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Communism as a Frame of Reference in Romania: Public and Private Recollections

This article attempts at assessing the importance of the communist past in the Romanian public and private lives in the last 30 years looking back at several aspects of its memory. The first level of analysis concerns the instrumentalization of the memory of communism by political actors in order to gain influence, to legitimize/delegitimize people, ideas and ideology. This instrumentalization had a hugh impact on the memorial policies which will be questioned in order to see what was at stake in adopting such policies and who were the actors who promoted them. The memorial and compensatory laws were fashioned by the social frameworks of memory, but also by the European politics and were meant to create an official (anticommunist) memory of communism.

Repressed and ordinary people's ways of remembering communism will be also analyzed, with a special focus on women perspective as regards this epoch, in order to size the complex interplay of social and individual memories as regards communism in postcommunist Romania.

The analysis uses various sources: laws, public speeches, political declarations as well as secondary literature on communism and its memory. The outcomes of three different researches undertaken by the author of this article beginning with 2003 are also to be discussed in the text. The analysis of the above mentioned sources will provide us with schemata of remembering communism from a diachronic perspective by pointing out to the loci of encounter of various forms of memory.

Memory Politics

The fall of Ceaușescu and his clan in December 1989 did not mean a complete break with communism. Power was immediately taken over by individuals

and interest groups of the second rank of the *nomenklatura*, of the secret political police, the notorious *Securitate,* and other structures of the communist state, those who organized the Coup d'État against Ceausescu.[1] Offspring of national communism, this new elite was called by researchers, the neo-communists.

Shortly after Ceausescu's execution, the neo-communists framed a new political order, defined by the first post-communist neo-communist president of Romania, Ion Iliescu,[2] as an "original democracy". They struggled to stay in power through a rhetoric, public actions, behaviors inspired by their communist mentality. During the whole year of 1990, they used the same communist slogans in targeting social groups such as the intellectuals, during the Mineriad[3] on 13-15 June 1990; the historic political parties, accused of fascism during the 1990 (before, during and after the electoral campaign of May); and the former political detainees, still deemed "enemies of the people".[4] Though its rhetoric and practices are drawn from national communism, any identification with said regime is rejected by neo-communists. In a press release from 25th of December 1989, the day of Ceausescu's execution, Ion Iliescu who was recognized as the new leader *de facto* of the country, stated that the communist regime was condemned by History. He argued that reconciliation was necessary, that all forces should unite in order to rebuild the country.[5] The responsibility for the past atrocities and social and economic difficulties was assigned to Nicolae Ceausescu and

[1] In 2016, the military prosecutors of Romania began an investigation concerning the events of December 1989. Eventually, the prosecutors discovered that the events of December 1989 were the result of a mixture between a popular uprising and a Coup d'Etat organized by members of the Securitate and nomenklatura as well as by high ranking officers who sought to remove Ceausescu from power and to introduce reforms inspired by Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*.

[2] Ion 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 some point, he served as the head of the Central Committee's Department of Propaganda and as Minister for Youth between 1967 and 1971. In the late 1970s, he was marginalized by Ceausescu and removed from all central political offices but still held high offices in the province. During the December uprising in Bucharest, he became the leader of the anti-Ceausescu movement. He won the free general elections of May 1990 and became the first post-communist president of Romania.

[3] 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.

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

[5] *Monitorul Oficial al Romaniei*, 25 decembrie 1989, an I, no. 2.

his wife. Meanwhile, the neo-communists tacitly take upon the communist heritage by controlling all state institutions.[6]

However, although the neo-communists aimed at imposing amnesia about Communism, the existence of a big number of former political detainees[7], many of them former liberal, social-democrat and conservative politicians, hindered the total oblivion of the past. "Driven by a stronger solidarity than any other group of remembrancers, the former political prisoners were able to carve out for themselves a distinctive social, civic, and political collective identity...".[8] The Association of the Former Political Detainees of Romania (Asociatia fostilor detinuti politici din Romania, AFDPR) was created in January 1990 as an NGO with the purpose to make known the sufferings of its members and to gain recognition. It organized local branches in the whole country playing an important role in transmitted the memory of political persecutions as well as promoting their social, civic and political agenda.

Almost at the same time, the re-creation of the historical political parties, The National Peasant Party (christian-democrat) (PNTcd), the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Social-Democrat Party (PSD) whose leaders, as well as many of theirs members, were former political detainees who defined themselves as anti-communists transformed anticommunism in a political doctrine. PNTcd, which militated for the rehabilitation of the political detainees, for the restoration of monarchy, for the restitution of properties, etc. imposed itself as the beacon of the new (interwar modeled) democracy.

Anti-communism was supported and disseminated by several mass-media outlets, by some intellectuals, by few civic associations and NGOs. A newspaper, *România liberă (Free Romania)*,[9] even called for a trial of

[6] Alexandru Gussi, *La Roumanie face à son passé communiste*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2011 (hereafter, Gussi *La Roumanie)*, p. 45.

[7] Cristina and Dragos Petrescu mentioned a number of 100 000 former detainees in 1990s. C. Petrescu, D. Petrescu, "The Canon of Remembering Romanian Communism: From Autobiographical Recollections to Collective Representations", in: *Remembering Communism. Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe*, ed. by M. Todorova, A. Dimou, S. Troebst, CEU Press, Budapest — New York 2014, p. 57 (hereafter, C. Petrescu, D. Petrescu, "The Canon of Remembering Romanian Communism").

[8] D. Petrescu, "The Canon of Remembering Romanian Communism", p. 57.

[9] *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."

Communism, bringing evidence for this purpose by publishing testimonies of former political prisoners. *Dreptatea (The Just)*, the official newspaper of PNTcd promoted an anticommunist discourse while introducing to the audience former political detainees' deeds and civic actions. Associations such as the Group for the Social Dialogue (GDS);[10] The Civic Alliance, the "Academia Civică" Foundation and the "Sighet" Memorial[11] also played an important role in shaping the Romanian post-communist memory culture. They endorsed and distributed an anticommunist discourse through debates, protests, civic actions, memorial practices, rituals, publications, new institutions and memorial laws.

As early as 1990, the communist past imposed itself as a line of division between the the neo-communists and the historical parties, which were seen as the solely political alternative to the communist offspring's agenda.[12] This ideological separation between the two camps became even more visible during the electoral campaigns of 1990, 1992, and 1996.[13] In 1996, the Democratic Convention (Convenția Democratică), the coalition lead by the PNTcd, transformed anticommunism in the prominent force which eventually helped them winning the elections. Populism was another driving force for the Democratic Convention during the electoral campaign.[14] However, neither anticommunism, nor populism defined its public policies while in power. Nevertheless, the president Emil Constantinescu privately condemned Communism; the activities of the "Sighet" Memorial received material support thanks to Law no. 95 of June 10, 1997; and great figures

[10] The Group for Social Dialogue (GDS) is an organisation established in 1990 by intellectuals and former communist dissidents of the last years of Ceaușescu's regime. Its goals are to protect human rights and the environment and to promote democratic and civic values. It also focuses on the memory of political persecutions in Romania.

[11] In 1992, Ana Blandiana, a well known poet and dissident, designed a "Memory Center" dedicated to the memory of victims of communism, the Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Anticommunist Resistance in Sighetul Marmației (known as the Sighet Memorial). The Sighet Memorial includes an International Centre that keeps written, oral, and visual archives pertaining to the communist repression and anticommunist resistance, and a museum. It also collects testimonies, publishes books, and run "Memory Summer Schools" for pupils and students.

[12] A. Gussi, *La Roumanie,* p. 144.

[13] Allegations of fascism of historical parties, of homosexuality of their leaders dominated the neo-communist discourse. See more in C.-F. Dobre, *Ni victime, ni héroïne: les anciennes détenues politiques et les mémoires du communisme en Roumanie*, Electra, București 2019, p. 134.

[14] A. Gussi, *La Roumanie*, p. 194.

of the armed anti-communist resistance,[15] such as Elisabeta Rizea of Nucşoara,[16] were publicly acknowledged.

Anticommunism versus neo-communism defined the Romanian political life until 2000 when the agreement of all political forces to work for Romania's admission to NATO and UE made it marginal. Anticommunism moved slowly from the political arena to the cultural field of power becoming the dominant paradigm of the public space after 2006 official condemnation of the communist regime.

Condemning Communism was part of the anticommunist memory struggle. It was constantly requested by the former political prisoners, but rejected by neo-communists as a witch hunt. The Resolution 1481 of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly of January 25, 2006, which condemned the crimes and abuses of communist regimes, brought about a reaction from the Romanian president, who, on 5 April 2006, decreed the creation of a commission to "analyse the communist dictatorship in Romania".

Coordinated by Vladimir Tismăneanu and including a scientific board of former political detainees, dissidents and well-known intellectuals, the Commission presented an extended report of over 600 pages on the abuses and communist crimes, pointing out to the institutions and people

[15] The armed anticommunist resistance in Romania began in 1944, in the territory of northern Bukovina which was already occupied by the Red Army, and lasted until the early 1960s. Its peak period lasted between 1949 and 1952. The rebel groups were mostly clustered in mountain regions and had few members: between 10 (sometimes less) and 20. Countrywide, there were about 10.000 anti-communist fighters in the mountains. However, the number of people involved in the resistance was considerably greater, as the groups were helped by peasants from neighboring villages. The rebels were mostly officers of the royal army who had fought on the Eastern front, teachers, small village clerks, members of political parties which communism had outlawed, rich peasants and members of the legionnaire movement. At first, they were supported by the Americans, who parachuted troops, ammunition, materials, supplies and other goods into the mountains. A dogged repression followed, people were killed, tortured, arrested. By 1970s, the anti-communist resistance would become nothing but a memory, chased away into the darkest corners of the minds of those who had taken active part in it, before being discovered and brought to light after the fall of communism. C.-F. Dobre, *A Country Behind Barbed Wire. A Brief History of Communist Repression in Romania*, Fundaţia Culturală Memoria, 2015, pp. 25-27.

[16] Elisabeta Rizea was a peasant living in the village of Nucsoara whose husband and family was persecuted by communists. When her husband hide in the mountains, Elisabeta supplied the refugees with food, water, clothes, and news. She was sentenced to death and afterwards to 25 years. Liberated in 1964, she remained in the village and survived communism. In 1992, she was interviewed for a television series called the "Memorial of Sorrow", a documentary dedicated to former political prisoners. A charismatic figure, she became very popular and a beacon of the anticommunism in Romania. C.-F. Dobre, "Elisabeta Rizea de Nucşoara: un «lieu de mémoire» pour les Roumains?", *Conserveries mémorielles*: www.cm.revues.org/290.

responsible as well as proposing new public policies meant to promote the anticommunist perspective. The president used the report as evidence in his 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 assumed the anticommunist stance of the Commission and its Report. Furthermore, the president recommended the implementation of an anticommunist official program, which consisted in building of a monument to the victims of communism in Bucharest, the opening of a museum of communist dictatorship and of a centre for the study of communism, the creation of an encyclopedia and a handbook on the history of communism, holding conferences and travelling exhibitions based on the conclusions of the Report of the presidential commission.

In 2019, a revival of anticommunism added a new dimension to this ideological stance. Former communists who benefited from the fall of Ceausescu, as well as their populist followers used an anticommunist discourse to accuse those fighting against corruption in Romania of being perpetrators of a new kind of repression inspired by communist practices, laws and institutions.[17] Politicians condemned for corruption pointed out to the Anti-corruption National Department as being inspired by the communist repressive patterns while comparing themselves with political detainees of the communist era.[18]

Memorial Policies and Compensatory Laws

The neo-communist amnesia could not hindered the communist crimes and abuses. On contrary, they became more visible and difficult to ignore. Under the constant pressure of the AFDPR, but also trying to diminish the moral force of the former detainees, the neo-communists adopted several compensatory laws. The Decree-Law no. 118 of March 30 1990 granted monthly compensation to former political prisoners, deportees, and former

[17] The case of the former General Prosecutor of Romania, Augustin Lazar, is striking in this respect. As a young prosecutor in the 80s, he was involved in evaluating the file of a political detainee who was proposed for liberation. He did not recommend his liberation. When he became General Prosecutor of Romania and while he rejected the changes brought to anti-corruption laws, he was accused of being a perpetrator of the communist repression by the mass-media controlled by a former Securitate officer, condemned for corruption.

[18] This is the case with the leader of the ruling party, the Social Democrat Party, an offspring of Ion Iliescu, who being condemned of corruption claimed that he is a political detainee as he points out to the Secret Service interest in having him fall from power. His claims are not based on proves, misusing the anticommunist discourse.

POWs, in various amounts depending on the number of years they had spent in prison, exile or camps, free public transport, inclusion of the years spent in prison into the calculation of their old-age pension, etc. Another decree-law from December 1999 granted the label of fighter in the anti-communist resistance to all people who opposed communism between 6 of March 1945 and 22 of December 1989. They were entitled to compensations and restitution of theirs belongings. The decree-law combined compensatory rights with memorial policies as it proposed to rename streets and squares after anticommunist figures as well as to grant decorations and medals.[19] According to the Law 221/2009, the former political prisoners could also ask for material compensations as regards their imprisonment.[20]

To the compensatory laws were added memorial laws aimed at commemorating the victims of communism and Nazism or only the victims of communism adopted under the influence or under the pressure of European laws and recommendations. In 2011, the Parliament adopted the Law 198 which declared 23rd of August the National Day of Commemoration of Victims of Nazism and Communism as well as the day of 21st of December the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Communism in Romania.[21] In 2017, the Parliament passed the Law 127, which declares 14th of May the national day of commemoration of the martyrs of the political prisons in Romania.[22]

Shortly after granting compensations to former political detainees and deportees, and POWs, a new privileged category was being created through the Law 48 of December 18 1990, — the "revolutionaries". Anyone who testified with witnesses (many of whom had lied, as we have learned in 2017-2019) that they had taken part in the events of December 1989 were granted all sorts of privileges: pecuniary compensations, houses and land owned by

[19] www.lege5.ro/Gratuit/giztsmbr/ordonanta-de-urgenta-nr-214-1999-privind-acordarea-calitatii-de-luptator-in-rezistenta-anticomunista-persoanelor-condamnate-pentru-infractiuni-savarsite-din-motive-politice-persoanelor-impotriva-caror (retrieved 2nd of November 2019).

[20] www.lege5.ro/Gratuit/gezdkobwge/legea-nr-221-2009-privind-condamnarile-cu-caracter-politic-si-masurile-administrative-asimilate-acestora-pronuntate-in-perioada-6-martie-1945-22-decembrie-1989(retrieved 2nd of November 2019).

[21] www.cameradeputatilor.ro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck2015.proiect?idp=12097 retrieved 2nd of November 2019).

[22] This law is rather controversial as it was promoted by the Romanian fascists. Their inheritors are the only ones to celebrate it each year in the Revolution square of Bucharest. www.juridice.ro/580565/ziua-nationala-de-cinstire-a-martirilor-din-temnitele-comuniste.html retrieved 2nd of November 2019).

the State, priority for employment in public office, free access to education, free public transport, *etc*.[23]

The privileges granted to revolutionaries were an expression of public policies, which turned the bloody events of December 1989 into the 'foundation myth' of the neo-communist regime. The peaceful street protests of the citizens, the street fights between the army and the so-called terrorists, the trial of the Ceaușescus, the power takeover by Ion Iliescu and his colleagues, were considered elements of what was called a "revolution of reconciliation" as it was stated in a press released on 29 December 1989, by the National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naționale), fresh out of the communist laboratory. The neo-communists urged Romanians to forget the past and join hands in reconstructing the country which Ceaușescu had ruined.[24]

Several memorial laws protect the relay of the neo-communist myth of the "revolution": Law 48/1990, 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 organise 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 of Romania, the Institute of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989 (Institutul Revoluției Române din Decembrie 1989) was 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 research centre affiliated to a future Museum of Communism sparked numerous reactions from neo-Communists.[25]

The memorial and compensatory laws were meant to hinder any public debate about culpability, perpetrators and responsibility. Furthermore, memorial policies promoted by neo-communists transformed the events of December 1989 into the foundation myth of a new political order. The opposite opinion, which considered "the Revolution" as the final stage of communist aggression in Romania, is still marginal even after February 2019 when the General Prosecutor of Romania presented the results of an investigation which has showed that in December 1989 we witnessed and

[23] C.-F. Dobre, "Remembering Communism in Post-Communist Romania: Memorial Regimes and Individual Recollections", in: *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană*, 2018/17 (hereafter, C.-F. Dobre, "Remembering Communism"), p. 158.

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

[25] C.-F. Dobre, "Remembering Communism", p. 159.

experienced rather a Coup d'État than a popular uprising as we were told for almost 30 years.

The idea of the Coup emerged in the public space as early as 1990. Therefore, the protesters of the big Bucharest rally of 12 of January 1990 and of the March protests in Timisoara asked for the removal from the public offices of those involved in political persecutions, in communist leadership. This position was assumed in the public space at the end of December 1989 by the philosopher and civic activist Gabriel Liiceanu, the founder of the publishing house Humanitas, a beacon of anticommunist culture in Romania.

> Allow a longer breath between the last tribute you payed, between the last time when you expressed your enthusiasm for the re-election of Ceaușescu at the 14th Congress (of the Communist Party) and the eager support you have showed afterwards while the inhabitants of Timişoara were burying their dead, and on Magheru Boulevard and in the Palace Square the blood had not yet dried up. [...] Do not appear on television, do not write in newspapers anymore ... .[26]

The anti-communists depicted communism as a regime imposed by the Soviet Union on the Romanian nation 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. It depicts the Romanian concentration-camp experience as extreme even by the standards of totalitarian regimes, and argues that the repression left deep scars and thus discouraged people from rebelling against the communist state.[27]

A lustration law was constantly demanded by anticommunists, but it was never adopted. However, in 1999, a law meant to point out to those responsible for the communist repression was adopted by the Parliament controlled by the Democratic Convention. The actual text of the law, called "the Ticu-Dumitrescu law" after the president of the AFDPR, who promoted it in the public sphere, modified after intense debates in the Parliament, 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. The former political prisoners, the former dissidents or a few well-known intellectuals were vilified for having signed collaboration agreements with

[26] G. Liiceanu, *Apel către lichele* (Appeal to Rogues), Humanitas, Bucharest 2005, pp. 11-12.

[27] C.-F. Dobre,"Uses and Misuses of Memory: Dealing with Communist Past in Postcommunist Bulgaria and Romania", in: M. Pakier and J. Wawrzyniak (eds.), *European Memory: Eastern Perspectives*, Berghahn Books, series Studies in Contemporary European History, New York — Oxford 2015, p. 303.

the Securitate under the impact either of the horror of their past experiences in prisons and/or labour camps, or under the threat of (new) persecution.[28] Meanwhile, the Securitate officers enjoy huge pensions compared to the rest of the population, control segments of the economy, and have influence on the post-communist secret services.[29]

Former Political Detainees and Deportees Ways of Remembering Communism

The politics of memory played an important role in shaping the memorial discourse of the former political detainees, and deportees of Bărăgan.[30] Most of theirs written memoirs and oral testimonies denounced communism as an oppressive, illegitimate regime which was imposed from the outside, promoted anti-communism, and attempted at legitimising and/or de-legitimising certain ideologies, persons and historical events.

My research findings gave me the opportunity to size the various layers of the memory of those persecuted for political reasons during communism in Romania. It provides some explanations about the ways of remembering communism and political persecutions, and assesses the importance of the memory politics in the building process of the individual and collective memory during post-communism.

I have started to interview former political prisoners, women and men, in 2003, for my PhD research on testimonies about communism and political persecutions in post-communist Romania. My inquiry followed the theory and method of oral history (récits de vie),[31] questioning former political detainees imprisoned in the 1950s. The narratives can be seen as "life reviews"[32] as the interviewees were above 70 years old (except for one woman who was 68 at that time). All women and men were retired and involved in various activities related to the memory of communism, such as informants for research projects, consultants for movies, documentaries, and trials pertaining to the communist repression.

[28] C.-F. Dobre, "Remembering Communism", p. 160.

[29] 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 and not only.

[30] Bărăgan is called the steppe region situated in the south-eastern part of Romania.

[31] D. Bertaux, *Les récits de vie*, Nathan, Paris 1997.

[32] P. Thomson, *The Voice of the Past, Oral History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, p. 137.

The criteria for choosing my informants were related to their education, to their confidence in me as a researcher, to the reasons for their imprisonment (their anti-communist endeavors). The research followed the snowball interview sampling technique, one informant introducing me to another. This technique is the most appropriate in dealing with sensitive issues such as political persecution due to the need for trust between informant and researcher and for informants' need to feel safe with respect to the person doing the research.

In 2011, I have started (with Valeriu Antonovici) a similar inquiry as regards former deportees of Bărăgan. We have used the same approach, the snowballing technique. The interviews were filmed and recorded on tape. One of the outcomes of this research was a documentary entitled "Baragan Stories. Memories from the Romanian Siberia".

Based on my research outcomes, I argue that the memorial discourse of former political prisoners and deportees is part of the anticommunist paradigm (while being shaped by it). All former political detainees, men and women alike, whom I interviewed describe communism as a regime characterized by genuine fear, which deteriorated human relations, and social solidarity.[33] They accused communism of changing the social fabric while constructing a new MAN, deprived of any moral values, lacking social abilities and valuable professional skills. One lady I interviewed described communists as:

> . . . a gang of hooligans who challenged the people to follow them . . . . They made fun of workers crammed into the HLM,[34] into these unhealthy ghettos while they enjoyed wealth through their bank accounts in foreign countries. They created these poor men without any God ... they destroyed everything; look at the hospitals; the doctors got derisory salaries, being thus forced to accept bribe and presents . . . .

Even the equality between men and women was depicted as a manner of destroying the family, the traditional couple, and of alienating children. A women stated that:

> . . the relationships between men and women were diverted from their normal course. They did not understand that women should keep their feminine aspect. For instance, they persuaded women to become tractor drivers... they drove tractors and I found this humiliating . . . .

[33] These conclusions resulted from my research on the memory of Communism from the perspective of former political prisoners, which led to the presentation of my doctorate thesis at the Université Laval in Québec, in 2007.

[34] HLM are those block of flats characteristic of communist regimes, with very small apartments. They are also called match boxes.

The narratives of former political detainees respond to a societal demand of depicting the former regime as "criminal, illegitimate and anti-Romanian" imposed by the Soviet Union at the end of the World War II. However, although theirs life-stories emphasize anti-communism and victimhood, former political detainees personal experience is inscribed in a positive, self-growing and humanistic frame. They try to give to theirs life-stories a general moral dimension beyond ideologies, national pride, personal motivations, and everyday life and political sympathy.[35]

Since they are less marked by a need of showing exemplar deeds and attitudes, a hallmark of the life histories of former political prisoners, the testimonies of those who were deported to the Bărăgan plain also reveal other aspects of recalling the recent past, such as nostalgia for a personal past perceived to have been happy, even though marked by persecutions.[36] A women even told us:

> No, I wouldn't erase a thing. Everything remains in my soul. I'm not talking about these things with regret . . . It was fate! . . . I wish I could have gone to the village where I grew up. I would like to see the grass around the house; I would like to see the trees planted by my mother and father. The black locust trees that surrounded that large courtyard! I miss the flowers we planted in front of the house with help from our German neighbors, who loved flowers and gardening in general.

The narratives of former deportees of 1951 highlight two patterns of parallel witness rhetoric, which do, however, intersect at times on both deportation and the communist period. On the one hand, we have "formal" narrations which define deportation as a stage of repression and in which the discourse on the phenomenon is part of the paradigm denouncing the crimes of communism; on the other hand, we have life stories with a nostalgic tone whose narration is made up of benchmarks defining success in life despite the difficulties encountered and successfully overcome.[37]

Remembering Everyday Life during Communism

The memorial discourse of the former political detainees and deportees of Baragan is marked by anticommunism. The ordinary people who experienced

[35] C.-F. Dobre, "Women Remembering Communism in Romania: Former Political Detainees Perspectives", in: K. Popova and N. Muratova (eds.), *Women and Minorities Archives: Subjects of Archiving,* vol. 3, Blagoevgrad: 42-58.

[36] C.-F. Dobre, V. Antonovici (eds.), *Deportaţi în Bărăgan: Amintiri din Siberia românească* (Deportees of Bărăgan. Memories from Romanian Siberia), Ratio et Revelatio, Oradea 2016 (hereafter C.-F. Dobre, V. Antonovici, *Deportaţi în Bărăgan)*, p. 284.

[37] C.-F. Dobre, V. Antonovici, *Deportaţi în Bărăgan*, p. 283.

communism in more banal circumstances remember communism in less radical ways. Their memory of communism is a private matter influenced by the postcommunist transition and its outcomes.

Between 2016 and 2018, I have conducted interviews with women belonging to the three cohorts (1939–1949; 1950–1960, 1961–1975) in the framework of the project "Regaining the future by rebuilding the past: women's narratives of life during Communism". The technique used in this research was the interview, based on a flexible questionnaire, flexible in terms of giving preference to dialogue and not to an interrogatory. The questionnaire provided me some points of discussion and not a mandatory plan to be followed. The witness had the liberty to present her life during communism according to her own schema.[38]

The everyday life recollections of women I have interviewed depict communism in various nuances: a good period in the 1960s, but a dark epoch in 1980s. This approach corresponded to a historical evolution of the communist system in Romania, which in the '60s and early '70s abandoned large scale repression, modernized the country while providing people with basic goods. In the '80s, the harsh living conditions and the attempts of the regime to control the intimacy of individuals created the premises for a negative image of communism.

> I had the opportunity to experience the good times, at the beginning of the '70s, when I could go to the grocery shop and buy cheese or chocolate. I experienced also, the notorious queues in the late '80s. I remember and I will never forget that once I stayed in line for hours in order to buy something. I did not know what they were selling there but I stayed in line. When my turn came they gave me the skeleton of two chickens, the notorious "Fratii Petreuș".[39] The chickens were so horrible to look at that I got sick and I said to my mother at home that I prefer to die than to eat that chicken. . .

a lady from Bucharest told me.

To summarize broadly, for ordinary women, I talked to, communism was neither good or bad. It had positive parts as regards education, work and equal pay, but had many shades of gray when it came to the attitude towards women, the anti-abortion legislation, and the living conditions in the '80s. The fact that women were still assigned to their traditional roles, hindered

[38] C.-F. Dobre, „Women's Everyday Life in Communist Romania: Case Studies", in: *Analele Universității din București, Limba și Literatura Română*. Vol. LXVII/2018, pp. 35-51 (hereafter, Claudia-Florentina Dobre, "Women's Everyday Life").

[39] This was a running joke during communist times. Fraţii Petreuș, 'the Petreus Brothers', were two popular folk singers, who always appeared together on stage. Because they were very thin, this invited the comparison with the two skeletal chickens that were sold together in the same packaging.

them to enjoy equality and eventually felt communist emancipation as a burden not an achievement.

This approach can partially explain the rise of a new type of nostalgia, one which aligns itself with a post-memorial trend. It seems that more than a third of people born in or around December 1989 evaluates communism rather positively. A poll from 2010 showed that 38% of young adults between 18 and 34 years old considered Communism to have been a better or far better period than the present.[40] In 2013, the percentage diminished slightly to 34,1%.[41] This attitude assesses the importance of "communicative memory"[42] in passing on perceptions of the past.

Furthermore, it came in conjunction with a memorial trend which I have called, the 'pink memory' of communism.[43] a type of nostalgia, often translated into irony and self-irony, promoted by people who were very young in the '80s, relying on theirs personal and group experiences aimed at circumventing the vigilance of the communist system.

Conclusions

Remembering communism has acquired new dimensions and has displayed new modes of representation in the last couple of years. However, its memory is still controversial and no dominant paradigm prevails within the Romanian society. The public space is saturated with anti-communism. However, the private recollections show a more nuanced image of communism in which nostalgia and positive feelings mix up with criticism of current situation.

Beginning with 12 of January 1990 (after the big rally of the opposition forces in Bucharest), the anti-communists and the neo-communists engaged in a constant fight to win over the society and to prevail in the public space. The neo-communists promoted reconciliation through amnesia as a means of avoiding responsibility. The anti-communists claimed justice legitimated through sufferings. The clashes between the two camps were intense in the early '90s and diminished over years due to political interests, but also to

[40] 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.

[41] www.revista22.ro/actualitate-interna/sondaj-incsop-aproape-48-dintre-romani-sunt-nostalgici-dupa-comunism-pina-si-tinerii-34-cred-ca-acesta-a-fost-bun (retrieved 10 of November 2019).

[42] 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. 110-120.

[43] C.-F. Dobre, "Memorial Regimes and Memory Updates in Post-communist Romania", *Sensus Historiae*, 2 (27) (2017), pp. 40-43.

a generational change which occurred in the 2000. The people of the decree (decreteii)[44] promoted a less radical view about communism, more nuanced, ironic and critical.

Although, anticommunism became a public frame of reference for remembering communism in Romania, within the society other approaches are also present. Reflexive nostalgia and restorative nostalgia,[45] post-nostalgia as well as a total amnesia. They reflect the evolution of the post-communist Romanian society, its failures and its success. The way we remember communism tell more about our today condition than about our recent past. It clearly shows the ambiguity in dealing with the communist past. An ambiguity derived from a dichotomy experienced by the society as a whole as well as by individuals. On the one hand, people tried to live as normally as possible, (as well as to retrospectively give a sense of normality to theirs deeds, attitudes, habits), and, on the other, they had to adapt to a regime out of normality, in which arbitrariness, controlling, repression, anxiety were dominant features.[46]

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Communism as a Frame of Reference in Romania: Public and Private Recollections

Abstract

30 years after its fall, Communism remains a frame of reference for the memory culture of Romania. While the public space is saturated with anticommunism (in various ways, and on different levels), the memories of people who experienced communism are fashioned by theirs present living conditions and their horizon of expectations. The young generations born shortly before or after its demise do not take into account the difficulties to overcome such a burdening heritage and evaluate it rather positively.

Keywords: Communism, Anti-communism, Nostalgia, Cultural Memory, Collective Memory, Everyday Life.

[44] The people of the decree are those born after 1966 decree which banned abortion in Romania.

[45] S. Boym, *The future of nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York 2011, p. XVIII.

[46] C.-F. Dobre, „Women's Everyday Life", p. 51.