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Communism in retrospect: the rhetoric of historical representation and writing the collective memory of recent past

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The '1989 moment' and the fall of communism in eastern Europe have been posing acute problems for collective memories and issues of representation of recent history. Various surveys across eastern European countries show marked ambivalence towards the communist past and nostalgia for communism (Velikonja, 2009). Under the general heading of "coming to terms with the past" attempts have been made to 'reprocess' (cf. Adorno, 1986) the communist past, that is, to struggle *for* insight about what happened in the past and *against* forgetfulness. This paper places the issue of reprocessing the past in the context of how post-communist democracies reckon with (the crimes and abuses of) former regimes. Using a case study of official representation of communism in Romania, the paper addresses the construction of historical representation and national narratives around "coming to terms with the past" and dealing with the authoritarian legacy of the past. The focus is on the recent official condemnation of communism as 'illegitimate and criminal' (Tismăneanu, 2008).

Politics of memory and representations of recent history

The paper considers elite attempts at "coming to terms with the past" from the perspective of a critical evaluation of national narratives and politics of memory. How does collective memory emerge at the national level, in the public sphere, especially in the context of radical social change and contested attempts at appraising the legacy of former regimes? How is it turned into a national narrative, one that can foster the shaping of new (national) identities and 'usable' pasts? More specifically, how is communism appraised as both object of historical knowledge and collectively remembered event? The paper

contends that any consideration of the public dimension of historical and collective memory narratives (and knowledge in the public sphere) should start with the study of the social and discursive organization of various 'texts of history' (Wertsch, 1997) as socially occasioned, rhetorical and textual accomplishments (Tileagă, 2009). The phrase 'politics of memory' is an umbrella term for different manifestations of memory, both those grounded in lived experience or more formal symbols and representations (Assmann, 2008; Huyssen, 2003; Olick, 2007). It is often used as a label for transitional justice processes in democratizing societies (e.g., de Brito et al., 2001), narrative clashes over monuments and sites of memory and collective meanings attached to it (e.g., Wertsch, 2008), conflicts over the meaning given by 'mnemonic communities' to events of national importance (e.g., Wertsch, 2002; Wertsch and Karumidze, 2009), 'mnemonic resistance' of minority or repressed groups or antagonisms between elite historical discourses and vernacular ways of meaning-making and representing reality (e.g., Andrews, 2007). In the context of coming to terms with the legacy and recent history of communism in eastern Europe, I use the phrase 'politics of memory' to refer broadly to the, sometimes ambiguous interplay and tension between acts of oblivion and acts of actively creating positive collective memories for the future (the mutual interpenetration of informal social memory and organized political memory) and the interactions between institutional political actors (domestic and international) that can influence the way in which the past is appraised, and used as an instrument of political action. For researchers of transition, politicians and lay people, collective remembering is conceived 'primarily as a matter of political negotiation and contestation' (Wertsch, 2007: 655)¹. Issues around the public appraisal and public use of recent history are crucial in sociological, historical and political science

thought (see, *inter alia*, Corney, 2003; Stan, 2006; Olick, 2003, 2007).

Sociologists, but especially historians and political scientists have approached collective memory and issues of social change with the aim of explaining macro-social political and historical processes of change and transformation. In contrast, anthropologists, ethnographers and some cultural historians have highlighted the inherent moral ambiguities and vagaries of memory. This is argued to stem from the idea that the (collective) memory of social and historical 'realities' can be located by social actors (academics, politicians, ordinary citizens, and so on) within different social frameworks, identity constellations and networks of interpretation (Bucur, 2009; Gallinat, 2009).

There is also a need for a clearer focus on the production, legitimization and dissemination of national narratives and political memory within the context of their *projected* and *constituted* public dimension. When one considers how nation-states reckon with former regimes (in this case, communism), the issue of how representations of recent history are constituted, legitimated and circulated in society - their *social organization* - becomes of central importance (cf. Tileagă, 2009). We will not understand fully the debates about what ought or ought not to be part of public/official memory unless we study representations of recent history and politics of memory as social accomplishments. As Kenneth Gergen suggests

'forms of "objective" appraisal of recent past should be ... conceived as social accomplishments, dialogical achievements. That is, the languages of description do not reflect or mirror what is the case; rather, the language functions to index a state of affairs for all practical purposes within a given community' (2005: 108).

Any attempt to understand the politics of memory in eastern Europe should treat memory as, quintessentially, a 'social product' and social

accomplishment, 'reflecting the agenda and social location of those who invoke it' (Cohen, 2001: 241). This position does not imply naïve acceptance of 'everything goes' in constituting the recent past. It just signals that there is so much to engage with beyond elite, dominant ways of constituting the recent past. There are multiple perspectives and alternative ways of meaning-making that are sourced in the subjective standpoint of the social actor, experiences and 'typifications' of everyday life, and the seemingly anarchic interplay of 'well-informed' opinion in the public sphere. A critical evaluation of elite national narratives and political memory needs to start with close attention to how representations of recent history are put together (as products of human practices - e.g., political, academic -) and how they are constructed to speak *to* and *of* official collective memory.

The Romanian context

Romania is a country that has undergone a radical, yet troubled transition to democracy in the last twenty years. Successive post-1989 governments have drawn upon a notion of collective memory that reflected both progressive arguments for change and facing the past, as well as conservative arguments of consensus, continuity and putting the past to rest. Romanian politics since the 1989 revolution has been an 'ongoing struggle for political power between the surviving forces of the old regime and those who believe in a complete break with the pre-1989 nationalist-communist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu' (Ciobanu, 2009: 313). It is this struggle that, twenty years after 1989, sets the tone for political reflection and political action around the creation of 'public spheres of "real" memory that will counter the politics of forgetting' (Huyssen, 2003: 15) or denial (Cohen, 2001). Liberal

academic experts (historians or political scientists) have been invested with or, in some cases, have taken the role of opinion leaders. Their role was that of setting the moral agenda of the present, shaping a moral discourse and sensitizing present generations of its responsibilities to the past (Cesereanu, 2008, Poole, 2008; Thompson, 2009). In the Romanian context, the role of historians and political scientists was to ensure that emerging elite representations of the communist speak *against* alternative ways of organizing and approving knowledge in the public sphere coming from right-wing and ex-communist political attempts of downplaying or even denying the atrocities perpetrated by the communist regime (Tismăneanu, 2007a, 2008; King, 2007).

The setting up of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania was one such attempt. Its Final Report condemned the crimes and abuses of communism in Romania from 1945 to 1989 (Tănăsioiu, 2007; Stan, 2007). The commission was not unique in its aims, it was preceded by similar attempts at investigating the crimes of communism in Germany, and several Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) (cf. Stan, 2009)². Subsequently, in front of the Romanian Parliament, the President, Traian Băsescu, officially condemns the crimes and abuses of the communist regime³. The communist regime is, unequivocally, declared by both report and President as 'illegitimate and criminal'.

The report consists largely of an account of communism's policies and institutions; it aims to convey the repressive and criminal nature of totalitarian regime. The report's analysis of the communist regime takes up almost 700 pages. The introduction covers the 'nature, scope and effects of the Romanian communist totalitarian regime', followed by separate chapters on the Romanian communist Party (chap.1), the communist repression (chap. 2),

society, economy, and culture (chap. 3). The Conclusions of the report bear the title: 'the necessity of the analysis, condemnation and repudiation of the communist regime'. The report closes with the biographies of the communist bureaucratic elite.

The commission, also known as the 'Tismăneanu commission' was lead by Vladimir Tismăneanu (Romanian born professor of political sciences at University of Maryland, College Park, in the US) who after 1989 became actively involved in Romanian public life ⁴. But it was not Tismăneanu that instigated the report. The Romanian president, Traian Băsescu was responding to civil society appeals by formally setting up, in April 2006, the Presidential Commission ⁵. Tismăneanu was given full authority to appoint the members of the commission, which included around twenty members (mostly public intellectuals that gave legitimacy and credibility to the project) and around twenty experts who were charged with writing the texts that made up the various sections of the report. Some of them were known to the Romanian public for their academic work, others for their anti-communist activity and activism in civil society groups.⁶

According to Hogeia (2010), the main political and media themes that emerged in political discourse around the report were related to 'timing (the right moment has already passed), authority (only a non-communist can condemn communism), political capital (witch-hunting), and a new beginning (through the closure of a traumatic past).' (p. 23). Băsescu 's official address in the Romanian Parliament, endorsing the report, was fiercely opposed by the two main opposition parties (the left of center Social Democrats and the right-wing Greater Romania Party). As Ciobanu writes, the reactions were not especially surprising, as the report 'deprived two groups (former communists and nationalists) of an honourable place in national history. While it relegated

these groups to the status of oppressors, it endowed former dissidents and anti-communist opposition groups with a moral authority that conferred on them political legitimacy.’ (2009: 332)⁷. Media reactions to the report were mixed. The majority of the liberal leaning media considered the report a good and needed initiative, yet futile since former communists were still occupying public posts (cf. Hogeia, 2010). Liberal newspapers (e.g., Cotidianul) were more inclined to consider the report as a ‘redressive ritual that would bring closure to a traumatic past’ (p. 26). The right-wing media (e.g. Jurnalul National) promoted an agenda of suspicion and accusations of rewriting history for political purposes and contested the objectivity of the report. This was achieved through vicious personal attacks, and questioning the authority and honesty of Vladimir Tismăneanu. The right-wing media went as far to suggest that some of the methods used by the Romanian president and his commission resembled those of pre-1989 communists.

The implications and influence of the report for a national narrative around coming to terms with the communist past were limited at the general level of public opinion. This is not surprising, as the report was trying to cast itself as a national narrative at a time when opinion polls were showing that the majority of Romanians considered communism as a ‘good idea’. Although the report championed legislative and legal concerns with lustration and ‘decommunization’, its function as a legal instrument was extremely limited.

Method

This paper is part of a wider project on how the controversial political imaginary of the Romanian communist/post-communist past is accomplished in talk and text in various social/institutional settings (commemorative addresses, political news interviews, official reports) (e.g., Tileagă, 2008, 2009). The analysis focuses on the report and various other texts that have supported it, particularly the President's speech in the Romanian Parliament endorsing its conclusions and Vladimir Tismăneanu's own texts (newspaper articles and commentaries) collected in *Refuzul de a uita* [The refusal to forget] (Tismăneanu, 2007b)⁸. I am interested in how these texts, as sites for the constitution, organization and transmission of public memory, work together to engender and negotiate an elite social representation of communism. It is true that the report and Tismăneanu's texts represented one position among many at the time, yet an (exemplary) position whose aim was to establish itself as national narrative, a *representative and normative* framework around national reckoning with the recent communist past. Here, I attempt to study it in its own right and point to some of its ideological consequences. This does not mean I minimize the role of the broader argumentative context in which the report and debate around it took shape. I have purposefully omitted other texts and especially those that have called into question the credibility and genuineness of the report as an elite representation of the recent communist past. Those texts (and their 'dialogue' or 'quarrel' with the report) require separate analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper. It is nonetheless a task that must be fulfilled to get a sense of the overall pattern of organization and transmission of elite political memory in Romania. The analysis presented here can be complemented by other

studies that consider in detail the social organization of elite political memory in the context of argumentative dialogue between different social and political actors, ideologies, voices and texts.

The present analysis is informed by an ethnomethodologically inspired critical analysis (Eglin and Hester, 2003; Lynch and Bogen, 1996; Coulter, 2001; Tileagă, 2008, 2009). By 'ethnomethodological' I refer to the perspective pioneered by the late Harold Garfinkel and its concern with the production of social reality and the various argumentative practices that go with that. When applied to texts, an ethnomethodologically inspired analysis looks at texts in actual social occurrence and in term of 'what can be discovered in and from them' (Eglin and Hester, 2003: 90). Texts are treated as 'phenomenal' fields (Watson, 2009) whose discursive, sociocultural and political details are socially occasioned, rhetorical and textual accomplishments (Tileagă, 2009). Within this framework, I am interested in a critical analysis of texts that focuses on the discursive processes involved in the *constitution* of realities texts are ostensibly about (Lynch and Bogen, 1996; Watson, 2009; Smith, 1974). As a particular type of public document, inquiry reports are 'politically salient exercises in reality construction' (Green, 1983: 10). The aim of the analysis is to describe how documents and texts, such as the report, constitute an authoritative and particular representation of communism, mediate and organize the official political memory of communism. How is the condemnation of communism achieved as an authentic scientific and political enterprise? How is that reflected in the argumentative structure and organization of the report? What are the discursive means used in the report to bring off a particular representation of communism?

Official documents and texts (especially those that appraise historical

and political events) have been usually analysed as merely a window onto a historical reality or directly reflecting the (politically motivated) wishes, desires, interests of their producers. What these positions do not take into account is that language is not merely a kind of (transparent) window 'onto the world' and written texts themselves can 'predispose our "access" to and conception of' (Watson, 2009: 8) historical events/phenomena/reality. In the case of the Tismăneanu report the task of the analysis is to untangle the image of (historical) 'reality' which the text projects (cf. Prior, 1997: 70).

Analysis

Communism as a category of the 'macro-social'

As Tileagă (2009) has shown, in order for the condemnation of communism to acquire historical and political meaning, communism needs to be construed as a political category with uniquely bound characteristics or features: 'illegitimate' and 'criminal'. These categorically tied attributes of communism are constitutive of, and can be said to provide for the 'moral inferential logic' (Jayyusi, 1991: 240) of thinking about recent history. The moral and political basis for the condemnation of communism, and engendering the collective memory of communism is given by the constitutive work accomplished by attaching morally-implicative, value laden attributes to the category 'communism'.

But what kind of 'object of inquiry' is communism? Constituting the nature of communism involves more than simply attaching a series of characteristics and category-bound attributes to the category 'communism'. When the professional historian and political scientist describe communism,

they are describing an 'object that has already been described, namely by lay society-members themselves' (Watson, 2009: 1). In the Report, communism is not an indefinable phenomenon, but rather something 'out there', something to which one can point out to.

[1] "communism has fallen only officially on the 22nd of December 1989. Unofficially, structures, and especially, methods and communist mentalities, have continued to exist under different guises, some extremely pernicious, which we have the duty to discuss primarily because they represent forms of manifestation of the previous regime, transfigured, yet not fundamentally transformed." (Report)

The clear temporal delineation of the fall of communism ('22 December 1989') acts as a resource to establish the meaningfulness of inquiry but also to treat communism as more than an historical *event*. The starting point for the version of collective memory that the Report is at pains to put forward is the experiential and historical 'objectivity' of communism as a *total event/institution*, with its different forms, 'realities' (official vs. unofficial) and web of effects and consequences. It is the *nature* of communism ('transfigured, yet not fundamentally transformed') that should inform the way one approaches the collective memory of communism. Communism is treated as a *descriptive label* for an ideological social organization *and* relations between people and institutions. Communism is not treated as a category that can be said to be routinely, 'perceptually recordable' (Coulter, 2001: 37), or identifiable, although it can be discerned in its material and psychological manifestations ('structures', 'methods' and 'mentalities'). It is treated as a category of the 'macro-social' (Coulter, 2001), an *accountable, observable* public phenomenon, a nexus of practices and texts, *already present* and *experienced* in its various manifestations and consequences.

[2] "The Committee's Report aims to put together all the incontestable facts that demonstrate the systematic, methodical, antihuman and utterly

repressive nature of the communist regime. An enormous amount of documents exist regarding these crimes: testimonies, recollections, reports, information notes, meetings of the Political Bureau” (Report)

[3] “A lot of dictatorship’s crimes have not been consigned to documents ... the most extreme decisions of the Romanian communist rulers have been either passed on orally or carefully contained in the insidious disguise of wooden language” (Report)

Communism is constituted as an accountable and observable public phenomenon by being portrayed as a macro-social, textually-mediated reality and practice. The existence [2] and non-existence [3] of texts/documents is treated as both *proof for* and *constitutive of* a description of communism that emphasizes its ‘systematic, methodical, antihuman and utterly repressive nature’. In [2], the use of category-bound attributes such as ‘systematic’, ‘methodical’, ‘antihuman’ and ‘repressive’ lock into place (Baker, 2000) a moral discourse of historical appraisal that is intimately linked to textually-derived knowledge. It is the task of the Report to ‘derive an organized pattern [of collective memory narrative] from a body of documents’ (Lynch, 2009: 92). Communism is (already) socially *constituted, distributed and circulated* in ‘documentary’ form (Smith, 1974). The issue of the macro-social and textually-mediated reality of communism is essentially a *moral and political accountability* issue; it is the starting point to uncovering, detailing and proving the ‘crimes’ of communism, and constructing a particular collective representation around it. It is also the starting point for the disentangling and distillation of collective and individual agency, accountability with reference to situations, people, events, spatio-temporal frames (Tileagă, 2011).

The ‘need’ for a scientific approach

The question of what kind of object of inquiry is communism cannot be separated from other questions: what kind of investigation is needed to address such an object? What is the nature of the inquiry itself? What sort of knowledge is seen as consequential for the irrevocable condemnation of communism?

The constitution of communism as a category of the macro-social and textually-mediated reality is seen as the *premise* for a certain (very definite) type of *accountable* inquiry. In [4] (an excerpt which follows directly from [2]), 'therefore' introduces the suggested upshot of the Report's endeavor: the 'rigorous', 'scientific' study of the recent past and present.

[4] "Therefore, the committee proposes the head of state to consider the necessity to analyse in a rigorous, scientific way the December and post-December 1989 events, directly linked to the communist regime, including finalizing urgently research began through the justice system" (Report)

The invocation of 'rigorous' and 'scientific' as category-bound attributes of the inquiry can be said to point to the *accountability* and *method* of inquiry (and its outcome) as an exercise of socially deriving and approving knowledge. The Report is keen to promote a specific world view and approach to the collective memory of communism, one that enlists an unambiguous configuration of socially deriving and approving knowledge: science. The two terms make available inferential trajectories grounded in 'mundane social knowledge' (Jayyusi, 1991) about characteristics normatively associated to scientific inquiry. *Scientific* knowledge is needed for the irrevocable condemnation of communism.

[5] "It is easy to say in an interview or public position: communism has been

evil, communism has been demonic, communism has been sinister. The problem is that you need rigorous arguments, which have to be economic arguments, political arguments, sociological arguments, legal arguments, all put together in a rigorous and coherent vision” (Tismăneanu).

[6] “We demanded of the Commission a rigorous analysis of the components of the totalitarian system, of the principal institutions that made this tragedy possible, and of the personages decisively implicated in the system. We required a thorough analysis of the communist system in Romania ...” (Băsescu)

[7] “We were asked for a scientific document, rigorous, synthetic and coherent, set to examine the main institutions, methods and personalities that made possible the crimes and the abuses of the communist dictatorship in Romania” (Report).

[8] “We need an extremely well documented analysis, an unbeatable synthesis from a scientific and moral perspective” (Tismăneanu)

The particular invocation of 'rigorous' and 'scientific' as attributes of the inquiry places the discourse of the Report in a more general moral, academic worldview, that of historical and political science. In [5], Tismăneanu points to a tension between simply *claiming* something ('communism has been evil, communism has been demonic, communism has been insidious') and actually being able to *prove* it through the use of a comprehensive approach, formal logic and argument ('rigorous and coherent vision', 'extremely well documented analysis' in [8]). The co-location of 'rigorous', 'scientific', 'thorough analysis', 'rigorous, synthetic and coherent' in [6] and [7] can be said to be functioning as a sense-making device (Eglin and Hester, 2003). These terms index the credentials and character of scientific rationality in the service of democratic politics. The practical political and historical significance of condemning communism becomes thus *available* and *visible*, an accomplishment of a very specific way of socially deriving and socially approving knowledge, one that could be said to rely on what Alfred Schütz (1967) has termed the epoché peculiar to the scientific attitude. The need for a scientific approach is not construed as 'an abstract intellectual demand but

the precondition of a coherent political analysis' (Chesneaux, 1978: 30).

It can be argued that what is asked for in [5], [6], [7] and [8] (and in other parts throughout the report), is *analysis* and *knowledge* that is not *yet* or otherwise *available* in the public sphere, knowledge significant and consequential for moral and political action, the creation of a particular 'regime of knowledge' that can support a very specific representation of recent history around the notion of condemnation. What is seemingly available in the public sphere are alternative, non-scientific ways of socially deriving and approving knowledge and understanding communism. It is hoped that a scientific, carefully documented and sourced approach will trump other competing accounts, setting the record of communism straight.

[9] "... a research team is needed, a collective effort that includes not only experts, but also public and moral intellectuals ... in a period where we see so many revisionist and negationist accounts, some of them quite obscene, this Report settles the matter in an order of competence, truth and dignity..." (Tismăneanu).

[10] "The final Report tries to counter ... attempts of rewriting the past through the rehabilitation ... of the communist regime and its insidious ideology" (Tismăneanu).

[11] "In contrast to the various revisionist tendencies and myths of the Ceaușescu era, the Presidential committee argues that there was continuity between the Dej and the Ceaușescu years" (Report)

'Revisionist', 'negationist', 'revisionist tendencies' are attributes attached to descriptions of the communist past offered by others. They point to the negative character of attempts at socially deriving historical knowledge. [9], [10] and [11] build a moral contrast between rational and pernicious versions of history. This serves as a resource through which the justification of a need for alternative knowledge can be accomplished. Constituting the collective memory of communism is a matter intimately related to the 'contestability' of communism as historical and political category (Connolly,

1993), What is at stake, morally and politically, is countering ways of socially deriving, socially approving and systematizing knowledge of the communist past, especially those whose role is to reproduce and reaffirm communist ideology itself. The report is thus a vehicle for writing the official collective memory of communism. In doing so, it proposes a 'self-sufficient research paradigm' (LaCapra, 2001), where 'getting the story straight', 'settling the matter' includes expert knowledge, in combination with issues of truth and moral probity ([9]), and insists on the transcendence of facts. This is a process that entails the contextualization of a moral perspective stemming from a collective effort and the participation of the professional academic. The participation and self-contextualization of the professional academic (in this case, Tismăneanu, the leading author of the report) as academic expert is as significant as the placing of the report in a wider context of controversy.

[12] "For me, as historian and political scientist, the verdict of such a commission was not needed in order to argue that "communism has been an aberrant system, criminal, inhuman" (Tismăneanu).

The self-categorization 'historian and political scientist' indexes

Tismăneanu's double academic credentials, his full membership into a 'world of scientific contemplation handed down to him by the historical tradition of his science' (Schütz, 1967: 250). The categories 'historian' and 'political scientist' are deployed to legitimate a social and moral judgment that is *already* firmly in place. The professional historian 'has the answer' and uses his professional knowledge to inform a political perspective on recent history. Tismăneanu knows he holds a reasonable and rational position because his position 'looks and reads like other people's operating in the same discourse' (Jenkins, 1991: 52). The co-location of Tismăneanu's self-categorization and category-bound

attributes of communism ('aberrant', 'criminal', inhuman') provide reflexively for a distinct form of social knowledge 'in which the presence of the subject is suspended or displaced and "knowledge" ... is constituted as standing over against individual subjects and subjectivities, overriding the idiosyncrasies of experience, interest and perspective' (Smith, 2005: 43).

As a regime of *scientific* knowledge the 'inhuman', 'criminal', 'illegitimate' character of communism needs to be recognized in relation to accessing and socially deriving data from various documentary sources. Scientific data that can be adduced to constitute the collective image of communism is both *premise* and *outcome* of the scientific process and historical representation. There are constraints placed on deriving knowledge by the contingency and unfinished nature of social practices (including scientific ones) and ethics of human relations. The Report is careful to introduce scientific and ethical caveats with regards to the full, partial or non-availability of historical data and the kinds of consequences for writing the collective memory of recent past.

[13] "Where we have found documents we have used them, where we did not have them we have preferred to signal their absence; where we could count the victims we have done so; where we could not, we have preferred to approximate the order of magnitude. But, even using the most extreme caution to avoid the risk of exaggeration, we are responsible to every persecuted individual ... for having transformed it into a figure ... and figures are by definition cold and distant" (Report)

Excerpt [13] points to the inherent dilemma between a scientific approach to collective memory and ethics of human relations. A scientific approach does not preclude moral positioning; quantitative rhetoric does not supplant a rhetoric of ethic and humanism. It is recognized that texts, documents, numbers do not simply reflect or determine the collective memory of a traumatic past, but are inextricably involved in its construction, appraisal,

and dissemination. There is also an appreciation that documents and numbers 'can systematically disguise as much as they reveal' (Lynch, 2009: 91). The Report recognizes and displays strong adherence to a documentary or self-sufficient research model based on 'gathering evidence and making referential statements in the form of truth claims based on that evidence' (LaCapra, 2001: 1). However, these are not seen to constitute ultimate, necessary and sufficient conditions. A documentary, self-sufficient research model is qualified by introducing an ethical disclaimer.

[14] "We are used (perhaps because for so many years the victims of communism have been forgotten, contested or even denigrated) to use scientific sobriety and to avoid a sentimental approach to research... in every atom of this universe of suffering there is a human being, a biography who goes through the circles of hell, but preserves its own thoughts, feelings and memory. Taking each case in turn you are more horrified than when contemplating statistics on thousands or millions of cases" (Report)

[15] "When we talk of hundreds of thousands of victims (arrests, detentions, deportations, murders) there is no doubt that the communist regime has committed crimes against humanity. It has mutilated human souls, it has disfigured and changed destinies ... it has transformed Romania into an immense detention center, populated with informers, collaborators and officers of the Securitate." (Report)

In [14] and [15] the membership category 'victims' can be said to imply a locus for rights and obligations (Stokoe, 2009). A particular moral order is thus framed, one that seems to rely more on an idiographic rather than nomothetic character of social and moral judgment. By playing off nomothetic aspects of research against idiographic ones, a dispassionate scientific approach against the suffering of specific people (the 'victims of communism'), the report manages and accomplishes a factually and ethically robust official version of recent history and sets 'limits on the *kinds* of stories that can be *properly* (in the sense of both veraciously and appropriately) told' (cf. White, 1992: 39, emphasis in original) about communism.

Communism as 'Other'

Representations of recent history acquire their ideological contours in part 'because of the point of view from which they are formed' (Connolly, 1993: 23). Although the condemnation of communism is legitimated as the outcome of a scientific approach to the legacy of communism, the relationship of communism with the national body politic is still something in need of constitution. As Tileagă (2009) has argued, throughout the Report, communism is described in general terms as a 'regime' and 'ideology', 'utopian conception', 'enemy of the human race', instituting 'the physical and moral assassinate', and having survived 'through repression', but also in 'national' terms, where communism is seen as a '(foreign) occupation regime', 'criminal towards its own people', 'antinational', and so on. To talk and write of communism means to talk and write of national identity, narrate the nation, its past and future.

The report (and texts supporting it) seems to be proposing a specific method of reasoning about society, history and memory that constitutes communism as Other, not 'us'. The narrative of communism is not self-condemnatory or self-blaming, but rather communism is distanced from (the national) self.

[16] "Communism has been a global phenomenon applied in an extremely repressive way in Romania, it has produced passions and fanatic perspectives in all directions" (Tismăneanu)

[17] "The total sovietisation, by force, of Romania, especially during the period 1948-1956 and the imposition, under the name 'dictatorship of the proletariat' of a despotic political system, ruled by a profiteering caste (nomenklatura), tightly united around its supreme leader" (Report)

[18] "Pretending to fulfill the goals of Marxism, the regime has treated an entire population as a mass of lab mice part of a nightmarish social engineering experiment" (Report)

[19] "...the imposition of a dictatorial regime totally surrendered to Moscow and hostile to national political and cultural values" (Report)

In [16] - [19] one can see how legitimating communism's existence, forms and experiences is portrayed as the effect of someone else's *doing*: 'global phenomenon applied in an extremely repressive way in Romania' [16], 'the total sovietisation, through force, of Romania' and 'the imposition of ... a despotic political system' [17], [19], 'fulfilling the goals of marxism' [18]. Communism (and its effects) is treated not as something of 'our' own making (reproduced and sustained by Romanians themselves), but rather as an emergence and outcome of other people's desires and actions hostile to national values (the Soviets and Moscow).

The categorizations 'despotic political system' [17], 'dictatorial regime' [19] mediate the constitution of communism as political ideology. As Edelman has argued, 'the terms in which we name or speak of anything do more than designate it; they place it in a class of objects, thereby suggest with what it is to be judged and compared, and define the perspective from which it will be viewed and evaluated.' (1970: 131). It is suggested that communism is a clearly definable phenomenon, a *sui generis* political form and ideology that, in last instance, 'must be seen to appear in the same way to anyone' (Smith,

1978: 35). It also points to an underlying issue: communism cannot be defined in terms of characteristics that are accidental, but rather in definite and deliberate terms that may provide the support for a description and explanation of the *nature* and *motivation* of the regime.

Moreover, the very meaning of legitimate statehood under communism is questioned.

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

A criminal act was considered the

[21] “abandoning of national interests through a limitless servile attitude towards the USSR, after the imposition of the puppet-government lead by Petru Groza (6 martie 1945)” (Report)

The coming into being of the Romanian Popular Republic is said to be the result of external forces and influences (‘diktat’, ‘coup d’etat’) [20]. The communist state is described as ‘imposture’, not reflecting popular opinion, and essentially, not reflecting the national Romanian interest [21]. In the terms of the Report, the attribute ‘Romanian’ points to an ideological *misdescription* or *miscategorization* when attached/tied to the category ‘Republic’. Further attributes are attached to the communist dictatorship project: this is described as ‘antipatriotic’ [22], the Romanian communist leaders as not showing ‘patriotic sentiments’ [23], and Romanian politics not being the affirmation of a ‘patriotic spirit/will’ [24]. What matters politically for the condemnation of communism is to construe communism as not reflecting Romanian values and national interests. This is achieved through tying of specific attributes (such

as the ones previously listed) to the explicit argument made by the report:
communism was illegitimate and criminal.

[22] "After examining thousands and thousands of pages of documents, and taking into consideration the existence of an enormous scientific literature and confessions who demonstrate the antipatriotic nature of the communist dictatorship, we can say that the communist regime in Romania (1945-1989) was illegitimate and criminal" (Report)

[23] "The truth is that neither Dej nor Ceausescu showed patriotic sentiments. 'The communists don't have a country' wrote Marx and Engels in their communist Manifesto ... The communist leaders of Romania have stayed faithful to the basic principles of Leninism as a technique of control and preservation of an ideocratic dictatorship" (Report)

[24] "The self-determination of Romanian foreign policy after 1964 was not the expression of an affirmation of a patriotic spirit/will, but has served communist leadership (first, around Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and then Nicolae Ceausescu) in maintaining their power unaltered" (Report)

The effects of communism are not only political and ideological. The report argues that communism corrupted the very essence of the nation, literally, the *body* and *spirit* of the nation. Communism is 'responsible' of crimes 'against the biological makeup of the nation'.

[25] "The capacity for physical and intellectual effort has continually declined in almost 50 years of communism" (Report)

[26] "Psychological weakening and disheartening of the population, as a consequence of terror, propaganda and undermining of traditional values of the nation; the weakening of psychological resistance has had harmful consequences on the biological vitality of the nation" (Report)

Through references to physical and psychological effects, communism is *externalized* and *objectivated* (van Leeuwen, 1995) as a *sui generis* political ideology that has worked against the Romanian nation. "Illegitimacy" and "criminality", as unique attributes attached to communism, are rationally justified through creating a national narrative that shows how to draw the line

between communism as 'myth' and the 'real' communism.

Although sensitizing the reader to important historical and ideological aspects consequential to communism's condemnation, the report seems to downplay the idea that the macro-social is elusive, 'dissolved into an ongoing historically committed interplay of people's doings' (Smith, 2005: 68). For most Romanians communism was not just an external ideological order governing or influencing the behavior of elites and population. Some Romanians have experienced it directly, whilst others have individual and collective memories relating to it.

The issue of how people experienced and lived communism still remains. Bucur expresses this idea cogently:

'if the picture of Romanian communism viewed from the inner sanctum of the Politburo in Bucharest is one of unchanging authoritarianism with grotesque elements of a cult of personality, this angle provides very little insight into how people lived it' (2009: xiii)

Conclusion

As an official document of the Romanian state, the report deploys a very specific argumentative (discursive) 'net' over the public project of investigating the legacy of communism. Many identifications of communism in the report take the form of categorizations that forge links between the category 'communism' and specific attributes ('criminal', 'inhuman', 'illegitimate', and so on). The language drawn upon in the report is a tool for promoting reasoned conclusions about the *nature* of the communist regime. Value laden terms, such as 'criminality', 'inhumanity', are used to achieve a very particular *representational* effect. These, seemingly unambiguous attributes of communism serve a specific purpose for public officials: to 'evoke beliefs in line with the ideologies of the interpreters' (Edelman, 2001: 53).

Describing communism using highly loaded terms institutionalizes a particular memory of communism that paves the way for distancing the (national) self from the communist ideology (communism as 'Other') and advances a 'preferred' version that reflects more the ideologies of elite interpreters than those of ordinary people. Nonetheless, there is no point in starting from the assumption that elite texts, like the report, *can be* (or always *are*) instruments serving sectional and party politics, that they are just an *obvious* means to a political end. One needs to investigate first *how* they work and *how* they *produce* the historical 'reality' of which they talk about.

Arguably, the report falls victim to the temptation of treating the memory of communism as singular, mimetic, as somehow independent of social relations between people, as a tangible thing rather than a process (cf. Olick, 2007). Although the report claims to have identified the *essence* of communism (its 'criminality' and 'illegitimacy'), this can also be said to be far from a satisfactory understanding of its *foundations* and means of *perpetuation*, originating 'in the imperfect and naïve empirical knowledge of everyday life' (Schütz, 1975: 48). The report fails to address directly the tension between historical reconstruction and dialogic exchange with the past and the self. Elite representations of recent history need to be able to articulate a critical relation to the national self, not only through the narrow political or academic lenses (e.g., political condemnation), but also in terms of actual meanings, practices and lived experiences attached to communism as a 'lived reality'. A collective and sometimes contradictory relationship of broader society to the (communist) past 'is present in every field of social experience' (Chesneaux, 1978, p. 11). The work of politicians, professional historians and political scientists is 'an aspect only, and by no means the most significant one' (ibid., p. 11).

There is an implicit tension between the elite formalization of recent history and the naturally occurring diversity of experiences, perspectives, and interpretations. Investigating the politics of memory and historical representation should not automatically presuppose a search for 'grand narratives' and ultimate truth but rather a closer engagement with the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of different life-worlds, the multitude of local voices, and the variety of means of expression and relations to the body politic. In this way one can present and open the way for alternative, "bottom up" analyses of political practices and political representations.

One way in which an ethnomethodologically inspired critical analysis can contribute to modern debates on the 'politics of memory' is to show how official political memory is not pre-given, but rather something that is actually produced. The social representation of communism is something in need of *constitution*. Looking for foundational narratives of national history should not be solely an exercise with a forgone conclusion, an exercise of confirmation of already existing political and academic knowledge. One can learn more about collective memory and coming to terms with the past by looking at the various ways in which knowledge of recent history and representations of history are created, how knowledge *circulates* and is *circulated* at various levels of social organization (individual/group/institutional). As argued elsewhere, 'by ignoring the discursive resources used to constitute, maintain and reproduce representations of history, social psychologists, historians, political psychologists, and political scientists have disregarded what is, arguably, *social* about representations of history' (Tileagă, 2009: 341, emphasis in original). Texts of history and politics, such as the Tismăneanu report, are crucial in understanding coming to terms with the past as political phenomenon. They are not merely 'passive' channels to a reality beyond the

text, but rather 'active' social objects (Smith, 1999), whose role is to actively bring off and potentiate particular versions of historical phenomena.

Notes

1. For psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and ethnographers, cultural historians and political scientists with an interest in collective memory, the phrase underpins a broader concern with (national) narratives and the role of (political) memory in social and political life. Social psychologists have turned to the study of social representations of history to consider the creation and maintenance of national historical narratives (Liu et al., 2002; Tileagă, 2009), the various roles and functions collective representations of history serve (Condor, 2006; Liu and Hilton, 2005; Liu et al., 1999; Reicher et al., 2006), the various narrative facets (Bruner, 2005; Gergen, 2005; Sträub, 2005) and dialogical aspects (Markova, 1997; Markova et al., 1998) of constructing moral narratives and identities, and remembering as public, culturally mediated experiences and actions (cf. Middleton and Brown, 2005, 2007; Wertsch, 2002, 2007; Wertsch and Karumidze, 2009).

2. For the Report itself, see Tismăneanu et al. 2007 (Romanian)

3.. The English version of the Presidential address can be found at http://www.presidency.ro/pdf/date/8288_en.pdf

4. Some have argued that Băsescu's choice of Tismăneanu as president of the commission was solely motivated by his national and international

academic and public reputation; others have expressed suspicions as to Bănescu's genuine political motives and were more inclined to discuss Bănescu's decision in terms of his 'real' political motives: settling scores with coalition partners and political opposition.

5. It should be perhaps added that there were not only national (Romanian) concerns that triggered the report, but also European. In January 2006, the Council of Europe passed a resolution condemning the crimes committed by communist regimes and in January 2007, Romania was finally granted membership of the European Union.

6. The relatively short time-frame in which the report had to be produced (six months) and delivered and issues raised by unhindered access and use of archives posed a variety of problems for the members of the commission. To fulfil its mandate the report relied on the study of archival documents (including those to which there was newly granted access), formal academic analyses of communism and post-communism, and memoirs of former political prisoners, dissidents or members of the former repressive apparatus. However, the commission, did not interview directly victims nor include testimonies of surviving victims. The report's assessment of the number of communist victims and the various types of opposition to the communist regime represented in the report were matters of intense controversy among historians, journalists and public figures.

7. Ciobanu also argues that the various public reactions to the report can be seen as struggles for representation in this emerging anti-communist narrative. *Whose* collective memory was being represented, recuperated and

re-written (and *how* was this done) was almost invariably a subject of controversy. For instance, several institutions, including the Romanian Academy and the Institute for Investigating the Crimes of Communism in Romania, contested the scientific value of the report. Various anti-communist associations were unhappy that the variety of anti-communist movements before 1989 was not properly acknowledged. The Romanian Orthodox Church even ordered its own investigation irritated by the report's revelations of the links between clergy and the communist party and secret police.

8. The extracts used in this paper have been translated from the original Romanian by the author. The analysis was carried out on the original text.

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