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Negotiating Memory Canons: The Issue of Political Violence in Romanian Memory Culture

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Abstract:

In 2014, new Romanian legislative modifications challenged the usual interpretations of the 1989 events as a foundational act prompted by popular political will. Starting from its implications, this paper consequently engages with the constraining effects imposed on memory expression by a predominantly anti-communist rationale of relating to the past. Often informing the official “politics of regret”, this epistemological perspective has endowed both justice claims and memorial representations with a unifying understanding of recent history. This contribution argues that the intersection between a local perspective where a moralizing discourse largely informs the rationale of relating to the past and transnational remembrance ethics associated to the European sphere has produced new memorial constructions. By looking at conceptual debates around recent public acts of remembrance and transmission of memory, the paper analyzes “reflexive particularism” (D. Levy 2011) as means of explaining how an apolitical consensus around remembrance and a transnational-oriented configuration of reconciliation have become proper to particular memorial “languages”.

Keywords:

Ethics of remembrance, cosmopolitan memory, narratives, communism, statehood

Introduction

The debates stirred by the official demands to acknowledge all experiences of occupation and legacies within the project of European integration asked for a diachronic rethinking of the Holocaust centered postwar memory politics and local discourses of remembrance in Eastern Europe. As European memorial narratives have gradually articulated around the discourse of human rights abusesⁱ, recent scholarship has discussed the attempts of affirming the topic of “communist crimes” for transnational memory practices in the context of EU enlargement in 2004 (Neumayer 2014, Mink, Neumayer 2011). As a corollary of this shift, in particular after the Prague Declaration of 2008 and the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism in April 2009, countries in the former Eastern bloc have oftentimes found themselves in the position of effectively acknowledging the communist past when such previous efforts have already registered slow and oftentimes tense progress internally. Such debates have constantly straddled memory as a category of “historizing discourse” – to borrow Georges Mink’s terminology- that mediates between remembrance practiced internationally and changing perspectives on statehood and citizenship brought by 1989 and the expanding European sphere.

This paper explores several aspects of the ontological re-configuration of the national memory exerted by a cosmopolitan dimension by drawing on „the reflexive particularism” thesis put forward in recent scholarship in sociology of memory (Levy, Heinlein, Breur 2011).ⁱⁱ Such a perspective takes another approach than an intentionalist perspective on cultural memory as belonging to specific groups that control narratives on the past, and turns to the manner in which memorial analytical categories are formed. I therefore examine the intersection between ethics of memory and politics of memory based on the reality that successive governments in Eastern Europe employ an „anti-communism” discourse to distance themselves from their predecessors and thus to affirm their legitimacy of their new leadership (Appel 2005). While this highlights the rhetorical impact of transitional justice mechanisms as a defining criterion for liberal development (Teitel 2000, Stan 2014) it has also affirmed particular “memory languages” (de Cesari 2014). By inquiring into the relation between remembrance expression and state making, this contribution follows the manner in which transnational dimensions are accommodated locally as “symbolic markers of change” (Zerubavel 1995, 9). The analysis is informed by a recent corpus of literature in memory studies that focuses on the mutual influence and the new constructions in remembrance practices that occur at the contact point between different historical perspectives in cosmopolitan (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 2005, 2006) and transnational (Rothberg 2006, de Cesari, Rigney 2014) memory and the attention in social studies of memory (Halbwachs 1981, Zerubavel 2003, Olick 2007) on processes of meaning making concerning the past.

Memory and norms

In December 2014, Romanian authorities brought a significant alteration to the official legislation concerning the entitlement of participants in the national protests that led to the demise of the communist regime in 1989. The change disturbed a definition of a historical event which, although highly contested in historiography, is nevertheless embraced as foundational event for the new polity after 1989. The phrase “a popular revolt which was reprimanded by security forces registering deaths, casualties and arrests, and that has led to gaining freedom and democracy in Romania” thus replaced the political motivation of the communal political act of 1989. This had previously been defined as “a revolution which has been set off by the popular rising from Timisoara, continued in Bucharest and other cities and transformed into an anti-totalitarian revolution, conscripted by the army, which led to the demise of the communist regime and to a democratic political system”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although 1989 arguably had the potential to solidify a commonality around this historical event, that would ease the development of the pluralist public sphere and encourage a dynamic memory environment, recent scholarship has shown that conflictual accounts have prevented a foundational engagement with its meaning (Murgescu 2007, Petrescu 2012). Multiple opposing voices framed it as a “confiscated revolution”, denying its transformative potential, which was only aggravated by the constant focus on the ambiguities and negative results of December 1989 that prevented the development of a consensual collective memory of the event. Given this conflicted context, comments regarding this new interpretation of the 1989 historical events criticized the step to disregard the emancipatory character in historical understandings of the event, particularly since this blankspot in Romanian collective memory is mostly attributed to official environments. One commentator argued „According to the Romanian government, the revolt of Romanian citizens has lost its object, it is no longer anticommunist or antitotalitarian. It can be easily deduced from this context that this revolt had only consequentially led to freedom and democracy, without these two elements being in fact its main purposes”^{iv} The same author echoes general voices that largely attributed this new lack of a historical project to a need of the Social Democrat Party to re-distance its genealogy from its former communist roots, after the massive drawback in popular support at the recent polls, in the aftermath of the November 2014 elections.

This interpretative inflection can be better understood when looking at the debates on this event in the last two decades. As much as 1989 as a historical event has fluctuated in the narratives of recent history, it was anchored in a relationship of genetic continuity to the present and to the political exigencies of the hour. A highly politically dependent public visibility ensued, which is still under the influence of initial attempts of 1990-1991 on behalf of the National Salvation Front to impose an ideological key of interpretation and consolidate the revolutionary impetus to support its new political program (Adamson, Florean 2011, 166). Up to 1996, the 1989 events acted as “narrative sequence that supported a political mythologisation of the Romanian revolution” (Adamson, Florean 2011, 173) for the National Salvation Front by deflecting the issue of communism and instead focusing on the former leader and his entourage, “but not communism as such” (Adamson, Florean 2011, 173). Such debates became the subject of political feuds and group disputes in the last 25 years and motivated conflicting public positions and sometimes irreconcilable appropriations and usages. As a collective consequence, the event in itself did not come to be publicly commemorated as a milestone display of solidarity until the late 2000s. Largely, such occasions had been previously regarded as official commemoration of its victims^v.

As such, discussing this latest legislative step to reinterpret the historical narrative as a reaction to an institutional abuse of violence, rather than a communal political act, renders it as indicative for the attitude towards memorialization. This new proposed official interpretation and the public reactions this reconsideration sparked become in effect a clarion call whereby anti-communist epistemology showcases a paradoxical situation: how both official narratives on the past and the larger sphere of memorial interactions come to share a common ground against a collective recent past. Indeed, this convergence prompted Alexandru Gussi to discuss anticommunism as a shared *topoi* which is simultaneously as “instrument” (of political legitimacy), “symptom” (of the contrite political sphere prior to 1989) and “frame” (for the ensuing political culture) (Gussi 2007, 3-5). As practice, it is similarly employed for different purposes: by state and civil society, institutional and vernacular, which aggregated two threads of “civic” and “political” anticommunism (Gussi 2007, Abraham 2011). Several authors have also shown that such unilateral perspectives on the past have also decisively oriented scholarship research mainly towards the daily realities of the repression system and personal biographies of political prisoners (Abraham 2011). In other words, such an epistemology holds the potential to render a timeless and eternal perspective on political dissent (and also projects a narrative of resistance before 1989). The sole exception stands in the discontinuity that distinguishes this now indefinite present of the individual from the now archaic past that permitted the experience, that is now overridden by the present. This is not to say that an anti-communist narrative invites to forgetting. Rather, the past becomes interpretable only to inspire a dread of

looking back which transforms memory narratives in a normative frame of explaining the past, rather than commemoration. Yet, as Barbie Zelizer argues, “remembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having as much to do with identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms, and social interaction as with the simple act of recall” (Zelizer 1995, 214). Anti-communist interpretations consequently stabilize an understanding of the past in relation to the present, as one sovereignty, one law and a homogenizing drive of a civilized society is reiterated in the name of justice and human rights. However, such epistemology has also, as I will show in the following analysis, affirmed particular “languages” of memory that tie in with what Jeffrey Olick terms as a “politics of regret” (Olick 2007), that is the attitude of states of publicly acknowledging the responsibilities concerning the past and the commemoration narratives they manifest. At the same time, in this transnational sphere of interaction, I will argue in relation to Romanian debates, memory topoi employ and partially find their definition in relation to a “European identity”.

In public gestures of remembrance, the canonicity imposed by anti-communist attitudes becomes caught in the horns of a dilemma of its own making. In January 2015, as the newly elected president reiterated the break with the past and the democratic European dimension, he stressed the ‘duty to remember’ and took a relatively singular step to ‘commemorate the victims’ of communism^{vi} through an official gesture of recognition. Oscar Bjoza, the head of the Association of the Former Political Detainees, was decorated by the Presidential office in a gesture of reparation for what has long been seen as a disinterest of Romanian authorities in actively supporting the organization’s programs and visibility. In doing so, Bjoza’s consistent association with far right political expressions and the a sympathetic public position towards the xenophobic ultra-nationalist Christian Iron Guard Movement active in Romania until 1941 came to the fore and raised questions about its legitimacy. Contested by several organizations^{vii}, the gesture was defended publicly as a necessary show of respect for those who perished and suffered in the prison system and rendered it thus incompatible with ideological debates. Oscar Bjoza’s extended this argument by putting forward that prison experience can be hardly subsumed to the political differences of those imprisoned.^{viii}

With few exceptions^{ix}, public responses to the gesture were mostly cautious and distanced themselves from ideological debates and in fact mostly abide with this political violence meta-narrative. In a recent opinion article, journalist Sever Voinescu argues that such dilemmas can only be descriptive of an incomprehensibility of the scale of violence of the regime^x Even critical historians of communism have proved reluctant to engage with the case, as was the case of investigative historian Marius Oprea, who deemed such debates as a sign of misrecognition of the experience of prisoners^{xi}. This overwhelming moral perspective on the history of the recent past thus ties in with “the emergence, dominance, and persistence of a unique reading of this past, detectible in all public representations: the communist period was the darkest epoch in national history.” (Petrescu, Petrescu 2014, 73). While such interventions forward an ethics of remembrance, they also feed into a perspective on historical injustice that over-generalizes a notion of sufferance and therefore silences both questions of political relevance concerning the past and already directs interpretations. As it has been pointed out, a narrative that includes only victims and heroes fails not only to represent collectively the Romanians who outlived communism, but also to explain convincingly the survival of the regime for forty-five years.” (Petrescu, Petrescu 2014, 86). The immediate effect of a depoliticized analytical category – of political violence – therefore merges a transitional discourse and ensuing memory debates to comprise a memorial arena where transmission and representation are defined by truth claiming.

However, on a closer inspection of these cases, it is debatable whether ideological undergrids were actually considered as such, since such type of affective and competing memory work is illustrative of a defining feature in recent Romanian official political culture, that discursively equates between uneasy historical legacies (that is communism and Holocaust). In the recent public intervention of former president Traian Basescu, the implications of the Holocaust for the Romanian state was publicly addressed by using a parallel with the communist episode^{xii}. Given the problematic attempts of issuing a formal position towards the Holocaust, which was officially denied in 2001, and publicly acknowledged one year later under mounting national and international, the situation makes a case for the paradigmatic category of political violence that provides the blueprint for ascribing meaning to conflicting and often competitive memory narratives. Recent analyses of historiography which commend a heroic historical reinterpretations regarding the role and scale of armed resistance against communism (Ciobanu 2014), for instance, are a case in point of how memory narratives incorporate such conflicting histories.

Whether invoked in discourse or employed as an official template for representation, these cases show how the convergence between anti-communist epistemology and a political violence topoi articulate a shifting perspectives on statehood. Evident in such “politics of regret” is that public interventions of remembrance partly motivate commemorative gestures by emphasizing European identity as implying change and a need to break with the past. In addition, theories in cosmopolitan memory in particular have highlighted the ways in which “global concerns become part of local experiences” (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 87) and advance a human rights consensus that is potentially world-wide. For Daniel Levy, an increasingly interconnected sphere of state

formations precludes a direct link between memorial practices and national political culture which is visible in a “reflexive particularism”, a prerequisite for a cosmopolitan orientation (2011, 130). Since as he argues cosmopolitanism does not negate nationalism, but they are rather mutually constitutive, he refers to deliberative cognitive reflections that can be read as reactions to renegotiations of the national : skeptical narratives about the nation emphasizing injustice and perpetratorship, and an increased recognition of the Other.” (Levy 2011, 141). As such, such cultural attitudes marshal a memory imperative which imposes a significant “the normative command to remember past injustices”, which is at the same time an active component of anti-communist epistemology.

However, the increasing awareness which is included in Levy’s inclusive definition of the memorial sphere relies on an affirmative and expanding possibility of memory negotiations. In contrast with this inclusive perspective, scholars such as Ann Rigney have astutely pointed out the sphere of collective memory as a competing, rather than an accommodating space (Rigney 2005). This perspective departs from the Halbwachsian discussion that public remembrance changes in line with the shifting social frameworks within which historical narratives are conceived (Halbwachs 1925/1994). As such, the relevance of a topic of remembrance does not guarantee its transmission, but, argues Rigney, it is rather the forms of this perpetuation which makes its suitable for transmission” (2005, 23). The lack of an automatic fit between relevance and memorability means that cultural memory therefore emerges through new memorial languages, and these influence the recycling and adaptation of old forms in new situations. Following this line of argument, the interdependency between an ethics of remembrance and a transmission of memory affirms the generative importance of memory languages in the selective processes of meaning making.

With its attachment to an anti-communist perspective, the category of political violence has been evident in processes of retrieving historical memory and settling on a communality of experience and interpretation. For instance, the discussion around a Romanian museum of communism evolve around frequent debates on the potential perspective it offered on the past and often question whether the message of the existing memorial should in fact be replaced or given an alternative^{xiii}. The Sighet Memorial, established by private initiative in 1993 and partially supported with state subsidy ever since 1997 is set around a straightforward motif of remembrance. For instance, the newly opened permanent exhibition of the Sighet Memorial in Bucharest, “Memory as a form of Justice” (2013), proposes the narrative of personal experience as a storytelling frame: the continuity of the communist past, from individual to collective, and from remembrance to a politics of remembrance is conveyed through a detailed canvas of biographies of political prisoners during communism^{xiv}. Such narratives come to reiterate, together with the incommensurability of each experience of suffering, a rather constricted interplay of memorial reconsideration.

For M. Halbwachs, the construction of collective memory, as the main mechanism through which society reproduces and transmits the subjective interpretation of its past (Halbwachs 1992), is an active and dynamic process. As scholars have argued, to the extent that cultural memory is the product of representations and not only of direct experience, it is by definition a matter of vicarious recollection (Rigney 2005, 24). Thus, the multivocality of memorial narratives and contentious national memories can either be reinforced or subjected to a memory discourse promoting reconciliation and humanistic values. It could therefore be argued that, following Maurice Halbwachs’s classification of memory, the act of memorialization present in this epistemology of suffering thus remains narrowly confined to “autobiographical memory”. To M. Halbwachs, however, a mediation of memory is inevitable. He suggested that individuals seek to express the memory of their own experience in terms that are understandable by others, and that they may end up identifying with someone else’s recollection even if this does not correspond in all respects with their own experience (Halbwachs 1981, 53). It is arguable therefore that if communality is based on the exchange of memories, then the price of this communality is a loss of genuine political debate. In other words, a preference of representation for a memorial, rather than open, past often implicitly entwines personal and affective recollections with meta-narratives. In this sense, a disembodied, increasingly vague in its contours, and plural, even inchoate in its aims biographical legitimacy of witness-victim keeps to a functional memorial expression.

A recent such case were the 2013 public debate over the first trials on communist crimes against Alexandru Visinescu and Ion Ficior, former chief guards up to 1964 in two of the largest prisons, which were publicly discussed as opportunities to were receive a “pedagogical” heed against “amnesia and complicity”.^{xv} In many ways, the deeply personal memories of state repression have played an affective card in supporting transitional justice efforts for the demise of at least 600.000 political prisoner (Stan 2014, 13). Placed under accusations for crimes against humanity and held responsible for the deaths of 30 political prisoners during their collaboration with the National Directory of Penitentiaries, the late trial of Alexandru Visinescu was seen as symbol of a faltering transitional justice system and thus strengthened general appeals that a history of communism should imply in fact a topical, rather than open, memory negotiation. Some scholars have argued the consistent predilection of both public and historiographical research equates this human rights commemoration and memorial expression to the truth value which was in fact a substitute to a laggard mechanism of transitional justice (Petrescu, Petrescu 2014, 87). In a context of a normativity of transmission of memory, remembrance

encourages on the one hand a moral, “apolitical” reaction to the socialist legacy of the past, where to be horrified or outraged by violence becomes the basis and rationale of relating to the past and, on the other an anti-communist memory ethics that argues for a deeply political investment in the new post 1989-polity.

Memory and the language of reconciliation

As I have argued so far, the “language” of political violence can provide a perspective on the mutual influence of an ethics of memory and an anti-communist epistemology of memory discourse. If through Levy’s thesis that cosmopolitan configurations grasps a different constitution or coming into being of political subjects it crucially also emphasizes the inscription of memory practices into power geographies. I would therefore like to return to the convergence between the selective process of memory transmission and an ethics of memory as “reflexive particularism” and discuss a second “language” of memory, which stabilizes a perspective on statehood.

The post 1989 historical reconsideration, the transitional justice program focusing on debates concerning lustration, access to secret files or restitutions meant that a reconciliation discourse based on reparation or truth commissions have largely remained undiscussed (Stan 2014). However, examples show that political expression has returned to the language of social reconciliation as means to attach the liberal development and democracy to a separation from the past. In the post-1989 context, this vocabulary circumscribed engagements with recent history. In 1990, for instance, authorities motivated the decision of restricting access to the Securitate archive on account of being „attune to the principles of the revolution, which offer Romanian citizens equal chances, non-discriminatory, to bring their input to national reconstruction” (Magureanu, qtd. in Gussi 2011, 60), stressing on political reconciliation. „Consensus” in fact became a central discourse in 1991, as the National Salvation Front was strengthening its political grip, to account for a needed “quietness” of political expression in order to ease the democratic development of the new polity (Gussi 2011, 24). Mostly informed by power politics of the moment, the recent communist past projected a negative perception on agonistic politics and conflict driven political culture, which was still new for the large part of the electorate (Siani Davies 45). The notion of social amnesty was also often invoked during the June 1991 open civil opposition which followed the decision of the National Salvation Front (the first revolutionary organization) which has been, up to that point, an expression of civil society, to coagulate as a political party on January 28th 1990. In the context of transition, consensus therefore is often invoked alongside institutional continuity and presented as vital for protecting the prestige of the state and thus the state’s economic wellbeing and security. Furthermore, a particular understanding of reconciliation is appropriated among the cultural dispositions and institutional practices that emerge at the interstices of global human right norms and local memory practice,

As a nexus of “a public reckoning with a history of political violence and their legacy in order to enable people divided by that past to coexist within one political community and to recognize the legitimacy of the same law” (Schaap 3) reconciliation has therefore straddled the official processes of dealing with the uneasy legacy of the past. A case in point is the official public address of condemning the communist regime in Parliament as “illegitimate” and “criminal”, weeks before Romania’s accession to the European Union on January 1st, 2007. The conciliatory consensus on separating from the past, arguably the overall project of the statement, avoided debate by connecting personal biographies under the regime with the historical context: “respecting an internationally recognized regime and the laws in effect at the time” (Official statement 7). It concurrently assigned the legacy of the past to a divisive nature for the public sphere and made successive efforts in describing the „moral crisis” after 1989 as a cause of a lack of consensus about the past (Official statement 7). The perspective eased debates on historical responsibility or agency and attached the notion of reconciliation to a communitarian project of development and state building:

“My aim relates to an authentic national reconciliation, all the more since the numerous misgivings of the past continue to mark the present. Our society is ailing of a generalized distrust. The state institutions do not seem yet to follow their true vocation, which is to fully exert all civil rights. From what is happening in hospitals, on the redistribution of property, to justice, to the accord of public institution- citizen and the reality of penitentiaries, we see that disrespect for man is still present” (Official statement 6).

The declaration may, to a certain extent, be read as a theory of recent Romanian history where close ties between history-culture-development are informing recent memory culture. Furthermore, it makes evident that it is source of both constraints in memorial expression and part of memory politics. The point this tension makes is an analytical one, as such discourse displays the tension between the consequences of trenchant historical compartmentalization and exclusion of the past from historical identity (Tileaga 2011, 2012). As a complex, elite-driven phenomenon, memory politics affirmed an understanding of “reconciliation” as ideological, to the extent that it affirms human rights while only genuflecting to the ideal of popular sovereignty” (Schaap 4). Through both its form and its content the official declaration identified “the cause” for the post-1989

developments of the state, while it constantly eludes historical questions regarding responsibility or accountability. The Romanian gesture in Parliament still stands as a unique precedent of officially condemning the context and nature of a political regime in Eastern Europe. Despite several consistent critiques at the time^{xvi}, the declaration was appraised publicly due to the official recognition of various degrees, but the common experience, of victimhood under the communist regime.

While strongly politicized, the usage of the language of reconciliation contextualizes the relation between a well-being of statehood with a need to resolve the legacy of the past. The official declaration set a mark for what could be described as an ethicized collective memory discourse which should conjoin the political efforts of breaking away with the existing continuity between pre and post 1989 structures „to set a national identity on a clean state” (Official statement 9). We might argue that an anti-communist perspective could hardly maintain the risk and uncertainty which is implied by reconciliation as the ‘not yet’. Because this ‘not yet’, this tending into the future, imports an awareness that keeps community both attuned to the aspiration of being-in-common and aware of its vulnerability; (Schaap 3). In this sense, the “language” of reconciliation, which „brings into relief the limits and possibilities of democracy, both as institution and ethos” (Schaap 2) attests to an ambiguous memorial attitude, which relies confronts the past in a problematic context of democratic legitimacy. Same as the declaration in Parliament that condemned communism, the additional report - The Tismaneanu report published in 2007, placed the regime under an “other”, whose effects are not only political but also threatening to the national identity: the report argues that communism corrupted the very essence of the nation, literally, the body and spirit of the nation and is ‘responsible’ of crimes ‘against the biological makeup of the nation’ (Report 347) . This analytical key resonates with the normativity in representations in public memory such as the Sighet Memorial, which theorizes “memory” (in this case as morality of obligatory remembering) as an instrument, “that would rehabilitate the communist new man, devoid of memory”. As such, it provides a clear trajectory for how this past should be “dealt with”, including the very assumption that such “dealing with” is necessary for a future-oriented free and democratic state construction, as a basis for “national identity” and the new democracy. Furthermore, the statements quoted reveals the sometimes uneasy coexistence of multiple idioms relates to the past, such as the language of development, the language of nationalism and national state building by complements an anti-communist understanding of sufferance as functional memory narrative. As such, this stratigraphy of the notion of reconciliation, both political and historical, brings into clear sight how memorial discourse merges at the interstices between cultural practices and institutional practices that can emerge at the interstices of human rights norms and local practices.

Rather than considering the past as legacy or heritage—something abstract, malleable and susceptible to serving political interests—this perspective returns to the meaning-giving power of memories and symbols and illustrates how contested and fragmented interpretations of critical events were structured by and through sustained social and political imaginations. Since it therefore approaches transmission, rather than representation through time, it places memorial culture at the intersection between its institutional character and its culturally rooted (“democratic consolidation”). In this way, Romanian memory culture relies on a memory canon comes which is selectively compiled “after a rational selection process” (Assman 2011, 22). Aleida Assman’s concept can also prove useful in locating the social transference of memories, either between social groups or generational, of social values as „the working memory store and reproduces the cultural capital of a society that is continuously recycled and re-affirmed.” (Assman 2011, 23). The effect however, translates into current political culture where metaphors such as ‘settling accounts’, ‘healing nations’ and ‘restoring community’ that are often invoke to induce presumption of unity as unified perception on memory as to assure that the past and the present are placed at different spectrums of the liberal polity.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that a type of radicalization of memorial culture occurred in direct relation to a particular transnational notion of statehood, which supports efforts to differentiate the new post-1989 polity from the past. As the argument addressed the wider problem of how a politics of memory interacts with an ethics of memory, it relied on Daniel Levy’s interpretation of cosmopolitan dimension and the “reflexive particularism” that maps the mutual interaction. Despite the mutual constraining effect in entails, the concept maintains an open, humanistic understanding of memory, which, as has become evident in recent Romanian situations, is rather disturbed by an anticommunism practice of memory. It is therefore arguable that a restrictive memory expression is not stemming from a simple willingness to forget, but as the result of dominant discourses which fail to provide space beyond the development paradigm. In a similar definition, Michael Rothberg, calls a ‘zero-sum struggle over scarce resources’ in cultural memory, as if one memory would in and of itself block the emergence of another one (Rothberg 2009, 15). In this sense, debates in Romanian understandings of the recent past question to what extent a cosmopolitan ethics and perspective on memory can help articulate and negotiate a perspective on the past.

Particularly as a canonized national memory intersected with a transnational memory ethics, memorial expression defined by anti-communism coalesced in an essentialized understanding around the recent past. As this epistemology provides the archetype for understanding the state today and its liberal trajectory, memory culture maintains and employs particular memory “languages”. Although this indicates awareness of cosmopolitan memory constructions, it feeds into a unifying human rights (and political violence) key of interpretation which tends to operate with depoliticized categories.. In this context, the local selective remembering and commemoration often resorts therefore to a language of consensus and reconciliation as a communication key on the break between the past and the new democratic state and finds a mutually accommodating narrative in the European accent on memory considerations and political integration.

Notes:

i Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider have discussed in this regard of the Holocaust benchmark of a “global memory imperative” caust; conceived as a “universal code” the memory of the Holocaust, they argue in the *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, now underpins a global concern for human rights that changes the nature of national sovereignty and indeed the very idea of an autonomous “bounded nation” (Levy and Sznaider 2006; 2010).

ii Literature in cultural memory studies has often intersected notions of transnational and transcultural definitions of memory (see Rothberg 2009, Erll, Nunning 2008, Astrid Erll, *Travelling Memory*, in *Parallax*,17(4), 2011.) as means to depart from a national understanding of memory culture which restrict an understanding of memory making, appropriation, influence or competition and mediation in memory negotiations and take into account categories such as the ‘local,’ the ‘national,’ and the ‘global’ that are as often sites of asymmetrical encounters. In parallel, the notion of cosmopolitan memory often follows the sociology tradition initiated by Ulrich Beck through “reflexive modernization” that closely focuses on the social and political aspects of a globalized sphere of interactions and the mutuality of the occurring influences.

iii The full text of the law can be accessed here:

http://www.dreptonline.ro/legislatie/oug_95_2014_modificare_lege_recunostinta_eroii_martiri_luptatori_victoria_revolutiei_romane_1989_jertfit_viata.php, retrieved 11.04.2015

iv Raluca Alexandrescu, *Ordonanță de urgență pentru rescrierea istoriei*, Revista 22 1/2014 <http://www.revista22.ro/ordonanta-de-urgenta-pentru-rescrierea-istoriei-51905.html>, accessed 10.04.2015

v In particular this is visible in the official manifestations which occurred for the commemoration and the representations such occasions were given in media coverage.

vi Full text here: http://www.presidency.ro/?_RID=det&tb=date&id=15389&_PRID=ag, accessed 10.04.2015

vii As here: <http://antisemitism.ro/comunicate/administratia-prezidentiala-decoreaza-un-sustinator-al-miscarii-legionare> accessed 11.04.2015

viii Quoted here: <http://www.ziuanews.ro/revista-presei/iohannis-nu-mi-se-par-fondate-acuza-iile-aduse-lui-octav-bjoza-139177> accessed 11.04.2015

ix Sever Voinescu, *Deruta Conștiinței în fața complexității raului*, Dilema Veche, 1/2015 <http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/ce-lume-traim/articol/deruta-constiintei-fata-complexitatii-raului>, accessed 14.04.2015

x Marius Oprea, *Centrul pentru Combaterea Asociației Fostilor Detinuti Politici*, in *Observatorul Cultural*, http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Centrul-pentru-Combaterea-Asociației-Fostilor-Detinuti-Politici*articleID_31264-articles_details.html, accessed 10.04.2015

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xii http://presidency.ro/index.php?_RID=det&tb=date_arhiva&id=15665&_PRID=arh

xiii In Vintila Mihailescu, *Dincolo de bine si de rau*, <http://irir.ro/wp/muzeul-comunismului/lang/ro/>

xiv http://www.memorialsighet.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1537%3Amemoria-ca-form-de-justitie-spaiul-expozitional-permanent-al-memorialului-sighet-la-bucureti&catid=62%3Amemorialul-sighet-jubileu-20-de-ani-1993-2013&Itemid=169&lang=en

xv Andrei Muraru, *Procesul Visinescu*, in *Observatorul Cultural*, http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Procesul-Visinescu*articleID_31043-articles_details.html

xvi National debates were surveyed in by Cristian Tileaga (“Communism and the meaning of social memory: towards a critical-interpretive approach” in *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, December 2012, Volume 46, Issue 4, pp 475-492 and “Communism in retrospect: the rhetoric of historical representation and writing the collective memory of recent past” in *Memory Studies* October 2012 vol. 5no. 4 462-478) and Alina Hogeia (“Coming to Terms with the Communist Past in Romania: An Analysis of the Political and Media Discourse About the Tismăneanu Report” in *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 2010, Vol.2(2), p.16)

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