nincs es ezen a világon", pp. 266-272.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 268-269.

language ethnographic literature<sup>49</sup>. Klára Győri started to write her life story in 1960, and only after the death of her abusive husband could she finish a genuine manuscript. In the book *Kiszáradt az én örömem zöld fája* [*The Verdant Tree of My Delight Has Drained*] her experiences as a maid, her vulnerability, her unhappy marriage, and her toxic relationship with her husband were disclosed. After the First World War, her marriage to widower István Filep brought decades of suffering. The lonesome years spent with the rude, uneducated, and insensitive man left their mark on the wife. Győri's book was ground-breaking in many senses and it was the first female autobiography to disclose the "wedding night" of newlyweds. Even the manuscript's editor Olga Nagy was shocked since Győri never talked about forced sexual relations in her marriage during the many years of their acquaintance. Unhappy, cold marriage and forced sexual intercourse with her husband were not even considered de jure violence in that era. Regular sexual intercourse between husband and wife was acknowledged as part of the marriage, and this perception excluded the existence of sexual violence within a marriage:

My man was asleep, but suddenly woke up. In vain did I promise God thirty prayers. Now he begins to squeeze me, to embrace me, I feel something rising from the hangman's pants! Oh, what shall I do? This was the first difficulty. He said some mild words: Well, look, this is how it should be, others do it too. I said: God damn who came up with this. [...] Well, I didn't even get warm, I was shivering, I was so cold. Anyway, he was the stronger. When I was free from torture one evening (I never once desired it, nor had any desire for it), I wondered: if he had worn nice underpants the first time he undressed, would it have helped? Or is it not the underwear that counts?<sup>50</sup>

From Győri's narration, it is unmistakable she was aware of the inappropriateness of this relationship, but no forum existed where she could express her doubts. Moving back to her parents' house was opposed by her father for marriage was considered a lifelong choice. This attitude was typical since the foundation of rural society was the family. Caring for divorced or single women would have placed an additional burden on the community. The coping strategy of women could only be patience and acceptance, which contributed to their vulnerability and solitude.

The concern of folk text publications – i.e., who is authorized to publish, what is to be printed, and when to uncover narratives – occurs in the case of Klára Győri's autobiography. This volume was unprecedented in its explicit description of the sexual vulnerability of peasant women and the intimate, private details of marriage. A significant circumstance for the publication was that the editor, Olga Nagy, sent "appropriate" chapters to the editorial office of *Valóság* and *Korunk* –

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<sup>49</sup> Klára Győri, "Kiszáradt az én örömem zöld fája".

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 137-138.

two leading Hungarian-language journals – to advertise the forthcoming book<sup>51</sup>. Caution proved necessary, as the book provoked substantial debates among both Transylvanian and Hungarian experts. The intimacy of the narration and the textualization of domestic violence were perceived as a violation of social norms not only by the village community but by some professionals as well<sup>52</sup>.

Concerning Klára Győri's volume, peasant women argued for the inappropriateness of writing about such private incidents. The assessment was also determined by local morality and religion: people of the Calvinist Neaua (Havad), mentioning shamefulness, completely rejected the book, while the ones of the Catholic Sândominic (Csíkszentdomokos) identified with the narrator. According to the inhabitants of Sic (Szék), Győri spoke out against the will of the village, meaning she disclosed information about them for which she did not have the moral authority<sup>53</sup>. The nonacceptance of experts could also be triggered by the fact that Győri's autobiography did not conform to the canonised image of the Transylvanian peasantry and also dismantled the idealised view of Sic (Szék)<sup>54</sup>. The romanticized representation of Transylvania and the "untouched" rural life was part of the nationalist discourse in Hungary and among the Hungarians living in Romania. Investigations with different outcomes – which were closer to reality – were suppressed, as they could shatter the identity of Transylvanian people.

Another example of sexual violence against women is the case of Mrs András Berényi (1887–1973) from Tarnabod, Hungary, who also exposed the violent nature of the wedding night. She was raised in a poor peasant family and was an agricultural worker and a maid throughout her life. She had been writing and publishing regularly since the 1950s in communist journals, which were significant forums for women on the one hand, and legitimized the Stalinist emancipatory policies on the other hand. Berényi had also been involved in the voluntary ethnographic collection movement since 1967. In arranged marriages, there was a relatively short time to become acquainted with each other before the wedding, but an intimate relationship was expected to be established on the first night:

Oh dear, now I have to go to bed. I've made so many plans to get away from this, and now I'm in a room with this stranger who is so persistent, let's go to bed, I have to get up in the morning. He's so violent, I can't even get out of his arms, and he pulls my clothes off. I push him away in vain, I can undress, but he wants me to lie against the wall, no, I'd rather not lie down, and I beg him not to touch me, I have to pray! He spits on the lamp, I struggle with him for a while, but he is so strong, he knocks me down, and I feel so much pain. I scream loudly, and now I am no longer a virgin, that

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<sup>51</sup> Olga Nagy, "Hagyományőrző népi kultúra", pp. 83-84.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 106-108.

<sup>54</sup> Vilmos Keszeg, *Alfabetizáció, írásszokások, populáris írásbeliség [Alphabetization, Writing Habits, Popular Literacy]*, Cluj, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, 2008, pp. 306-307.

which for years I have lived in perpetual anxiety and suffered many painful hours for has happened<sup>55</sup>.

The description of a “wedding night” lacking any kind of intimacy and humanity permits a glimpse into the emotionally poor world of the vast majority of peasant marriages. Though mothers attempted to prepare their daughters, still the common assessment was that men’s violent behaviour was reasonable, or at least unchangeable, and young women had to tolerate it. These memoirs published in the mid-1970s, were among the first to discuss intimate relationships inside marriage and gave a brief description of the first sexual intercourse of newlyweds. In doing so, they paved the way for the exploration of peasant women’s life experiences and also served as a model for future narratives.

### *Coping with Physical Abuse in Everyday Life*

In what follows I examine the textualization of wife beating in rural autobiographies. The fractured articulations of abuse in the texts may be explained by the fact that the author did not consider the events to be particularly remarkable<sup>56</sup>. On the other hand, there may exist some ambiguity when it comes to shame, silence, and the desire to share their experiences. In the life narrative collection edited by Anikó Salamon, we can also find a sequence of mistreatment in two women’s autobiographies.

Borbála Csobot (1880–1971) from Bukovina was regularly abused by her husband. During their 58 years of marriage, she gave birth to 14 children, and her aggressive husband abused her while pregnant. In one case, on returning home late at night, the husband suddenly attacked his wife with a saw while she was making dinner. Csobot could only escape with the help of a neighbour:

He hit me so hard with the little saw that the wood in the middle broke. So he hit me on the head with the wooden ends until blood ran from my head down to my feet. [...] There was only one tough man next door. He broke through the gate, came in, grabbed him by the throat, and pulled me out of his hands<sup>57</sup>.

Amália Botos (b. 1907) experienced various forms of physical and emotional terror in her dysfunctional family relationships from a very young age. At the age of fifty, Botos moved to an apartment in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely), where she started to take diary-like non-chronological notes about her life. Later she wanted to destroy them because of their excessive honesty. Neither as a child nor as an adult did Botos have any human relationship without some kind of violence: she was abused by her father and stepfather, and beaten by both husbands. Dissatisfied

<sup>55</sup> Mrs András Berényi, “Nagy Rozália a nevem”, p. 173.

<sup>56</sup> See Sándor Balázs Kovács, “Válás a sárközi paraszti társadalomban”, pp. 273-275.

<sup>57</sup> Mrs Albert Dávid, [Untitled autobiography], p. 16.

with the unemployment and drunkenness of her first husband, she wanted to divorce. Infuriated by this news, the husband started beating her and only stopped upon the landlady's intervention:

And in response, he grabbed my hair, pushed me to the ground and kicked me wherever he could, saying, "Do you want a divorce? Right? A divorce?" And the wall being thin, my landlady, hearing what was happening, came in and saw us and said, "Mr Orbán, what are you doing?" And my dear husband let go and said, "Nothing"<sup>58</sup>.

Physical violence was an everyday experience for Mrs József Tóth Szőke (pseudonym: Mrs Sándor Varjú) in her first marriage.<sup>59</sup> On one occasion she smiled at her former lover while smashing corn, and her sister-in-law informed her husband about it. The man brutally beat his wife, despite her being seven months pregnant:

Then my husband called me out. He beat me badly, even though I was already pregnant. My mother saw it too, she felt sorry for me; she told me not to go back to my husband. But I took my scarf and went home with my husband and sister-in-law. Jóska also noticed that my husband was beating me. Only later did he tell me that he followed us home and stood under the window for a long time wondering if they would hurt me<sup>60</sup>.

The abovementioned examples underscore that the intervention of the neighbourhood or relatives may have put an end to domestic violence. Still, in the vast majority of incidents, eyewitnesses did not provide aid to the abused women and the interventions only occurred in explicitly brutal cases<sup>61</sup>. The autobiography of Erzsébet Zsigmond (b. 1937) from Mureş county also exemplifies the mechanisms of physical and verbal abuse and the recurring motifs of abused women's stories. Erzsébet Zsigmond's life writing consists of two parts: her recollections from 1977 and her diary-like entries between 1988 and 1990 after she had lost her child. Zsigmond was kept under constant control by her husband, who physically and emotionally abused her wife. In the academic reception, no details have appeared about the violent, drunken husband or her unhappy marriage. Scholars positioned the autobiography to the public as a story of a mother traumatised by having lost her child. Either by involuntary tabooing or conscious silencing, this fact obscures Zsigmond's long-standing and systematic physical and mental abuse<sup>62</sup>. Furthermore, restraining the experience of traumatized women hinders the understanding of the sequence of causes and consequences that ultimately shaped the authors' identity. It was not by accident that in each case

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<sup>58</sup> Amália Botos, [Untitled autobiography], p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> Mrs Sándor Varjú, "Egy paraszttasszony élete".

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 116.

<sup>61</sup> Amália Botos, [Untitled autobiography], p. 90; Mrs Albert Dávid, [Untitled autobiography], p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Vilmos Keszeg, "Élettörténetek", p. 166; Vilmos Keszeg, "Alfabetizáció", pp. 308-307.

analysed the life account was written only after the death of the husband or the permanent separation of the couple. Writing and publication can be perceived as a form of compensation for lifelong suffering and, likewise, an opportunity to liberate oneself from the husband's oppression<sup>63</sup>.

Like many other women in cold marriages, Erzsébet Zsigmond suffered from the absence of attention and care, the husband's crudeness, and excessive alcohol consumption<sup>64</sup>. Resignation and the acceptance of the fate imposed on her were coupled with a sense of permanent terror. While drunk, the husband behaved unpredictably and violently with those around him, especially with his wife. In one instance, he tried to murder his wife with a butcher's knife which he regularly used to threaten her with:

He locks the hallway door from the inside, he is still drunk, he turns off the light and takes the large butcher's knife, he always pulled out those, holy God, I often wonder why I didn't let him kill me, but then God knows why I was so afraid, trying to save my life, I could not think. I run out, but the door to the hallway is locked, I try the key but in my nervousness, the door won't open, I can feel the knife in my back, I'm so desperate that it's all over, the door opens at the last moment, on February 24, 1980, in the crackling cold, I run to my dear mother in a house dress. [...] I trembled so badly, when he was drunk, his eyes were like those of an enraged animal, I was even more afraid that he would hang himself and his relatives would eat me alive, saying that I was to blame. When I told my sister what he did, she always told me to let him do it<sup>65</sup>.

Unmistakably, the threat with a knife was not an impulsive, single occasion. Moreover, the husband was emotionally blackmailing the distressed wife with his suicide, so Zsigmond had to fear possible revenge by the man's relatives. Accordingly, the wife had to bear not only her torments but also the weight of her husband's possible actions. Her mental and emotional condition is well reflected by the fact that she did not even understand why she was protecting her own life when her husband tried to kill her. Therefore, domestic violence cannot be considered a "private affair", as it also affects the relatives of the couple, let alone their children. Only in the 21<sup>st</sup> century had violence against women as a social problem been widely acknowledged in Eastern Europe. These narratives of systematic abuse were formerly labelled as bad marriages, estrangement, issues related to mentally ill or drunken husbands, or the unhappiness of women. Marginalizing the problem and pathologizing the perpetrators have all contributed to silencing the experiences of abused women.

The story of Mrs Ferenc Bakó from Neaua (Havad) not only reflects on and re-evaluates her former actions, but also sheds light on solidarity as a possible

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<sup>63</sup> Vilmos Keszeg, "Alfabetizáció", p. 309.

<sup>64</sup> Erzsébet Zsigmond, "Sirató", p. 58.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

response to violence. During an escalating conflict over domestic labour, physical punishment was retaliation for the woman's harsh words:

When he gets up, he says: – Is there any food ready? I say: – Is there any wood under the stove? As you cut wood, so I cooked. When you're at work, that's different. You're making money. But on Sunday you are sleeping and I should cut wood? Did you take me as a lumberjack or a wife? Do you think, you are the only smart one here? Well, he beat me so badly that my back was blue. That was the kind of man I had. I tolerated him because of the children. I'd never have dared to fight back, if I had I would have gotten even more of that. A woman is a woman, and a man is a man, so God has ordained<sup>66</sup>.

In her narrative, the concept of tolerating the beating for her children's sake and obeying the divine order is combined with exceptional self-esteem. Pride and desire for human dignity encouraged Mrs Bakó to communicate her complaints despite being conscious of the consequences. Following another incident, the woman called her adult son, who acted upon the protection of his mother and openly confronted the abusive father<sup>67</sup>. Solidarity in the family could thus provide a kind of response to the problems of abused women, as moving out with an adult child, parent, or relative could be a solution for women, even in a social system where divorce came at a very high social price: they could not fit in the village community any longer.

Nonetheless, the abovementioned examples also illustrate that this type of solidarity was rather exceptional. Even close family members accepted the abusive treatment of women and did not intervene in marital conflicts. One informant of Lajos Balázs, who was beaten by her drunken, violent husband several times, asked the local priest for help, but her hopes were shattered. Eventually, the neighbours intervened to protect her young children. In this case, secular forces, and the local authorities appeared as potential aid providers, while the clergy remained silent<sup>68</sup>. The husband's sober periods and vows resemble the batterer's behaviour and answer the question of why women stay in such relationships<sup>69</sup>. Although the neighbours' action was a significant moment in the story, it is obvious that their primary motivation was to protect the children, not the wife.

### *Conclusion*

Transformations in academic paradigms and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in materializing violence against women and domestic violence in

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<sup>66</sup> Mrs Ferenc Bakó, "Ma már nem tűrnék", p. 102.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>68</sup> Lajos Balázs, "Amikor az ember nincs es ezen a világon", pp. 269-270.

<sup>69</sup> Lenore Walker, *The Battered Woman*, New York, Harper & Row, 1979.

the social and political discourse. These transitions coincided with the transformation of the Hungarian and Romanian rural societies under state socialism and Western second-wave feminism. Peasant women were oppressed in the patriarchal culture of peasant society and scarcely benefited from political representation despite the emancipatory policies of state socialism.

Therefore, these social changes and the evolution in academic interest can be perceived as game-changers. The re-evaluation of the boundaries between the public and private spheres permitted rural women to share their experiences. These eight women's narratives scrutinized above moved beyond taboo and stigma, into a realm where peasant women's traumas would gain a voice. This phenomenon is exemplified either by the social and political changes that facilitated the visibility of the suffering connected to interwar, bourgeois society, or by the death of the husband and the escape from patriarchal repression.

Transformations in women's lifestyle, mentality, and gender roles also allowed for the narration and subsequent reassessment of (domestic) violence against women<sup>70</sup>. Although the experiences of violence in peasant women's autobiographies have not yet been reinterpreted at the time of their textualization, they have already become articulated and narrated. Self-narrations were preceded by a transition in mentality during which women moved away from the traditional peasant lifestyle and attitude. By transforming the evaluation of their experiences, public narration became achievable. Yet, the implicit principle of non-intervention and family life as a private environment remained until the 1990s. The narratives of domestic violence were hindered by a state discourse based on ideological familism, which, by treating the family as an exclusive unit, obscures its internal relations and dynamics, thus silencing male-female conflicts<sup>71</sup>.

In this study, changes in the notion of violence and the peculiarities of female autobiographies as marginalized counter-histories were briefly presented via eight life narratives. In this corpus, two main types of abuse were scrutinised: sexual and physical violence against wives. These women publicly violated the regulations related to female socialisation patterns, therefore there was no space for community solidarity to be established. It is unsurprising that women only spoke out when they were older, after the death of their husbands. This may be explained by the loosening of norms in the case of elderly women, or a desire to share their life stories prior to the end of their lives. Recording violence and harassment may have served as a coping mechanism or a creative activity. Retrospective life narration could also be a tool for the restoration of their self-esteem, as it was

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<sup>70</sup> Karen Offen, *European Feminisms. A Political History, 1700–1950*, Los Angeles, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> Csaba Dupcsik, Olga Tóth, "Feminizmus helyett familizmus".

recognized as labour by the community. Thus, their writing can also be evaluated as a means of taking their destiny into their own hands.

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**BEYOND TABOO AND STIGMA: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN 20<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY RURAL HUNGARY AND TRANSYLVANIA***(Abstract)*

The study underscores the conversions in violence concepts textualized in eight Hungarian-speaking peasant women's life narratives. By addressing the central questions of violence against peasant women, the examination provides a path toward including the rural as a geographic and socio-cultural dimension in the studies of women's writing. In this corpus of marginalized counter-histories, two main types of abuse were scrutinized: sexual and physical violence against wives. Breaking with the social and community norms, these rural women textualized and publicized their stories of abuse and moved beyond the stigmatizing efforts of patriarchal society. I examine these accounts of violence as coping strategies that transform former victims into actors. Based on the concepts of resilience and agency, I attempt to disentangle the stories of women who have experienced domestic violence from indescribability and shame by suggesting a possible approach beyond taboo and stigma.

*Keywords:* domestic violence, violence against women, rural society, female life narrative, Hungary.

**DINCOLO DE TABU ȘI DE STIGMĂ. VIOLENȚA DOMESTICĂ ÎN MEDIUL  
RURAL DIN UNGARIA ȘI TRANSILVANIA SECOLULUI AL XIX-LEA***(Rezumat)*

Studiul evidențiază schimbările de concepere a violenței, reflectate în opt narațiuni despre propria viață, aparținând unor țărânci de limbă maghiară. Abordând problematici centrale despre violența împotriva femeilor din zona rurală, articolul pledează pentru recunoașterea ruralității ca o dimensiune geografică și socio-culturală relevantă pentru aria de studii dedicate scriiturii feminine. În cadrul acestui corpus de contra-istorii marginalizate am analizat două tipuri de abuzuri: violența sexuală și violența fizică la care au fost supuse femeile în ipostaza lor de soții. Încălcând normele sociale și comunitare, aceste femei din zona rurală au transpus în scris și au făcut publice abuzurile la care au fost supuse, așa încât au eludat procesul de stigmatizare tipic societății patriarhale. Valorific aceste dări de seamă despre violența domestică ca strategii de adaptare menite să transforme victimele în actori. Pornind de la concepte precum reziliența și capacitatea de a acționa, îmi propun să delimitz poveștile victimelor violenței domestice de prejudecata indescriptibilului și a rușinii cu scopul de a configura o posibilă abordare dincolo de tabu și de stigmă.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* violență domestică, violență împotriva femeilor, societate rurală, narațiuni ale vieții femeilor, Ungaria.