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Memorial Regimes and Memory Updates in Post-communist Romania[1]

Inspired by the Western European "regime of historicity"[2] of the age of testimony (*l'ère du témoignage*)[3], Romania also turned memory into the privileged means of relating to the recent past. However, memory is not an objective narration of the past; rather, by resorting to experience and recall, it represents a more or less valid method of updating it. Memory rebuilds the past starting from the present and depending on social context, based on what Halbwachs called the "social frameworks of memory."

Memory is first and foremost a biological function of the human brain involving various processes such as encoding and recall.[4] All the other definitions of memory are based on cultural codes which assign various contents and roles to the concept, depending on the interpretation needs of each community/society or of more or less qualified researchers. Pierre Nora defined "collective memory" as

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[2] Memory has replaced the future as a means of legitimising the actions of the present. F. Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps*, Seuil, Paris 2002.

[3] A. Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, Plon, Paris 1998.

[4] G. Tiberghien, *Croire à la mémoire… Comprendre la mémoire?*, [in:] Croire à la mémoire? Approches critiques de la mémoire orale, Rencontres internationales Saint-Pierre Hôtel, "La Lanterna" October 16, 17, 18, 1986, p. 42.

> ... conscious or unconscious memories of experiences which a community has lived or mythicized, which are an integral part of the identity of said community. Memories of events which were experienced directly and/or transmitted through oral or written traditions. Collective memory is an active memory, maintained by institutions, rites, historiography, literature, etc. Collective memory is what is left of the past in the memory of a group and what the group does with its past.[5]

According to Jan Assmann, quasi-similar content defines the "cultural memory."[6] In Assmann's opinion, cultural memory is a form of collective memory (in the sense attributed to it by Maurice Halbwachs[7]) shared by a broad community, the role of which is to give people a cultural or national or collective identity.[8] Cultural memory is maintained from one generation to the next through cultural practices and institutions, such as historical, literary or artistic texts, rituals, symbols, monuments, memorials and other elements.[9] Cultural memory turns certain events and figures of the past into subjects of public remembrance,[10] gradually leading to their being turned into myths.[11] Thus, myths become a narration of the past meant to explain previous events or to lend strength and meaning to the present.[12]

In post-communist Romania, the "cultural memory" is a work-in-progress influenced, on the one hand, by "memorial regimes"[13] and, on the other, by various collective memories, some of them marginal, others dominant. The representations of the recent past promoted by each memory group have created a competitive memory space in which it became possible

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[5] P. Nora, *Mémoire collective*, [in:] La nouvelle histoire, J. Le Goff (ed.), Retz, Paris 1978, p. 398.

[6] J. Assmann, *Communicative and Cultural Memory*, [in:] A. Erll, A. Nunning (eds.), A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies. De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2010, pp. 109-118.

[7] M. Halbwachs stated that individual and collective memory depends on the process of socialisation and is always a reconstruction of the past from the perspective of the present. M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Albin Michel, Paris 1997.

[8] J. Assmann, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

[9] D. Manier, W. Hirst, *A Cognitive Taxonomy of Collective Memories,* [in:] A. Erll, A. Nunning (eds.), A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies. De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2010, pp. 253-254.

[10] J. Assmann, *La mémoire culturelle. Écriture, souvenir et imaginaire politique dans les civilisations antiques*. Aubier, Paris 2010, p. 47.

[11] *Ibidem.*

[12] J. Assmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

[13] By "memorial regime" I understand a matrix of perceptions and representations of the past which defines at a certain time the structures of public memory. J. Michel, *Gouverner les mémoires. Les politiques mémorielles en France.* PUF, Paris 2010, pp. 12-17.

for victimization to coexist with the paradigm of common guilt, as well as with various forms of public amnesia, denial of persecutions (of Jews but also of political prisoners) and/or nostalgia.

This article deals with various "memorial regimes" which dominated the public space in Romania in the last 27 years. It will analyze the public policies concerning communism and fascism in an attempt to see what was at stake in implementing such policies and who the actors were that promoted them. I argue that if the Holocaust has become a "lieux de mémoire," communism still functions as a "milieu de mémoire."

The '90s Neo-Communist Memorial Regime: Between Intentional Oblivion of Communism and Denial of Holocaust

The removal from power of the Ceaușescu couple and the first rank *nomenklatura* did not mean — as was presented to the public — a complete break with the communist regime. Power was immediately taken over by individuals and interest groups of the second rank of the *nomenklatura*, of the Securitate and other structures of the communist state. The new power, influenced at first by the evolution of events in the USSR, aimed to liberalize and reform the communist system, not to destroy it.

The "original democracy," as the first post-communist neo-communist president of Romania, Ion Iliescu,[14] called the regime installed after 22 December 1989, perpetuated the national communist mythology in the form of rhetorical nationalism along the lines of "we will not sell our country" and of communist social practices such as demonizing certain social groups — intellectuals, as during the *Mineriad*[15] on 13–15 June 1990; the historic political parties, accused of fascism or Legionarism[16] during the 1990

[14] I. Iliescu born on 3 March 1930, served as president of Romania from 1989 until 1996, and from 2000 until 2004. He joined the Communist Party in 1953 and made a career in the *nomenklatura*. At one point, he served as the head of the Central Committee's Department of Propaganda. Iliescu later served as Minister for Youth between 1967 and 1971. In the late 1970s, he was marginalized by and removed from all central political offices but still held high offices in the province. During the December uprising in Bucharest, he became the recognized leader of the new power. He won the free general election of May 1990 and became the first post-communist president of Romania.

[15] The *Mineriad* is called the action of suppression of an anti-communist rally in Bucharest by groups of miners from Valea Jiului, an event that occurred several weeks after Ion Iliescu and his party achieved victory in the May 1990 general election. The violence resulted in some deaths and many injuries on both sides of the confrontations.

[16] Legionarism is the Romanian type of fascism based on aggressive nationalism.

electoral campaign; and former political prisoners, still deemed "enemies of the people."[17]

Though its rhetoric and practices are drawn from national communism, any identification with said regime is rejected by neo-Communists. Communist symbols were removed from public space, the Communist Party was outlawed, the Ceaușescu clan was removed from the public stage, whether directly, by shooting, in the case of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, or by imprisonment, in the case of their children, Nicu and Zoia Ceauşescu, joined in prison by a group of former ministers loyal to Ceaușescu and by several officers responsible for the crimes committed in Timișoara in December 1989. This form of mock justice claimed to bring reparation to the Romanian nation and to pinpoint scapegoats.

At the memorial level, the neo-Communists encouraged and promoted intentional oblivion (as described by Paul Ricoeur's concept of *oubli intentionnel*[18]) of communism and the denial of Holocaust. As early as 25 of December 1989, Ion Iliescu claimed that the communist regime was condemned by history and did not deserve to be brought back into public debate. This strategy of intentional oblivion hid the desire of neo-Communists to dissimulate their own past, as well as to avoid blame and responsibility for the abuses and crimes committed by the communist authorities.

At the same time, the controversial figure of the commander-in-chief and authoritarian leader during the Second World War, Ion Antonescu,[19] was rehabilitated. In 1991, the Romanian Parliament dominated by neo-communists celebrated Antonescu as a national hero and a victim of communism. A few of his busts were built in various parts of the country, and in the capital.

In celebrating Ion Antonescu, the neo-communists acknowledged the communist political persecutions and proceeded to compensate the persecuted. Political detainees, but also deportees of Baragan received material compensation for their suffering during the communist period. Decree-Law no. 118 of March 30 1990 granted monthly compensation to former political prisoners, deportees, and former POWs, in various amounts depending on the number of years they had spent in prison, in working camps or in camps for war prisoners (these were insignificant sums compared to the pensions of former officers of the *Securitate* and the *Miliție* or the communist

[17] Political detainees were called as such during communism.

[18] P. Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Seuil, Paris 2000, p. 585.

[19] Ion Antonescu, an army officer, became the chief of the state during the Second World War. Arrested on 23 August 1944 by King Michael with the support of all political parties, he was deported to Russia with the help of Romanian communists. He was brought back to Romania where he was judged, condemned to death, and executed in 1946.

Army who had been involved in repression), free public transport, inclusion of the years spent in prison/camps/exile into the calculation of their old-age pension, etc.

At the same time, a new, privileged category was being created — the "revolutionaries," presented as true heroes of the anti-communist struggle. Anyone who testified with witnesses (many of whom lied, as we have recently learned) that they had taken part in the events of December 1989 were granted all sorts of privileges; apart from compensation, they also had the right to homes and land owned by the State, priority for employment in public office, free access to education, free public transport, and so on.

The privileges granted to revolutionaries were an expression of public policies which turned the events in December 1989 into the foundation of the new neo-communist regime. The street protests of the citizens of Timișoara and Bucharest, the flight of the Ceaușescus, the power takeover by Ion Iliescu and his colleagues, the street fights against "terrorists" were all considered manifestations of what was called "the democratic Revolution." On 29 December 1989, the National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naționale), fresh out of the communist laboratory, qualified the events at the end of December as a "revolution of reconciliation" and urged Romanians to forget the past and join hands in reconstructing the country which Ceaușescu had ruined.[20]

Several memorial laws protect the relay of the neo-communist myth of the "revolution": Law 48 of December 18 1990, which established the existence of two types of "revolutionaries:" "hero-martyrs" and "fighters;" Law 258 of April 2002, which declared December 22 a commemorative day for the "freedom of Romania." The central and local public authorities are obliged to organize solemn manifestations on that day, such as laying wreathes, holding a moment of silence, or lowering the flag to half-staff.

In 2004, just before the end of Ion Iliescu's second mandate as president, the Institute of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989 (Institutul Revoluției Române din Decembrie 1989) was also created, with the continuing mission of promoting the memory of the Revolution. In 2010, the attempt to close down the institute by integrating it into a future research center affiliated to a future museum of Communism sparked numerous reactions from neo-Communists.

In the 1990s, the neo-communists celebrated the December 1989 Revolution while rehabilitating the victims of communism and compensating their suffering. At the same time, the existence of Holocaust in Romania was denied. The neo-communist president Ion Iliescu argued that during the

[20] The announcement was published in *Adevărul*, on December 29 1989, p. 1.

WWII in Romania were persecuted not only Jews, but also communists. His statement stirred controversy and protests from the Jewish international community. In order to silence the international criticism, Iliescu created a commission for the Study of Holocaust in Romania lead by the Nobel Prize winner and former deportee Elie Wiesel. The Commission was constituted on 22nd of October 2003 and funded through a Government decision (HG no. 227 from 20 February 2004). The members of the commission were also established through a Government decision (HG no. 672 from 5 May 2004), most of them historians, but also leading figures of the Romanian Jewish Community.

The Commission met three times: between 16 and 22 May 2004 in Washington, between 6 and 9 September 2004 in Jerusalem and between 8 and 13 November 2004 in Bucharest. On 11 of November 2004, a Final Report was handed to president Ion Iliescu. Based on this report, the existence of Holocaust in Romania was publicly acknowledged. A Memorial Day of Holocaust in Romania was established to be celebrated on 9 of October.

According to the report, Ion Antonescu was considered to be responsible for the genocide of the Jews in Transnistria and for the pogrom of Iasi and other persecutions along with his government and the legionnaire movement. The short time rehabilitated chief of the State was banned once again from the public space.[21] Nevertheless, he seems to enjoy a large sympathy as proved by the 2006 national survey of the 'Ten Greatest Romanians.'

After 2004, the public space welcomed a few monuments dedicated to the Holocaust victims. In Bucharest, Oradea, Cluj, Satu Mare memorials that commemorates the persecutions of Jews by the Romanian authorities as well as the Jews deported from Romanian territories during the Second World War by the Hungarian authorities were built. The inauguration in 2009 of a Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest generated few debates on the non-existing memorial of communism' victims.[22]

These measures taken by the authorities were all part of a memorial regime which promoted the oblivion of communism and the denial of Holocaust and transformed the events of December 1989 into the starting point of the new political order. The opposite opinion was supported by the so-called democratic elite, which considered "the Revolution" as the final stage

[21] According to the decree no. 31 from 2002, article 12, it is forbidden to build statues of persons condemned for crimes against humanity and to display them in public space, except for museums.

[22] The denial of Holocaust is still present in the public space. In 2013, during a session of the Romanian Academy, a history professor from Germany of Romanian origins declared Romanian Holocaust to be a lie. Protests of the civic organizations determined the Romanian Academy to eventually condemn these affirmations.

of communist aggression in Romania. They promoted the anti-communist endeavors of the 1950s as true anti-communist acts, in contrast to the anti-Ceausescu attitudes defined as anti-communism by neo-Communists.

Real Anti-Communism vs. Fake Anti-Communism

The anti-communist paradigm was present in the public sphere as early as January 1990, through the creation of the Association of Former Political Prisoners in Romania (Asociația Foștilor Deținuți Politici din România, AFDPR), through the re-creation of the historical political parties and by the publication of the first Romanian memoirs of imprisonment. Anti-communism was supported by newspapers such as *România liberă*,[23] which called for a trial of Communism, even bringing evidence for this purpose by publishing testimonies of former political prisoners; by the Humanitas publishing house through its editorial policies as well as through the public activity of its director, the philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu;[24] by well-known personalities who refused to allow themselves to be recruited into the neo-communist system, such as former dissident Doina Cornea; by the activities of Ana Blandiana,[25] the "Academia Civică" Foundation and the "Sighet" Memorial; as well as by "Memorialul Durerii" [The Memorial of Pain], a documentary created by Lucia Hossu-Longin and produced by TVR, the Romanian national television channel.

[23] *România liberă*, Thursday, November 29 1990, p. 1. The newspaper called for a trial of Communism "in the name of the martyrs of December 1989, of martyr children of Timișoara, of the millions of peasants who lost their land, of the exploited workers who rebelled in Valea Jiului in 1977 and in Brașov in 1987, of the thousands of intellectuals who were systematically humiliated and exterminated in the Romanian gulag, in the name of all those who suffered because of the class struggle over the last 50 years."

[24] Just after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, right-wing elites, through the voice of Gabriel Liiceanu and his "Apel către lichele" [A Message to Scoundrels], declared Communism a "malady" which had come from the outside, a disease with a seductive face, which turned Romanians into beings colonised by communist aliens. Though Romanians were ill, Liiceanu believed a cure still existed in the moral example of those who had fought these "invaders." Gabriel Liiceanu, *Apel către lichele*, Humanitas, Bucharest 2005.

[25] Ana Blandiana is a well-known poet and an important cultural and civic figure in Romania. A representative of the 1960s generation, who had a modern poetic discourse, after more than a decade of restrictive socialist realism, she was cast aside during the latest years of Ceausescu's regime. During, but mostly after, the events of December 1989, she took on the difficult position of a poet with a cause, founder of the Civic Alliance, and of the Civic Academy Foundation.

As early as the 1990s, anti-Communism was defined by various content, from taking a stand against Ceauşescu (many members of the *nomenklatura* posed as opponents of the dictator, as they called Ceausescu[26]) to publicly claiming acts of dissidence which were not always real, or to the so-called "resistance through culture," but also by mythicizing the anti-communist armed resistance. Those opposing communism from the very beginning, who had suffered because they expressed themselves against Communism by various means, remained marginalized. Their experience and life stories were politically instrumentalized by the democratic elite in their struggle for power instead of being transformed into a means of dealing with communist cultural trauma. This has been due, in part, to the amnesiac memorial regime promoted by neo-Communists, as well as to misunderstandings among former prisoners regarding collaboration with the former *Securitate* and membership in the Legionnaire movement.

Anti-Communism was promoted intensely as a social, cultural, and political alternative during the general elections in 1996, won by the Democratic Convention (Convenția Democratică).[27] Once it came to power, however, the coalition did not openly promote anti-communist policies.[28] The spirit of the law proposed by the AFDPR on unmasking Securitate agents, adopted in 1999, was weakened by the changes Parliament made in it. The actual text of this law, called "the Ticu-Dumitrescu law" after the man who promoted it in the public sphere, more than unmasking the communist political police, led to a process of sabotaging the reputations of many former political detainees and opponents of the communist regime by revealing their ties to the *Securitate*. In the public space, former political prisoners are still vilified for having signed collaboration agreements with the *Securitate* under the impact of the horror of their past experiences in prisons and/or labor camps and/or in exile, possibly under the threat of further persecution. Little to nothing has been said, however, about Securitate officers who to this day enjoy generous privileges such as huge pensions compared to the

[26] C. Petrescu, D. Petrescu, *The Nomenklatura Talks: Former Romanian Party Dignitaries on Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceausescu*, "East European Politics and Societies" 2002, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 958-970.

[27] The Democratic Convention was a coalition of historical parties, prohibited by Communists and recreated after the fall of communism, whose leaders were former political detainees.

[28] This can be explained by the fact that members of the former *Securitate* infiltrated the historical parties. It is well known that a former Prime Minister supported by the Democratic Convention was a former *Securitate* collaborator.

rest of the population, control over segments of the economy, and influence on the post-communist secret services.[29]

Although it did not become state policy, anti-Communism enjoyed public support during the mandate of the Democratic Convention. President Emil Constantinescu privately condemned Communism; the activities of the "Sighet" Memorial received material support thanks to Law no. 95 of June 10, 1997; great figures of the armed anti-communist resistance, such as Elisabeta Rizea of Nucşoara,[30] were publicly acknowledged.

The Democratic Convention eventually granted partial moral damages to those who had been oppressed by the communist regime, but it failed to counter the problem of the quasi-amnesiac recall of Communism in the public space. The return to power of neo-Communists, disguised as Social Democrats, once again laid the blanket of oblivion over the communist past. The social costs of the reforms needed in order to join NATO and the EU, as well as the economic evolution of the transition to capitalism, diminished the public interest in Communism. Keeping the memory of communist repression alive and passing it on fell exclusively to private institutions such as Civic Academy Foundation, AFDPR, and other national or local associations.

[29] Recent events, determined by the actions of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (Direcția Națională Anticorupție, DNA) have brought to light information on offspring of former *Securitate* agents who still control people and structures in the post-communist secret services.

[30] Elisabeta Rizea was a peasant living in the village of Nucsoara. After refusing to give up to their land, the *Securitate* pursued Elisabeta's husband threatening him. Therefore, he decided to hide in the mountains near his homes together with other individuals persecuted by the communist regime. Elisabeta remained at home trying to supply the refugees with food, water, clothes, and news. Betrayed by neighbors, she was tortured by *Securitate* officers and then imprisoned. Released after 7 years, she continued to help the refugees in the mountains. When the chief of the "Haiduks of Muscel" (as this movement was called, Muscel being the name of the department) was caught and tortured, the authorities arrested all people involved in hiding the revolted. Elisabeta was imprisoned again and sentenced to death and afterwards to 25 years. She was liberated in 1964, after 3 years in prison as the system freed all political prisoners. She remained in the village and survived communism. In 1992, she was interviewed for a television series called the "Memorial of Sorrow," a documentary on the communist political persecutions. A charismatic figure, she captured the hearts of Romanians with her painful story. She became a favorite of the media and of the democratic opposition leaders. She took part in the electoral meetings and even made speeches. Claudia-Floretina Dobre, "Elisabeta Rizea de Nucşoara: un «lieu de mémoire» pour les Roumains?," *Conserveries mémorielles*, http://cm.revues.org/290

The 2000s: The Pink (Auto-ironic) Nostalgia of Communism

At the beginning of 2000s, a new memorial trend burst into Romanian public space: ironic (or reflexive, in the words of Svetlana Boym[31]) nostalgia for Communism. The change of generations and the increasing influence of *decreței*[32] in various fields brought nostalgia to the forefront of public memory. This type of nostalgia, often translated into irony and self-irony, promotes the memories of the youth of the '80s and their personal and group experiences aimed at circumventing the vigilance of the communist system.

Promoted by collective works — such as *Cartea roz a comunismului* [The Pink Book of Communism],[33] *Cum era? Cam așa... Amintiri din anii comunismului românesc* [How Was It? More or Less Like This... Memories from the Years of Romanian Communism],[34] *În căutarea comunismului pierdut* [In Search of Lost Communism],[35] to quote some of the most representative, as well as cinematic episodes collected under the common title "Tales from the Golden Age," (2009) created by an award-winning director, Cristian Mungiu — the nostalgic irony aimed at Communism found monumental expression in a series of artistic installations entitled "Proiect 1990."

This project, initiated by the artist and assistant professor at the National Art University of Bucharest Ioana Ciocan, introduced to the public space art installations signed by various visual artists, both Romanian and foreign, who took an ironic approach to public representations of the communist past and the transitional period. The first installation, "Ciocan vs. Ulyanov," exhibited in January 2010 was placed on the vacant plinth in front of the former House of Spark (Casa Scînteii[36]), the actual House of the Free Press, where Lenin had stood for several decades. Another Lenin, the same size as the original statue which had been pulled down in March 1990, was made of boiled grains of wheat and tiny pink and burgundy-coloured candy, *koliva*, a mixture commonly served at funeral repasts. This Lenin was meant to

[31] S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York 2001.

[32] The term is used to refer to the generation of children born after the application of Decree no. 770 of October 1 1966 prohibiting abortion in Romania for women under 45 with less than four children.

[33] G. H. Decuble (ed.), *Cartea roz a comunismului* (The Pink Book of Communism), vol. 1., Club 8, Editura Versus, Iași 2004.

[34] C.-A. Mihăilescu (ed.), *Cum era? Cam așa... Amintiri din anii comunismului românesc* (How was it? More or Less Like This ... Memories from the Years of Romanian Communism), Curtea Veche, Bucharest 2006.

[35] P. Cernat, I. Manolescu, A. Mitchievici, I. Stanomir, *În căutarea comunismului pierdut* (In search of lost communism), Paralela 45, Pitești-Bucharest-Brașov-Cluj 2001.

[36] *Scînteia* (The Spark) was the official newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party.

suggest the funeral feast at the death of Communism and its symbols (or at least a desire to consciously bury the past).

Until April 2014, 20 artistic installations were displayed on the empty pedestal of Lenin. In 2010, after the pinkish Lenin, the pedestal was occupied, for 15 minutes, by a group of young well-known artists, "Romanian Piano Trio," Alexandru Tomescu, Răzvan Suma and Horia Mihail, who played tango. The installation was called "Tango vs. Ulyanov." In 2012, an installation called "Hydra" was meant to draw attention to the invisible heritage of the communist regime. In 2013, a statue called "A4" stands for the excessive bureaucracy which characterizes both communist and postcommunist societies. The installation called "Una Mirada/The Gaze" belonging to the international artists Jose Antonio Vega Macotela and Chantal Penalosa Navarro, displayed in September-October 2013, addressed the issue of the pedestal demolition and the new uses of the space, which eventually became reality as on the same spot stand today the sculpture "Wings" dedicated to the memory of the Anti-communist fighters from Romania and Bessarabia. The installations addressed not only the memory of communism, but also some aspects of Romanian postcommunism like economic emigration, the nouveau rich, and the crisis of values.[37]

1. Communist Nostalgia/Pseudo-Nostalgia

Communist nostalgia, already present in the 1990s, is in fact false nostalgia. Polls[38] which measure common people's perception of Communism positively do not provide an absolute reflection of how people relate to the communist regime, but one of how they relate to their past as individuals or as a social

[37] A catalogue of all the artistic installations was published under the title *Proiect 1990. Program de artă în spațiul public 2010–2014* (Project 1990. Art in Public Spaces Program 2010–2014), Vellant, Bucharest 2014.

[38] The opinion barometer of the Foundation for an Open Society (Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă) in October 2006 on the perception of Communism, a study on a group of 1975 people, gave the following results: 12% of the interviewed considered Communism to have been a good idea well applied, 41% thought it was a good idea badly applied, while 34% considered it a bad idea. Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă. *Comunicat. Percepția actuală asupra comunismului*, December 2006, available at http://www.fundatia.ro/perceptia-actuala-asupra-comunismului, last accessed on July 4 2015. The Institute for the Investigation of the Communist Crimes and the Memory of Romanian Exile (IICCMER)-CSOP poll in April 2011 does not show any significant changes in the perception of Communism. According to it, 18% of the polled considered Communism a good idea well applied, 43% — a good idea badly applied, and 25% — a bad idea. 14% answered "do not know." *Atitudini și opinii despre regimul comunist din România*, a poll made in May 2011, available at http://www.iiccr.ro/index.html?lang=ro&section=sondaje_iiccmer_csop, last accessed in July 2015.

group. The past is always reconstructed in hindsight, thus, a current state of uncertainty, doubt, and difficult situations on the public and individual level determines a favorable opinion of a past that seems to have been based on a clear and safe framework. In contrast, nostalgia for Communism indicates nostalgia for one's childhood, one's youth, a past which seems better compared to a present marked by uncertainties and difficulties. In fact, childhood is often perceived and recalled as one's "golden age."

The nostalgia stemming from the disappearance of attitudes, traditions, customs, and human typologies does not necessarily reflect a positive perception of Communism or regret for its disappearance, but rather nostalgia for behaviors, customs, scenery, and knowledge systems which often date back to the interwar period (those who claimed life during Communism was better do not realize that, in fact, these attitudes and behaviors were part of a kind of socialization which belonged to a pre-communist traditional world).

The last years have also seen the birth of another type of nostalgia, one which aligns itself with a post-memorial trend. Many young people born in or around December 1989 express their appreciation for Communism in the public space.[39] This attitude reflects, on the one hand, the importance of "communicative memory"[40] in passing on perceptions of the past when, on the one hand, the educational system suffers from an endemic lack of the capacity to perfect knowledge, while the public space is part of a show-oriented society, of the simulacrum of post-modern society, and on the other hand, society was stricken with anomia after the fall of the communist regime.

Memory is selective and present-oriented, which is why a present difficult situation in one's family may determine a positive perception of Communism in members of the young generation. The fact that their parents lose their jobs sends negative signals regarding current society and almost automatically creates a good image for an age when it seemed that everyone had work (except those who were a hindrance to the system).

[39] A poll among young people showed that in 2010 38% of them considered Communism to have been a better or far better period than the present. G. Bădescu, M. Comșa, A. Gheorghiță, C. Stănuș, C. D. Tufiș, *Implicarea civică și politică a tinerilor* (The Civic and Political Involvement of Young People), Editura Dobrogea, Constanța 2010, p. 65. A study requested by Open Society Foundation.

[40] "Communicative memory" is socially mediated, based on the memory of a group and transmitted within that group or within the society to which it belongs, by daily interaction and communication. Communicative memory can be relayed over a maximum of three generations interacting with each other. The durability of this type of memory depends on affective ties and on the interaction between generations. J. Assmann, *op. cit*., p. 111.

2. Victimhood as National Heritage

Condemning Communism was a running theme of the thirst for justice expressed by former political prisoners as early as the beginning of the 1990s. Though requested repeatedly and despite legal recourse, a "trial of Communism" was not possible in post-revolutionary Romania. The interest of European institutions in the "crimes of totalitarian communist regimes" resulted in a change of perception at a national level. Resolution 1481[41] of the Council of Europe, which condemned the communist abuses and crimes, brought about a reaction from the Romanian president, who, on 5 April 2006, ordered the creation of a commission to "analyze the communist dictatorship in Romania."

Six months later, the commission, made up of well-known historians, intellectuals, and former political prisoners, coordinated by Vladimir Tismăneanu, presented an extended report of over 600 pages. The president used the conclusions of the report as evidence in the official condemnation of Romanian Communism during an extraordinary session of the Romanian Parliament, on 18 December 2006. By declaring the Romanian communist regime to have been "illegitimate and criminal," the former president's speech paves the way to a new memorial regime, one which initiates the transfer of the suffering caused by Communism to the nation's cultural heritage. In his speech the president recommended the building of a monument to the victims of Communism in Bucharest, the opening of a museum of communist dictatorship and of a center for the study of Communism, the creation of an encyclopedia and a handbook on the history of Communism, and the holding of conferences and travelling exhibitions based on the conclusions of the report of the presidential commission. His proposal underpins a Western view on the transfer of the past into the local/ national cultural heritage, as some of the elements in the president's speech are present in a type of institution called "center for memory" (centre de mémoire).[42]

Cultural heritage elements play an important part in the creation of collective identity. Turning the suffering caused by Communism into a part of the national cultural heritage highlights collective victimization. Under these conditions, holding a trial of Communism that would allow the guilty to be sentenced becomes obsolete. From 2008, material damages were added to the moral repayment of former political prisoners. However, those

[41] Resolution 1481 of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly of January 25 2006 condemns the crimes and abuses of communist regimes, without condemning the regimes themselves.

[42] A. Wieviorka, *Commémorer la violence du siècle. Le cas du génocide des Juifs*, [in:] Actes des Entretiens du Patrimoine, Le Regard de l'Histoire. L'émergence et l'évolution de la notion de patrimoine au cours du XXè siècle en France, Fayard, Editions du Patrimoine, Paris 2003, p. 123.

who stand as witnesses to communist crimes enjoy no positive personal recognition in the public space.

The Memory of Communism and Holocaust today

In Romania, the memory of communism and the memory of Holocaust seem to be in constant competition in the public space. Controversy arose from time to time related either to former members of the legionnaire movement who were persecuted by the communists, to laws which ban xenophobia, fascist symbols and organizations or to the building of new monuments or museums.

In 2015 a law[43], which ban organizations, individuals and fascist symbols from public space was adopted. It stirred controversy as it forbids any public display of gratitude towards people who were involved in the persecutions of Jews, who were eventually condemned by communists to death or to many years in prison. After the fall of communism, some of them were considered national heroes as they fought communism. According to this law, their public commemoration is forbidden. Former political detainees and other public figures (mostly nationalists) protested against it considering that it will hinder the celebration of anti-communism.

Another dispute was caused by the possible creation of a Museum of Holocaust and the History of Romanian Jews. In September 2016, the Council of Bucharest Mayoralty take the decision to build a museum of Holocaust and the History of Romanian Jews in the capital. The nationalists argued that the authorities should firstly build a museum of communist crimes which will commemorate the Romanians victims of communism. The Mayoralty decision was part of the actions undertaken by the Romanian authorities as Romania headed between March 2016 and March 2017, the International Alliance for the Memory of Holocaust (IHRA). Several other public actions were put into practice: debates, workshops as well as documentary presentations in Romania or abroad. On 16 and 17 February 2017, IHRA under the Romanian presidency organized together with the Papal administration in Vatican an international conference on "Public policies regarding refugees from 1933 until today: challenges and responsibilities." Mihnea Constantinescu, the Romanian president of IHRA stated that:

> IHRA knows better what the consequences are if the international community fails to properly respond to the humanitarian crisis. Although the situation of the today migrants is different, one may identify parallels between the treatment of the refugees now and then (during the WWII),

[43] Law no. 217 from 2015 to complete the Government ordonnance no. 31 from 2002 witch banned the organizations and fascist symbols, as well as all manifestations of xenophobia and the promotion of people who perpetrated crimes against humanity.

> especially regarding closing of the frontiers, xenophobia, the humiliating discourses...[44]

The Jewish memory as well as the anti-communists' memory (of people trying to seek refuge in other countries as they were persecuted by communists) could help us today to better understand the position of the refugees and their misfortune. Unfortunately, the Romanian public space is concerned only with domestic fights as regards the memory of the recent past. The experience of the exiled Romanians, of those seeking asylum abroad or of those failing to cross the closed borders of communist Romania do not serve humanitarian and humanist purposes, but it is used to gain influence and to control the various fields of power ("le champ du pouvoir" as defined by Bourdieu).

Conclusions

In the first postcommunist decade, the communist past was a major stake in Romanian politics and public life. Converted to capitalism, the neo-communists were adamant about forgetting the recent past. The material traces of the communist years were destroyed, reused, and/or reinterpreted. The communist leaders' mausoleum was proposed for demolition by a neo-Communist government. Even the opening of the archives of the Romanian political police (the notorious *Securitate*) was instrumentalized to validate a myth of collective culpability.

The self-styled "democrats" or "anti-communists" denounced communism, depicting it as a foreign regime imposed by the Soviet Union on the Romanian nation after the allied powers "betrayed" Romania during the peace negotiations at the end of the Second World War. This discourse emphasizes the uniqueness of Romanian communism by pointing to the brutality of repression and the chilling efficiency of the political police.

Public anticommunist discourse has never enjoyed the same consensus among ordinary people. Periodic surveys have revealed that around fifty percent of Romanians have a rather good image of communism, a kind of nostalgia for a more secure and organized past in contrast to the uncertain, disorganized, and inequitable present.

In the 2000s, a kind of nostalgia for communism was expressed in the public space through a memorial trend that I call the "pink" memory. This

[44] Agerpres, "Conferinta la Vatican despre politicile privind refugiații" (Vatican conference about the politics concerning refugees) organized by IHRA, under the presidency of Romania and Vatican, 17 February 2017, https://www.agerpres.ro/externe/2017/02/17/conferinta-la-vatican-despre-politicile-privind-refugiatii-organizata-de-ihra-sub-presedintia-romaniei-si-sfantul-scaun-11-46-30 (Accessed 20 May 2017).

memorial trend is the result of a generational change. At the beginning of 2000s, a new generation of artists, scholars, and political leaders attained influential positions in the cultural, political, and social fields. They challenged the public memory of communism which depicted the former regime as "criminal" and the Romanians both as victims and perpetrators.

At the beginning of 2000s another memorial regime was forged by a new political context, namely the adhesion of Romania to NATO and the desire to join the European Union. The new situation determined the Romanian authorities to acknowledge the Romanian Holocaust and to compensate its victims as well as to condemn the communist regime. On 18 December 2006, the then-president of Romania, Traian Băsescu proclaimed communism "criminal and illegitimate" in a statement made during a common session of the Romanian parliament. This official condemnation of the Romanian communist regime, however, did not change much in the country as no measures were taken to revoke the privileges of the former agents of the political police and members of the *nomenklatura*.[45] Furthermore, one could argue that condemning communism hinders any inclusive and intensive debate about this regime. Instead of a *travail de deuil* (a working-through process), Romania opted for a quasi-silent definitive burial (in a future museum of communist crimes?!).

Claudia Florentina Dobre

Memorial Regimes and Memory Updates in Post-communist Romania

Abstract

In post-communist Romania, the "cultural memory" is a work-in-progress influenced, on the one hand, by "memorial regimes" and, on the other, by various collective memories, some of them marginal, others dominant. The representations of the recent past promoted by each memory group have created a competitive memory space in which it became possible for victimization to coexist with the paradigm of common guilt, as well as with various forms of public amnesia, denial of persecutions (of Jews but also of political prisoners) and/or nostalgia.

Keywords: Memorial Regimes, Memory Updates, Oblivion, Nostalgia, Anti-communism, Denial of Holocaust, Holocaust Memory.

[45] Recently, attempts have been made to bring former communist torturers before a court of law. A list of 31 names of former heads of prisons or labor camps was drawn up by IICCMER. Three former prison chiefs were investigated by the Ministry of Public Affairs for "crimes against humanity." One of them was found guilty of crimes against humanity and condemned to 20 years in prison.