(RE)CONSTRUCTING THE SELF IN WOMEN'S AUTOFICTION: THE CASE OF SAŞA ZARE'S *DEZRĂDĂCINARE*

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ABSTRACT. *(Re)constructing the Self in Women's Autofiction: The Case of Saşa Zare's* Dezrădăcinare. This paper aims to examine the (re)construction of the female subject in contemporary autobiographical fiction by looking into Saşa Zare's debut novel, *Dezrădăcinare*. Drawing on feminist and postfeminist theory as well as research on self-writing centred on women's inscription of personhood in their works, this study attempts to investigate the relationship between the narrator and the narrated self, focusing on the negotiated distance between the two fictional constructs. This analysis will build on concepts such as metatextuality, autotheory, performativity, and on Lacanian and post-Lacanian feminist means of understanding the self as a product of societal and cultural discourse (as opposed to the idea of a unified self), by centring on the narrative techniques that show the narrator's perception of herself, and struggle to represent different parts of her identity (the writer, the daughter, the girlfriend, the student and the therapy patient). As language plays an important part in rendering the feminine subject's fragmented vision of her identity, this paper will highlight the role of personal and societal narratives in constructing an idea of the self.

Keywords: Saşa Zare, Romanian literature, autofiction, women's writing, autotheory, metatextuality.

REZUMAT. *(Re)construcţia sinelui în autoficţiunea feminină: cazul roma-nului* Dezrădăcinare *de Saşa Zare.* Această lucrare îşi propune o analiză a (re)construcţiei subiectului feminin în literatura contemporană de factură

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autobiografică, aplecându-se asupra romanului de debut al autoarei Sașa Zare, "Dezrădăcinare". Pornind de la teorii feministe și postfeministe, precum și de la studii concentrate asupra inscripționării subiectului feminin în literatură, acest eseu va încerca să examineze relația dintre naratoare și sinele narat, accentul fiind plasat asupra distanței dintre cele două constructe ficționale. Studiul de caz propus pornește de la noțiuni precum metatextualitate, autoteorie, performativitate, dar și de la o paradigma feministă și postfeministă care valorizează tradiția psihanalitică (în special cea lacaniană și post-lacaniană). O astfel de poziționare critică deschide lucrarea spre o înțelegere a subiectul drept produs al practicilor discursive socio-culturale (perspectivă poziționată în opoziția tradiției care postulează unitatea absolută a sinelui). Analiza se va axa pe dificultatea naratoarei de a unifica diferite părți ale identității sale prin scris (autoarea, fiica, iubita, pacienta), subiectul feminin oferind o percepție fragmentată asupra propriului sine. Un rol important în redarea acestei viziuni este îndeplinit de către limbaj, motiv pentru care lucrarea de față va sublinia contribuția narațiunilor personale și societale în procesul formării sinelui ficțional.

Cuvinte-cheie: Sașa Zare, literatură română, autoficțiune, scriitură feminină, autoteorie, metatextualitate.

Theoretical framework

Autofiction and (auto)biographical writing has benefited from renewed attention after the poststructuralist turn in the 1960s and 1970s, which emphasised the fragmentary nature of the self and human subjectivity as opposed to the possibility of imparting and ascertaining objective truths. Sașa Zare is a contemporary Romanian award-winning author whose debut novel works in the vein of self-writing.

Her novel might best be described using the word "autofiction," a term that has gained considerable attention since its coinage in 1970s France. As Johannie Gratton points out, this French term appeared during a period of disbelief in "the power of memory and language to access definitive truths about the past or the self" (2001, 86). Serge Dubrovsky's coinage and initial definition of the term "autofiction," as cited by Johannie Gratton in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, states that the genre relies on a blending of fiction with reality, achieved by entrusting "the language of an adventure to the adventure of language" (86). Furthermore, Gratton points to the subversive nature of this term when it comes to its relationship to truth and fiction. By rejecting a "referentialist paradigm sustaining conventional auto/biographical discourse" (86), autofiction places itself in between the mimetic and purely fictional impulse. Further in the

Encyclopedia of Life Writing, Michael Sheringham anchors autofiction's impact beyond a solipsist understanding of the world: even though this genre works by blurring the lines between fiction and reality and centring on self-exploration, it is especially effective when this "exploration of identity occurs in a wider socio-political context" (2001, 340). This is also the case for Saşa Zare's novel, as it is not only a work that seeks to explore the narrator's self, but more precisely the narrator's self and her relationship with others as a queer woman who has immigrated from Moldavia to Romania.

I opt for autofiction instead of merely using the term "autobiografiction" to describe Zare's narrative, even though both point towards the relationship between one's lived experiences and fiction. The distinction between these two concepts relates to autobiografiction's investigation into "a self's autobiography" and fiction, as compared to autofiction which is centred on "fiction and a self" (Saunders 2010, 7). I find autofiction to be the more fitting term as it is a notion directly related to the ability of fiction and language to convey truths outside of a mimetic understanding of reality, but still valid in a fictional attempt to explore the self.

Building on concepts such as *Postfeminism, metatextuality, text as productivity* (Kristeva), and *autotheory* (Fournier), as well as the understanding of the subject from a Lacanian and post-Lacanian frame, this paper aims to explore how the *writing subject* (Kristeva) and the narrated self are depicted and reconstructed in Saşa Zare's novel. Before diving into the analysis, I will attempt to justify my methodological choices. The relationship between feminism and Postfeminism is a sinuous one. Misha Kavka credits Toril Moi with coining the term "Postfeminism" in her book *Sexual/Textual* Politics (2002, 29), but Moi will only dedicate herself to discussing the implications of this notion in her 1988 article "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Style: Recent Feminist Criticism in the United States". In this article she responds to criticism aimed at her earlier work, *Sexual/Textual* Politics and tries to imagine a future trajectory for the feminist movement. Moi opens a discussion regarding Postfeminism's underlying paradox: how can one be a Postfeminist (postmodern feminist) if postmodernity, according to Lyotard, means disbelief in "all metanarratives," thus including feminism? (4) Even though she holds a critical stance towards Postfeminism's attempt to combine both poststructuralist and postmodernist thought, often resulting in a discourse that centres itself on abstract notions such as the "ontological feminization of Otherness" (19), she recognises that Postfeminism's attempt to escape definitions and categories might be a way to undermine the "patriarchal paradigms of Western thought" (5). Moi is therefore not rejecting Postfeminism altogether, but recognises its importance to the feminist project as long as one manages to push "past the political impasse of postfeminism" (19).

What Toril Moi sought to remedy were both the dichotomy between liberal and radical feminists, as well as academics' approach to feminist theory. The latter was to be achieved by reevaluating the importance of political efficacy in lieu of convoluted academic jargon. Even though this term meant to be a critique of the sometimes essentialist perspective of second-wave feminism, it is important to note that the prefix "post" has made it so that this idea could easily be corrupted and appropriated by antifeminists. As Misha Kavka notes, the "post" in Postfeminism was originally meant as a methodological and theoretical shift (2002, 29), however the fact that it has been rendered as a historical break from feminism (30) has given rise to the dispute surrounding its meaning. The problem lies, as Kavka further points out, with situating feminism in a linear history – an argument that she supports with Kristeva's notion of the inherent link between the feminine and "cyclical temporality" (29). While not entirely dependent on it, Postfeminism does draw some of its theoretical roots from Poststructuralism, namely from the poststructuralist critique of stable identities, essentialism, and its reliance on discourse analysis in examining power relations. The versatility of working with a poststructuralist lens gives greater flexibility to postfeminists' investigation of power and sexuality.

In spite of tendentious readings of Postfeminism, which understand its prefix "post" as a marker denoting the irrelevance of the feminist movement,[2] I believe the applicability of the term, understood here as a line of thought which borrows from postmodernism and poststructuralism (Moi Feminism, 19), but more specifically from poststructuralism's "notion of the dispersed unstable subject" as Wright stresses (2000, 5), stands in the case of studies that intertwine a poststructuralist and a psychoanalytic view of a text. Taking the idea of the non-stable identity of the subject as my starting point, anchoring my essay in these three paradigms (Postfeminism, Poststructuralism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis) provides ample ground for an investigation, but also for the possibility of a positive resemantisation of Postfeminism by combining it with other non-essentialist frameworks. Theories circumscribed in an anti-essentialist worldview are

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[2] For further reading, see Angela McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism. Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2009) or *Interrogating Postfeminism. Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (2007) edited by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra. The essays in the anthology edited by Tasker and Negra (which also includes an essay by McRobbie) start from the definition of Postfeminism as "a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the "pastness" of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned or celebrated" (1), as well as the link between Postfeminism and neoliberal feminism, by emphasising "emphatic individualism" and the "figure of woman as empowered consumer" (2). These sociological studies differ from Moi's view of Postfeminism not only by aligning it with neoliberalism, but also by stating that Postfeminism is clearly political (5), whereas Moi was especially critical of its refusal to commit to a political position.

particularly operable in the case of (auto)biographical writing, as this type of genre allows for a fluid exploration of the subject. Before moving further with my investigation, I find it necessary to stress out that I am not labelling Zare's novel as nonfictional, but as a blend between autotheory and fiction. This is reflected on the structural level of Zare's writing, as her work is built on at least two levels. One of them can be described using autotheory as a methodological tool because it relies on a subversive attitude towards "dominant epistemologies" (Fournier 2021, 13), and uses metatextual strategies to extend the scope of the novel by theorising the writing practice. Autotheory is therefore a level added to the fictional world; it is a strategy employed by the narrator in order to extend novelistic discussion. The other textual level contains the plot, the events that move the narrative forward.

Language and "real literature" as space and practice

Dezrădăcinare paves the way for an important conversation regarding the idea of "real literature" (Bâlici and Iovănel 2022) as well as the means by which a female writer can integrate herself in a patriarchal literary system. Saşa Zare suggests that while attempting to conform to literary norms imposed by male writers, women might experience a schism at a personal level, resulting from the fact that established writing patterns cannot adequately be used to give meaning to their own experiences (2022, 330). Asserting her style as going against the grain set by the canon, the discourse of the female writer can be interpreted as belonging to one of the four fundamental types of Lacanian discourses, namely to the hysteric. In her 2020 study concerning Lacan and feminist theory, Rahna Mckey Carusi looks back on the French psychoanalyst's main concepts to evaluate their place in today's feminist tradition and use them as tools to investigate how women have repositioned themselves in male-centred narratives. According to Carusi, the Lacanian hysteric is always identified with the feminine as her status is determined by her exclusion from patriarchal discourse (2020, 29). For Lacan, reality is generated by discourse, one of the key concepts associated with one's positioning in the symbolic order of language and culture being that of gender (or in Lacan's terms *sexuation* – a concept which does not resume itself to biological sex but also entails the idea of a position generated by social constructs).

Gender plays an important role even in literary discourse, especially in the reception of literary works throughout the ages. When it comes to the way that criticism has approached the question of gender in literary texts, Anna Livia discerns between two of them: one which sees "gender as cultural property" and subsumes categories such as feminine/masculine writing style and one that

sees "gender as morphological property" to analyse how the linguistic gender system of different languages has been implemented in literary works (2003, 142). She denounces the search for the "female sentence," attesting that there is no correlation between being a woman and a specific style of writing (145). From Livia's perspective, it would seem that the only differences attributed to a feminine and a masculine stylistics stem from preconceived notions regarding how men and women convey emotion and information through their writing. Still, Sașa Zare's writing persona cannot help but feel as if the text she is immersing herself in while writing is a "borrowed land" (2022, 43), a metaphor that clearly illustrates women writers' peripheral position in the literary world, not related to a lower quality of text production, but to the wider issue of gaining intellectual credibility. The uncertainty that characterises the narrator's relationship with the text is further exemplified by her inability to choose between tenses, as she borders between writing her novel using a combination of past tenses or sticking to the present tense. The reader gets to see extracts of the text written in the past before the narrator decides to continue writing in the present, a sign that she is consciously attempting to reverse her hesitancy towards the actions she is describing.

The text also feels like borrowed terrain because of the impossibility of authentically constructing oneself through language. From a Lacanian perspective, the subject feels alienated by its very entry into language, something that Zare also depicts in her novel. The feeling of estrangement does not only occur because the narrating self attempts to (re)write herself without employing previous conventions, but also because of her indecisiveness concerning her approach to language: is it necessary to use formal, standard language in order to write well or would a writing style that retains influences from the Moldavian dialect give way to more authenticity? (Zare 2022, 135-6). When meditating on her view of the text as unstable she turns to ask herself: "Is this how I'm feeling in relation to Moldova?"[3] Throughout the novel, the narrator tries to make a clear distinction between her life in Moldova and her life in Romania. Not only does Romania occupy a more central position in relationship to Moldova (reason for which the narrator opts to go to a Romanian university), but it also guarantees enough distance between herself and her mother, who is depicted as emotionally suffocating. Although Moldova is the place where she gets to spend time with her friend, Xenia, it is also a place where she regresses into her old way of living, having to once again assume the role of being the emotional caretaker of her mother. However, in the process of writing the novel, the narrating self maintains an affectionate view towards her homeland, inserting not only formative, but

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[3] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original Romanian reads: "Oare așa mă simt acum în relație cu Moldova?" (Zare 2022, 43)

also humorous moments from her childhood (for example her time spent with "tanti"[4] Liuba, even though one of the key moments associated with the story of tanti Liuba [the devil episode] is described as profoundly frightening).

In contrast to Moldova, Romania is also seen as a cultural hub, a place of literary festivals and poetry readings, whereas the narrator's home country is one marked by creative inactivity: "*nothing ever happens here.*"[5] This explains the reason for everyone's fascination with Alice, the narrator's ex-girlfriend, who had completed her Bachelor's degree in Cluj and had integrated herself in the Romanian literary circle. She is perceived by both the narrator and Xenia as an intruder: not only had she already received validation from the literary world, but she proceeds to criticise Xenia's poems based on the norms of the Romanian language. The reason she tries to impose Romanian grammar as the golden standard relates to the deeper issue of centre vs. periphery. If one writes in the Moldavian dialect one risks "not to be taken seriously," which will in turn have a disastrous effect according to Alice: "*We will be stuck in this country forever*".[6] Writing in Romanian is therefore not only a marker of seriousness and maturity, but also an element that guarantees the circulation of the literary product and social mobility in terms of a limited cosmopolitanism.

The way in which the protagonist perceives language as something to be performed rather than as a mechanism for self-expression ties into the novel's overarching theme of displacement, of experiencing a sense of dislocation both at home (Republic of Moldova) and abroad (in this case Romania) which translates into an ambivalent relationship with discourse itself. In matters of discourse analysis, Foucault's work has informed much of feminist scholarship and has provided a useful framework with which to examine discursive power dynamics. Nevertheless, as Carusi points out, the limitations of a Foucauldian investigation lie within too close a focus on identity politics, whereas a turn towards an understanding of discourse in the Lacanian sense (as both transindividual and transsubjective) would shift the emphasis towards how certain desires that inform traditional narratives relate to repressions at a societal level (2020, 6). Gaining a better understanding of how these traditional narratives are formed is something that can be aided by fiction, as literary texts engage with broader social and political structures, sometimes questioning said structures. The narrating self in Sașa Zare's novel scrutinises traditional institutions such as marriage, the nuclear family built upon heteronormativity,

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[4] A Romanian term used for older women in the community, comparable to "auntie".

[5] Italics are to be found in the original as well. "La noi niciodată nu se întâmplă nimic." (Zare 2022, 260)

[6] Italics are to be found in the original as well. "O să rămânem blocați în țara asta forever" (Zare 2022, 259)

and the conservative nature of the literary world. By challenging her own relationship with setting boundaries, the narrating self peers into deeper issues related to being a woman.

One of the prominent issues tackled relates to the constraining nature of expectations placed on mothers in a traditional environment. Required to abandon their ambitions and focus their entire attention on raising their children, these demands are in turn perpetuated by the same mothers on the younger generations, turning into a cycle that can only be broken by casting a critical look on commonplace tropes. The narrator's relationship with her own mother is of a complicated nature, making it so that the novel allocates plenty of narrative space to explore its construction. Although the mother is presented as suffocating and emotionally dependent on her daughter, this is in part explained by the traditional gender roles that mothers are expected to fulfil. The narrating self-recognises the constraints imposed by "familial systems" (Zare 2022, 107) and the normative nature of such structures. Using the metaphor of the "matryoshka" (107), the narrator peers into the limits that have been set by her mother's socio-political and familial environment. Nevertheless, the novel does not imply a reductionist view of selfhood, one that erases the agency of the individual, but rather acknowledges the elements that may have hindered further personal development. Therefore, while Sașa does at times show herself to be sympathetic towards her mother's over-controlling behaviour, she also acknowledges the importance of gaining distance from her. The very efficacy of this distance is however questioned in the beginning of the novel when uncertainty concerning the very possibility of detaching from one's mother is brought into discussion: "You separate from your mother, yes, but do you ever really separate from your mother?"[7] The answer to this question will unfold throughout the entire story. While literal estrangement and setting firm boundaries are possible, the narrator will continue to carry the image of her mother into her adult life.

Following Zare's narrative one can observe how the narrator tries to highlight different discursive practices at work. This is achieved through the double layer of the text (mentioned in the section discussing the theoretical framework employed in this analysis) which works by having the narrator use autotheory in the fictional world through metatextual insertions. Metafiction is famously defined by Patricia Waugh as a type of writing "which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (1984, 2), a "tendency" as opposed to a genre which operates based on a process of "frame and frame-break" (14). This tendency is implemented in the novel as a way to shatter the

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[7] "Te desparți de mama, da, dar te desparți vreodată cu adevărat de mama?" (Zare 2022, 20)

illusion of a seamless process of writing, but also as a way to offer explanations related to certain novelistic choices or character portrayals (Zare 2022, 330-34). These clarifications constitute a revolutionary act in themselves, sustaining the idea that it is impossible for someone to have enough authority to decide what does and does not belong in the category of so-called "real literature". Julia Kristeva's view on the power of text places it in the proximity of a political revolution. In her definition, the text is seen as "productive violence" owing to its hybridising the unconscious, subjective, and social relations into one mechanism that both constructs and makes itself subject to its own deconstruction (1984, 16), but also because of how it "brings about in the subject what the other [political revolution] introduces into society" (17). By acknowledging the revolutionary aspect of the text, Kristeva underlines how the narrative signifying system manages to deconstruct the very discourse that makes up the fabric (or textuality, in a poststructuralist view) of society itself by engaging with it through a double-aimed practice; one that provides a space where structuring (especially visible in mimetic logic) and destructuring tendencies (confronting unconscious, subjective and societally internalised narratives) can co-exist. Only as this dual practice can the text be "jouissance and revolution" (17).

The narrator's reworking of societal narratives through therapy and writing (which constitutes a therapeutic act in itself) is revolutionary both at an individual level (allowing Zare the necessary space for processing) and on a literary one. *Dezrădăcinare* situates itself in the contemporary debate concerning "real" literature, more specifically in a network of writers who produce politically powerful texts but still have a difficult time justifying the aesthetic value of their work. Zare attempts to surpass the distance between politics and aesthetics through the way in which she intertwines statements regarding literature with powerful political messages. When the narrating self finds out that Răzvan (Alice's boyfriend because of whom she had split up with the narrator) has written a book about his relationship with Alice which distorts the narrator's involvement and paints her out to be a "predatory, crazy"[8] lesbian she points to the possibility for manipulative narratives to be turned into literature. Such writing operates on a system of marginalisation, which "can erase people from humanity."[9] Răzvan is depicted as holding discursive power because of his destructive use of fiction, something that points not only to his reductionist view concerning the narrator's and Alice's relationship, but also to his privilege as a white heterosexual writer with credit in the literary world. The narrating self's choice of words, "*He writes me,*"[10]

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[8] "prădătoare, nebună" (Zare 2022, 385)
[9] "poate șterge oameni afară din umanitate" (Zare 2022, 387)
[10] "mă scrie" (Zare 2022, 385)

clearly indicates the violence that accompanies misrepresentation and the implicit power imbalance to be read in a misconstrued narrative.

Intertextuality and the marginalising tactics of literature

Returning to matters of aesthetics, poststructuralist critics such as Kristeva, who understand the text as emerging from the textuality of society, from "the social text" (Allen 2000, 36) refuse to define it in simple terms of aesthetic autonomy. Understood instead as a heterogenous practice, writing assimilates and recodes culturally constructed textuality. This is Kristeva's justification for considering the novel as constituted through "*ideologemes*". This concept refers to the study of text as intertextuality, meaning an understanding of "novelistic practices" as being "linked with the totality of novelistic production" (1980, 37), as influenced by the extra-novelistic (society, culture, history) in its creation. In Graham Allen's interpretation of Kristeva's notion of "intertextuality," the concept is to be perceived as a reworking of the Bakhtinian "dialogic," the reason for a text's inability to convey clear-cut meanings being its embodiment of "society's dialogic conflict over the meaning of words" (2000, 36). Even though Bakhtin focuses on human language and Kristeva's "intertext" glides into a more general territory of textuality, both theorists understand the inseparability of the written text and the place and moment in time that it occupies (36).

If intertext, as understood in Kristevan logic and as explained by Allen, means that a "text is not an isolated object, but a compilation of cultural textuality" (36), emerging from the "social text" while continuing to exist "within society and history" (37), then *Dezrădăcinare* assumes its intertextual position consciously. Saşa Zare states that her intentions lie in opening up a common space that makes healing and processing trauma possible, that sheds light on the societal fabric (the "social text") defined by the differences it imposes through its systems of exclusion.[11] Through the act of claiming the text's origins as coming from a background determined by society's treatment of marginalised groups – women, queer people – the novel seeks to build bridges between itself and its readers. In this way it tries to alleviate the effects of what have often been the discriminatory practices of literature that integrated into itself the same categories and hierarchies that stood at the basis of societal oppression. The novel thus is consciously opposed to literature written out of blissful ignorance, rooted in the "central" position occupied by its authors (Zare 2022, 387).

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[11] See the dedication page.

Autotheory and performativity

The fact that *Dezrădăcinare* contains so many passages where the author theorises upon the state of literature and her writing process offers one the possibility to read Zare's work through the theoretical framework provided by Fournier, namely that of autotheory (the suggestion for such an analysis has also been provided by Mihnea Bâlici (see Bâlici and Iovănel 2022). What autotheory does is to provide authors with a unique chance of dismantling dominant narratives and analysing their own lives through theory (Fournier 2021, 13). The necessity of such a term as "*autotheory*," as opposed to memoir, manifesto or autobiography, ties into a wider debate concerning the splitting of literature into categories such as women's and men's writing. Furthermore, the term *theory* works as a token of intellectual credibility (26-7) in an academic environment that tends to value theory for the cultural capital that its incorporation implies. Autotheory fits perfectly within a feminist understanding of the world since it takes the experience of the subject as its starting point, asserting the personal as a fertile source from whence to commence theorising. The autotheoretical tendency is inherently connected to metatextuality since it expands on postmodernism's metatextual techniques (269), providing thus both ground for self-reflectivity (as exemplified in the novel through the narrating self's constant self-examining of her identity as daughter, writer, girlfriend) and glimpses into an author's perception of her work.

As a liminal genre, autotheory brings out what Kristeva considers to be the essential dimension of the text, that of being a "practice calling into question (symbolic and social) finitudes by proposing new signifying devices" (1984, 210). What such a practice accomplishes is to suggest a new angle from which to approach theory and practice, fusing these two categories often thought of as separate as in the tradition posed by the separation of mind and body in the logic of Cartesian dualism.[12] The success of Saşa Zare's novel must also be considered in light of the fluidity with which it connects the personal and the political, the two being understood as synergistic and interchangeable in the context of this narrative. The narrator transposes what she experiences at home into her writing. Personal and political aspects become clear analogues: the narrator's feelings of not being in control of her own body or life, describing them both as a "playground" (Zare, 2022, 174), as recipients for her mother's vision get translated into moments of uncertainty regarding her literary force. The implicit marginalisation that comes with non-conformation to heterosexual norms are morphed into the sense of not belonging to the centre of the literary

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[12] For an elaboration on the discussion of Cartesian dualism see Fournier 2021, 50.

world due to stylistic unorthodoxy. Wanting to have a say in other people's perception of her, the narrator takes control of the reader's perception of the text; personal explanations are turned into metatextual gestures deemed as necessary for female writers who have to reinvent language in order to properly describe their experiences (330). Insofar as the political and the personal construe themselves as mutually generative, the self manages to escape the limits of the private and the domestic, boundaries stereotypically associated with women's writing, engaging in broader discussions that extend to the extra-literary. These discussions are, nonetheless, reflected in the creative process of an author, in a way that Fournier finds similar to the "postconfessional" mode and the idea of performativity (2021, 27).

Going past the autotheoretical level of the fictional world, autofiction itself can be linked with the notion of performativity. As Gratton points out, performativity is inherent to autofiction, since this is a genre that fulfils the double role of being both a "mirror" and a "scene" for writing. This effect is achieved by promoting "act-value at the expense of truth value" (2001, 86). What Gratton means by this is that, as opposed to autobiography, which is a genre that places value on a direct rapport between truth and writing, autofiction comes closer to being a performance. Abandoning the rigid distinction between the categories of truth and fiction, it opts for a view of fiction that places it neither "as the other [n]or the outside of truth" (86).

Performativity has been at the centre of debates surrounding the fragmentary nature of the self within feminist theory inspired by Judith Butler's explanation of gender-as-performance. The narrating self's relationship with writing in Zare's prose broaches the topic of performativity but refuses the description of writing as a performative act, understood here in the negative light of a mask that one puts up for an easier labelling of one's occupation. The preferred analogy for writing as an activity is that of a tiny/wild/scared animal (Zare 2022, 108, 402) that visits the author and makes the production of text possible. At first glance, such a metaphor appears as a rephrasing of an already dated description of the writer receiving inspiration (either from external sources- nature, a Muse, or spontaneously, without the intervention of any element from the outside world). However, Zare is careful to formulate this metaphor clearly to convey a tense relationship between the writer and this animal, one that requires patience, willingness to welcome it and to accommodate one's habits to fit its caprices rather than as a transaction through which an author benefits from inspiration without putting in much effort. The analogy of text as a snail (26) further supports this argument. The image aims to reveal the tediousness and meticulous nature of self-writing explicit. These non-anthropocentric images illustrating the writing process serve to dismantle the

image of the writer as sole master over his own text, as well as the preconception of inspiration as a marker of literary genius. The writing process is also described as a unifying act, connecting disparate facets of the self (250) which would otherwise be understood as separate realities (queerness and the narrating self's life). The only other element which provides a sense of unity is corporeal experience, described as a vessel through which one gets to "understand the world."[13] The materiality of the body and the text provide ground for exploration and for trying to reconcile a disjointed self.

A non-essentialist view on the subject

Denying the existence of a proper unified self because the contemporary world only allows for fragmentariness and a "chaotic blend"[14] relates to Postfeminism's attempts to consider what the existence of an unstable self-identity might entail. Postfeminism offers a critique of traditional feminism for failing to consider the possibility of another mode of existence outside the one provided by a positive view of the self, according to Elizabeth Wright (2000, 3-5). Wright investigates the notion of the destabilised, dispersed subject by shifting her attention towards the tradition of Lacanian psychoanalysis, but also by looking into the work of certain poststructuralist thinkers. Wright does not categorise these thinkers (such as Kristeva or Cixous) as being Postfeminist, but rather inquires the works of French theorists to shed light on the close connection between certain strands of French feminisms and psychoanalysis, namely its affinity to the notion of the unconscious. This seems opposed to Anglophone feminism, which had adopted a more reductive stance towards psychoanalytic works (8). Wright's understanding of Postfeminism will borrow its non-essentialist view of the subject from the writings of such poststructuralist thinkers.

It is important to further discuss Kristeva's notion of the "writing subject," as this poststructuralist concept transcribes a non-essentialist view of the subject onto the realm of text, specifically onto the authorial figure. In the introduction to Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Leon S. Roudiez explains the theorist's choice to identify the writer with the notion of a "writing subject" as opposed to an "author". The latter "emphasises the conscious intent of a writer who has author-ity over the meaning of his work" (1984, 7), while the term "writing subject" also acknowledges the role that the unconscious plays in the process of text production (1984, 7). This concept goes against a rationalist understanding of writer as demiurgic creator in favour of one that emphasises the workings of the unconscious on writing. For Kristeva, the practice of

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[13] "să înțeleg lumea" (Zare 2022, 374)
[14] "melanj dezordonat" (Zare 2022, 93)

significance involves destabilising dominant systems of signification, the text as "productive violence" (16) being able to accomplish such a task because it refutes any theory of the subject as entirely knowable. Owing to this explanation, Graham Allen points out that in Kristeva's work "it is not only the text that is in process but also the subject, author, reader, analyst" (2000, 34). That *Dezrădăcinare* exploits and integrates into its very structure a similar perception on the text is what makes it, as some commentary already points out, impossible to exhaustively analyse from a single point of view (Crețu 2022).

This impossibility for an exhaustive interpretation can also be traced to the fragmentary way in which the writing subject presents herself. The disjointed view on her own existence adds to the ambiguity of the text and brings out the existence of limits in the investigation of subjecthood. Max Saunders also refers to the subject in (auto)biographical writing as one that does not necessarily constitute an object of knowledge in the classical sense, for it is involved in a process of "re-construction" more so than one of construction. Such an effect is a result of the way the self is represented in mediated fashion to the reader (Saunders 2010, 502). This "incommensurability of self and text" points in the direction of a complete failure of this type of writing to deliver the very selfhood that it bases its narrative upon (505). This being the reason, Saunders suggests the usage of phrases such as the "autobiographic-" or the "fictional effect" (526) when referring to writing inspired by (auto)biographical experiences. Zare's novel contains two levels (which retain both effects): that of the diary, dedicated towards trauma-processing and reflections on the act of writing, and that of the written text, which is still a work in progress. The two levels of writing contained by the prose create a feeling of simultaneity and authenticity regarding the text's very production. The first level of the text relies on autotheory to justify creative choices, while the second level forms the novel proper. As readers, we get a clarification regarding the choice for an omniscient narrator implemented at written-text level. The use of the third person allows for enough distance between the narrating self and her past experiences in her homeland (Zare 2022, 23). Furthermore, there is also a level of introspection on the part of the narrator regarding the writing of Sașa's narrative: "I often examine myself in the process of writing Sașa (...) I ask myself if I want to construct a likeable character, one that will be considered a good person at the end (...)"[15] The question pertaining to means of construction remains- the narrative becomes a vessel for a performance, which implies an audience that will react to the moral or immoral actions of the protagonist. Zare's choice is therefore not limited to the bounds of good fiction-writing, but actively considers how writing the protagonist

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[15] "Mă examinez des în procesul scrierii Sașei (...) Mă întreb dacă îmi doresc să fac un personaj care să placă, să fie considerată la final un om bun (...)" (Zare 2022, 332)

will seep into perceptions of her own life. The act of examining one's life from afar gives the text a sense of constructed objectivity, an impression of controlling one's narrative, as well as a better understanding of what Saunders deems as the Rimbaudian effect of auto/biographical writing (*I think therefore I am another*). This also tends to be emphasised by the time-gap between the narrating and narrated selves (Saunders 2010, 503).

The novel attempts to depict corporeal experiences through a narrative that fuses artificial objectivity (consciously opting for third person narration, contingency generated by seeing the writing process unfold) and passages dedicated to theorising on the fragmentary nature of the self. Such a blend contributes to the merge of somatic and semantic categories, which Josephine Machon sees as an important aspect of female practice. This has in turn added to what Machon terms the (*syn*)*aesthetic* inheritance, which is constructed by the mutual contamination of "corporeal and cerebral experiences" (2009, 4). Two of the examples offered by Machon as to how women writers have added to the (*syn*)*aesthetic* are the construction of transgressive narratives that actively explore a "hybridised practice" and the creation of space for theory to be firmly rooted in artistic practice (26). These instances of the (*syn*)*aesthetic* are carried out by Zare's novel in passages discussed formerly, namely those in which her prose moves further away from the canonically imposed novelistic form by alternating between narrative perspectives and reflections on the writing process itself.

The many deaths of female authors

The narrating self-approaches certain discussions aware of future criticism directed towards her tendency to clarify certain novelistic choices. "You will tell me that real literature does not explain itself. Or, alternatively: if you write well, your book speaks for itself."[16] If "good" or "real" literature does not need to make its construction process explicit, then extra-literary elements have no place in actual writing according to canonical norms. Condemning the writing subject's choice to explain herself opens up the discussion related to the postmodern decree of Death of the Author. In her book *Autobiography*, Linda Anderson quotes certain feminist critics' stances on this poststructuralist idea, such as Nancy Miller and Nicole Ward Jouve. What feminist scholarship points out is the poststructuralist tendency to "universalize and fetishize difference," since the concept of the "dead" author, far from having the same impact on the writings of men and women, still follows a gendered pattern (Anderson 2001, 88).

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[16] "O să zici că literatura adevărată nu se explică. Sau: dacă scrii bine, cartea ta vorbeşte de la sine." (Zare 2022, 330)

According to these feminist critics' the-so-called Death of the Author would not necessarily come to the benefit of women writers who do not have the same institutional ties to the literary world as men do, nor could such authors afford to deconstruct a self that has not fully been constructed yet (88). The novel's writing subject is revived in the process of producing a text that tries to be both aesthetically and politically coherent. The narrator identifies three ways for women to approach the practice of writing: give up on the self, give up on writing altogether or refuse to inscribe the text in hegemonic and "legitimate" ways of writing literature (Zare 2022, 331). If every time and every place has its own literary norms, the most radical act for the female writer becomes to refuse such norms altogether and (re)write herself authentically, even if such writing flouts common-held beliefs like the erasure of the author from her own text. The writing subject's metafictional incursions in *Dezrădăcinare* thus also seem to retrace the lines rendered by a feminist re-examining of conventional postmodern, poststructuralist tropes.

Conclusions

What Sașa Zare's novel accomplishes through its intriguing reworking of traditional expectations placed on novelistic form and content is exactly what the writing subject has set out to do in the book dedication: create a space where healing and connection becomes possible. My study has focused on some of the novel's metafictional strategies and passages that integrate it into a wider discussion regarding societal and literary structures. Through looking back on poststructuralism's insight into matters of textuality, openings offered by a Lacanian and post-Lacanian framework, as well as newer concepts such as "autotheory" and (*syn*)*aesthetics*, I have tried to cast a critical look on the way the self is engaged with and translated into Zare's autofictional and novelistic project. I have also attempted to put the controversial concept of Postfeminism to use, by connecting it with a poststructuralist and psychoanalytic appreciation of the self. While taking the heated debates that surround Postfeminism into account, my analysis has endeavoured to test whether such a concept could offer valid interpretative angles. As problematised when motivating these frameworks, analysing the self in (auto)biographical writing requires multiple points of view because of the variety of strategies used to inscribe the self into text. Such a practice implies both writing and rewriting, the dual practice of constructing and reconstructing one's personhood in order to unite its fragmentariness through literary creation.

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