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**BATTLING OVER ROMANIAN RED PAST.
THE MEMORY OF COMMUNISM BETWEEN
ELITIST CULTURAL TRAUMA AND
POPULAR COLLECTIVE NOSTALGIA***

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the mnemonic battle fought over the Romanian communist past between the active forces of intellectual democratic elites and the passive resistance of the majority of the population. The former try to impose a narrative of cultural trauma regarding the communist past against the latter's popular resistance expressed by strong nostalgic attachments towards the same communist past. The paper investigates the formation of the new official consensus on the communist legacy as cultural trauma, proposing a three stage sequence of its articulation: i) the breakthrough made by detention memorialistic literature in the aftermath of 1989 Revolution; ii) the officialization of 'communism-as-cultural-trauma' narrative by the Tismăneanu Report condemning the communist regime; iii) the institutionalization of the cultural trauma narrative in the educational system. All these struggles over the memory of communism from the part of the anticommunist political elites are tacitly countered by strong popular nostalgia, as revealed by extensive survey data..

KEYWORDS

- collective memory
- collective nostalgia
- cultural trauma
- Romanian communism
- Tismăneanu Report

The struggle over memory: making sense of the past

Against popular thinking, critical scholars never stopped pointing out that memory – both as the human faculty to remember as well as the collective endeavor to save past from oblivion – is not to be trusted as an unalterable storage and a faithful reproducer of the past. Prone to distortions and subjective biases, highly selective in its mechanism of retention, frail on its power of preservation and fallible in its capacity of reproduction, human memory is more reconstructive rather than reproductive in nature. Against the Freudian consensus regarding memory as a complete repository of experiences out of which specific memories could always be excavated by the skillful

* This paper is a result of a research made possible by the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132400 – “Young successful researchers – professional development in an international and interdisciplinary environment”.

psychoanalyst, it was the merit of Sir Frederic Charles Bartlett (1995 [1932], p. 20), the Cambridge social psychologist, to point out that remembering, far from being a mechanic act of effortless recollection, involves in fact an “effort after meaning” – a hermeneutic struggle to make sense of the past in the pressing context of the present. Across the Channel, Maurice Halbwachs (1980) [1950] articulated his sociological theory of collective memory, inspired by the same *presenteistic principle*: social memory – the memory of the past possessed by a social group – is always reconstructed in terms of the changing conditions and shifting interests and needs of the imperious present. If human memory itself is now thought of being tricky, sandy and deceitful, collective memory should be all the more so, as in its case questions of power and political interests always come into play. At the societal level, Bartlett’s principle of the “effort after meaning” and Halbwachs’ principle of *presenteistic* remembering are always engrained with power-struggles to impose a politically convenient interpretation of the past to be used in shaping the present and building the future.

Grounded on such premises, this article aims at unraveling the power politics of the past, trying to shed some light on the process by which Romanian communism came to be defined in the public sphere and official memory in terms of cultural trauma, although this understanding of recent past worked out by anticommunist elites goes against the grain of popular collective nostalgia expressed by a large component of Romanian society. The first part of this paper sets up the theoretical framework against whose background our analysis will unfold by presenting the main tenets of the theory of cultural trauma elaborated in the area of memory studies. Next, moving on from the general theoretical frame of reference to the particular case study of Romanian politics of memory, we propose a three stage model to account for i) the emergence, ii) the officialization, followed by iii) the institutionalization of the communism-as-cultural-trauma narrative in Romanian official memory. We shall argue, grounding our position on a range of statistical data and opinion poll results that this cultural traumatization of Romanian communism whose mnemonic entrepreneurs were the anticommunist intelligentsia in alliance with the political right went against the tide of popular collective nostalgia towards communist times. This hermeneutical mismatch and narrative incongruity between the elitist active program of remembering and rendering communism as cultural trauma and the passive popular nostalgic resistance reveals the essential tension that lies at the heart of Romanian contemporary memory.

It should be clear that we are not dealing with a “Romanian exceptionalism”, as the Romanian case fits the general pattern of the political use of the communist past in transitional times. As shown in collective works such as *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe* edited by Mink and Neumayer (2013) and *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union* edited by Stan (2008), reckoning with the communist past has been the general pattern of postcommunist, transitional, societies. It is also a general Central and Eastern European pattern, nonetheless, that the anticommunist consensus, along with the thrust of interpreting it as a total societal trauma, are recently being the subject of contestation from a newly articulating left revisionism, which starts to give voice to the hitherto passive popular nostalgic resistance. A short methodological note is in order, before proceeding to the theoretical exposition. The analysis is methodologically grounded on discourse analysis, examining how the narrative of communism as cultural trauma came into being by delving into

its discursive layers (memorialistic literature, the Report of condemning communism, didactic literature). The analysis of people's attitudes towards the communist past are based on different sets of databases – “New Europe Barometers” (Rose: 2010) and “School students and civic culture” (Soros Foundation: 2010) – as well as on secondary data reported by different opinion polls.

Cultural trauma, collective memory, national identity: conceptual junctions

The last hundred years – with its agglomeration of human catastrophes in the form of political totalitarianism, genocides and total wars, unprecedented in human history both in the intensity of destruction and the incommensurable death toll left behind – has been, arguably, the century of trauma. The Holocaust, the Gulag archipelago, Hiroshima, Nanking, Rwanda are only a few of the events symbolizing the traumatic experience of the twentieth century. After all these moral abysses into which humanity sank over the past century, it is no wonder that the discourse of progress, emanating from the Enlightenment's optimism regarding the ability of reason to improve and perfect human condition, has been replaced since the mid-twentieth century with the discourse of crisis, the latter being substituted in its turn by the discourse of trauma (Sztompka: 2000). Defying the conventional standards of periodization, it can be argued that the twentieth century is not yet over. The catastrophic events of the last century elongate themselves into the present under the guise of a traumatic memory, carrying enough identity-defining force as to shape the self-consciousness of a community. One of the major challenges of contemporary world has thus become to cope with the legacy of traumatic experiences generated by the events of the twentieth century.

Scholarship built on insights drawn from a historical sociopsychological viewpoint has made it clear how historical traumas, collective memory and group identity are closely intertwined by intimate connections. Traumas, stored into memory, mark the identity of the community whose (ex-) members experienced the effects of the “terror of history” (Eliade: 1991, p. 139). “In the course of defining national identity, national histories are constructed around injuries that cry out for revenge.” (Alexander: 2004, p. 8) More than a century ago, in his famous answer to the question “Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?” given in 1882, Renan (1990, p. 19) held that “having suffered together [...] unifies more than joy does”. While regarding memory and national identity, “griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort” (Renan: 1990, p. 19). Adapted to the discourse of trauma, Renan's argumentation states that cultural traumas, whose remembrance is preserved through collective memory, are the most potent coagulating agents of national identity. The terrorizing moments of history leaving in their wake traumatic memories, rather than the glorious deeds and celebrated achievements, engraved in the collective memory, are the more durable building blocks of national identity. Traumatic experiences are those that silt into the structure of collective memory forming the pillars supporting the cultural identity of social communities.

Injected with cultural meanings and applied to social systems, the notion of cultural trauma can be conceived through the prisms of three theoretical lenses (Alexander: 2004, pp. 3-10). The least theoretically sophisticated mode of understanding

cultural trauma is provided by *the naturalist approach*. According to it cultural trauma is an event, situation, or phenomenon which, due to its intrinsic destructivity, dislodges social order and thus tears apart the social fabric that keeps individuals connected in stable “networks of interdependence” (Bauman and May: 2001, p. 5). It is a naturalist approach because it promotes the idea that between the traumatizing event and the traumatic experience there is a direct, causal and natural relationship. Quite naturally, the objective event or condition disrupting the established social order (be it a bloody revolution, a war decimating the population, famine, depopulation, etc.) is thought to immediately redound upon the subjective dimension of social existence, creating the collective consciousness of the traumaticity of the events that took place. Implicit in this conception is a simplistic stimulus-response model (taken from the theoretical tradition of behaviorism, Skinner: 1938): the objective stimulus causes the traumatic reactions. What happens within the “black box” between the input and the output remains obscure.

A superior degree of analytical sophistication characterizes the second theoretical lens through which cultural trauma can be conceptualized. Of definite Freudian inspiration, *the socio-analytical approach* opens up the “black box” by revealing the internal processes occurring inside it. Between the stimulus (the traumatizing event) and response (the active manifestation of trauma symptoms), the socio-analytical model introduces a prolonged period of incubation. The collective experience of trauma is being delayed by the action of repression mechanisms, activated as part of the defense apparatus protecting individuals and the community from direct contact with the unbearable reality. This refusal to confront reality thus becomes encapsulated in a traumatic memory, the latter being in its turn repressed and stored in the collective unconscious, from where it continues to influence insidiously the functioning of the traumatized community. Due to these disturbing interferences traumatic memories, hidden in the subterranean galleries of collective consciousness, must be excavated, brought to the surface of awareness and thus overcome. The socio-analytical therapy devised towards this end consists in means of attaining redemption from the traumatic legacy through *catharsis*, thought to result from confronting a difficult and problematic past. Commemorating the victims through public rituals and mournings, remembering the collective sufferings, publicly voicing the sorrows, all these forms of “working through” (*Durcharbeiten*) a traumatic past remove the repressive effect of defense mechanisms and enable the release of the traumatic burden of the past.

Both the naturalist and the socio-analytical approaches are theoretically deficient to characterize cultural trauma since they are both biased by what Alexander (2004) calls the “naturalistic fallacy” (i.e. considering traumatic events as traumatic in themselves). Calling for the abandonment of these naturalistic approaches, species of the “lay theory of trauma” characteristic of conventional thinking, Alexander proposes a sociological-reflexive understanding of cultural trauma, anchored in the social constructionism paradigm. Approached from a constructionist angle, it becomes clear that “events do not, in and of themselves, create cultural trauma” (Alexander: 2004, p. 8). In the same vein, Smelser (2004, p. 35) advanced a “radical proposition” according to which “No discrete historical event or situation automatically or necessarily qualifies itself as a cultural trauma, and the range of events or situations that may become cultural traumas is enormous”. Walking on the precipice of “the naturalistic fallacy”, Smelser agrees that

there are, of course, “nearly certain candidates” competing for the title of trauma (e.g., major natural disasters and genocides) (Smelser: 2004, p. 36). But careful not to step into the naturalistic abyss, Smelser warns emphatically against conceptualizing cultural trauma in essentialist terms. Catastrophic events or conditions do not contain any traumatic essence, making them reverberate instantly (as in the naturalist approach) or developing gradually (as in the socio-analytical approach) in collective consciousness as cultural trauma. Instead, cultural traumas are “historically made, not born” (Smelser: 2004, p. 37) since their genesis is not natural but symbolically constructed and socially mediated.

Adopting a constructionist perspective, cultural trauma can be defined as the outcome of the “process of trauma creation” (Alexander: 2004, p. 1), involving a “traumatic sequence” (Sztompka: 2000, p. 453). The sociocultural construction of trauma as a fact of collective consciousness implies the serious hermeneutic work of culturally defining a condition, situation, or event as profoundly disruptive to the social and moral order of the community. The definition of a situation as cultural trauma is successful if agents having vested interests in depicting the situation in traumatic terms manage to impose, legitimize and accredit within the larger society their own framework for interpreting reality. The process of socially constructing cultural trauma (i.e., the traumatization of collective memory) follows roughly the same pattern outlined by Becker (1963, p. 147) for labeling social behavior as deviant: it becomes deviant as a result of the success of the definitional labor done by certain “moral entrepreneurs”. Traumatizing collective memory is thus, in part at least, an entrepreneurial business, in the sense that it requires the interpretative effort of certain agents committed to labeling a situation as having a traumatic nature affecting the entire community.

The social construction of the traumaticity of a past event or situation is thus dependent upon the successful imposition of certain “fundamental principles of vision and division” (Bourdieu: 1998, p. 53). Typically, the culturally traumatized situation is hermeneutically worked out into a “new master narrative”, structured upon four central thematic nodes, clustered around the nature of pain, the nature of victim, the relation of the trauma victim with the larger societal audience and the moral issue of attributing responsibility (Alexander: 2004, pp. 13-15):

a) *The nature of pain*: the master narrative of cultural trauma is focused on creating a phenomenology of suffering, which would highlight the traumatic experience suffered by individuals and groups that fall victims to the traumatizing event. The phenomenology of suffering is usually doubled by an account of “what actually happened”.

b) *The nature of victim*: within this thematic category, the questions regarding the identity of the group(s) which was the subject of trauma are being clarified. Moreover, beyond aspects related to the victim’s identity, le grand récit of cultural traumaticity must establish a credible and reliable statistics of the victims of the catastrophic event.

c) *Relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience*: in order to be compelling and to acquire persuasive effect, the narrative of trauma must also include both the systemic context within which the victim-group found itself and the nature of the relationships between the group and the socio-institutional environment (i.e.,

other social groups and the institutional structures of the state). For instance, the cultural trauma of Jews in Nazi Germany or in Antonescu's Romania is impossible to understand without clarifying the relationship historically established between the Jewish minority and the ethnic majoritarian population.

d) *Attribution of responsibility*: the discourse of trauma is necessarily a moral discourse par excellence. Decisive within the symbolic logic of the cultural trauma discourse turns out to be the determination of culpability. This is achieved by identifying the perpetrator (be it a specific individual, a social group, a political regime, or a people in its entirety), who will be burdened with the moral responsibility for the pain caused. The discourse of trauma does not limit itself to provide diagnosis, but pleads passionately for moral incrimination, claiming restorative measures (be they material and/or symbolic in nature).

Against this theoretical backdrop, Romanian communism appears as a serious candidate for being symbolically processed into cultural trauma. The main objective of this paper is to examine how the Romanian democratic postcommunist political regime, sprang from the Revolution of 1989, tried to legitimize itself by breaking with the communist past. Departing from a problematic past, elongated deep into the present, was intended to be epitomized by an act of symbolic purification expressed by *criminalizing the communist past*. Towards this end, the elaboration of the *Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania* (hereafter the Report) has been commissioned in 2006. The main thesis explored in this paper asserts that liberal intelligentsia made up of civil society activists that managed to form a timely coalition with the power elite of the new postcommunist regime succeeded in their struggle to impose a grand narrative of cultural trauma upon communist past against the background of popular resistance expressed by the nostalgia felt towards the same communist past subjected to cultural traumatization by the elites. The central argument defended here is that Romanian communist past has become a mnemonic battleground between the elites' narrative of communism as cultural trauma and the popular version of communism as a better alternative to the current society. Starting from these theoretical premises, the paper examines the process of constructing collective memory of Romanian communism as cultural trauma, a process modulated in three sequences: a) *the breakthrough phase*, represented by the memorialistic literature emerged in the public arena in the aftermath of the collapse of state censorship, through individual, unconcerted, bottom-up efforts of the victims of communist repression; b) *the totalizing phase*, which was done by extrapolating the traumatic experience suffered by the victims of the communist regime to the entire level of society. This action of extrapolating trauma to the whole social body finds its ultimate expression in the Final Report condemning communism drawn up by the "truth-commission" and promulgated by the President of the republic. In contrast to the dissidents' and victims' literary initiatives, the official condemnation of communism has been a coordinated and state-sponsored action, imposed from the top down; c) *the institutionalizing phase*, achieved by devising a "pedagogy of trauma" to teach the master narrative of cultural trauma through public schooling. The memory of communism, officially ruled as cultural trauma by the judges of the past who were politically sponsored to draw up the Report, is now disseminated in the social body through the educational apparatus, using history textbooks as its ideological vehicles. The argument

defended in this paper states that the cultural trauma which the anticommunist forces of the postcommunist state try to totalize is in fact an experience localized at the level of an elitist (and thus minority) category made up from intellectuals, dissidents and the surviving victims of the communist repression. A large part of Romanian population (almost half of it) relates to the ex-communist regime not as to a traumatic past, but nostalgically, as shown by the opinion surveys that explored people's attitudes towards the former communist regime.

Elitist trauma: memorialistic literature as breakthrough moment

The breakdown of the state apparatus of repression and censorship in the aftermath of the 1989 Romanian Revolution enabled the public release of traumatic experiences suffered by the victims of the communist regime. With the censorship floodgates now widely open, the "memorialist boom" erupted shortly, focusing on voicing the experiences, memories and traumas (physical and psychological) sustained within the carceral universe of communist prisons and labor camps. It is not an overstatement to describe the memorialist phenomenon as an outburst of memories, after decades of magmatic accumulation under the repressive state apparatus. Literature of the Romanian Gulag amounted to more than 150 books (Cesereanu: 2005), from the collapse of the communist regime in December 1989 (the moment that made possible the transfer of carceral experiences from private memory into the public arena) until 2006 (the year of the communist regime's official condemnation).

The carceral infrastructure developed by the Romanian repressive communist system was fashioned to model the pattern of the Soviet Gulag. Immediately after the Romanian communists seized power in the aftermath of World War II with the help of Soviet troops stationed across Romanian territory, the newly erected regime initiated the procedures for establishing a system of prisons, labor camps, and other detention centers in order to eliminate (and exterminate) social and political opposition to the "Promethean project" of building the communist society (Durandin: 1998, p. 285). The secret police agency of Communist Romania (*Securitatea*, founded in 1948) was the organisation responsible for managing the construction of these loci of punishment in which members of social categories decreed as "enemies of the people" were geographically placed, morally-ideologically "reeducated" and eventually physically annihilated. That was to be the collective fate of the Iron Guard members (Romania's abortive fascist movement that managed to set up an ephemeral "National Legionary State" in 1940) alongside many politically unregimented intellectuals. Concurrently, the political interwar elite, together with the part of the clergy that did not accept the *modus vivendi* with the atheistic regime and peasants who stood up against collectivization were to be the targets of extreme state repression. By establishing the Romanian Gulag, the communist regime systematically destroyed its internal opposition, while by setting up a climate of terror it managed to domesticate the population, inhibiting any remaining pulsation of disobedience.

The repertoire of punitive methods used to reeducate political prisoners included torture (both physical and psychological), systematic beating, starvation, coldness, and generally the most abject of humiliations. The negative apotheosis has been reached in the "Pitesti Experiment" (1949-1952), where prisoners were not just

reeducated through torture, but turned themselves into torturers (Ierunca: 1990). Similar atrocities plagued all the other major *lieux de terreur* forming the central nodes of the Romanian Gulag network (Gherla, Aiud, Sighet, Jilava prisons and labor camps spread across the length of the Danube-Black Sea Canal). The Romanian Gulag Archipelago numbered in total more than 240 islands of punishment. It lasted from its founding in 1948 until 1964 when the communist regime, through its absolute ruler – Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej – issued a general amnesty, releasing the surviving political prisoners. The concentration system continued to function until the collapse of the regime in 1989, but its “Dark Age” of mass brutal repression was over. In the evolution of Romanian communism, the moment of amnesty symbolizes the transition from the phase of violent repression through physical incarceration and corporal annihilation, towards the phase of social control through mass surveillance, less brutal but more subtle and effective. With the destruction of active socio-political opposition in the cells of communist prisons completed, the regime could evolve from a system grounded on state violence towards a totally controlled panopticon society absent of brutal corporal violence.

The detention memorialistic literature that sprang out in the aftermath of the collapse of the repressive regime, confessional and depositional in nature, is the literature of suffering, voicing the pain and the horrors endured in communist prisons. The profound physiological, psychological and social traumas caused by the carceral experience suffered by the victims of the communist regime are textually hypostatized as testimonial documents. Without denying or questioning the authenticity of suffering and the abominability of the punitive methods (in this regard, human empathy is not elastic enough to fully understand the carceral experience of the victims), it must be said that this paper treats *cultural trauma* and not psychological trauma. In contrast to psychological trauma, suffered by individuals, *cultural trauma* is theoretically defined as a social construction, the result of a process involving the extrapolation of certain individual sufferings to the collective level of the social system as a whole. As such, cultural traumatization results from the construction of social representations and discourses about the past, the latter requiring an intense hermeneutic labor of symbolically coding reality in a traumatic register. The analysis of psychological trauma or even social trauma as cultural trauma is thus simply a “category mistake”. In this sense, memorialistic literature, although voicing authentic suffering endured in the Romanian Gulag, evokes the traumatic memories of the individuals who experienced the terror of communist prisons. It articulates discursively the genuine and undeniable pains experienced by its authors and their fellow travellers in suffering. It gives voice to a collective trauma experienced by a community of victims, without capturing in its discourse the pains inflicted to the entire social body. Taken as an integrated whole, under the form of a body of texts knitted together to make up the literary genre of detention memoirs, the memorialistic literature expresses a traumatic collective experience without being at the same time a *cultural trauma* (in the theoretical meaning of the term discussed above).

The testimonies of carceral experiences published after 1989 constitute the first efforts of constructing the memory of communism as cultural trauma. It was through the rising tide of detention writings that flooded Romanian post-totalitarian culture that the *carceral paradigm of society*, so central to the narrative of communism-

as-cultural-trauma, started to take definite shape. By “the carceral paradigm of society” we designate the school of thought portraying the entire reality of Romanian communism as a societal prison, in which Pitesti, Gherla, Aiud, and Shiget were nothing but the archetypal microcosm of macro-society. The Virgilian/Dantesque topos of communist Romania as an infernal society is central to the carceral paradigm of society which emerged out of the memorialistic literature and was later incorporated in the cultural trauma narrative. Pioneered by Solzhenitsyn (1974-1978), this infernal analogy set the metaphorical device for rendering the Romanian society during communism as a Tartarean realm, with its concentric circles funneling down towards the center of the infernal pit represented by the prisons. Without a doubt, detention testimonies recuperated a gruesome, but intrinsic dimension of the communist experience to be incorporated in the memory of the red past. But it would be reductionistic to render the memory of Romanian communism exclusively through the carceral lenses as a collective Dantesque odyssey through the infernal depths of totalitarian terror. Even in the “obsessive decade” of the 50s¹¹, Romanian political and sociocultural reality was too complex to be reduced to this simplifying carceral account. The gruesome dimension of the criminality of the regime is one fundamental and constitutive dimension of Romanian communism, but it is not the only one.

The approach we are advancing is neither apologetic nor – *horribile dictu* – negationist towards the crimes and many other horrific deeds committed by the communist regime. Nevertheless, although we cannot but acknowledge the original large scale criminal sin of the regime – as it was founded on brutal political violence – we are also convinced that, from a sociological point of view, the communist regime cannot be reduced to its undeniable criminal dimension. When generalized from personal (subjective) and inter-personal (inter-subjective) experiences of its victims to society at large – as the narrative of cultural trauma institutionalized in the anticommunist consensus did – the *sociological fallacy* of criminological reduction of the intricately more complex Romanian social reality is competed only by the *hermeneutical fallacy* of parabolic rendering communist society through the Dantesque imagery of the inferno in (mis)understanding the communist phenomenon.

Once again, without the slightest intention of trivializing the unbearable reality of the pains and sufferings inflicted on the bodies and souls of the victims of the Romanian Gulag, it must be nevertheless emphasized that these traumas – social, psychological, and physical – that the direct victims of the regime have communicated through the memorialist literature in the public sphere are restricted to a demographic minority. This remark is valid not only to the case of Romanian communism, but has been made regarding the Nazi regime. Adorno (1998 [1959], p. 95), for instance, pointed out that “it is an illusion to believe that the National Socialist regime meant nothing but fear and suffering, although it certainly was that even for many of its own supporters. For countless people life was not at all bad under fascism. Terror’s sharp

¹¹ The term “obsessive decade” deserves a special discussion. It emerged in the Romanian literary field during the 70s, as writers were starting to address with a critical eye the dogmatism of Socialist Realism decreed as official literary paradigm during the 50s and 60s. The term itself was coined by the writer Marin Preda (1970), who published a short article bearing this title – Obsedantul deceniu – but in which he makes no reference to the political violence and social terror of the 50s. Nonetheless, once launched into the cultural sphere, the term broke free from its literary roots, underwent a semantic shift, and acquired the meaning with which it made a prodigious career, designating the societal trauma inflicted by the socialist revolution during the 50s.

edge was aimed only at a few and relatively well defined groups. After the crises of the era preceding Hitler the predominant feeling was that ‘everything is being taken care of’.” *Mutatis mutandis*, the same thing can be said about communism: after a period in which the newly installed communist regime ensured its total domination over Romanian politics by persecuting the groups challenging its hegemonic claims, the rest of the population accommodated to the conditions set by the regime. Especially after 1964, an informal social contract, negotiated at the table of power (i.e. in the terms dictated by the totalitarian regime) settled the relation between civil society and state authorities. The outcome of this asymmetric societal pact by which civil society accommodated to the state power has been a *modus vivendi* type of cohabitation. This is precisely why the traumatic experience of the communist regime is restricted to the category of the anticommunist elites who suffered state repression at the most personal level. The memory of communism as sociocultural trauma is, thus, the memory of anticommunist elites and not of the entire Romanian society, which eventually came to terms with the communist system.

Before being taken over by official memory policies, the wave of detention testimonies appear to have formed a multitude of simultaneous but disparate and uncoordinated memory works, as bottom up struggles to recover the memory of the criminality of the communist regime. The literary struggles to convert private traumas into collective public trauma have been accompanied by media campaigns broadcasted through national television (TVR). *The Memorial of Pain*, the documentary series produced by Lucia Hossu-Longin visually depicting the crimes of the Communist regime, has arguably been the most influential campaign of cultural traumatization of the memory of Romanian communist totalitarianism. Against the background of political domination of the heir of former Romanian Communist Party (PCR), whose avatar has survived in the National Salvation Front (FSN) and then in Social Democrat Party (PSD), parties that largely controlled the political life in Romanian postcommunism, these struggles of recuperating memory continued to be “counter memories” (Foucault: 1977) localized in the undergrounds of official historiography. The latter was still marked by a relationship of complicity with the communist past. The turning point occurred in 2006, when the loss of power by the PCR’s successor party created the political breakthrough for taking the symbolic act of breaking with the past.

Totalizing trauma: officializing the past by political fiat

More than a decade and a half after the regime change, responding to the pressures exerted by the newly institutionally emerged civil society¹²¹ in the political

² The most influent non-governmental organization was The Group for Social Dialogue (GSD) – the first NGO to be founded after the revolutionary movement – which, voicing their opinions in its organ 22 Magazine, was the core of the emerging postcommunist Romanian civic sphere. In 1990, GSD joined forces with other civic initiatives to form the Civic Alliance. Claims for initiating “the trial of communism” were at the head of their agenda. In 10 March 2006, Sorin Iliesiu, in the name of the Civic Alliance, launched an appeal addressed to the President of Romania Traian Băsescu, urging him to condemn communism. Signed by hundreds of supporters (734 by 16 May 2006), many of them former political prisoners, the appeal was vacillating between calls to condemn “communism as a criminal regime” and the crimes or the “criminality of the communist regime”. The Report issued by the “truth commission” embraced later that year by the presidency (and, ipso facto, by the Romanian state) ended up taking the first, more

order of postcommunism, the bottom up literary struggles of the dissidents and victims of the communist regime were taken over by the state. In 2006, the President of the republic appointed Vladimir Tismăneanu to form a “truth commission” to investigate the crimes of the former regime, and to draw up a report legitimizing the official condemnation of the communist regime (Ciobanu: 2009; Hogeia: 2010; Tileagă: 2012). Grounding his speech in the findings of the Report, the President pronounced the communist regime as “illegitimate and criminal” in a tumultuous joint session of the Romanian Parliament. By this symbolic act of officially breaking away with the communist past, the Romanian state’s attitude towards the red past suffered a sudden change of hearts. The times of the “politics of amnesia” professed by state authorities as means to avoid a face-off with the communist past were over. A new confrontationist mindset with its “politics of anamnesis”, substituting the old evasive strategy, took over as the official attitude towards the communist past. With the Report the Romanian state had assumed the traumatic memory, previously localized to the level of the intellectuals and direct victims and extrapolated it to the level of the whole society. The totalization of the traumaticity of communism from elites to the whole of society has been officialized by creating a new master narrative of communism as general sociocultural trauma. Resorting to the four fulcrums provided by Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma, the process of how communism has been culturally traumatized by the late Romanian postcommunist state in its attempt to legitimize the new democratic socio-political order against communist legacy can be broken down for analytical purposes.

The nature of pain. The Report can be read in its entirety as a phenomenology of collective suffering. The almost ineffable intensity of pain the Report wants to convey is the probable reason why the collective suffering caused by communism is rendered through metaphors. By way of organismic language, communism is being presented as a “cancer” that plagued the entire social body (Report: 2006, p. 632). Demonic formulas are used to portray communist regime as the embodiment of the “devil”³ (p. 166). The Report seems to ground its argument on what Poliakov (1980) called as “*la causalité diabolique*”, namely, the attribution of all evils to a malevolent entity – in this case, communism and its Satanic plot against Romanian people. The text of the Report is thoroughly suffused by a galloping metaphorical inflation. The purpose of this rhetoric strategy aims to highlight the traumatic intensity that communism caused to Romanian society. Everything converges to support the thesis of “Romanian exceptionalism” (p. 11), this being l’idée directrice underpinning the entire analysis whose conclusion is the uniqueness of the trauma suffered by Romanian people. Claiming uniqueness, as Novick (2001) has shown regarding the Holocaust, presupposes competing for “the gold medal in the Victimization Olympics”. In general, uniqueness claims are subject to “the illusion of localism” (Ilut: 2000), itself a species of sociocentric bias.

Metaphorical inflation turns into semantic inflation when notions like “genocide” or “terrorism” are employed recklessly, without further reflection and analytical

radical, call, that of condemning the communist regime as criminal and illegitimate – so not only the criminality of the regime, but the regime tout court as criminal.

³ The metaphor of communism as the incarnation of the devil is not a stylistic slip or semantic license, but a recurring theme. For instance, the last book published by Tismăneanu (2012), the President of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, is titled *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century*.

precision. The main count raised against the communist regime was that of being a genocidal system, responsible for “the crime against the nation’s biological fund” (Report: 2006, p. 160). If the conventional definition of genocide can be forced as that the crimes of the communist regime to be categorized as genocide⁴, the persecution of intellectuals, the installation of censorship, and the total domination of cultural life certainly cannot be qualified as “true cultural genocide” (p. 165). Associating such grave words and heavy-handed notions is far from accidental. In the social construction of cultural trauma, hyperbolic language turns out to be a decisive tool. In matters of ideology and social representations, language creates reality by providing the cognitive prisms through which the world is perceived (Berger and Luckmann: 1966; Whorf: 1956). The big picture rendered by the Report is that of a carceral and carcinogenic society, possessed by a diabolic regime responsible for orchestrating the genocide of a captive population and its culture. It was through the account developed in the Report that the carceral paradigm of Romanian society during communism, rooted in the detention literature, became official memory, along with its allegorical understanding of Romanian communism in Dantesque terms, as a collective descent into totalitarian hell.

The nature of victim. The phenomenology of suffering is supplemented by the victimology of genocide. Regarding the latter, two parallel dimensions structure the master narrative of the Report: a) the victimization of Romanian people, in its entirety, as the collective subject of the “unleashed terror” of communist regime; b) the identification of the specific victims and the categories directly victimized by the repressive system. At the general level, the entire Romanian society is presented as suffering the trauma of communist dictatorship, excepting the “parasitic caste” (*nomenklatura*) (Report: 2006, p. 15). The “rape of the masses” by a “system went into trance” (pp. 17, 14), the collectivization of agriculture, the economic disaster created by centralized economy responsible for the starvation of the population, the degradation of education and science alongside the “cultural genocide”, the destruction of the environment, and the religious persecutions traumatized the social body to the backbone. At a more specific level, the Report is at pains to identify the concrete social categories and specific victims of communist repression. In this direction, the authors of the Report undertake the arithmetization of genocide, calculating the number of the victims of communism as ranging between 500,000 and 2,000,000 individuals (p. 161). The calculations by which this amount with a very wide estimative range is reached are quite approximate and amateuristically made, based on all sorts of suppositions, unfounded inferences and incomplete data. It is worth saying that one of the truth-commission’s members mentioned, in a footnote, that the estimations are likely to exceed the real figure (p. 161, f.n.3). The hyperbolic language alongside the approximate nature of this arithmetic of genocide fully entitle Shafir (2007) to classify the Report as memory (subjective, morally engaged, simplifying) and to refuse it the status of history (aspiring towards objectivity, emotionally detached, aware of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of history). As an expression of the will to memory, the scientific validity of the victim toll holds less importance

⁴ Shafir (2007), after reviewing the terminological consensus in the literature regarding the terms “genocide”, “politicide”, and “democide”, is right to criticize the definitional misuse of the notion of “genocide” in the Romanian case.

that the emotional impact of such impressive figures. In constructing cultural trauma, emotional pillars turn out to be more instrumental than scientific buttresses.

Victims' relation to the system. The typical case of the relationship between the victim group and the oppressive system in traumatic renderings is that of a minority (be it ethnic – such as in the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire, racial – such as Jews in the Nazi Holocaust, or religious – such as the Albigenian crusade in the 13th century) systematically oppressed by a powerful majority forming a persecuting society. Against this pattern of a minority group victimized by a persecuting majority, in the Romanian construction of communism as cultural trauma the pattern is turned upside down. The victim was the Romanian people – both in its totality and certain constitutive parts of it – who came under the tragic reign of a gang of ruthless rulers completely “alien to the interests and aspirations of the Romanian people”, which managed to “confiscate the Romanian state” “for four and a half decades” (Report: 2006, p. 17). By victimizing the entire Romanian people the Report totally obscures the thorny issue of the popular support of, adhesion and participation to the regime, especially, but not exclusively, after 1964. It is a basic postulate of political sociology that a regime cannot survive indefinitely only through sheer terror. A minimum of social legitimacy and support is needed for a regime to survive its violent birth and it is beyond question that the Romanian communist regime succeeded to enroll the population to its political project through different strategies of co-optation by which it ensured popular compliance. Otherwise, its survival for almost half of a century could hardly have been possible. This popular participation is also the main reason why the Report is so reluctant to use the term “totalitarianism”, opting instead for “dictatorship”. (The name of the commission itself is *Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania*.) The terminological choice is not innocent, as one feature of any totalitarian society is its success of enrolling the population to its political goal, while a dictatorship does not necessarily presupposes such a total recruitment of the population. The Romanian people could not have been kept morally clean as an innocent entity cursed to fall under the rule of a foreign band (of thugs) unless the regime would be called a “dictatorship”. In fact, as Barbu (2008, p. 97) justly pointed out, if it is to accept the terminological conventions used by the rapporteurs themselves, what we are dealing with is a “participatory dictatorship”, one in which ordinary people, by simply living their lives and coming to terms to the structural reality of the communist regime, participated, although prosaically, to its daily endorsement.

Attribution of responsibility. Being above all a moral judgment of the past in the court of the present, the Report's critical point relies in establishing responsibility and guilt. The credibility of communism's master narrative as cultural trauma hangs on the ability to determine moral culpability and to identify the perpetrators. Assigning moral guilt is the *punctum crucis* of the entire process of cultural trauma construction. Moral responsibility for “Romania's tragedy under communism” (Report: 2006, p. 19) is distributed by the panel of historian-judges who drawn up the Report along several lines: a) communist ideology; b) Romanian Communist Party (PCR) and its leaders; c) the ruling couple Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu; d) nomenklatura; e) Securitate; f) Europe's betray.

At the most general and impersonal level, *communist ideology* is found guilty as a

criminal system of thought. Although the Report does not explicitly treat the nature of communist ideology in a dedicated section the conclusion of its criminal nature transpires from every pore of the discourse, which does not differentiate between the idealist project of communist society as egalitarian social system grounded in the core value of social justice, free of class struggle and socio-economic inequalities and the political dictatorship justifying itself in the name of communist ideology. This deliberate confusion of political theory and political praxis is revealed by the recommendation to “forbid the dissemination of communist propaganda materials” (p. 642). Incidentally, if this recommendation had been taken seriously, this paper would have run the chance of being labeled as a material of communist propaganda, and consequently forbidden. Setting the record straight, it has to be emphasized that this paper does not follow an explicit ideological agenda, as it aspires towards the venerable Weberian precept of “value-free scholarship”. Implicitly, however, it can be thought of as espousing what has been called as the “anti-anti-communist” position. The double negation (“anti-anti”) does not make it “pro”-communist. It reacts against the ossification of an anticommunist perspective as discursive orthodoxy in Romania’s contemporary politics of memory that is ideologically committed to reduce the complex social reality of the Romanian socialism to a “criminal regime” without any further qualifications. This criminal view of Romanian red past is biased by a “cataractic effect”, as it fails to see and acknowledge the other non-criminal sides of the communist project. Adopting this unilateral perspective focused exclusively on the criminal nature of the communist regime makes it easy to pronounce definitive and irrevocable moral sentences. The problem with this approach is that the “cathartic effect” strived for by sentencing the red past is only made possible by an underlying “cataractic condition”. Purification of the troubling past needs a half-blind eye to occur.

Abstract culpability attributed to the communist ideology is rooted down in the *Romanian Communist Party* (PCR) as the political structure responsible for organizing the bio-cultural genocide and transforming Romania in a prison, “from the first to the last day” of communist rule that lasted from 1945 until 1989 (p. 16). PCR’s image is that of an anti-national party (not only in the first stage of its existence, but even during Ceausescu’s time of nationalistic convulsions), made up of “allogenic elements” and suffering for this reason from “pariah psychology” (p. 31). In this capacity, at least in the first phase of Romanian communism, the Party betrayed national interests, acting as Moscow’s agent in Romania.

Moral culpability is completely personalized in the double figure of the ruling couple of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu. If his predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, together with the other Party potentates, is the author and architect of Romanian Gulag archipelago, Nicolae Ceausescu bears the burden of the cultural genocide and for continuing and exacerbating the catastrophic policies that traumatized the social tissue. The totality of criminal facts incriminating him is too extensive to be detailed in this paper. Highlighted among the most serious of them is the megalomaniac personality cult that reached pharaonic proportions and the preparations made for establishing a dynastic communism modeled after the North Korean case. Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena are portrayed as the iconic symbols of repression, misery, famine and, in the last resort, as the human incarnations of the criminality of

the communist regime.

Founded upon the communist ideology and embodied in the person of its messianic leader (Gheorghiu-Dej, then Ceausescu), the Party and its operations were run by a human apparatus whose superior echelon was the privileged *nomenklatura*. This “parasitic caste” (pp. 15, 638) takes a large share of the moral responsibility for communism’s traumaticity. The authors of the Report compile an *index infamis nominum* containing the names and biographical details of the sixty-five high-profile nomenklaturists bearing the burden of culpability (pp. 646-666).

In the allocation of infamy, *Securitate* gets the lion’s share. Founded in 1948, shortly after the communists seized power, *Securitate* is criminalized as the Party’s main repressive instrument, its secret police arm. Demonic language is found suitable for accounting the institutional behavior of this “diabolical organization” and “diabolical mechanism” (pp. 166, 167), the tool by which the Party subjected the population to a continuous “state terrorism”.

A share of the total historical and moral responsibility for Romania’s tragedy under communism rests with Europe (Western allied powers), which in the wake of World War II abandoned Romania in the Soviet sphere of influence. “Romania was simply sold to the Russians for several decades!”, thunders the passionate voice of the Report. The conclusion is forcefully restated several lines afterwards: “At Yalta, Romania has been cynically abandoned in Soviet claws” (p. 159).

The distribution of responsibility is thus allocated between different institutions, social groups, and specific persons. The nuclei magnetizing moral responsibility are various and multiple, but nonetheless, they form an integrated nexus made responsible for the total sociocultural trauma of communism. In a single stroke, the moral discourse of the Report can be reduced to these narrative essentials: the communist ideology, organizationally condensed in the Party equipped with an apparatus of cadres orbiting around the messianic figure of the leader disposing of the terrible tool of *Securitate*, against the background of Western allies’ betrayal in the Soviet claws, is responsible for the half a century continuous trauma experienced by Romanian society. As keenly pointed out by both Abraham (2008, pp. 21-22) and Barbu (2008, p. 75) in their critical readings of the Report, it conveniently bypasses an analysis of the role played out by the juridical system and the army in the making and preservation of the communist regime. By exonerating these two institutions of any responsibility the entire burden of guilt could be placed upon the Party, its members (*nomenklatura*), and its institutional arm (*Securitate*).

Institutionalizing cultural trauma: the pedagogy of traumatic memory

One of the Report’s recommendations has been to design a course teaching the history of communism in Romania. A textbook had to be developed for this purpose. Two years after the Report, in 2008, the new optional course designed for secondary education made its debut. Announced as a lucid, *sine ira et studio* analysis of communist past, the gymnasium textbook (for the 12th grade) *A History of Communism in Romania* (Stamatescu et al: 2008) is thus the direct offshoot of the Report. Although the metaphorical and semantic inflation overflowing the Report is contained in the textbook’s discourse, there are some irruptions evoking the language of the Report.

For instance, in the very foreword written by Marius Oprea (the President of the “Center for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania” – CICC, not to be confused with “The Institute for the Investigations of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exiles” – IICCMRE), the author speaks of the “true triangle of death” (2008, p. 5), made up of the Party, Securitate and Militia and the communist Criminal Justice. As a synthesis of the Report, the textbook follows the argumentative structure developed in its reference-document. The theme of Romanian communism’s traumatic uniqueness is restated by the textbook: “in a century of tragedies, such as the twentieth century turned out to be, communism has been in their very center” (2008, p. 13). The constitutive conditions of the total trauma (social, psychological, and cultural) caused by the half of century of communism are roughly identical with those identified by the Report: the extermination of elites and the annihilation of opposition by establishing the “concentrationary universe”; the destruction of national economy by adopting the Soviet model (the collectivization of agriculture being responsible for inanition, while forced industrialization created a pseudo-modernity), the program of urbanization and systematization of villages (which in reality equated to the systematic destruction of rural Romania), the state-colonization of private life, the demographic policy outlawing abortions responsible for the high rate of infant mortality etc. However, unlike the narrative of the Report, which has an explicit inquisitorial and accusatory tone, the discursive line developed in the textbook denotes more sobriety and moderation. Although depicted in less dark nuances, the communist period continues to be, between the lines, condemned *in toto* and painted as a darkish spot littered across the history of Romania.

The introduction of the textbook in the educational circuit indicates the educational institutionalization of the cultural trauma discourse regarding communist past. The cycle started with the breakthrough moment of memorialistic literature (which represented the emergence of the cultural trauma discourse in the public sphere), continued by officializing cultural trauma through the condemnation of communism by the state-sponsored “truth commission”, is completed with the institutionalization of a “pedagogy of cultural trauma” exercised through the textbook of the communist history in Romania. The officially ratified master narrative of the Report is thus educationally socialized through the pedagogy of cultural trauma of the communist past.

Parallel with the socialization of the traumatic memory of communism through the institutional channels of the state educational system, another dimension revealing the process of institutionalizing cultural trauma is the creation of a permanent apparatus of “historical prosecution” materialized in the “Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile” (IICCMRE). Founded in 2006 by governmental decree, IICCMRE has been legally granted a functional duality: a *cognitive one*, to research scientifically the communist past, and a *proto-judicial one*, of providing assistance to penal investigation of the crimes committed during the communist regime. In this dual capacity, IICCMRE is a state-sponsored institutional apparatus for scientific-judicial inquiry of communist crimes. The legal basis underpinning the institute stipulates the obligation of penal notification: “[the institute] collects data, documents, and testimonies regarding all actions which led to the infringement of human rights and liberties, and notifies the criminal prosecution

authorities irrespective of the time and circumstances of their occurrence” (art. 3, paragraph 1, letter b of Government Issue no. 1,372/2009, modified by Issue no. 768 of July 25 2012). The five years’ activity report, issued in 2012, mentions that the institute has made about 300 penal notifications. The official obligation of penal notification turns the institute from a scientific research site into an organ of “historical prosecution”, whose institutional purpose is not understanding the intricate nature of Romanian socialist system within the larger political and historical context, but prosecuting individuals by bringing them to justice on criminal charges. The cognitive goal legitimizing historical knowledge is thus diverged towards a punitive purpose. The dual nature of the institute (of scientific research and penal notification) turns it into a Foucaultian power/knowledge instrument in the hands of historians-prosecutors. Again, we are not apologetic, as we do not consider that the criminals of the former regime should be granted amnesty. But it is not the historian’s task to prosecute the subjects of her research. Moreover, at a more general level, by prosecuting the trial of communism history has been brought in the *pretorium*. It is our epistemological conviction that the role of historical knowledge is not judging (morally, all the less juridical) the past in the court of the present, but understanding, without, it should be hastily added, transforming understanding in moral alibi or scientific apologetics. Even if historical knowledge can be used in the investigation of legal cases (this was always the case), historical knowledge *per se* should not be put to punitive ends. *Historia ancilla iuris* is not the best status for history.

Taking a provisional stock of the argumentation up to this point, we can conclude that the two simultaneous movements rising from the Report’s conclusions consolidated the master narrative of Romanian communism as cultural trauma in the postcommunist order of Romanian society. The process of narrative constructing cultural trauma as the official memory of Romanian communism was finally completed with the putting in place of the last two institutional keystones: i) the pedagogy of communism’s traumatic memory through the educational system and ii) the criminalization of communism through the institutional apparatus of historical prosecution.

Nostalgic resistance: the red memory of communism

Institutionalizing the traumatic memory of communism through history textbooks, monuments, and commemorative practices (erecting a Monument of Communism’s Victims and founding a commemorative day in the name of communism’s victims are two of the recommendations of the Report: 2006, p. 639) reveals the post-totalitarian state’s endeavor to construct a new mnemonic order. But the assiduous struggles of intellectual democratic elites that eventually found political support of imposing the official interpretation of communism as cultural trauma are countered by a powerful popular resistance under the form of collective nostalgia. Articulated as popular “counter memories” (Popular Memory Group: 1982), people’s nostalgia towards the communist past advances an alternative narrative, one in which occupational stability and the safety of the workplace, the social protection provided by the paternalist state and socio-economic homogeneity are deplored more than the gaining of democratic freedoms. Public opinion surveys that explored people’s

attitudes towards the communist past reveal that a considerable part of Romanian society harbors nostalgic feelings. A series of statistical data can be illuminating in this regard.

Table 1. The evolution of Roumanian public opinion regarding the appreciation of the former regime (N=7,064)

Year	The presentists (%)	The neutrals (%)	The nostalgics (%)	Total (%)
1991	66,9	6,8	26,3	100
1992	55,6	9,0	35,3	100
1993	61,6	6,1	32,3	100
1995	60,8	13,1	26,1	100
1998	53,9	14,0	32,1	100
2001	31,4	13,6	55,0	100
2004	42,3	13,1	44,7	100

Source: author's calculation based on New Europe Barometers databases

New Europe Barometers (NEB) trend data from 1991 to 2004 can offer us a longitudinal image of how Romanian public opinion towards the former regime evolved until the brink of the Report's publication. The "presentists" are those Romanians who appreciated negatively the former communist social order on a scale ranging from -100 to +100, while the "nostalgics" are those who evaluated communist society positively on the same scale. "Neutrals" were categorized those who chose "0". Respondents were asked to provide an answer to the following question: "Here is a scale for ranking how our system of government works. The top, plus 100, is the best; the bottom, minus 100, the worst. Where on this scale would you put the former Communist regime?" Despite an initial enthusiasm towards the change of regime, data reveal a progressive grow of nostalgic feelings as people became more and more dissatisfied with the endless road of transition paved as it turned out to be with social and economic drawbacks. Describing with their long term trends a scissors movement, the percent of the "presentists" dropped from 67 as it was at the beginning of the transition to 42 in 2004, while the "nostalgics" thicken their ranks from 26 percent in 1991 to 45 percent in 2004. Unfortunately, the New Europe Barometers studies came to a halt after this date, so that we can only get a glimpse of what the direction of the nostalgia trend could take by looking at the surveys and opinion polls conducted from 2004 onwards. Putting together data taken from various Public Opinion Barometers (POB) and other surveys conducted by "The Institute for the Investigations of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exiles" (IICCMRE) we can get an idea of how the attitudes towards the communist past evolved in the last ten years unmapped by New Europe Barometers.

Table 2 The evolution of Romanian public opinion towards the idea of communism after 2004 (N=10,198)

Year	A good idea, well applied (%)	A good idea, wrongly applied (%)	Not a good idea (%)	Don't know/ No answer (%)	Total (%)
2005 ⁱ	9,8	35,7	42,9	11,5	100
2006 ⁱⁱ	12,2	41,5	34,1	12,3	100
2007 ⁱⁱⁱ	8,6	36,0	38,0	17,3	100
2010 ^{iv}	14,5	45,5	28,0	12,0	100
2011 ^v	18,0	43,0	25,0	14,0	100

Source: POB and IICCMRE surveys

ⁱ POB May 2005, based on a representative sample of 1800 respondents, with a margin of error of $\pm 2,3$ per cent at a 95 per cent level of confidence.

ⁱⁱ POB October 2006, based on a representative sample of 1975 respondents, with a margin of error of $\pm 2,3$ per cent at a 95 per cent level of confidence.

ⁱⁱⁱ POB October 2007, based on a representative sample of 2000 respondents, with a margin of error of $\pm 2,3$ per cent at a 95 per cent level of confidence.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ The per cents represent the average values calculated for the two public opinion polls done by The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMRE) in September and November of 2010. The September 2010 IICCMRE poll was based on a representative sample of 1133 respondents, with a margin of error of $\pm 2,9$ per cent at a 95 per cent level of confidence. The November 2010 ^{iv} CCMRE poll was based on a representative sample of 1123 respondents, with a margin of error of $\pm 2,9$ per cent at a 95 per cent level of confidence.

^v May 2011 IICCMRE poll, based on a representative sample of 1125 respondents, with a margin of error of $\pm 2,9$ per cent at a 95 per cent level of confidence.

These survey data are consistent with those revealed by NEB databases, showing a progressive rise in the percent of Romanians considering communism to be a good idea (that had been well or wrongly applied in Romanian society). In the same time, surveys reveal a sharp drop in the percent of Romanians appreciating communism as a bad idea in itself (from 43 percent in 2005 down to 25 percent in 2011).

All these data suggest that a considerable part of the population had positive attitudes towards communist past. Moreover, nostalgic feelings seem to be on the rise. In addition to the data presented in the tables above, 45 percent of the respondents to another survey from 2010 regret the fall of communism, while 50 percent do not feel sorry about it^[5]. The same proportion of 45 percent thinks that they would have been living a better life if the Revolution had not occurred. Even more suggestive is the fact that, presented with an electoral scenario in which Nicolae Ceausescu would run for presidency, 41 percent of Romanians would vote for him^[6]. Regarding the condemnation of the communist regime as illegitimate and criminal, the popular nostalgic resistance is expressed by the fact that only 37 percent of Romanians agree that the former regime was a criminal one, while 41 percent do not agree with this sentence. Concerning the issue of the regime's illegitimacy, 42 percent agree to the

5 Nostalgia for the Past. Sacrifices of the Present", July 2010, The Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (RIES). The survey used a representative sample of 1,406 individuals, with a margin of error of 2.7 percent. The rest of 5 percent were "don't know" and non-answers.

6 "Romanians and the nostalgia for communism", July 2010, The Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (RIES). The survey used a representative sample of 1,460 individuals, with a margin of error of 2.7 percent. The rest of 6 percent were "don't know" and non-answers.

Report's conclusion, while 31 percent do not share this view⁷.

What boggles the mind even more is that teenagers, who never experienced communism as they were born after the breakdown of the socialist regime, seem to yearn nostalgically after a pre-biographical past. The study "School students and civic culture" (Soros Foundation: 2010), based on a representative sample of 5,861 school students enrolled in classes from the 8th to the 12th grades, asked them the question "In comparison to the communist period, the current period is...?" The distribution of the answers shows that 35,8 percent of the students consider current situation to be worse and much worse than the communist period that they never experienced personally. Indeed, almost 60 percent of them prefer the postcommunist status quo in comparison with the old regime, but still the statistical fact that more than a third of Romanian teenagers present the signs of nostalgic feeling towards the system in which only their parents could have lived is a strong indicator of the yearning for communist past in contemporary Romanian society.

Table 3. Teenagers' attitudes towards the communist past (N=5.861)

In comparison to the communist period, the current period is...	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Much better	850	14,5
Better	2.649	45,2
Worse	1.494	25,5
Much worse	605	10,3
Don't know/ Don't answer	263	4,5
Total	5.861	100

Source: "School students and civic culture" (Soros Foundation: 2010)

Extensive survey data suggests the polarization of attitudes towards the communist past around two centers: on the one hand, the educated middle-class which benefited from the regime change that opened up for them new sociopolitical and economic horizons tends to conceptualize communism in terms of the state-sponsored official narrative rendering communism as cultural trauma; on the other hand, the aged and less educated population, the most affected by the economic difficulties of postcommunist transition – the losers of transition – is longing nostalgically for the past, deploring the social security swept away by the capitalist order. As Cioflâncă (2010) concludes, "communism lost the battle with history, but, at least for now, not the one with memory". To which we feel compelled to add immediately: Romanian postcommunist liberal democratic elite finally won the battle over Romanian red past's *official memory*, but lost the war over vernacular memory and private remembrances of the previous form of life. If the Romanian intelligentsia feels deeply troubled by a post-traumatic societal condition left in its wake by the crumbling of the communist regime, it is a wide feeling of collective nostalgia that haunts the Romanian popular consciousness.

Furthermore, remaining faithful to the warlike tropological language to which we have paid tribute so far, another hermeneutic front is opening up in the battle over

7 "Attitudes and Opinions on the Romania's Communist Regime", September 2010, Center for Opinion and Market Research (CSOP).

Romanian red memory. The hitherto passive nostalgic resistance to the anticommunist hegemonic narrative of Romanian communism as total sociocultural trauma is starting to turn active. Initiatives such as books – e.g., Ernu et al (2008) *The Illusion of Anticommunism* – and debate platforms – e.g., CriticAtac – are the results of a process of challenging from the left the anticommunist consensus endorsed by the currently hegemonic trauma discourse on the red past. These initiatives reveal the articulation of an active and activist phalanx to give voice to and to galvanize the “passive resistance” towards challenging the anticommunist consensus and advancing a revisionist view on the communist past.

Conclusions

Comparing the two catastrophic atrocities of the twentieth century experienced by European civilization, Maier observes that the traumatic memory of the Holocaust continues to twitch in the collective consciousness, while the memory of communism is slowly but surely fading away. “[T]he black book of Nazism remains, in the consciousness of so many of those preoccupied by the history of the twentieth century, blacker than the black book of Communism” (Maier: 2002), despite the fact that in terms of human casualties, communism turned out to be incomparably deadlier. Starting from this observation, Maier contrasts the reflection of the two totalitarian pasts in contemporary consciousness by resorting to a caloric metaphor: the Holocaust’s “hot memory” continues to irradiate due to its long half life, while the communism’s “cold memory” already reached its shorter half time. The data collected by opinion surveys in postcommunist Romania show not only that the traumatic collective memory of communism cooled down, but also that we are dealing with a strong nostalgic yearning for the communist past. Supplementing the caloric opposition proposed by Maier with a chromatic contrast, it can be said that the positive attitudes towards communism express the existence of a “red memory”, localized within the lower ranks of the social hierarchy, resisting the “black memory” of communism embraced by intellectual democratic elites. It is against the grain of this red memory of Romanian communism that the democratic intellectual elite in coalition with state sponsored cultural institutions is trying to impose the master narrative of cultural trauma. The seemingly impassible obstacle is the powerless of state authorities to curb down peoples’ collective nostalgia flourishing in the harsh time of the transition. Clinging to the past works like a coping mechanism in the face of the socio-economic difficulties of the present.

The retrospective criminalization of the past by prosecuting the communist case provides further evidence in support of the “presentist theory of collective memory” (Halbwachs: 1980; Hobsbawm and Ranger: 1983), according to which each socio-political order manufactures its own convenient and usable past as a foundation of its legitimacy. Every new political order colonizes the past, selectively retaining in the content of collective memory only those elements from the past that can be politically capitalized and symbolically exploited, obliterating in the same time the problematic aspects of the historical legacy. The notion of “mnemonic revolution” can describe the mutation occurring in the structure of collective memory as a result of the overthrow of social order, by which the entire image of the past is radically

reinterpreted. Against this theoretical backdrop, the criminalization of the communist past represents a mnemonic revolution triggered from the top-down, by which the official memory organized during the communist regime is being deconstructed and replaced by the equally official memory articulated by the postcommunist regime. Starting in the late 1940s and continuing throughout the 1950s, the then newly in power communist regime tried to radically redefine the national past, exorcizing the “nationalist soul” inhibiting Romanian historical memory to infuse it with the inter- (and anti-) nationalist Soviet spirit. Mihail Roller’s infamous textbook, *The History of Romania (1948)* – subsequently published with the revised title of *The History of RPR (1952)* –, stands proof of this Sovietization of Romanian past. This major state operation of reinterpreting the past in a Soviet key ultimately failed, since by mid 1960s Romanian historiography made a spectacular nationalistic turn, reintegrating in the official collective memory the national identity, previously removed in the process of the Soviet re-writing of Romanian past. Paraphrasing Eastman (1990), we can designate this attempt as an “abortive mnemonic revolution”. For now, it is too early to draw conclusions regarding the success of the mnemonic revolution triggered by the condemnation of communist through the Report of the “truth commission”. Although the public sphere has been won by the trauma discourse, private opinions and attitudes towards the communist past continue to be a major obstacle in the way of the popular success of the communism’s master narrative as cultural trauma.

Acknowledgment: This paper is a result of a research made possible by the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132400 – “Young successful researchers – professional development in an international and interdisciplinary environment”.

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