

Justice, Memory and Redress in Romania

Justice, Memory and Redress in Romania:

New Insights

Edited by

Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu

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INTRODUCTION

LAVINIA STAN

Transitional justice has attracted increased attention since the term first described state and society efforts to come to terms with past human rights abuses. In 1989, Central and Eastern Europe joined the growing number of regions interested in reckoning with their recent past with the help of a wide range of practices, programs, and methods. Whereas the practical experience of post-communist countries with transitional justice has been extremely rich, the academic literature has paid attention primarily to selected reckoning methods, countries and themes. Indeed, methods like the vetting, screening or lustration of governmental structures, court trials against former communist officials, and access to secret archives compiled on ordinary citizens by the secret police forces have attracted significantly more attention than commemorations, truth commissions, property restitution, or compensation packages. Similarly, the states that have engaged in sustained reckoning with the recent past (in particular, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland) have come under closer scrutiny than countries which have adopted only limited post-communist transitional justice (Albania, Bulgaria or Romania) or have done almost nothing to rectify past human rights abuses (Belarus or the former Soviet republics of Central Asia). At the same time, the literature that examines truth and justice greatly outpaces studies on reconciliation, a transitional justice goal which remains poorly understood in terms of its role and limitations in post-dictatorial contexts. The outcome of this preferential selection of cases has been the uneven mapping of reckoning efforts in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, with important theoretically driven questions remaining largely unanswered and some empirically rich cases being systematically overlooked.

To address some of these gaps, the proposed volume looks closely at Romania, a country that has remained under-studied, although the communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu retained a Stalinist flavour until the very end, the December 1989 Revolution was the only bloody regime change in the region, the Romanian courts organized a large number of trials to deal with the crimes perpetrated by state agents in 1989, and the

country was among the few in the region to create a history (truth) commission. Rather than analyzing in-depth the most important transitional justice methods adopted to date – and thus echoing several recently published works – this volume identifies and discusses new insights that could open venues for future research in the field of post-communist transitional justice. Bringing together a group of researchers who are working inside and outside Romania, the volume weaves together novel themes and fresh theoretical perspectives engendered by the study of a country that has moderately engaged in efforts designed to address the human rights violations of communist times. Indeed, Romania stands somewhere in between Central Europe, where reckoning programs were implemented soon after the communist regime collapsed, and the former Soviet Union, where post-communist governments have blocked more than have promoted an honest assessment of the communist past. This “muddling through the past” – by neither fully reckoning with its legacies of rights abuse, nor fully rejecting their reconsideration – has characterized not only post-communist Romania as a whole, but also its society and civil society, as well as the main political formations that have taken turns to form successive governments. By studying a middle-of-the-pack case, we can appreciate a variety of reckoning methods, understand the interaction between judicial and non-judicial programs, and distinguish the reasons that led to delayed or abandoned initiatives. This volume’s choice of Romania was, thus, determined not only by the still scarce academic literature devoted to that country but also by solid theoretical considerations.

The volume is divided into three parts, each of which is gathering chapters that deal with inter-connected themes relevant to the study of transitional justice. In what follows, transitional justice is understood as consisting of the judicial and non-judicial measures and programs implemented by state and non-state actors in post-communist Romania in view of redressing the human rights abuses perpetrated by the communist regime.¹ These include attempts to “come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation.”² In line with other recent studies, this volume

¹ This definition is adapted from International Center for Transitional Justice, “What Is Transitional Justice?,” 2016, available at: <https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>, accessed 23 September 2016.

² UN Security Council, “The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Report of the Secretary-General,” UN Doc. S/2004/616, New York: United Nations, 2004, available at: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/unga07/law.pdf>, accessed 24 September 2016.

defines transitional justice broadly to encompass a range of responses to past rights violations – from court trials (discussed in Chapter 5), lustration (Chapter 4), public identifications (Chapter 6), and access to (secret) archives (Chapter 4) to commemorations and memorialization (Chapter 7), truth commission (Chapters 4 and 11), and artistic projects (Chapters 8 and 12). Initiatives promoted by both government officials and civil society actors, including theater and movie directors as well as painters, are closely considered in the following chapters. To be sure, in December 1989 the self-declared incipient democracy was for the first time in decades in a position to reckon honestly and openly with the legacy of three different recent pasts – the more distant fascist dictatorship of World War II, the communist regimes of 1945-1989, and the brief but bloody December 1989 Revolution. In their unique ways, all three recent pasts necessitated a vigorous response from the society and considerable political will to seek redress, since each one of these pasts had led to significant loss of human lives. Future projects could look comparatively into these reckoning efforts, identify the reasons why some recent pasts have elicited more attention than others, and examine the consequences of addressing some pasts while neglecting others. Here, by contrast, the focus remains restricted exclusively to the crimes of the communist regime for reasons related to both space limitations and theoretical consistency.

The more theoretically oriented Part I includes four chapters that delve into key conceptual and theoretical issues relevant to any post-communist transitional justice program. The theoretical lens is directed toward some of the key concepts and terms we rely on when studying post-communist reckoning: how memory, historical redress, collaboration and resistance are understood and reflected in the literature, where does Romania stand vis-à-vis its neighbors with respect to the adoption and implementation of specific programs, and what do prompt and delayed transitional justice measures entail in a post-communist setting. Part II is more empirical in focus, examining a number of factors and actors that have determined the presence, pace and breadth of selected methods of post-communist redress. The four chapters included here contribute to both the literature that documents the many forms taken by reckoning during post-communist times and the literature that identifies the determinants and effects of transitional justice, highlighting the contribution of selected program aspects and of explanations neglected to date. Finally, Part III is dedicated to the examination of the victims and the victimizers of communist rights violations, that is, the individuals and organizations that were most directly affected by and involved with or against the feared repressive organ of the communist regime, the Securitate. Four chapters

examine this theme by giving special attention to the bystanders, a social category that has been particularly overlooked by transitional justice experts and practitioners, the majority Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as the (un)repentant former Securitate torturers and Communist Party decision-makers. The ways in which the victims, the victimizers and the bystanders relate to the recent past, reconstruct and deconstruct it, and consider it in comparison to post-communist realities are investigated here from different viewpoints that build on the literature about transitional justice and memory.

More than half of the contributions included in this book were presented at the international congress organized by the Society for Romanian Studies in June 2015 at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Bucharest. That congress allowed Turcescu, Stan, Ciobanu, Dragos and Cristina Petrescu, Tileaga, Vasile, Gussi, and Preda to present their work. The lively discussions we engaged in during the ten panels on transitional justice included in the conference program allowed us to exchange ideas and refine our arguments. These conference presentations were then turned into chapters by deepening their analyses, aligning their theoretical and conceptual frameworks, updating the concrete examples they refer to, and in some cases rethinking the conference talk almost in its entirety. Other scholars known for their work on transitional justice, but who unfortunately could not attend the Bucharest conference due to some other obligations (Horne, Grosescu and Fijalkowski, as well as Light and Young), were then invited to join this book project, so that the volume's theoretical scope and contribution would gain in significance.

The contributors to the volume are recognized for their considerable expertise in the area of transitional justice, especially as it has unfolded in post-communist Romania. All of them have published extensively on various aspects of post-dictatorial reckoning and de-communization, their studies having been presented at numerous international conferences or having been disseminated as scholarly articles, book chapters, or authored and edited books. Some of them (Stan and Turcescu, Grosescu and Fijalkowski, Dragos and Cristina Petrescu, as well as Light and Young) have already collaborated jointly in a number of research and writing projects. Several of them have acquired practical experience by becoming involved in various transition justice projects and programs in Romania and other countries – Stan, Vasile, and Grosescu were involved with the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania, Vasile as well as Dragos and Cristina Petrescu worked for the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Regime in Romania, while Gussi was a presidential adviser at the time when the Commission's final

report was presented to the Romanian Parliament. This experience informs their contributions to this volume.

At the same time, we want to acknowledge the significant financial support offered by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through its Insight Grant programs, which has allowed the co-editors to pursue work in the general areas of transitional justice, and religion and politics.

PART 1.

**MEMORY, RECKONING, LEGITIMACY,
AND JUSTICE:
THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTIONS OF MEMORY AND HISTORICAL REDRESS

CRISTIAN TILEAGA

In this chapter I start from the premise that the formal (official) condemnation of communism in Romania, primarily based on researching the physical archives of the communist regime, has offered only a limited framework for driving historical redress and social justice forward. I argue that the relatively limited impact of this official condemnation of communism is partly due to it being predominantly based on a narrow archival understanding of memory, and insufficient elaboration of alternative forms and conceptions of memory. Although the analysis of the dynamics of individual and social memory plays an important part in grounding transitional justice approaches, discussions and debates about the nature of different conceptualizations of memory that drive, and underpin, these approaches are conspicuously absent. It is acknowledged that different forms and conceptions of memory may underpin the relationship between official and unofficial processes of historical redress, but there is less focus on theorizing these different forms and conceptions of memory.

The various theoretical and practical concerns with lustration, decommunization, restitution of property, retroactive justice and, more generally, with the new political vocabulary of transition, can be said to have arisen out of, and received their significance from, the struggles of institutional and individual memory against the background of living with troubled, painful, and difficult, pasts.¹ Active, positive, revealing acts of remembering are usually seen as key means through which injustices can be redressed, victimization and responsibilities recognized, and suffering

¹ Lavinia Stan, "The Vanishing Truth: Politics and Memory in Post-Communist Europe," *East European Quarterly*, 40:4 (2006): 383-408.

acknowledged.² However, a series of socio-structural and political factors (see, for instance, Chapter 5 in this volume for the influence of legal culture, and Chapter 4 for the role of timing of transitional justice measures) have hindered or limited the reach and significance of these acts of remembering.

One, less-considered, aspect is the idea that troubled, painful, and difficult pasts can also be so “disruptive or disorientating that they become disconnected from the present, unamenable to narrative form and so off limits as a resource for making sense of experience.”³ The memories (especially, personal memories) that provided the impetus, and the substance, of transitional justice might be described as “vital memories,”⁴ that is, memories that were articulated out of living with a difficult and sometimes contested past.⁵ What defines “vital memories,” Brown and Reavey argue, is that they are simultaneously *problematic* and *essential* in “terms of what is being recollected and its significance for ongoing identification with self and others.”⁶

This chapter focuses particularly on some conceptual issues around individual and social memory that can contribute to a deeper, and more meaningful attempt at understanding the nature of personal and societal discourses around transitional justice and how to represent the communist era into public consciousness. I contend that broadening the scope of historical redress and social justice might entail a fuller appreciation of alternatives that place more emphasis on different forms and conceptions of memory which, in turn, might allow us to delve deeper into vital memories of troubled, difficult and painful pasts. Here, I distinguish between “archival,” “relational” and “psychosocial” (or “psychodynamic”) conceptions of memory, and explore their points of contact and tension. I start by exploring the differences between “archival” and “relational”

² Vladimir Tismăneanu, “Democracy and Memory: Romania Confronts Its Communist Past,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 617:1 (2008): 166-180.

³ Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, “Painful Pasts,” in *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, eds. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 151.

⁴ Steven D. Brown and Paula Reavey, *Vital Memory and Affect: Living with a Difficult Past* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁵ Jovan Byford and Cristian Tileagă, “Accounts of a Troubled Past: Psychology, History, and Texts of Experience,” *Qualitative Psychology*, in press, forthcoming in 2016.

⁶ Steven D. Brown and Paula Reavey, “Experience and Memory,” in *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, eds. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 55.

understandings of memory. I then introduce and explore the relevance of a “psychosocial” understanding of memory by using the example of what I call “practices of avoidance” based on repression and resistance, and I show what might be gained from it. Finally, I argue that researchers of transitional justice ought to consider these three understandings of memory as complementary, mutually informing, positions. A deeper appreciation of the role of different conceptions of memory for the understanding of contextual conditions of acts of remembering and forgetting, preservation and loss, expression and repression will hopefully lead to a more meaningful appreciation of both official (formal) and vernacular (ordinary) mnemonic stances and activities.

The official condemnation of communism and archival memory

In the majority of former communist states reckoning with a troubled and painful communist past has presupposed a strong dimension of recuperation and reassessment of communist memory and history through empowering the victims, identifying the victimizers, and revealing the nature and the extent of crimes and abuses perpetrated by the defunct communist regime.⁷ The official condemnation of the communist regime in Romania in the so-called “Tismăneanu Report,” that is, the final report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania chaired by Professor Vladimir Tismăneanu, was a peculiar case in point. As an initiative unmatched by any other Central and Eastern European country except Germany, which constituted two history commissions in 1992 and 1994, the Presidential Commission set out to give a definitive account of the crimes and abuses of communism in that country (1945-1989).⁸ The avowed ambition of the Tismăneanu Report

⁷ Lavinia Stan, “Comisia Tismăneanu: Repere Internaționale,” *Sfera Politicii*, 126-127 (2007): 7-13; and Tismăneanu, “Democracy and Memory.”

⁸ For more details on the structure, scope and reactions to the Tismăneanu Report, see Monica Ciobanu, “Criminalising the Past and Reconstructing Collective Memory: The Romanian Truth Commission,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61:2 (2009): 313-336, Ruxandra Cesereanu, “The Final Report on the Holocaust and the Final Report on the Communist Dictatorship in Romania,” *East European Politics and Societies*, 22:2 (2008): 270-281, Cosmina Tănăsioiu, “The Tismăneanu Report: Romania Revisits Its Past,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, 54:4 (2007): 60-69, Vladimir Tismăneanu, “Confronting Romania’s Past: A Response to Charles King,” *Slavic Review*, 66:4 (2007): 724-727, and Tismăneanu, “Democracy and Memory.”

was to provide a synthetic and rational account of the history of communism and, in doing so, to facilitate the creation of a unified collective memory of communism capable of overriding lay, individual experiences or perspectives.⁹

The leading author of the Report was Vladimir Tismăneanu, an internationally renowned expert (political scientist and historian) of communism. The Report consisted largely of an account of communism's political methods and institutions. It aimed at documenting the repressive and criminal nature of the totalitarian society and giving an exhaustive account of communism as a self-perpetuating political system. In December 2006, in front of the Romanian Parliament, President Traian Băsescu, officially condemned the crimes and abuses of the communist regime, declaring communism as "illegitimate" and "criminal." This is demonstrated by the following three excerpts from the Report:

Excerpt 1

"Condemning communism is today, more than ever, a moral, intellectual, political, and social duty/obligation. The democratic and pluralist Romanian state can and ought to do it. Also, knowing these dark and saddening pages of 20th century Romanian history is indispensable for the younger generations who have the right to know the world their parents lived in."

Excerpt 2

"Against the facts presented in this report, it is certain that genocide acts have been committed during 1945–1989, and thus the communist regime can be qualified as criminal against its own people."

Excerpt 3

"Taking act of this Report, the President can say with his hand on the heart: the Communist regime in Romania was illegitimate and criminal."¹⁰

As I showed elsewhere, by emphasizing the criminality and illegitimacy of the communist regime, the Report creates, affirms, and legitimates a narrative for a normative ethics of memory that transmits responsibilities to new generations.¹¹ The key implication that can be derived from the

⁹ Tismăneanu, "Confronting Romania's Past."

¹⁰ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrințu and Cristian Vasile, *Comisia Prezidentială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România. Raport Final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 35-36, 211, and 776, respectively.

¹¹ Cristian Tileagă, "The Social Organization of Representations of History: The Textual Accomplishment of Coming to Terms with the Past," *British Journal of*

Report is that the political category of “communism” belongs to an exceptional class of political categories. As such, one must wonder whether communism must be viewed “as manifesting only one story, as being emplottable in one way only, and as signifying only one kind of meaning?”¹²

The Report is nonetheless careful to openly announce the conception of memory that it uses in framing the criminality and illegitimacy of communism. Gleaning the “incontestable facts that demonstrate the systematic, methodical, antihuman, and utterly repressive nature of the communist regime,” as the Report puts it, presupposes working with raw historical materials and repositories – “testimonies, recollections, reports, information notes, meetings of the Political Bureau.”¹³ These statements reflect an archival conception of memory based on the notion that the collective memory of communism is purportedly inscribed in documents, and documentary traces, and mediated by personal and institutional archives. This way, the historian of communism is akin to the ethnographer of institutions, as DeVault and McCoy suggest: “to find out how things work and how they happen the way they do, a researcher needs to find the texts and text-based knowledge forms in operation.”¹⁴ The emerging collective memory of communism is therefore inextricably tied to “text-based knowledge forms”¹⁵ provided by personal and institutional archives. In this context, what matters primarily for the historian of communism is the *correspondence* between experience and its representation in documents. Moreover, this process is perceived as a “a necessary step in the development of the group’s ability to speak in one voice or be a political actor in the process of its mobilization,”¹⁶ as Myszal argued.

The archival conception of memory reflected in the Report is based on one of the most entrenched and enduring ways of thinking about memory: the idea of memory as storage of information, encoding and retrieval - the

Social Psychology, 48:2 (2009): 337-355, and Ross Poole, “Memory, History and the Claims of the Past,” *Memory Studies*, 1:2 (2008): 149-166.

¹² Hayden White, “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 38.

¹³ Tismaneanu, Dobrinu and Vasile, *Raport Final*, 35.

¹⁴ Marjorie DeVault and Liza McCoy, “Institutional Ethnography: Using Interviews to Investigate Ruling Relations,” in *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*, ed. Dorothy Smith (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 33.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Barbara Myszal, “Memory and Democracy,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48:10 (2005): 1329.

idea of memory as archive. The ‘archive’ metaphor is constitutive of everyday and scientific meanings of memory around the permanence and solidity of memory. According to Brockmeier, “Western common sense, both in everyday life and in science, assumes that there *is* a specific material, biological, neurological, and spatial reality to memory—something manifest—in the world.”¹⁷ Institutional and personal archives are the place for historical encoding and storage of information, and they are followed by contemporary retrieval based on the principles of accessibility and activation. In the process of reckoning with a troubled past, texts, documents, etc. are activated by the gaze of the historian, and made to speak of, and stand for, the vital memories of millions of people who lived under communism. Their accessibility is also crucial to this entire process. Although accessibility does not guarantee truthfulness, accessibility is a key criterion for judging their inclusion in the encoding-storage-retrieval sequence.

The model of encoding-storage-retrieval of information proposes a nomothetic, normative, version for writing about a specific collective memory of communism. The hallmark of creating and reproducing social memory in the public sphere is represented by a “dogmatic commitment to one – and only one account of the past.”¹⁸

The communal memory of communism that is centered on the notions of criminality and illegitimacy, and is reflected in the Tismăneanu Report, is produced by probing the social organization of textual archives that reproduce a closed, self-perpetuating, system of inquiry. The archive model is firmly grounded in an individualistic and positivist outlook of human nature. As Brockmeier argues, what is lacking from the archive model of memory is a perspective on “human beings as persons who remember and forget, embedded in material, cultural, and historical contexts of action and interaction.”¹⁹ The archive model of memory limits our vision of how individual and collective memories are formed, how they are affirmed, how they are resisted against, or transformed.²⁰

In the case of the official condemnation of communism that took place in Romania at the end of 2006, the archives of the communist secret political police, the notorious and much-feared Securitate, become a

¹⁷ Jens Brockmeier, “After the Archive: Remapping Memory,” *Culture & Psychology*, 16:1 (2010): 6, emphasis in original.

¹⁸ James Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 125.

¹⁹ Brockmeier, “After the Archive,” 9.

²⁰ Cristian Tileagă, *Political Psychology: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

“privileged space,”²¹ a space of discovery, from where carefully selected details are used to support the perspective offered. The key (self-assigned) task of the historian or political scientist is to construct a representation of the recent past by uncovering “the facts about the past” and recounting them “as objectively as possible.”²² Archives, and texts, documents, contained therein, “universalize or objectify, create forms of consciousness that override the ‘naturally’ occurring diversity of perspectives and experiences.”²³ Yet, the communist regime was not only “an administratively constituted knowledge,”²⁴ but also knowledge incorporated into various types and kinds of witnessing and testimonies, and various other public sources of memory. In order to appreciate the multitude of public sources of memory one needs to be able to reject a naïve notion of the past as a repository of social meaning, and of memory, as solidly preserved permanently in a material (or mental) archive.

Relational or sociocultural memory

The discursive,²⁵ narrative,²⁶ and sociocultural²⁷ turns have pushed the study of memory as both fashioned by and fashioning social and cultural frameworks. The realization that memory is not reducible to an archival model can be traced back to one of the classic formulations in the psychology of memory: “I have never regarded memory as a faculty,” Frederic Bartlett argued, “narrowed and ringed round, containing all its peculiarities and all their explanations within itself. I have regarded it rather as one achievement in the line of the ceaseless struggle to master and enjoy a world full of variety and rapid change.”²⁸ Bartlett’s exegesis is

²¹ Michael Lynch, “Archives in Formation: Privileged Spaces, Popular Archives and Paper Trails,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 12:2 (1999): 65-87.

²² Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8.

²³ Dorothy Smith, *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 195-196.

²⁴ Dorothy E. Smith, “The Social Construction of Documentary Reality,” *Sociological Inquiry*, 44:4 (1974): 261.

²⁵ Rom Harré and Grant Gillett, *The Discursive Mind* (London: Sage, 1994).

²⁶ Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

²⁷ Jaan Valsiner and Rene van der Veer, *The Social Mind: The Construction of an Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁸ Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932/1995), 314.

showing how cultural (and community) meanings are not fixed, and how social conventions, social representations, as well as social institutions play a pivotal role in the process of remembering.²⁹

The realization that memory is not reducible to the encoding-storage-retrieval model can also be traced to the work of French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on how people acquire their memories. Halbwachs famously argued that “it is in society that people normally acquire memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.”³⁰ Both Bartlett and Halbwachs believed that one needed to move away from individualistic, closed, nomothetic understandings of memory, and to research social life in and through the way in which individuals create life-worlds and actively use language-games that are “saturated” by the implicit or explicit presence of others, by relational, discursive and dialogical resources, by narrative tools, and ultimately by wider social frameworks of meaning-making.

The crux of a relational or sociocultural approach to memory that derives from the classic works of Bartlett and Halbwachs can be described along three lines. First, social memory is a social/cultural product. The task of researchers is to describe and understand the circumstances (for example, political, sociocultural, discursive) under which social memory becomes a public affair: how does “memory” actually “matter” to people.³¹ This entails treating social (collective) memory as a “relational process at the intersection of different durations of living.”³² Social factors, social frameworks, and social relations make social remembering possible. For instance, Rowe, Wertsch and Kosyaeva have shown how history museums mediate the public memory of events and people by linking vernacular, everyday stories with official ones, linking personal lives to collective narrations in the public sphere.³³ By making official

²⁹ David Middleton and Steve D. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Experience: Studies in Remembering and Forgetting* (London: Sage, 2005).

³⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1952/1992), 38.

³¹ Steven D. Brown, “The Quotation Marks Have a Certain Importance: Prospects for a ‘Memory Studies,’” *Memory Studies*, 1:3 (2008): 261-271; Sue Campbell, “The Second Voice,” *Memory Studies*, 1:1 (2008): 41-48; as well as David Middleton and Steven D. Brown, “Issues in the Socio-Cultural Study of Memory: Making Memory Matter,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociocultural Psychology*, eds. Jaan Valsiner and Alberto Rosa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 661-677.

³² Middleton and Brown, *The Social Psychology of Experience*, vii.

³³ Shawn Rowe, James Wertsch and Tatyana Y. Kosyaeva, “Linking Little Narratives to Big Ones: Narrative and Public Memory in History Museums,”

narratives more accessible, and by bringing vernacular narratives to the surface, museums become sites where both consensus, as well as contestation, resistance around national and local history can take shape. A similar example is given by the recent “terror sites” and national museums dedicated to the legacy of communist totalitarianism in Eastern Europe (for example, the famous House of Terror in Budapest). They are designed as tools for the political socialization of younger generations through mnemonic socialization, that is, socialization into particular images (of genocide), memories (of victimhood), and narratives (of redemption) about the past, present and future of the nation.³⁴

Second, interpretations and understandings of the recent past are a concern for professional academics as much as they are for ordinary people.³⁵ Professional academics and lay people may make use of and apply various (general and particular, universalist and individualist) interpretive schemes to understanding and interpreting a troubled and difficult recent past. The key task of the sociocultural approach to memory is to describe the variety of interpretative practices and to study the dilemmatic, and often contradictory, nature of social and political stance taking.³⁶ For instance, Bucur shows how both the communist and post-communist “official commemorative calendar” of the Romanian state has attempted to create national commemorative rituals (around a “heroes cult” and commemorative sites such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Mărășești Mausoleum) that implicitly or explicitly clash with local communities' own way of remembering and constructing social memories.³⁷

Third, social memory neither simply reflects nor expresses “a closed system for talking about the world,” but rather “contrary themes, which continually give rise to discussion, argumentation and dilemmas.”³⁸ Social memory is distributed beyond one’s head, and as such it “involves active

Culture & Psychology, 8:1 (2002): 97–113.

³⁴ James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central and Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

³⁵ Cristian Tileagă, “Communism in Retrospect: The Rhetoric of Historical Representation and Writing the Collective Memory of Recent Past,” *Memory Studies*, 5:4 (2012): 462-478.

³⁶ Michael Billig, *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³⁷ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

³⁸ Michael Billig, Susan Condor, Derek Edwards, Mike Gane, David Middleton and Alan Radley, *Ideological Dilemmas: A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking* (London: Sage, 1988), 6.

agents, on the one hand, and cultural tools such as calendars, written records, computers, and narratives, on the other.”³⁹ The contingency, context-related and context-dependent emergence of social memory is contrasted with the presumed stability and permanence of archival memory. The troubled history of reconciliation in South Africa is a relevant example here. Andrews shows how in the context of testimonies and responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) there was no unique or collective narrative model that was used by all of the social actors.⁴⁰ Although citizens recounting tales of suffering represented a unique (and successful) model of rebuilding a “broken” nation, it was far from being a uniform one, with different stories being told, sometimes as the result of pressures on victims to tell certain kinds of stories while testifying, or as the outcome of different experiences and perspectives of victims and perpetrators, and various other individuals and groups challenging official versions of the past and demanding redress. As Andrews argues, the concern of the TRC focused on the creation of acceptable, believable, pragmatic versions of memory more than on the truthful collective memory, and therefore on developing realistic and usable images of the past history of race relations rather than truthful ones.

Moreover, social/collective memory is also multidirectional memory.⁴¹ It points in different directions, and operates on many fronts, at both conscious and unconscious levels. It was Rothberg who argued that “collective memory is not simply an archive awaiting political instrumentalization; the haunting of the past cannot be harnessed in the present without unforeseen consequences.”⁴² A telling example comes from Gallinat whose work focuses on the narrative work of a group of former political prisoners in their attempt to communicate their experiences of a painful past. She notes that, in most of the cases, participants could not move their stories beyond general phrases like “horrible,” “awful,” or “unbearable.”⁴³ In a similar way very particular episodes of abuse in Stasi prisons were not mentioned, although other

³⁹ James V. Wertsch, “Collective Memory,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociocultural Psychology*, eds. Jaan Valsiner and Alberto Rosa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 646.

⁴⁰ Molly Andrews, *Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁴² Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 223.

⁴³ Anselma Gallinat, “Difficult Stories: Public Discourse and Narrative Identity in Eastern Germany,” *Ethnos*, 71:3 (2006): 343-366.

aspects were mentioned (lack of hygiene, privacy, sleep deprivation, etc.). The narratives of the inmates were also punctuated by heavy silences and difficulties of finding the right words. For Gallinat, all this shows the “tension between wanting to transmit the extraordinariness of the episode and a feeling of failing to do so.”⁴⁴ Gallinat’s interviewees were not finding it easy to be themselves; they were struggling to find both social and individual acceptable (rational and moral) identities that would satisfactorily capture their vital memories of pain, abuse, and marginalisation. In my own work,⁴⁵ I have shown how one might go about applying the idiographic principles and ethos of a sociocultural conception of memory to researching apologia for past wrongdoings (in the Romanian case, the informal collaboration with the Securitate) as a way of managing moral identity and moral accountability.

What discursive analyses show is that public apologies are culturally mediated experiences. They are not simple rhetorical exercises of image restoration nor do they reflect the hidden psychology of the person. Making “moral amends” presupposes a cultural orientation to an operative cultural norm of remedial work on social relationships through the use of language. In this context, remembering is a social practice that “enables the production of subjectivity,”⁴⁶ and the mobilisation of self-protective and self-affirming cultural repertoires. Analyses of public apologies reveal that social actors inhabit, enact, defend, or suppress multiple social identities, and they construct their accounts out of a carefully choreographed patchwork of material/cultural tools (narratives, written records, and social technologies). Public apologies express socio-cultural meanings (including the sociocultural meaning of what it means to be “sorry”) about memory, people, identities, events, social relations, and institutions.

Social memory and social practices of avoidance

An analytic focus on relational or sociocultural memory shows how memory manifests itself and takes various forms at different levels of

⁴⁴ Gallinat, “Difficult Stories, 354.

⁴⁵ Tileagă, “The Social Organization of Representations of History,” Cristian Tileagă, “(Re)writing Biography: Memory, Identity, and Textually Mediated Reality in Coming to Terms with the Past,” *Culture & Psychology*, 17:2 (2011): 197-215, and Cristian Tileagă, “Apologia,” in *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, eds. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 185-199.

⁴⁶ Steven D. Brown, “Two Minutes of Silence: Social Technologies of Public Commemoration,” *Theory & Psychology*, 22:2 (2012): 239.

social and political organization, in public and in private, in elite discourse and in lay meanings, in the guise of personal as well as societal remembering. Researchers working within and across disciplines research memory for the social functions it fulfills, and for how it assumes collective relevance in the cultural, social, as well as political web in which it is entangled.

The struggle to find socially and individually acceptable stories, the mediation of vital memories by personal and social relationships, and material environments is typically portrayed as a contingent, active and conscious social activity. Yet, I want to argue that the unconscious also plays a part in the mediation of these vital memories. A closer inspection of narratives and accounts reveals gaps, silences, avoidances, ambivalence and, more generally, a tension between wanting to express the uniqueness of painful, shameful experiences and wanting to repress unwanted, shameful experiences. This tension arguably points to deeper difficulties that people (and collectives) experience when encountering, and facing, a painful, troubled past. “One wants to get free of the past,” Adorno admitted, “one cannot live in its shadow,” but the “past one wishes to evade is still so intensely alive.”⁴⁷ In this section, I introduce what I would like to call a psychosocial or psychodynamic conception of memory that I see as a complement to a relational or sociocultural conception of memory. I focus on one set of social practices that are relevant to understanding the official appraisal of communism in public consciousness. I call these practices “social practices of avoidance.”

One of my main concerns here is with understanding the role of what Billig calls “social repression” and what Frosh describes as “resistance.”⁴⁸ Billig’s account of repression stresses the importance of social practices of “avoidance” that are part and parcel of conversational practices of society around topics or feelings that are too “difficult” to discuss.⁴⁹ Resistance refers to “something to be overcome”; analysis is a process of understanding the mind that is “at war with itself, blocking the path to its

⁴⁷ Theodor Adorno, “What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?,” in *Bitburg in moral and political perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman, trans. T. Bahti and G. Hartman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 115.

⁴⁸ Michael Billig, *Freudian Repression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Stephen Frosh, *Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic: Interventions in Psychosocial Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁴⁹ In a different, yet related, context see for the relevance of “social repression” in the analysis of extreme prejudice against ethnic minorities Cristian Tileagă, *The Nature of Prejudice: Society, Discrimination and Moral Exclusion* (London: Routledge, 2015).

own freedom.”⁵⁰ Also, I am guided here by LaCapra’s insights on the foundational problem that is facing historians and concerns “how to articulate the relation between the requirements of scientific expertise and the less easily definable demands placed on the use of language by the difficult attempt to work through transference relations in a dialogue with the past having implications for the present and future.”⁵¹

In his work on the Holocaust, LaCapra distinguishes between “constative” historical reconstruction and “performative” dialogic exchange with the past.⁵² As he argues, this latter “performative” dialogic exchange relies on certain unconscious memory activities. The process of canonization of a single collective narrative around the nature of communism in Romania has been, predominantly, a constative historical reconstruction based on the factual reconstruction of experiences and an archival conception of memory. In contrast, according to a psychosocial conception, whatever comes out of the past, whatever is “discovered” in dusty, previously unexplored corners of mental and physical archives, can trigger resistance, repression and avoidance, and can activate unconscious fears, phantasies, unexpected identifications, as well as unresolved conflicts.

In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on describing the performative dialogic exchange with the past in the Tismăneanu Report. I follow LaCapra in the assumption that the basis of a performative dialogic exchange with the past is rooted in the notion of “working-through” taken-for-granted ethical and political considerations. As LaCapra argues, “working-through implies the possibility of judgment that is not apodictic or ad hominem but argumentative, self-questioning, and related in mediated ways to action.”⁵³

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the representation of communism in the Tismăneanu Report is the image of communism as the Other.⁵⁴ Throughout the Report, communism is described in general terms as a “regime” and an “ideology,” a “utopian conception,” an “enemy of the human race” that instituted “the physical and moral assassinate,” and survived “through repression.” However, communism is also described in national terms: a “(foreign) occupation regime,” “criminal towards its own

⁵⁰ See Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 21, cited in Frosh, *Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic*, 166.

⁵¹ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 66.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 4.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 210.

⁵⁴ Tileagă, “Communism in Retrospect.”

people,” and “antination,” among others.⁵⁵ It is very clear in the Report that to write of communism means to narrate the (Romanian) nation, its past, present and future. In doing so, the Report is proposing a specific method of reasoning about Romanian history and memory that constitutes communism as the Other, not quite “us.” Interestingly, the narrative of communism is not self-condemnatory or self-blaming, but rather communism is distanced from (the national) self. This is demonstrated by the following excerpts:

Excerpt 4

“The total Sovietisation, through force, of Romania, especially during the period 1948-1956, and the imposition under the name ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ of a despotic political system ruled by a profiteering caste (nomenklatura), tightly united around its supreme leader.”

Excerpt 5

“Pretending to fulfill the goals of Marxism, the regime has treated an entire population as a mass of lab mice part of a nightmarish social engineering experiment.”

Excerpt 6

“...the imposition of a dictatorial regime totally surrendered to Moscow and hostile to national political and cultural values”

Excerpt 7

“The Romanian Popular Republic, who has come into being through diktat, or more exactly, through a coup d’état, symbolizes a triple imposture: it wasn’t even a Republic (in the full sense of the phrase), it wasn’t popular, and, most certainly, it wasn’t Romanian.”⁵⁶

In the Tismăneanu Report the communist regime is also found “responsible” of crimes “against the biological makeup of the nation.” Through references to physical and psychological effects (for example, “psychological weakening and disheartenment of the population,” and “decreased capacity for physical and intellectual effort”)⁵⁷ communism is externalized and objectivized as a sui generis political ideology designed to undermine the Romanian ethos.⁵⁸ The Report describes communism as

⁵⁵ Tileagă, “The Social Organization of Representations of History.”

⁵⁶ Tismaneanu, Dobrinu and Vasile, *Report Final*, 774, 775, 774, 765, respectively.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 461-462.

⁵⁸ Theo van Leeuwen, “Representing Social Action,” *Discourse & Society*, 6:1 (1995): 81-106.

“antipatriotic,” whereas the Romanian communist leaders are portrayed as lacking “patriotic sentiments,” and Romanian communist politics are described as not representing the affirmation of a “patriotic spirit/will.”⁵⁹

Paradoxically, the basic premise for the condemnation of Romanian communism is to construe communism as the Other, in other words as not reflecting Romanian values and national interests. This is not only in stark contrast with how ordinary people have experienced communism in both its positive and negative consequences,⁶⁰ but this also encapsulates an active avoidance of the implication that communism may have been in any way a “criminal” ideology that reflected, and furthered, national interests. This position can be seen as an example of how a progressive, social justice repertoire masks and represses an insufficiently worked-through transferential relation with a controversial past. The textual construction of the negative qualities of communism in the Tismăneanu Report (“enemy of human rights,” “illegitimate,” and “criminal”) opens the way for the operation of social repression, the suppression of the socially inappropriate thought that communism may have been historically part and parcel of national identity. In this context, what is not said is even more significant than what is said. The negative attributes of communism are distanced from the (national) self. One can see how the writings of the professional historians of communism, who are adhering strictly to the conventions of their field, actively resist alternative ideological implications, especially those that closely reflect nationalist representations of communism in popular culture. As Frosh notes, resistance is a useful notion to understanding the subtleties of ambivalence. “Resistance,” Frosh points out, “has general significance as a way of indicating how a person might want something but not want it at the same time.”⁶¹

The topics of repression and resistance in the Romanian context will vary from those of other Central and Eastern European countries. Any thorough analysis of social repression and resistance will need to identify and explore general, but also specific, topics subject to repression and resistance. Post-communist transition has developed its own complex social conventions and discursive codes that resist and repress the topic of collective involvement in the perpetuation of the communist system. By constructing communism as the Other, paradoxically, even progressive texts such as the Tismaneanu Report are engaging in collective avoidance of this very sensitive topic. As new generations of young people participate

⁵⁹ Tismaneanu, Dobrinicu and Vasile, *Report Final*, 765, 773, 30, respectively. Cf. Tileagă, “The Social Organization of Representations of History.”

⁶⁰ Bucur, *Heroes and Victims*.

⁶¹ Frosh, *Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic*, 167.