DE GRUYTER OPEN

DOI: 10.2478/aa-2014-0002

Denial of Humanity and Forms of Enslavement in the Russian Gulag: Early Narratives of Gulag Survivors (1919-1940)

Gabriela Tucan, Dumitru Tucan

Gabriela Tucan is a junior lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the West University of Timişoara. She has seven years of experience in higher education where she has now become specialised in teaching ESP, academic writing, as well as creative witting. Gabriela Tucan currently holds a PhD title in cognitive poetics, specifically in the cognitive operations necessary for reading and comprehension of E. Hemingway's short stories. Her broader research interests cover cognitive narratology, the properties of conceptual blending, and cultural cognitive theories.

Dumitru Tucan is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Letters of the West University of Timişoara. He currently teaches courses on Literary Theory, Romanian Literature, and Literary Hermeneutics. His research interests are in the fields of literary and critical theory, cultural studies, Romanian and comparative literature, academic writing and multiliteracy, and Gulag Studies. He is the author of *Eugène Ionesco. Theatre, Metatheatre, Authenticity* (*Eugène Ionesco. Teatru, metateatru, autenticitate* - 2006), and *Introduction to Literary Studies* (2007).

Abstract

Although the foundations of the Soviet concentration camp system date back to the Bolshevik Revolution and Russian Civil War, the amplitude of human suffering in the Gulag would not be known in detail until after 1962, i.e. the year when A. Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich *was published. But even before the start of World War II, the totalitarian Soviet universe spoke the language of oppression that public opinion in the West constantly refused to acknowledge. This paper tries to recover a neglected corpus of early autobiographical narratives depicting the absurd Soviet concentration system, in the authentic voice of a number of Gulag survivors (G. Kitchin, Tatiana Tchernavin, Vladimir Tchernavin, S. A. Malsagoff, etc.).*

Introduction

Admittedly, the history of the Gulag goes back to the beginnings of the Bolshevik revolution and Russian Civil War, but the real and terrifying amplitude of the human suffering of the Soviet concentration-camp system would only be officially brought to light in the 1960s when, during the short-lived ideological thaw following Stalin's death, A. Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) was published. It was the translation of this short novel into almost all European languages, closely followed by the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973-1974), that would set the Western cultural scene for a detailed assessment of the horrific totalitarian Soviet system; also, these two major writings would kindle the need for serious research into the extent of the horrors inflicted on the humans in that context and

aroused interest in the authentic accounts of the Gulag survivors. In the 1970s, many of these traumatic carceral experiences became publicly visible (V. Shalamov, E. Ginzburg, A. Dolgun, etc.) and thus acknowledged as the living proof of the recent history replete with horrors and endless forms of dehumanisation, slavery and death. All this corpus of horrendous narratives would become part of the already existing larger corpora of accounts that describe the human suffering and traumatic experiences of those who had experienced the hell of the Holocaust. In truth, the traumatic memory of the 20th century has been framed by these written authentic narratives, but in effect, such texts are only pieces of a larger puzzle which gives voice to the other equally traumatising experiences of the third decade of the 20th century. In this light, the paper tries to examine a corpus of early autobiographical narratives about the Soviet concentration system that have been disregarded and neglected especially by public opinion in the West and also attempts to explain the lack of immediate reaction upon the release of these books (for instance, the accounts of G. Kitchin, Tatiana Tchernavin, Vladimir Tchernavin, S. A. Malsagoff, etc.). This paper sets out to explore the early history of the Soviet Gulag, as revealed in the survivors' painfully genuine writings, with the focus on the uneven fight between the individual and the absurd mechanisms of oppression.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich or on the Breaking of Silence

It was the release of the novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in November 1962 that was felt to be an unprecedented occasion for Europe in acknowledging officially an essential part of its deadly traumatic history: the Soviet concentration camps. Written in an authentic voice, this book published in the Soviet Union was the first to render in words what ordinary people had already experienced first-hand, what they had learned from the painful accounts of their loved ones, or what they had previously lived on a daily basis. The fact that A. Solzhenitsyn's book was readily published and translated into most European languages (including the majority of the languages spoken behind the Iron Curtain) proves not only the increasing interest in the subject aroused in the European culture and society of the 1960s, but also the recognition of the exceptional nature of such writing that, although officially published in the USSR, speaks of the Soviet system's inhuman condition.

A detailed analysis of the historic context of the times can point out the 'sensational' effects stirred by Solzhenitsyn's brief novel that are mainly due to the contradictions between particularly distinct Soviet political views following Stalin's death in March 1953. This is the epoch when, in the battle for political power, Khrushchev actively engaged in a legitimising discourse that explicitly criticised the 'personality cult', which also served him as a genuine slogan giving voice to the negative energies that had been steadily accumulated within the Soviet society of the times. Khrushchev turned his critique into a propaganda tool between 1956 and 1964, starting with the moment he delivered 'The Secret Speech' at the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party[1] of the Soviet Union until his removal from power. Khrushchev himself paved the way for the publication of Solzhenitsyn's first book (Reshetovskaia 1995) which has the paradoxical quality of giving an authentic view of the concentration camps and of outlining a *paradigmatic* image of these unearthly places (Toker, 2000, pp. 188-190). Ultimately, it seems that Solzhenitsyn's book was able to generate contradictory effects in its readers (if not divergent, in functional terms).

Reviewers were quick to capture the divergent outcome of Solzhenitsyn's text that, despite its neutral undertones, managed to rebuild (in a genuinely authentic fashion and with a minimum of literary effects) the physical and moral geography of the Soviet concentration camps. The editor-in-chief of the journal Novy Mir and a fervent supporter of Solzhenitsyn at the dawn of his literary career, Alexandr Tvardovsky, pointed out in the foreword of Solzhenitsyn's novel that the book was more than documented writing. Deeply rooted in a wealth of personal experiences, Tvardovsky further argues, the book generates a sort of authenticity that is

doubled by an artistic craftsmanship able to transfer the novel's effects into the universal realm of aesthetic values: "*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* is not a document in the sense of being a memoir, nor is it notes or reminiscences of the author's personal experiences, although only such personal experiences could lend this story its sense of genuine authenticity. This is a work of art and it is by virtue of the artistic interpretation of this material from life that it is a witness of special value, a document of an art which up to now had seemed to have few possibilities" (Tvardovky, 1963, p. ii).

In his attempt to foreground the novel's artistic value, Tvardovsky evidently wished to warn against radical interpretations that were likely to occur among its readers. This fact can be easily noticed in Tvardovsky's preface and in his hidden historical references to the "personality cult" regarded as "violation of Soviet legality" (Tvardovsky, 1963, p. iii), in his clear indication of both Khrushchev's and the Communist Party's role in the condemnation of recent suffering (Tvardovsky, 1963, p. ii), and also in his spelling out the need to voice the truth, no matter how hurtful and cruel it may have been. However, the clear analogy between the need for truth (either in its historic or in its artistic forms) and the Party's directives may strengthen the argument that during the post-Stalinist ideological thaw the political power had to face two noticeably distinct legitimising needs: on the one hand, the need to break away from the Stalinist epoch, and on the other hand, the need to preserve the political status-quo. Consequently, all reviewers' interpretations were only limited to the critique of the Stalinist terror, which automatically rejected the possibility for reading the novel as severe criticism against the communist system in its entirety.

The epoch's political restraints may as well explain the overall neutral tonality of the text in which Solzhenitsyn deliberately chose to direct narrative attention to the almost obsessively accurate description of the physical universe of the concentration camps. By using this particular narrative technique, Solzhenitsyn brilliantly managed to depict the details of the uneven battle between the individual and the repressive system. Therefore, only by providing such detailed images did Solzhenitsyn succeed in launching systematic accusations against a political system that had created a universe of total dehumanisation. Behind the simple (yet skilfully designed) narrative constructions and the concentration of the action around the focaliser Ivan Denisovich, one can notice Solzhenitsyn's opting for artistic forms that are able to express his intentions to mask a "documented" act of human suffering, endowed with the inner strength of a fully concentrated example. More importantly, however, Solzhenitsyn submits his testimony, concealed in artistic camouflage, to a newly emergent world that seemed ready to accept and acknowledge his testimony, in the context of a new political and ideological agenda.

In a nutshell, Solzhenitsyn's novella meets a wide array of goals: it speaks the language of art, severely challenges cultural and political views, and closely follows the steps of documented history. The novel excels in the stylistic achievements of a densely packed writing that breathes in the air of authenticity and that primarily manages to adjust its language and its characters to the needs of the narrative construction. Then, even if Solzhenitsyn's universe is ultimately a fictional world, it seems that it can simultaneously portray the paradigmatic image of the concentration camp and of human suffering, both described from the thoroughly documented perspective of the historian. In this way, this image of intense human suffering will be "acknowledged" as "real" by the hundreds of survivors of the concentration universe and by many others. But finally, it seems that the strength of the book lies in its political and cultural qualities, i.e. the text's effort to encourage the act of remembrance and also the critical debate on the concentration universe. Once the novel was accepted by the Soviet officials as a legitimate artistic reminder of the intolerable Stalinist legacy that it was attempting to put behind it, it actually opened the door to a wealth of frenetic voices that began to revisit the traumatic times of intense sufferance experienced throughout the entire

history of the Soviet system. Slowly, behind these many writings vehemently driving a disquieting discourse, emerges a general pointedly critical attitude directed toward the heart of the communist system. Last but not least, starting with this self-critical approach to the Soviet political establishment, the Western culture became increasingly more interested in the subject and thus eager to explore the real extent of the tragedy[2]. Nevertheless, despite the frenetic critical attention paid to the seemingly new subject of the Gulag in the 1960s, this historic issue is anything but new to the Western culture. Accounts of the human tragedy occurring in the Soviet Union in the early years of the "Bolshevik revolution" had been already available to readers from the 1920s of the last century.

Early Writings on the Soviet Gulag – the Corpus

The increasing popularity of Gulag literature should be indeed attributed to Solzhenitsyn's insightful writing, but the immense mass of memoirs and collections concerning the Gulag printed and made publicly known in the late 1960s did not allow enough room for the rediscovery and detailed analysis of early pre-war "documents", although the early corpus retelling the traumatic experience of the Gulag had been large and relatively easily accessible to the Western public.

In conclusion, a brief summary of this early Gulag corpus can result in at least three separate categories of writings, which are intimately connected to the history of the Soviet penal system and to the ensuing human suffering that was further dramatically amplified. Therefore, the first category mainly comprises the accounts of the Civil War that give the feeling of the early chaotic beginnings of the Soviet penal system; Andrew Kalpashnikoff's *A Prisoner of Trotsky's* (1920) and Ludovic Nadeau's *En prison sous la terreur russe* (1919, 1920) are among the most significant early experiential writings adept at capturing the dark scenario of incarceration, along with its horrific plan that would annihilate the individual self – unfortunately, this frightening scenario of dehumanisation was systematically carried out throughout the entire history of the Gulag. Despite being highly factual writings, such documents, which are verified by similar other writings retelling the experience of the Civil War and "the Red Terror" (see, for instance, McCullagh 1922, Bufnea 1931, Lockhart 1935), rather accurately record the radical attitude of the times that can best explain the emotional undertones of these writings and also the central image placed at the core of these accounts: the Romantic battle with absolute evil.

The second category is directly linked to one historical event in the phenomenon of the Gulag, i.e. the establishment of the Solovki prison camp in 1923 (Solzhenitsyn, 2008, p. 25; Applebaum, 2011, p. 55). This place of utter terror is depicted in the accounts of the very few survivors who managed to escape, such as Soserko Malsagoff (*An Island Hell: A Soviet Prison in the Far North*, 1926) who made his escape from Solovki together with Youri Bezsonov (*Mes vingt-six prisons et mon evasion de Solvki*, 1928) in 1925. In a systematic manner, Malsagoff's account tries to give voice to the detailed moral and physical geography of the work camps on the islands of Solovki, which is also present, though in varying degrees, in all the other similar accounts that are to follow (if one looks at the recurrent images describing the detainees' exhausting forced labour and starvation, but also their innocence, the extreme temperatures in the USSR, the brutal behaviour of the guards and of the common criminal prisoners, etc. Tucan, 2013, p. 65)[4]. The concentration-camp universe of Solovki is also central in the accounts of Julia Danzas (B*agne rouge: Souvenirs d''une prisonniere au pays des Soviets*, 1935), of Boris Cederholm (*In the Clutches of the Tcheka*, 1929), or of Anton Klinger (*Solovetskaia katorga*, Berlin, 1928, published in German and not translated into other languages).

Nevertheless, in this second category, it is the accounts of the Tchernavins that are the most emotionally laden texts: Tatiana Tchernavin's *Escape from the Soviets* (1934) and Vladimir

V. Tchernavin's *I Speak for the Silent (Prisoners of the Soviets)* (1936); their books were published in the United States[5]. The Tchernavins' writings are meant to complement each other as regards the narrated events and their similarly dark tonalities. Starting with his own experience, Vladimir Tchernavin pointedly focuses on the absurd political regime that had lost touch with all practical realities and whose totally unrealistic projections slowly turned that regime into deadly insanity. His very sensible considerations about the innocence of the detainees and the absurd charges made against them (Tchernavin, 1936, pp. 7-8, pp. 77-78), about mass-arrests (p. 67) and interrogations designed explicitly to elicit forced "confessions" (pp. 178-179)[3], or his valid remarks in the context of generalised lies (p. 67) and large-scale forcible indoctrination (pp. 141-142), all led him to the logical conclusion that the country's' real "wreckers" were the newly empowered leading politicians.

Tatiana Tchernavin's account comes as the continuation of her husband's narrative through disclosing the terrible pain experienced by the loved ones left at home after the arrest of their close family members: husbands, children or mothers. Tatiana herself served five months in jail so as to be forced to inform on her husband, but she was released after Vladimir had been condemned and sent to Solovski. The inner strength of her writing is deeply rooted in the author's capacity to transform her own suffering into a concentrated example of misery and generalised poverty that was representative for the entire country, which was now becoming a real mass-scale prison. Speaking "for the silent", the Tchernavins actually spoke for humankind and, despite their employment of an indirect form of address, their narratives aimed to fulfil their mission by gathering details about mass-suffering so as to mobilise the public voice in the West against the Soviet regime.

Finally, the third smaller category of early Gulag accounts is a collection of writings that manage to give an accurate picture of the dying penal phenomenon initiated by the Solovki prison camp. These accounts were written during the course of the full expansion of the Soviet concentration camps. Among the most important writings we list: G. Kitchin's *Prisoner of the OGPU* (1935), Ivan Solonevich's *Russia in Chains: A Record of Unspeakable Suffering* (1936, 1938[6]), or Julia de Beausobre's *The Woman Who Could Not Die* (1938). One can explain the scarcity of such accounts in the epoch by the fact that starting with the 1930s the Russian political terror considerably increased under Stalin's dictatorship and when the repressive machinery had come close to perfection, which meant that during those times the punishments became more severe, and therefore the concentration-camp system turned into a completely closed universe from which any life-saving escapes or even the sheer act of survival were nothing more than remote possibilities.

Dehumanisation, Suffering, and New Forms of Slavery

All these traumatic narratives that address the phenomenon of the Gulag and its memory are written from the perspective of very personal experiences and from the accounts of fellow detainees. These emotionally loaded writings emerging from an autobiographical and inward impulse attempted to objectify outer reality. The authors' writing task is indeed an extremely difficult one if we consider the intense suffering or the unbearable experience encapsulated in each and every episode of these accounts. For instance, in the case of Tatiana Tchernavin, despite her emotionally focused account, the writer still found the strength for bitter reflection and for accurate observation in an attempt to construct a truth-oriented narrative discourse. The narrative impulse to disclose the bitter truth, though to different degrees, was therefore common in all the early accounts of the Gulag. In this way, by frequently resorting to accurate and factual description, the writers depicted the inner 'reality' of the concentration camp in a painfully direct – and ultimately very distressing – manner; the narrative techniques employed by these writers may have varied (for example, Ivan Solonevich camouflaged his account with the artistic device of rhetorical aphorism; Iulia de Beausobre embraced the art of

mystical effusion; and Vladimir Tchernavin focused on the dissemination of detailed economic information), but finally they all achieved a direct account of pain. Admittedly, the overall textual effects should not be necessarily attributed to the writing talent of the authors, but to the creation of an authentic image describing the brutal cessation of individual destinies within a universe of extreme evil.

However, the encounter with this unearthly world, acknowledged as a universe of extreme evil, had happened even before the actual act of detention, by making people aware of the fact that the absolutely arbitrary, powerful coercion and limitless crime had already become an indisputable fact, and accordingly, at any time anyone could become a helpless victim: "At the end of March I received a note from my husband that did not come through the post: 'S. and K. are arrested. My room was searched. I cannot understand what they are after. Burn everything.' Burn everything? Why, were we conspirators or criminals? What does it mean - burn everything? [...] Very well, I would burn everything I could, including books with inscriptions from the authors, so as not to compromise anyone by chance. If it had not been for the boy who loved his home I think I would have destroyed everything, so hateful was it to feel that any day the OGPU agents would come and rummage among my things, and look into all that was personal and intimate" (Tchernavin, 1934, pp. 39-40).

Despite holding the victims in fear of imminent arrest, when the arrest actually took place, the shock of the experience was in no way diminished. The mass-arrests were forms of moral preparation for V. Tchernavin and for his own detention, but the real moment when the authorities came to capture him was felt to be a living example of his close encounter with death: "The bell rang. I opened the door and saw the house superintendent with a stranger in civilian dress. I understood. The stranger handed me a paper – the order for search and arrest. I let him in. He entered the room which served as both bedroom and study and began the search. It was a very superficial one, only a formality. From the mass of papers and manuscripts in my desk he took only one notebook lying on top. When my wife came home the search was finished and I was preparing for my 'journey': two changes of underwear, a pillow, a blanket, a few pieces of sugar and several apples; there was no other food in the house. I changed my clothes. 'I am ready,' I said to the GPU agent, thinking to myself, 'ready for death" (Tchernavin, 1936, pp. 92-93).

Starting from the very moment of his arrest, the detainee went through a traumatising experience of dehumanisation at the end of which his mind and body were reduced to nothing more than a small grain of negligible humanity. Indeed, human beings fallen into the clutches of arbitrary and inhuman detention were nothing other than useless objects at the mercy of merciless masters, who only followed the regulations of their own senseless judgment, based on random choices, unreasonable impulses, and controlling desires. Therefore, detainees were forced to witness horrific spectacles set up as if to recalibrate the human limits of filth, prolonged starvation and of physical and mental torture. In this long corridor, most possibly leading to death, the first door opened to jail. We turn again to Vladimir Tchernavin and his traumatic account in which he bitterly remembers his first night in jail, which gave him the sudden and shockingly horrific pass into a universe of utter filth and extreme dehumanization: "A heavy, disgusting smell was spreading along the floor from the toilet seat which was not more than a yard from my head; a pile of stinking sawdust almost touched my pillow. Several men stood in line in front of the toilet. I felt very bad, a degrading helplessness was overcoming me. It was impossible to sleep, impossible either to get up or sit up, and there was nowhere to move as the whole floor was taken up by sleeping bodies. To save my pillow I pulled it down onto my knees, stuck my head out between the cots and leaned my shoulders against the wall. Dark, crawling dots were moving over the pillow in all directions. So began my prison education. For a novice it was quite enough" (Tchernavin, 1936, p. 98).

Unlike V. Tchernavin, S.A. Malsagoff's account does not point specifically to the physical filth of Tbilisi prison, where he served his first weeks in jail, but to the summary and arbitrary executions and the rising tension aroused by his close encounter with death: "Every week, on Tuesday nights, sixty to three-hundred persons were shot in the prison. That night was a veritable hell for the whole Metekh. We did not know who was marked down to be shot, so everyone expected to be shot. Nobody could get a wink of sleep till morning" (Malsagoff, 1926, p. 30-31).

In the late 1950s, the same triplet of physical torture, filth, and severe psychological pressure was recaptured, as if almost automatically, in the writings of A. Solzhenitsyn, V. Shalamov, E. Ginzburg and A. Dolgun, among many others, but it is important to note that this painfully complex image of human suffering began to take shape in this early period when the newly empowered political system, rapidly rising in popularity, befuddled its most ardent supporters who eagerly carried out the system's required tasks with the most pointed and malefic tenacity. If jail may be seen as hell on Earth, one may cynically call it an organised form of 'hell'. In contrast, throughout this time of rising expansion, the concentration camp was the real epitome of sheer atrocity, unbearable torture, ultimate starvation, and physical filth, while all these forms of punishment were amplified by means of deadly improvisation. The fact that the concentration camps were set up away from the Soviet power centres allowed their ruthless supervisors to implement their orders in a discretionary manner and allowed them to keep watch over thousands of detainees in improvised living conditions which, along with scarce provisions, the guards' brutality, and the completely unrealistic work norms, caused the death of thousands of people. G. Kitchin writes an accurate recording of the extent of the Gulag drama by describing several intensely horrific scenes. The following short extract is just one such revealing example: "Boots, coat and clothing were dragged from Seryozha, who was still senseless. He was lying in the snow in his underclothes and moaned as he gradually regained consciousness. Two great-coats approached carrying buckets. What a nightmare! Is this really possible? The priest was weeping: 'Seryozha, Seryozha.' They poured water over Seryozha and stood him up on his bare feet in the snow. On both sides stood sentries, rifles pointed. A dread came over us. The biting wind was getting stronger and fine snow flurried about us. Over our heads a great flock of crows was hanging in the air, battling the wind with measured wing-beats. Why did they come here now?" (Kitchin, 1935, p. 54).

One can find many similarly appalling scenes in the accounts written by other Gulag survivors. In fact, the general official attitude of guards and camp commandants was meant to squeeze the life out of the detainees' hopes and strip them of their dignity. In most cases, the guards' brutal and sadistic behaviour added to this inhuman practice, eventually leading to an amplified act of terror. Their main aim was, however, the turning of individuals into obedient slaves. It was a fact that the destiny of these helpless slaves was of no real interest to their masters as long as the activity of the Soviet repressive machinery was carried on at an unceasing pace. Therefore, in each of these early penal memoirs, the authors think and act by following the rules and instructions of their 'slave-' imposed status. Their personality and individuality, utterly questioned even at times of apparent 'liberty', were brutally rejected through a large number of symbolic acts conducted by their 'masters', who had been granted absolute power over the individual, now reduced to nothing more than an insignificant 'object': "You have arrived in the Northern Penal Camps of the OGPU. There is no district attorney here, you cannot complain to anybody. Therefore I advise you to work conscientiously and not to make any row. There can be no counter-revolution here. For attempting counterrevolution we line people up against the wall and shoot them. For rows, thieving, insubordination – also to the wall. I advise you to realize this and remember it. Not auntie's house party but a penal camp. Forget all your intelligentsia's grievances and other tricks, otherwise we shall bend and break you, you 'intelligentsia.' More than one of you has

already departed for better worlds. For refusal to work – the dungeon, and for a second offense – shooting. Understand?" (Kitchin, 1935, p. 46).

Conclusions

In recent historiographic works, there have been intense debates on the Gulag's economic aspects and on the political motivations of the Bolshevik leading class that might have been at the roots of this universe of terror (Gregory and Lazarev 2003; Marie 1989), but ultimately, the political repression of the early beginnings of the USSR and Stalin's fight for power around the 1930s, together with the typically Leninist obsession with social engineering, resulted in the transformation of the work camps into large-scale 'factories' that were based on force and the work of a gigantic army of slaves (which in the most direct and cynical sense of the word they certainly were). Leaving aside the paranoid excesses of extreme terror that occurred between 1936 and 1938, which led to summary executions similar to those taking place during the Civil War, the final objective of the Soviet concentration-camp system was in its first stage to increase the number of slaves, and then, by generating permanent terror, to prepare the whole population for a similarly tragic fate. The Gulag's survivors before World War II had been well aware of this fact, which they had personally and tragically experienced, but their detention and their later rescue (through escape, paid ransom, or time served in prison and camps) deprived them of an extended view over the entire historic epoch in which crime and horror achieved unprecedented depths and which were not brought to light until after World War II.

We specifically draw attention to this fact since the corpus of these early accounts about the Gulag manages to give voice only to a small fragment from the immensely huge Soviet concentration-camp industry that was booming around that time. One should consider not only the dark reality of the forced labour concentration camps, but also the equally dramatic reality of mass deportations and forced exiles. In addition to the mass arrests of 'wrecking' specialists (for instance, V. Tchenavin) and of small entrepreneurs involved in the New Economic Policy of the 1920s (such as G. Kitchin or B. Cederholm), starting from 1928 the waves of deportations became as deadly and ferocious as the previous mass arrests. In the early 1930s, the deportations of the 'kulaks' (known as a sub-category of 'class enemies' and purposely vaguely defined) and the deportation of "undesirable elements" were forms of extreme inhumanity while the traumatising episodes of these acts were probably far more savage than the ones recounted from jails and from forced labour camps. Whole families belonging to this social class, because of their modicum of prosperity, were sent into exile in the most hostile living conditions in Siberia or in Kazakhstan's southern desert, and turned into slaves[7], exactly as had happened with the detainees from the work camps.

The tragedy of over two million farmers, hundreds of thousands of deaths, families split apart and orphaned children who would never recover from the trauma was barely known and acknowledged in the epoch. True, in 1933 a volume of about one hundred pages came out in London, which was in fact a collection of letters sent from these unearthly realms of starvation, extreme temperatures and utter despair[8], where the deportees, who could be 12 year-old children or old men of over 70 years old, were made to work around the clock in extreme conditions and provided with very meagre food supplies. This counts as an insignificantly small shred from an immense ocean of human suffering that would have to wait long until its true and complete story could be released to the world, and this actually happened after the Soviet's definite removal from power.

The tragedy of the mass deportations of the 1930s spoke the language of the silent mainly because most of the deportees were ordinary people. After many years, their dramatic and painful stories will be retold by their children or will speak for themselves from the terrifying data recorded by the archives. But one should remember that the deportations of the 1930s

were just the beginning of increasingly larger waves of deportations following the nationalisations during the war (this was the case with the Germans from the Volga, the Polish from the East, the Romanians from the Bessarabia, the Crimean Tatars, and the Chechens from the Caucaus, etc.), which means that the stories of human suffering systematically continued so that in the end the corpus of traumatic accounts was dramatically amplified after the war. However, in the 1930s, the concentration-camp system grew significantly larger so that soon it covered a 'rich' area of territories. What is now known as the Gulag Archipelago would steadily and forcibly extend beyond the North-Eastern region, thus integrating new locations that would soon become essential hallmarks of Soviet concentration-camp terror. Pechora, Vorkuta, Norilsk, Kolyma, resounding voices in the 1930s, were symbols of authentic horror in the postwar period that began to be used as narrative engines for the painful accounts of Gulag survivors after the end of the war.

Endnotes:

[1] "The Secret Speech (On the Personality Cult and its Consequences", also known as "The Khrushchev's Report" (February 1956). See Medveedev, 2003, pp. 95-111.

[2] It is important to note the fact that Marvin L. Kalb, who writes the introduction to the first edition of the novel in English, draws attention to the yet undiscovered extent of the tragedy and to its connection with the overall Communist system (Kalb, 1963, p. 12).

[3] Malsagov's account stands as the starting point for Raymond Duguet's book *Une bagne en Russie rouge: Solovki, l'île de la faim, de supplices, de la mort* (1927), the first thoroughly documented study about the Soviet gulag, which, however, did not impact dramatically the consciousness of the French reading public, as a result of the aggressively intense influence of the left-side politicians in France.

[4] Tatiana Tchernavin, *Escape from the Soviets*, New York, E. P. Dutton & CO, Inc., 1934; Vladimir V. Tchernavin, *I Speak for the Silent (Prisoners of the Soviets)*, Boston - New York, Hale, Cushman & Flint, 1936.

[5] V. Tchernavin ironically calls "novels" these forms of confession and their wretched authors "novelists" (chapter 23 "The Novel Writers", pp. 178-185).

[6] In Russian Россия в концлагере. The book was published in instalments in 1936 in the Russian immigration magazine from Paris (see Toker, 2000, p. 31). The English version came out in two volumes in 1938, in London, Williams and Norgate Ltd., translated by Warren Harrow.

[7] See Courtois et al, 1997, pp. 164 – 177. An equally interesting analysis of this dark historic period and its impact on the destinies of ordinary individuals can be found in Figes, 2007, especially chapter 2, "The Great Break (1928-1932), pp. 76 - 147.

[8] *Out of the Deep: Letters from Soviet Timber Camps***,** London, G. Bles, 1933 (fragments from this volume can be found in Steinberg, 1971, pp. 281 - 287).

Works cited:

Applebaum, A., 2011. *Gulagul. O istorie*. Bucharest: Humanitas.

Bezsonov, Y., 1928. *Mes vingt-six prisons et mon evasion de Solovki*. traduit du russe par E. Semenoff. Paris: Payot.

Bruce Lockhart, R. H., 1932. *Memoirs of a British Agent*. London: Putnam.

Bufnea, E., 1931. *Cruciați, tirani și bandiți*; Vol. 1: *În Rusia sovietelor*, Vol. 2: *În Siberia lui Kolciak.* București: Editura Tipografiile Române Unite.

Cederholm, B., 1929. *In the Clutches of Tcheka*. New York: Houghton.

Courtois, S. et al., 1997. *Le livre noir du communisme. Crimes, terreur et répression*. Paris: Edition Robert Laffont.

Danzas, I., 1935. *Bagne rouge: Souvenirs d'une prisonnière au pays des Soviets*. Juvizy: Les Édition du Cerf (Centre dominicain d'études russes).

De Beausobre, I., 1938. *The Woman Who Could Not Die*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Duguet, R., 2004 (first edition 1927). *Un bagne en Russie rouge.* Paris: Balland.

Figes, O., 2007. *The Whisperers. Private Life in Stalin's Russia.* London: Penguin.

Gregory, P. R., Lazarev, V. (eds.), 2003. *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag.* Stanford: Hoover Institution Press - Stanford University.

Kalb, M. L. Introduction, In: Solzhenitsyn, A., 1963. *One Day in The Life of Ivan Denisovich*. New York – London: E.P. Dutton, pp. v-xii.

Kalpashnikoff, A., 1920. *A Prisoner of Trotsky's*. Garden City; New York: Doubleday – Page & Company.

Kitchin, G., 1935. *Prisoner of the OGPU*. London – New York – Toronto: Longmans.

Malsagoff, S. A., 1926. *An Island Hell: A Soviet Prison in the Far North*, Translated by F. H. Lyon. London: A. M. Philpot LTD.

Marie, J., 1989. *Le Goulag*. Paris: PUF.

McCullagh, F., 1922. *A Prisoner of the Reds. The Story of A British Officer Captured in Siberia*. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company Publishers.

Medvedev, Z. A., Medvedev, R. A., 2003. *The Unknown Stalin*. London; New York: I. B. Taurus.

Naudeau, L. Five months in Moscow prisons. In *Current History Magazine of the New York Times*, October 1919, pp. 127-36 and November 1919, pp. 318-321.

Naudeau, L., 1920. *En prison sous la terreur rouse*. Paris: Librairie Hachette.

Rešetovskaja, N., 1995. *Soljeniţîn*. Iaşi: Mydo Center, 1995.

Soljeni□în, A. I., 2008. *Arhipelagul Gulag*, vol. II. Bucharest: Univers.

Solonevich, I., 1938. *Russia in Chains: A Record of Unspeakable Suffering*. London: Williams and Norgate Ltd..

Steinberg, J., 1971. *Verdict of Three Decades: from the Literature of Individual Revolt against Soviet Communism: 1917-1950*. Manchester: Ayer Publishing.

Tchernavin, T., 1934. *Escape from the Soviets*. New York: E. P. Dutton & CO, Inc.

Tchernavin, V. V., 1936. *I Speak for the Silent (Prisoners of the Soviets)*. Boston; New York; Hale: Cushman & Flint.

Toker, L., 2000. *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Tucan D. Istoria relatărilor timpurii despre gulagul sovietic (1920-1950). In: Mihalache, A., Cioflâncă, A. (eds.), 2013. *Istoria recentă altfel: perspective cultural*. Iaşi: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iaşi, 2013, pp. 61-78.

Tvardovsky, A. Forward to A. Solzhenitsyn, One Day in The Life of Ivan Denisovich. In: Solzhenitsyn, A., 1963. *One Day in The Life of Ivan Denisovich*. New York; London: E.P. Dutton, pp. ii-iv.

Dumitru Tucan
Faculty of Letters
West University of Timișoara
Timișoara 300223
Blvd. V. Parvan, 4
Romania
dtucan@litere.uvt.ro