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Silence in the age of transnational memory

Recovering political violence in Romanian contemporary debates

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INTRODUCTION

1. A New Narrative?

In December 2019, on the 30th commemoration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the European Parliament in Strasbourg passed a memory resolution (termed ‘Declaration’) on the initiative of populists, conservatives, social democrats and the liberals of “Renew”, inscribing a new narrative regarding the December 1989 protests that led to the downfall of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania. The intervention of the state apparatus to quell these protests caused over 1,000 victims, and it was the only case of loss of life during the collapse of state socialist regimes in 1989 across Europe.¹ The brutality of the Romanian authorities against the protesters was only matched by the controversial execution of the dictator a few days later, which made headlines around the world.² Specifically, the European Parliament’s Declaration emphasised the obligation to settle the legacy of “the use of force against the Romanian people in December 1989, ” which “painfully shook all of Romanian society to the core,” and called for “the identification of the actual perpetrators of these crimes [that] remains an agonizing unresolved issue for the victims, their families, and for all Romanian citizens.”³

The Declaration set out to resolve the multiple and clashing accounts of who exactly was the mastermind of the actions taken against the protests and the ensuing violence by paying tribute to the victims among the protesters who took to the streets in Timișoara and Bucharest and condemning the Ceaușescu regime’s prolonged austerity politics and brutality. One way to

¹ Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 19-30. Siani-Davies provides an overview of the speculations surrounding the events in the immediate 1990s and describes how members of the Social Democrat Party, the NSF, the successors of the RCP (Romanian Communist Party), kept their positions of power and therefore “betrayed” the demands of the protests demanding change on the streets in 1989.

² Catalin Stoica. “Romania’s Failed Attempt at a Revolutionary Myth: Performances and Rituals of Degradation in Ceausescu’s Trial.” *Polish Sociological Review*, 128, (1) 1999, 461–83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41274726>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2023.

³ “Article 3”, *Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0109_EN.html. Last accessed December 11, 2020.

do so was to emphasize the narrative regarding “the sacrifice of the Romanian citizens who courageously stood in the line of fire, opened up the country’s path towards NATO, the European Union and the democratic world, from which it had been torn from after the end of the Second World War against the will of the Romanian people.”⁴

Establishing a new narrative for the memory of the Romanian protests of 1989 challenged a long absence of commemorative practices of anything else but the fall of the Berlin Wall, even at the pan-European level. Popular mobilizations were a more palatable historical image for this epochal moment of ‘transition’ than the various orchestrators within the existing political systems in Central and Eastern Europe or any hint of popular distrust in the authenticity of the political transformation.⁵ Even in Romania, the images of Berlin were a more alluring trope of memorialization than the local events, which, if addressed, were too bound up with internal party politics and relegated to a type of problematic event which is too polarizing, or too “politicized”.⁶ The European Parliament’s Declaration provided a more constructive angle on 1989, reversing the enduring Romanian outlook on the lack of restorative justice⁷ for the victims, a conspiratorial history of a “second-tier” communist takeover, a political coup, or merely an after-shock of a wider neo-liberalizing ‘wave’.⁸

⁴ “Preamble”, *Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary*.

⁵ Raluca Groșescu, "Judging Communist Crimes in Romania: Transnational and Global Influences", *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 11, 3 (2017), 505–524. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijx016>; Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania: The Politics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5-25. As of 2015, the Romanian government stands second only to Russia in the number of unresolved reparations for past violence victims' families, their “right to truth” and resolution at the European Court of Human Rights. Historians have pointed to the clean slate desired by the authoritarian regime of the National Salvation Front (NSF), the first political force in the 1990s, social-democrat but which incorporated many of the former key figures of the communist regime, as the cause of such silence on both victims and perpetrators. See Grigore Pop-Eleches, “Romania Twenty Years After 1989: The Bizarre Echoes of a Contested Revolution”, in Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik eds, *Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 85–104.

⁶ It is a dynamic described in Mihai Stelian Rusu, “Transitional Politics of Memory: Political Strategies of Managing the Past in Post-communist Romania”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69, 8, (2017), 1257-1279, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1380783>

⁷ Restorative justice entails the use of memory for reconciliation and dialogue, preventing the repetition in the future. See Anna Cento Bull, “Working through the violent past: Practices of restorative justice through memory and dialogue in Italy.” *Memory Studies*, 13(6),2020. 1004-1019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018790106>.

⁸ Davies, *The Romanian Revolution*, 5-7.

Indeed, while today's scholarship is beginning to challenge the myth of the achievements of 1989 (for instance, historian Paul Betts argues that the idea of "victory" in the Cold War obscures the transformation's problematic sides, such as inequality, ingrained racism, disenfranchisement⁹) these critiques were apparent in Romania much sooner. A sense of failed expectations, of "disenchantment" with the "unfinished revolution" of 1989, characterized by the successive economic crises of the 1990s, neoliberal reforms, and social disenfranchisement, had long been dominant in the region, as historian James Mark remarked.¹⁰ In this context, the fact that the violence of 1989 in Romanian cities, although pivotal, was never really addressed cannot be considered merely a question of a lack of commemoration of victims. Most often, the impunity was associated with an imperfect transformation to capitalism.¹¹ Successive generations of public commentators on the right attributed the tainted start of Romanian liberal democracy to the changes triggered by the transition to capitalism more broadly.¹² They took issue with the silencing and, indeed, denial of the events of 1989 by the government as an issue of authoritarianism of the Left.¹³ Three decades on, there seems to be a sober association between "1989" and a heritage of missed chances of challenging authoritarianism, but also all the presumed positive changes of the neoliberal transformation.

⁹Paul Betts, "1989 At Thirty: A Recast Legacy," *Past and Present* 244, 1 (2019), 271–305. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtz016>. 273.

¹⁰James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 1-16. See also Philipp Ther, "1989 and the Global Hegemony of Neoliberalism" in Eleni Braat and Pepijn Corduwener eds., *1989 and the West: Western Europe since the End of the Cold War* (Routledge: London, 2020), 93-123; Martin Conway, "Reading 1989 Backwards" in Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou and Henry Rousso eds., *Europe's Postwar Periods - 1989, 1945, 1918: Writing History Backwards* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1–15; Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 5-15.

¹¹See for instance, Silviu Cerna, "The Anti-Capitalist Mentality: A Big Problem for Romania", <https://www.themarketforideas.com/the-anti-capitalist-mentality-a-big-problem-for-romania-a826/>, last accessed April 24th, 2023 or H. R. Patapievi, "Capitalismul ca formă a civilizației, eseu introductiv (introduction)" in Ludwig von Mises, *Acțiunea umană. Un tratat de economie* [in Romanian], Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2018.

¹²Cătălin Augustin Stoica, "Our Martyrs of 1989 Did Not Die for This!": Political Capitalism in Post-Communist Romania", *Historical Social Research*, 37 (2) 2012, 26-52. DOI: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41636575>. See also Cornel Ban, "Beyond Anticommunism: The Fragility of Class Analysis in Romania", *East European Politics and Societies*, 29(3) 2015, 640-650. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325415599197>.

¹³Particularly those convened around Critic Atac, a website and debate platform.

Yet, integrating 1989 top-down into the arsenal of what we might call a “liberal” memory consensus - whose affordances and genealogy will be discussed in the following sections¹⁴ – entailed a number of contradictions. By liberalism, I refer here primarily to the political thought, narratives, and social and economic politics centred on liberty and consensus of those governed, with its 19th century and more recent iterations.¹⁵ In the post-1989 variant of liberal democracy dominant globally, liberalism became broader, prompting scholars to argue it is the “sum of the arguments that have been classified as liberal”.¹⁶ The European Parliament’s Declaration alluded directly to some of these dimensions, precisely at a moment in which these were being challenged by the right and far-right. First, infusing remembrance of a dark past with a governance scope (commemoration as a hallmark of democracy, collective memory connected to justice mechanisms, or the rule of law and human rights), as the Declaration does when it refers to socio-economic conditions and geopolitical insecurity caused by a violent past, happened as radical conservatives and the radical right were also mobilizing discourses of human rights and citizenship to coin alternatives to the liberal dimension.¹⁷ The Declaration’s timing could thus be seen as partly a response to the global “illiberal” and anti-liberal factions challenging the principles of Europeanization, the notion that liberal democracy

¹⁴ A number of authors, who will be quoted in this manuscript, have written about the liberal narratives behind collective memory, especially in relation to human rights (Dirk Moses), ethnicities (G. Mitchell Reyes, *Public Memory, Race, and Ethnicity*). Although the term “liberal memory” has been used, or referred to intermittently, by these authors, a more recent and directly relevant contribution in this direction is Vibeke Schou Tjalve ed., *Geopolitical amnesia: the rise of the right and the crisis of liberal memory* (Toronto: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020).

¹⁵ Shane D Courtland, Gerald Gaus, and David Schmidtz, "Liberalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/liberalism/>.

¹⁶ Duncan Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” *Political Theory* 42, 6 (2014), 1. doi:10.1177/0090591714535103.

¹⁷ The invocation of the global 1989 polarizes Europe, not only Romanian circles, in multiple ways. In Germany, the fault lines and systemic imbalances it triggered have endured after the regime transformation in Germany, for instance, and played a part in the rise of the “identitarians” stressing identity, freedom and self-affirmation in a less than liberal manner. See Manes Weisskircher, “The Strength of Far-Right AfD in Eastern Germany: The East-West Divide and the Multiple Causes behind ‘Populism’”, *The Political Quarterly*, 91, 1 (2020), 614-622. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12859>. See also Karel Šima, “From Identity Politics to the Identitarian Movement. The Europeanisation of Cultural Stereotypes?” in Jürgen Barkhoff and Joep Leerssen eds., *National Stereotyping, Identity Politics, European Crises* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, Studia Imagologica, 2021), 75–94.

has produced progress or the advancement produced by liberal tenets of diversity.¹⁸ Indeed, the once very wilful actors of the path to liberal democracy leading Central and Eastern European states “back” to Europe in 1989¹⁹, were now questioning the trajectory of liberal democracy initiated through 1989.²⁰ On the 30th anniversary of 1989, the old assessment of journalist Fareed Zakaria of the Central European liberal democracies as “illiberal” entities where (neo)liberal economics limited democracy and exacerbated authoritarian tendencies, appeared prescient.²¹

Secondly, in the document drafted by the European Parliament, the Romanian events of 1989 were imbued with a transnational value of democratic Europeanness, with references to the solidarity of the Czech “Velvet Revolution”, the peaceful Polish mediated transformation, and the Berlin Wall moment that depicted a triumph of the political resistance and grass-roots change - although the Romanian events of 1989 could hardly be inscribed within a heritage of “democracy” or Europeanness.²² Given this tension, European institutions crafting ideas about “European way of life” through the 2019 “Commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Romanian revolution of December 1989” did not have a stable narrative to build on optimism of liberalism in Europe and globally.²³ On the contrary, a potential cultural debate to resolve

¹⁸ Jan-Werner Müller, “The Problem With ‘Illiberal Democracy’”, *Social Europe* (January 2016). <https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-problem-with-illiberal-democracy>. Last accessed March 13, 2019; Peter Verovšek, “Caught between 1945 and 1989: Collective Memory and the Rise of Illiberal Democracy in Postcommunist Europe”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 4, 6 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1768279>.

¹⁹ The declaration was a joint project, but in general, members of these different groups in the European Parliament have all been at the forefront of debates arguing for the inclusion of victims of communism in European, not only national, remembrance agendas. Members are older “memory entrepreneurs” who have insisted on a notion of “memory of communism/state socialism” in the European symbolic political space. See Laure Neumayer, *The Criminalisation of Communism in the European Political Space after the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2018), 39-52.

²⁰ Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 3–15.

²¹ Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs* 76 (Nov/Dec 1997), 6.

²² Conor O’Dwyer, “Remembering, Not Commemorating, 1989” in Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism*, 171-195; Laczó Ferenc and Joanna Wawrzyniak. “Memories of 1989 in Europe between Hope, Dismay, and Neglect”, *East European Politics and Societies*, 31, 3 (2017), 431–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325417698741>.

²³ See relevant publications of the CoE on this topic, here: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/the-fall-of-the-berlin-wall-30th-anniversary/>.

the very contestations of 1989 was replaced by another type of “usable past”, one simply mobilizing a positive image of liberalism of the 1990s.

The disappointment with these ready-made narratives was evident in the responses that the Parliament’s Declaration elicited. A certain discontent emerged already in December of that year when Romanian President Klaus Iohannis proudly emulated the message of the Declaration and warned that not identifying perpetrators would only be detrimental to the liberal system and the “return to Europe” and that Romania “would have gone far” if this question of accountability had been resolved earlier.²⁴ Like many political actors, Iohannis was quick to make 1989 into a paradigmatic trope of a “Europeanizing” process for Romania: that is, “a remorseless and positive process by which Europeans transcended their national frontiers (and thereby their national conflicts)”.²⁵ This blanket victimhood concerning the past has often provided a platform for Romanian liberals (a broad political and cultural circle generally defining itself as anticommunist, pro-European, and market-oriented²⁶) to emphasize the cultural and political right to rejoin the European family. Yet, using and homogenizing difficult histories in order to cultivate and prove “Europeanness” has been a tactic criticized by even the staunchest liberal supporters of the EU hegemony. Natalia Buier, for one, has argued that this “break with the past” professed by a rejection of the communist past might well be building political narratives of liberal democracy, but it simply perpetuated reductionist perspectives on complex histories.²⁷

²⁴ Diana Grigore, “30 de ani de la Revoluție | Klaus Iohannis, la ședința solemnă din parlament”, *Gândul*, 16.12.2019. Last accessed March 2023, <https://www.gandul.ro/stiri/live-text-30-de-ani-de-la-revolutie-klaus-iohannis-la-sedinta-solemna-din-parlament-aflarea-adevarului-despre-revolutie-piatra-de-incercare-pentru-justitia-romana-premierul-am-fi-ajuns-mai-departe-dac-18668176>

²⁵ Ulrike von Hirschhausen, Kiran Klaus Patel “Europeanization in History: An Introduction”, in Martin Conway, Kiran Klaus Patel eds. *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century* (London: Basingsstoke, 2010) 2.

²⁶ Endre, Borbáth, “Romania – Polity Contestation and the Resilience of Mainstream Parties”, In: Hutter, Swen Kriesi, Hanspeter eds, *European party politics in times of crisis* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019), 214-235.

²⁷ Natalia Buier, “Traian Băsescu și Despărțirea de Trecut: Cariera Prezidențială a Anticomunismului Științific” in Costi Rogozanu, Florin Poenaru, eds. *Epoca Traian Băsescu* (Cluj Napoca: Tact, 2014), 225.

Recent re-evaluations of the 30th anniversary of 1989 illustrate where the blindspots in memory-making practices in a “liberal” sense lie. The European angle captured a landscape of memory politics, which tends to shut down “dissonance” and “a discordance or a lack of agreement and consistency”,²⁸ and resolves complex debates with ready-made narratives. The 2019 Declaration reinforced a story of the triumph of liberal democracy over state socialism instead of acknowledging and perhaps responding to the events' controversial memorial and political dimensions over the last three decades. The usage of this transnational Europeanizing narrative with regard to an event like 1989 created a surrogate language – adopting memorial debates and terminology to reference forms of governance, politics and economics - instead of opening a more complex debate about the difficult negotiations of memory that overshadowed the events themselves. This triggered distrust in narratives of “Europe and further exacerbated common past and thus contributed to further exacerbating an already impoverished and polarized sphere of debate on critical histories of human rights and political violence of various Central European governments.”²⁹

The Declaration, with its defensive and anti-totalitarian remembrance narratives, captures the very tensions embedded within the role of collective memory of political violence in cultivating values of liberalism and generates an interesting set of questions about its usages in relation to the fostering of ‘Europeanism’. Indeed, multiple scales are interlocking and in tension in this example. There is, first, the investment in memorial vocabularies to construct notions of *global* liberal democracy, with languages of human rights accountability, and victimhood, that seem to lose their potency when employed politically. Secondly, there are the *European* memory narratives mobilizing the notion of “Europe” to define liberal democracy

²⁸ J.E Ashworth and GJ Tunbridge, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (London: Belhaven Press, 1996), 20.

²⁹ For a broader discussion, see José-Manuel Barreto, “A Universal History of Infamy: Human Rights, Eurocentrism, and Modernity as Crisis”, in Prabhakar Singh and Benoit Mayer eds., *Critical International Law: Postrealism, Postcolonialism, and Transnationalism* (Delhi, 2014; online edition, Oxford Academic).,

and promote the two interchangeably (although this nexus is increasingly contested). Thirdly, there is the *national* scale, in this case, Romanian memorial debates, where political violence has been mainstreamed to signal the global triumph about liberal democracy, primarily in relation to the achievements of the 1990s “transition” to democracy and then Europeanization.

It is this paradox of forging consensus around a liberal memory aligned to supposed values of Europeanism and an ‘expanding’ Europe, which instead creates a restrictive memory sphere, that guides the research for this dissertation. As Ann Rigney has argued, from its earliest days, the idea of a ‘European collective memory’ aligned to EU values and narratives was about reconciliation between East and West, but also between different groups whose stories had not been properly presented to the public and those in the mainstream, already known.³⁰ That “reconciliatory” dimension initially also went hand in hand with the value of consensus in the project of liberal democracy until such consensus could no longer be supported.³¹ Prompted by an interest in competing interpretations of memory, this study looks at how remembrance practices recruited for a triumphant global liberal democracy emerged and the blind spots, biases and ultimate silences that ensued. The powerful entanglements between the three scales – global, European, and national – functioned to shut down debate, reflection or, indeed, investigation of certain difficult pasts. My argument in this dissertation is that it also created a particular silencing which, although emergent out of high hopes for a liberal democratic transformation, became, rather, a space for channelling the discontent with the latter’s affordances.

2. Mobilizing Europe

³⁰ Ann Rigney, “Reconciliation and remembering: (how) does it work?”, *Memory Studies*, 5(3), (2012). 251-258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698012440927>

³¹ Carles Fernandez-Torne, Graeme Young, “Mirroring Truths: How Liberal Democracies Are Challenging Their Foundational Narratives”, *Social Sciences*, 12(8) 2023, 438. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12080438>.

There is a substantial corpus of writing on European memory, that is remembrance and commemorations of the past that are somehow aligned to notions of European values, shared European heritage and ultimately a strong belief in Europe as a political project.³² This research shows how the remembrance of the Second World War consolidated a prescriptive way of remembering and of conveying a narrative: that is, a memory “regime”, in relation to Europe.³³ Sites of former political violence, often displaying acts of resistance against National Socialism and the plight of victims of the Second World War, have acquired a European or global status of “heritage”. Such sites represent key cradles of this political construct. They were part of what historian Jan-Werner Müller calls the “militant memory”, a “normative connection to the universalist liberal- democratic kernel of constitutional patriotism” that emerged after gradually rising contestation of the EU *within* the EU from the mid-2000s onwards.³⁴ This dissertation takes a step back from that moment and seeks to highlight the way collective memory supported contestations and anti-liberal constructs already from the early 1990s, under the guise of a Europeanizing process easily embraced by a diverse spectrum of actors.

Instead of establishing a dimension of consensus by reinforcing commonality through invocations of Europe, different claims to this shared liberal European lineage emerged.³⁵ For instance, while National Socialism was the central “negative memory” of Europe, between 2000 and 2010, there were intense debates about the politics of the recognition of victimhood inflicted by communism and the imbalances of remembrance.³⁶ In 2010, a call from Romania,

³² See Eric Langenbacher, Bill Niven and Ruth Wittlinger eds., *Dynamics of Memory and Identity in Contemporary Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay M. Winter, eds., *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010); Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, eds., *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

³³ For the usage of this term, see for instance Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Regimes of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 6-10.

³⁴ Jan-Werner Müller, “A Thick Constitutional Patriotism for the EU? On Morality, Memory and Militancy”. <https://www.princeton.edu/~jmueller/CP-ThickCPEurope-JWMueller.pdf>. Last accessed June 23, 2020.

³⁵ Parts of this section are loosely based on Dana Dolghin: “Dissensus: Recent Dynamics in the European Cultural Space.” In *Debating Dissensus over Liberal Democracy*, edited by Ramona Coman and Nathalie Brack. Working Paper 2023, 86-91.

³⁶ Ann Rigney, “Transforming Memory and the European Project”, *New Literary History* 43, 4 (2012), 607–28. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/497937>; Aleida Assmann, “Europe’s Divided Memory” in Uilleam Blacker and

Hungary and Poland to ban communist symbols was turned down in the European Parliament, because such symbols were not seen as eliciting the same danger as “fascist symbols”.³⁷ The decades between 2000-2010 saw many conflicts over the right of the victims of totalitarianism to belong to the European pantheon. Despite the narrative that took hold around 2008, when the ‘Prague Declaration of European Conscience and Communism’ inscribed a European narrative on the communist past, discourses and documents coming from EU fora did not always show what Claus Leggewie argues are ‘two totalitarianisms’ at the basis of the European idea.³⁸ National governments in Eastern Europe reacted negatively to this lack of representation. Talking about ‘totalitarianism’ in Europe’s past was thus not driven by any European consensus, but rather by nationalist claims, with a vindictive tone that dominated the debate.

Although this landscape has not changed profoundly after 2008, there has been a shift in framing references to “Europe”. Cultural landmarks, spaces of remembrance, or cultural goods symbolic of the victory over communist oppression have been earmarked as generative spaces in the creation of Europe, and have been awarded symbolic status, such as the European Heritage Label.³⁹ The remembrance of Eastern European popular mobilization is now presented as a bulwark for the EU’s political construction in the exhibitions of the Brussels-

Alexander Etkind, eds., *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 25–41; Henry Russo, “History of Memory, Policies of the Past: What For?” in Thomas Lindenberger and Konrad H. Jarausch eds., *Conflicted Memories. Europeanizing Contemporary Histories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 22–36; Bo Stråth and Peter Wagner, eds., *European Modernity: A Global Approach* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 15-20; Chiara De Cesari, “Memory Voids and the New European Heritage: A Proposal for Studying Transnational Memory”, *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 24, 2 (2012), 152–62. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41710659>; Zoltan Dujisin, “A History of Post-Communist Remembrance: From Memory Politics to the Emergence of a Field of Anticommunism”, *Theory and Society*, 2, 50, (2020), 65–96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-020-09401-5>. There is an argument to be made that this genealogy of negative memory can start much earlier, after 1945, which I discuss in the following section. See Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

³⁷ Leigh Phillips, “EU Rejects Eastern States’ Call to Outlaw Denial of Crimes by Communist Regimes,” *The Guardian*, December 21, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/21/european-commission-communist-crimes-nazism>. Last accessed July 23, 2018.

³⁸ Claus Leggewie, “Seven circles of European memory”, *Eurozine*, 20 Dec. 2010. <https://www.eurozine.com/seven-circles-of-european-memory/>. Accessed June 23, 2016.

³⁹ Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas, Sigrid Kaasik-Krogerus, Katja Mäkinen and Johanna Turunen, *Creating and Governing Cultural Heritage in the European Union. The European Heritage Label* (London: Routledge, 2020).

based House of European History Museum.⁴⁰ Indeed, with time, a distinct “policy narrative” has emerged about a shared past sufferance that makes societies more aware of their “progress”, modernization, and progressive becoming “European”: this shift has been fundamental in including the communist past in the European memory space.⁴¹ More and more, the angle on European memory has moved from a shared history of the Second World War, however disputed across Europe, to a question of demonstrating the liberal credentials of Europe, especially after various national challenges to liberal democracy after 2008.⁴² As principles of liberal democracy were increasingly contested by nativist and sovereigntist discourses, from Hungary to Poland to Slovakia,⁴³ collective memory became an instrument to show the virtues of liberal thought.⁴⁴

Yet, mobilizing “Europeanness” to strengthen the pull of liberal democracy does seem to have only led to a further exacerbation of this angle, as was made evident in the case of the European Parliament’s Declaration.⁴⁵ The notion of a “return to Europe” and a “cultural home” in Europe has been indelibly connected to the recognition of the innate European character of the “nation” (against that offered by communism and a Slavic past), that inspires nationalism

⁴⁰ Some of those added are the Pan-European Picnic Memorial Park, Sopron, Hungary (2013), the historic Gdańsk Shipyard, Poland (2014), Sighet Memorial, Romania (2017). Equally relevant are research funding programmes rolled out by the EU; one interesting example is the “European Remembrance” within the CERV (*Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values*) Programmes, focusing on “resistance” and the Holocaust. See https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/justice-and-consumers/justice-and-consumers-funding-tenders/funding-programmes/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme_en.

⁴¹ Wolfram Kaiser, “Clash of Cultures: Two Milieus in the European Union’s ‘A New Narrative for Europe’ Project”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 23, 3 (2015), 364–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2015.1018876>. I use here the term policy narrative defined as “stories (scenarios and arguments) which underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for policymaking in situations that persist with many unknowns, a high degree of interdependence, and little, if any, agreement.” In Emery Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 34.

⁴² Kirsten Ghodsee, “A Tale of ‘Two Totalitarianisms’: The Crisis of Capitalism and the Historical Memory of Communism”, *History of the Present*, 4, 2 (2014), 115-142. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/kristenghodsee/files/history_of_the_present_galleys.pdf.

⁴³ Máté Zombory, “The Anti-Communist moment: Competitive victimhood in European politics”, *Revue d’études comparatives Est-Ouest*, 2, 2-3 (2020), 21-54. <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-revue-d-etudes-comparatives-est-ouest-2020-2-page-21.htm>.

⁴⁴ The debate about consensus in the political philosophy of liberalism is complex, stemming from the 19th century, but for an overview in democratic politics, see George Klosko, *Democratic Procedures and Liberal Consensus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁵ See Meera Sabaratnam, “Avatars of Eurocentrism in the critique of the liberal peace”. *Security Dialogue*, 44 (3), 2013, 259-278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010613485870>.

and “othering”.⁴⁶ What was occluded in these debates was that ‘Europe’ had been the foundation of political debate in the interwar period in conservative and liberal circles in Romania, Poland and Hungary, serving far-from-liberal agendas bound to notions of ‘progress’ and ‘sovereignty’.⁴⁷ Indeed, “Europe”, “democracy”, and “progress” hold a moralizing dimension of collective memory in connection to liberal democracy, which has made it difficult to untangle the “overdeterminations” embedded within, for instance, how liberalism itself harbours dangerous constructs of Eurocentrism(s).⁴⁸

In fact, with the rise of “illiberalism” and anti-liberal voices in tandem with authoritarian tendencies across the geographical spectrum of European liberal democracies, an appropriation of the notion of Europe has been tied directly to notions of “sovereignty”.⁴⁹ Although they contest the prerogatives of the EU, appeals to Europeanism were essential for both the Polish PiS and Hungarian Fidesz parties, who bolster their “Catholic” credentials to prove their “deservedness” to a Europe that is evidently anti-Muslim and Christian.⁵⁰ Under the guise of a

⁴⁶ The abuse of the anticommunist narrative has been a concern in scholarship since the early 1990s. See James Mark, Muriel Blaive, Adam Hudek, Anna Saunders and Stanisław Tyszka, “1989 after 1989: Remembering the End of State Socialism in East-Central Europe” in Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik, eds., *Thinking through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), 88-102; Zoltan Dujisin, “Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance?” in Kopeček and Wciślik, *Thinking through Transition*, 553–86; Betts, “1989 At Thirty: A Recast Legacy,” *Past and Present* 244, 1 (2019), 271–305. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtz016>.

⁴⁷ In fact, Europe was part of the narratives of authoritarianism, in 1942, during the debate about Transylvania between Romania and Hungary, which pitted the two countries’ “European mission”. Both (far-right) Antonescu and Horthy governments competed with one another for their respective recognition of “historical rights”. Furthermore, “European” concern motivated nationalist and Europeanist politicians alike. The degree of “civilization” and “Europeanness” played into distinctly segregation politics and politics of exclusions in disputed “regions”, like Galicia, Transylvania and the “Christian” buffer that these supposedly entail for Europe. See Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). See also Shane Weller, *The Idea of Europe: A Critical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1-10; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin, 2013), 26-35.

⁴⁸ John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 285-310.

⁴⁹ About the “conservative” employment of Europe, and the differences between the contemporary detractors of Europeanism and the 18th century roots of conservative interpretations of Europeanism, see Matthijs Lok, *Europe Against Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). He traces the genealogy of the resistance to the Enlightenment ideas within the European sphere of thought. For an exploration of 19th century roots of Eurocentrism, see Marjet Brolsma, Robin de Bruin, and Matthijs Lok eds., *Eurocentrism in European History and Memory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 12-17.

⁵⁰ Aleksandra Wrobel, “Orbán Pledges to Keep Hungary Safe and Christian”, *Politico* (2018), <https://www.politico.eu/article/orban-christian-migrants-pledges-to-keep-hungary-safe/>. Last accessed July 12, 2020; Marton Dunai, “Hungary Will Defend EU against Migrant Wave, Orbán Says”, *Reuters*, March 4, 2020,

“purification” of origins, conservative right-wing factions in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia have also used a “cultural” national Europeanism to strengthen their authoritarianisms. A “return to Europe” also grounds Viktor Orbán’s messages about an alleged status of “second-class” Europeans imposed on the East by the West.⁵¹ Similarly, Romanian “sovereigntist” factions (those that rally around the message that the jurisdiction of the EU does not trump national sovereignty), most notably the Romanian Social Democrats in 2017 and the liberals, the closest to the “illiberal” wave, commended the 1989 memory Declaration because it showcased local victimhood.⁵²

This dissertation highlights how early negotiations of collective memory contributed to the recent dynamics described above, and how the early 1990s national tribulations over negative memory unwittingly also determined the pathway of the Europeanization of memory. It was the defensive Cold War dimension of liberalism, with its anti-totalitarian (and anti-Russian tinge) which characterized the 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe, that is today evident in European iterations. My research aims to show how this process came to be. As Samuel Moyn argues, in the Cold War liberalism first emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, “expectant hope now felt naïve, and the aspiration to universal freedom and equality was denounced as a pretext for repression and violence”.⁵³ Moyn describes the mechanism characterizing Cold War liberals (perhaps among the most famous are political philosophers Judith Shklar and Hannah Arendt⁵⁴), by which the connection with liberalism and rationalism

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-centraleurope-idUSKBN20R1H0>. Last accessed July 25, 2020.

⁵¹ “Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán Denounces EU’s ‘Colonialism’”, *BBC*, 2012. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-17394894>. Last accessed March 13, 2019.

⁵² Although not operating to the same degree as in Hungary, the “illiberal” direction has had some traction in Romania, through messages by the PSD (the Romanian Social Democrats), insisting on “anti-Soros” narratives. See Corneliu Pintilescu and Attila Kustán Magyarai, “Soros conspiracy theories and the rise of populism in post-socialist Hungary and Romania”, in Anastasiya Astapova, Onoriu Colăcel, Corneliu Pintilescu and Tamás Scheibner, eds., *Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2020), 130-155; Andreea Pora, “PSD și Tehnica Persiflării Comisiei Europene”, *Europa Liberă* (Bucharest, March 22, 2019, 8).

⁵³ See Samuel Moyn, *Liberalism Against Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 11.

⁵⁴ Philosopher Hannah Arendt was inevitably attached to the Atlanticist vision of liberalism, also as a reaction to the rampant antisemitism in Europe at the time. The limitation concerning colonialism in her work has reinforced critical readings of her vision of liberalism in her oeuvre. See Pascal Grosse, “From colonialism to National

proper to the Enlightenment is erased by a growing distrust in the capabilities of individuals.⁵⁵ The already-discussed disappointment with 1989 in Romanian debates points to how early the seeds of illiberal thought emerged in the region and how they contributed to the re-evaluation of the hopes of equality and rationality of liberalism. Replaced by a European narrative of liberalism, driven by “integration” in the early 2000s, Cold War liberalism returned from the mid-2010s onwards as a form of defensive, and not so optimistic, vision of human perfectibility and freedom.⁵⁶ The contestations of liberal democracy emerging since 2014 in Europe and globally made this defensive streak visible yet again.

Because it tracks the avenues that collective memory opened for the contestations of liberal democracy, this dissertation goes beyond interpreting collective memory (and imaginaries about the past) as sitting at the centre of what Peter Verovšek describes as a schism between the West’s “liberal conception of internationally constraining democracy rooted in the protection of individual human rights and Central Europe’s ‘illiberal’ version centred on the popular sovereignty of the nation”.⁵⁷ In this sense, it adds to the corpus of research on European memory by reflecting on collective memory as part of a vision of liberalism that has run out of steam due to restrictive teleological narratives, a selective perspective on the cultural and political process of making Europe and silencing.⁵⁸ Rejecting and “criminalizing” communism has politically and culturally edged towards a “purification” from everything associated with the Left.⁵⁹ These dichotomies are part and parcel of the “illiberal” memory that Rosenfeld

Socialism to postcolonialism: Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*”, *Postcolonial Studies*, 9 (1) 2006, 35-52, DOI: [10.1080/13668250500488819](https://doi.org/10.1080/13668250500488819).

⁵⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁵⁶ See Amanda Anderson, “Character and Ideology: The Case of Cold War Liberalism”, *New Literary History*, 42, (2) 2011, 209-229.

⁵⁷ Verovšek, “Caught between 1945 and 1989”, 850.

⁵⁸ See Gerard Delanty, “The European Heritage from a Critical Cosmopolitan Perspective”, *LSE ‘Europe in Question’ Discussion Paper Series*.

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/53305/1/_Libfile_repository_Content_European%20Institute_LEQS%20Discussion%20Papera_LEQSPaper19b.pdf. Last accessed January 23, 2021.

⁵⁹ Maria Mälksoo, “Criminalizing Communism: Transnational Mnemopolitics in Europe”, *International Political Sociology*, 8, 1 (2014), 82–99. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ips.12041>; Dujisin, “Post-Communist Europe”; Bogdan C. Iacob, “The Criminalisation of Communism in the European Political Space after the Cold War”, *International Affairs*, 95 (2019), 732-734. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz065>.

describes as emerging since 2013, which also appropriates notions of identity, victimhood and accountability.⁶⁰ Similarly, the dissertation also takes a different angle on notions of an “imitation” by the East of the West that Stephen Holmes and Ivan Krastev argue to be at the core of current challenges in liberal democracy in the region. I argue, rather, that the crux of the issue is really in the *type* of liberal narratives that circulated globally, how these latter created distinct frames of memory, and how they have mobilized silences.⁶¹

The dissertation also adds to this corpus of debates over European memory a reflection on what it is that a liberal dimension entails and the contradictions that it triggers. Consequently, in a first reading, this dissertation is a study of how and what liberal democracies remember in order to define themselves as such. As already shown, memory and heritage paradigms, in Europe and elsewhere, promote flat, reasonable narratives oriented by visions of the future, specifically showcasing the “common”: the defeat of certain ideologies, or shared ways of engaging with questions of guilt or responsibility. The dissertation focuses on some of these narratives: notions of modernization, cultures of law, human rights, and civic mobilizations. Often, such “consensus” narratives suppress memory exchanges, encourage silencing and hide the pitfalls of these founding triumphal stories about liberalism. Political subjectivity, the right to protest, and democratic opposition, otherwise tenets of democracy, are at the core of sovereigntist identity and this has created further repurposing of historical discourses. Wendy Brown has been a long-term critic of the damage that moralizing narratives of liberalism produce⁶² and the Romanian debates can be a relevant grounding of this critique, as I argue here. If anything, the invisible threads between liberal values and shadow authoritarianisms are increasingly more visible in Central and Eastern Europe, driven by the fact that narratives about

⁶⁰ Gavriel Rosenfeld, “The rise of illiberal memory”, *Memory Studies*, 16(4), 2023, 819-836. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020988771>

⁶¹ Stephen Holmes and Ivan Krastev, *The Light That Failed* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2020), 16-20.

⁶² See Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 13-25.

a strong state have always grounded definitions of liberalism, and, as historian Quinn Slobodian argues, were also instrumental in neoliberalism since its inception.⁶³ He also makes the case these are intrinsic to neoliberal thought in Central and Eastern Europe, where many of these ideas emerged in the early 20th century. As the memory of political violence is attached to imaginaries of democracy, I show how these consensus-making memory narratives have aggravated some blind spots and have operated through *silences*. This silencing, I argue, is key to understanding contestations of liberal democracy.

Secondly, and building on the first iteration, this dissertation is a study of what historian Kiran Patel calls a “banal’ Europeanism”, where “forms of discourse were increasingly structured and according to ‘European’ lines in order to produce a specific vision of Europe”.⁶⁴ The discourse of Europeanism, that is, belonging to Europe, “being” in Europe and sharing European values, has been the strongest bind, culturally, for Central and Eastern Europe.⁶⁵ Yet, “Europeanism” also feeds nationalist narratives and nativist or xenophobic dimensions of liberal democracy in a myriad of ways.⁶⁶ Following Patel’s definition, I further make a distinction between “Europeanism” and “Europeanisation”, distinguishing the conceptualization of a distinct identity formation from the dynamics of state transformation to ‘European,’ i.e. EU forms.⁶⁷ Though unmistakably linked, as both institutional and discursive processes, these are two distinct concepts, which refer to both formal requisites but also discursive frames (for instance, the memory frame). In this context. I show how silences also

⁶³ Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists, The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9-13.

⁶⁴ von Hirschhausen, Patel, "Europeanization in History ", 9. See also Dieter Gosewinkel, eds., *Anti-liberal Europe: A Neglected Story of Europeanization* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 17-20.

⁶⁵ See Branislav Radeljić, “Introduction”, Branislav Radeljić eds., “The Threatening Other” in *The Unwanted Europeanness? Understanding Division and Inclusion in Understanding Division and Inclusion in Contemporary Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 5-10.

⁶⁶ For this debate, see Bolaji Balogun, ‘Eastern Europeanism’: A Rethinking of ‘Race and Racism’ by and Against White People from Central and Eastern Europe. *Cultural Sociology*, 0(0) 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17499755231208550>. See also Hans Kundnani, *Eurowhiteness. The Origins of European Integration* (London: Hurt and Company, 2023).

⁶⁷ I thank prof. Luiza Bialasiewicz for suggesting this emphasis. See Luiza Bialasiewicz, Spectres of Europe: Europe’s Past, Present and Future, in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 98-120.

emerge from the long-enduring habit of externalizing controversial (national) histories into Europeanism, making remembrance into another conduit of Europeanisation.

Thirdly, and perhaps less abstractly, this dissertation is Romania-centric in studying how silencing has been embedded in the Europe-liberal democracy narrative nexus in Central and Eastern Europe, by charting memory debates, and how narratives change between the national and transnational scales. It provides a different angle to the story because, unlike elsewhere in the region, the political narratives in Romania have always professed attachment to European (neo)liberal economics, moralizing “anticorruption” and development. At the same time, as already discussed, a sceptical outlook on democracy and expectations for radical change have shaped anti-liberal tendencies from the start. In this dissertation, I thus show how these liberal tenets constrained the way past histories are told, perpetuated certain iterations and a mobilization that restricted critical reflection. In relation to the actors and voices which are more prominent in this manuscript, I chose to focus not simply on institutional political actors but also on the wider circle of those shaping political debates, such as journalists, writers, historians, and various other individuals who have a public capacity, in order to understand the workings of memory; this wider focus also allows for tracing different pathways of certain narratives.

The following sections outline a theoretical entry point into the three strands of this dissertation. The first section discusses how exactly does the memory of political violence sit at the core of “banal Europeanism” and shapes debate about active citizenship, political participation, and just states.⁶⁸ The second section introduces the idea of “silencing” that operates in the contemporary global liberal age, to explain the place of memory in liberal

⁶⁸ It is important to point out that all these debates are preoccupied with boundaries between liberalism, authoritarianism and nationalism, and this delimitation has been a central concern in the tradition of liberalism. These recent discussions shed a new light on this issue in Central and Eastern European intellectual contexts. See Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in 20th Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 5-12.

democracy. It argues that silencing in constructing liberal democratic vocabularies has been the driver of the “illiberal”, sovereigntist and far-right tendencies in Central and Eastern Europe. The third section describes the main theoretical advantages of looking at the notion of silencing in relation to the political and intellectual affordances of liberal democracy.

3. Cultivating Europeanness: Liberal Consensus and the Memory of Political Violence

The 2019 Declaration of the European Parliament about 1989 codifies the collective memory of political violence in Europe in relation to the strength of liberal democracy and policies of stabilization. As the text argues, the memory resolution is there to defend “the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights; [as] these values are common to all Member States”⁶⁹. In a sense, this defensive relevance of memorialization echoes a similar time in Europe’s past. In many ways, the early post-WWII years in Europe, which also operated with the selectivity and calibration of the memory of political violence, war and conflict were instrumental to the emergence of a specific type of consensus. “There was a pervasive sense that the bitter conflicts and personal suffering of the preceding decades were too proximate for it to be possible to celebrate the making of a new democratic era”, argue Martin Conway and Volker Depkat about the vision of “true democracy” after 1945.⁷⁰

In the post-war years, the rise and consolidation of Christian Democracy as part of the early political project for Europe were not only reliant on myths such as the medieval *Abendland* (the mythical cradle political space of Europe to help the continent out of the ruins of Nazism), but also on a specific angle on the victory of the Second World War.⁷¹ The

⁶⁹ Article G, “Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary”

⁷⁰ Martin Conway, Volker Depkat, “Towards a European History of the Discourse of Democracy: Discussing Democracy in Western Europe, 1945–60” in *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century*, 132- 157; 142.

⁷¹ Conway, “Western Europe’s Democratic Age: 1945—1968”, 148. See also Rosario Forlenza, “The Politics of the Abendland: Christian Democracy and the Idea of Europe after the Second World War,” *Contemporary European History*, 26, 2 (2016), 261–86. [doi:10.1017/S0960777317000091](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777317000091); Vanessa Conze “Facing the Future

resistance, many of whose members were Christian Democrats, was a preferred trope of memory given precedence during the postwar consensus of the ‘trente glorieuses’.⁷² It implicitly placed the memory of political violence at the centre of a notion of European “reconstruction” and helped turn the “civilizational mission”, which had been one of the tenets of Europe’s colonial expansion, into a “reconstructive” drive inwards.⁷³ As uneasy as it might have been in certain aspects, the memory of violence was a necessary steadying factor for the early project of European integration.

Despite the usage of histories of political violence to stabilize democracy, its mobilization came to be instrumental in the wave of contestation of the post-1945 order, and consensus was ever fleeting. The responsibility for the Holocaust came to be a fault line in Left and the New Left contestations of the conservative establishment of the 1960s.⁷⁴ Dealing with the history of the Holocaust often mobilized discourses about persistent issues of race and authoritarianism in Western Europe, while the political establishment was keen on insisting on resistance, heroism and the defeat of Nazism.⁷⁵ The memory of and the debate about the Holocaust challenged triumphant narratives about French decolonization in Algeria⁷⁶ or elsewhere in Africa and of those in the Federal Republic of Germany. The conflicts about justice

Backwards: ‘Abendland’ as an Anti-liberal Idea of Europe in Germany between the First World War and the 1960s” in Gosewinkel ed., *Anti-liberal Europe*, 72-90.

⁷² Tom Buchanan, “Human Rights, the Memory of War and the Making of a ‘European’ Identity, 1945-1975” in Conway and Patel, *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century*, 132-157.

⁷³ Paul Betts, *Ruin and Renewal: Civilising Europe After the Second World War* (London: Basic Books, 2020), 3-10.

⁷⁴ Johannes Heuman, “Promoting Global Holocaust Memory in the Era of the Cold War: The Tomb of the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris”, *History and Memory*, 27, 1 (2015), 116-153.

<https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.27.1.116>

⁷⁵ Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front, Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 23-30; See also Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 17-23.

⁷⁶ Andrea Brazzoduro, “Algeria, Antifascism, and Third Worldism: An Anticolonial Genealogy of the Western European New Left (Algeria, France, Italy, 1957–1975)”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 48, 5(2020), 958-978. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2020.1817232>.

for the Holocaust persisted into the late 1970s, with the Auschwitz trials taking place in West Germany in 1963.⁷⁷

Historical representations and remembrance of the Second World War and the memory of atrocities became relevant to Cold War liberalism, a liberalism marked by the potential of destruction, of total war, and above all, by the threat of (USSR) communism.⁷⁸ With the threat of totalitarianism looming, anti-Communist interpretations, in the Atlanticist sense, grounded the European Community project from the 1970s onwards.⁷⁹ The memory of victims of the Second World War and authoritarianism reinforced liberal democracy as a defender of rights, and the state and Atlanticism against the intrusion of the Left as “totalitarian”. Centre-right governments in Europe drove the process of restabilization and European integration as an anticommunist project, as “they exploited [...] fears of Communism—both external and internal—”⁸⁰ that also influenced colonial empires' attitude towards the periphery and strengthened the nation-state idea. The anticommunist narrative bolstered arguments on the centre-right, notably Christian Democracy, that the nation-state needed to be preserved at any cost, and on that the European Community was instrumental to this fact.⁸¹ Also, the fact that West European socialists changed political positions in relation to internationalism (the colonial struggle in Algeria proved to them that such struggles could only trigger further upheaval) made shared anticommunism the ground for an informal alliance with the Christian Democrats.⁸² As

⁷⁷ In general, the concern with the perpetrators, the SS middlemen, came later, after 1950 and was limited in scope. See Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5-10; David O. Pendas, *Democracy, Nazi Trials, and Transitional Justice in Germany, 1945–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 17-19.

⁷⁸ Moyn, *Liberalism Against Itself*, 12.

⁷⁹ Forlenza, “The Politics of the Abendland”; Brian Shaev, “Liberalising Regional Trade: Socialists and European Economic Integration” *Contemporary European History*, 27, 2 (2016), 258–79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777318000073>.

⁸⁰ Conway, *Western Europe's Democratic Age*, 46.

⁸¹ Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 25.

⁸² Brian Shaev, “The Algerian War, European Integration, and the Decolonization of French Socialism,” *French Historical Studies*, 41, 1 (2018), 63–94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-4254619>.

such, it marked another moment in time when memory of political violence worked increasingly to stabilize notions of liberal democracy.

This dynamic was not limited to Western Europe. Samuel Moyn shows how, in the 1970s context, human rights also turned into a crucial discursive Cold War instrument against state socialism and with that, ideas about memorialization of political violence came to be connected with liberal democratic rights.⁸³ Although the states behind the Iron Curtain did not find the same cause in the memory of the Second World War, as antifascism continued to drive that remembrance, they did find a memory cause in the human rights angle, which was associated to Cold War politics.⁸⁴

In 1975, this narrative received a further, and significant, boost with the signing of the Helsinki Accords, a treaty that wedged “human rights” between the East and West, and rendered the discourse of human rights a political condemnation of Eastern, primarily Soviet, political regimes and their track record in curtailing civil liberties.⁸⁵ Human rights thus emerged as a defender of a particular European cultural specificity against state socialism.⁸⁶ This late Cold War imaginary did away with philosophies of anarchism, socialism, or even social democracy present in the East, as Atlanticism became the tenet of Cold War liberalism and a contrast to French radicalism.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the “Final Act” of the 1975 Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe enlivened the prospects of the political future for the “Easterners” through narratives about Europeanization.⁸⁸ The text grounded the “return to Europe”, as described below:

⁸³ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 13-18. See also Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of the Nation-State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 4-13.

⁸⁴ Stone, *Goodbye to All That*, 9-12

⁸⁵ Ned Richardson-Little, “From Tehran to Helsinki: the International Year of Human Rights 1968 and State Socialist Eastern Europe”, *Diplomatica*, 1, 2 (2019), 180-201. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25891774-00102003>.

⁸⁶ Robert Brier, *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 209-210.

⁸⁷ Moyn, *Liberalism*, 120.

⁸⁸ Sarah Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of The Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2-13.

In his Nobel Prize speech of 1975, the Lithuanian human rights activist Andrei Sakharov responded to the Helsinki Accords by promoting the idea of Europe as a single geographical space within which Europeans should be free to travel unhindered by Soviet restrictions". Images of Europe were frequently constructed in articles by Polish intellectuals in underground journals, such as those by Adam Michnik in the magazine Puls.⁸⁹

The different meanings ascribed to liberal Europeanness brought together a dizzying range of interests and political causes. The “civilizing” potential of “Europe” and its “re-civilizing” mission were determined by the means of dealing with political violence, and primarily in professing values of Europeanness. As Tony Judt noted, Europe, rather than capitalism, was the imaginary to be reached and attained.⁹⁰ The 1970s–1980s pro-Europeanism of Eastern European dissidents was thus an attentively crafted mirage of European liberal identity rather than “Western” capitalism.⁹¹ Debates persisted between reformists and conservatives within the socialist establishment during the last two decades of the Cold War, but “Europe” was a “third way” between capitalist democracy and communism in political debates, a mediator between two types of politics.⁹²

The defensive dimension re-emerged in the 1990s, when the history of violent pasts served not only “to reclaim the social contract between citizen and state”⁹³, but also helped the stark realities of the past shape a vision of the future in Europe.⁹⁴ For instance, anti-

⁸⁹ Jessica Wardhaugh, Ruth Leiserowitz and Christian Bailey, “Intellectual Dissidents and the Construction of European Spaces, 1918–1988” in Conway and Patel, *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century*, 33.

⁹⁰ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 690.

⁹¹ Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik, “Towards an Intellectual History of Postsocialism” in Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik, eds, *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts and Intellectual History in East Central Europe after 1989*, 25–28; Ther, “1989 and the Global Hegemony of Neoliberalism”.

⁹² Ljubica Spaskovska, James Mark, Bogdan C. Iacob and Tobias Rupprecht *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), especially “The West Is Not the Enemy: Reinterpreting Peripheralisation and Backwardness”, 56–58.

⁹³ Teitel, *Globalizing Transitional Justice*, 34.

⁹⁴ Yifat Gutman argues that “this Janus-faced view of memory as looking to the past in order to shape the present and future is the basis for the increasingly relevant and pressing concerns and scholarship about the relationship of individual and collective memory to democratic politics; human rights and transitional justice; revenge, imposture and forgery; social movements and utopian moments; and historical facts and scientific technologies” [“Introduction: Memory and the Future: Why a Change of Focus Is Necessary” in *Memory and the Future: Transnational Politics, Ethics and Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 13]; Rodney Harrison looked at this issue as an imaginary of frailty that depends on a “late modern disassociation of preservation and value.” [Rodney Harrison, “Forgetting to Remember, Remembering to Forget: Late Modern Heritage Practices, Sustainability and the “Crisis” of Accumulation of the Past”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19, 6 (2013), 579–95. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13527258.2012.678371>.]

discrimination and inclusion legislation made use of the history of the Holocaust as reference for the values of the European space and triggered substantial debates about the limits of free speech.⁹⁵ Early in the 1990s, the Council of Europe actively encouraged a politics of remembrance of victims by sponsoring memorials discussing the memory of communism and democracy, and funding museums in Eastern Europe. Building on the older anticommunism of the European project, this perspective merged with the transformational discourse about the values of liberal democracy and neoliberalism. Several resolutions in the European Parliament called for European leaders to act upon their mandate when invoking the Holocaust as a historical language explaining the war in Bosnia.⁹⁶ A crucial instance of a relationship between memory and politics was the 2000 Stockholm Universal Declaration of Holocaust Remembrance, with its Article 8 calling upon all “to plant the seeds of a better future amidst the soil of a bitter past”.⁹⁷ The history of the Holocaust thus metamorphosed into a foundational “negative memory” of European democracies. Natan Sznaider and Alejandro Baer described such focus on political violence as an ethics of remembering in terms of a “reverse Utopia” that is “not geared toward the construction of a new society but toward fending off repetitions of horrific pasts”.⁹⁸ This victim-centred consensus drove the “transnationalization” of memory, which Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney have explained as the process by which political and

⁹⁵ Uladzislau Belavusau, “Fighting Hate Speech through EU Law”, *Amsterdam Law Forum*, 4, (1), 2012, 20–35, <http://doi.org/10.37974/ALF.208>; Uladzislau Belavusau and Aleksandra Gliszczyńska-Grabias, “Memory Laws: Mapping a New Subject in Comparative Law and Transitional Justice”, *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*, 2, 17 (2017), 1-26.

⁹⁶ Anne Wæhrens, “Shared Memories? Politics of Memory and Holocaust Remembrance in the European Parliament 1989-2009”, *DIIS Working Paper*, 2011, 1–24; Roman Krakovsky, “The Peace and the War Camps, the Dichotomous Cold War Culture in Czechoslovakia, 1948-1960” in Thomas Lindenberger, Annette Vowinckel and Marcus M. Payk eds., *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (Berghahn Books, 2012), 213-235.

⁹⁷ The Stockholm Declaration was not explicitly European, but it was an important topic within European political circles. This issue is addressed in Rob van der Laarse, “Beyond Auschwitz? Europe’s Terrascapes in the Age of Postmemory”, in Marc Silberman and Florence Vatan eds., *Memory and Post-war Memorials* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 72-115.

⁹⁸ Alejandro Baer and Natan Sznaider, *Memory and forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era: the Ethics of Never Again* (London: Routledge, 2016), 34.

knowledge boundaries of the national memory “regimes” become more porous.⁹⁹ At the same time, it also determined the way national landscapes of memory developed.

Over the decades, we can see a type of *negative memory* emerging. I use this term to explain the didactic, and often politically imbued imaginaries of the past, that tend to be used to cultivate liberal norms such as human rights, law, and freedom – and a progressive, deterministic view on trajectories of those seeking to abide by them. The fact that victims have been the central vehicle of this “negative memory”, a history shared by Eastern and Western Europe, speaks to a certain currency that notions of human dignity have taken on.¹⁰⁰ Partly a way to reflect on vulnerability and to protect states against the return of authoritarianism, the ethos of memory of political violence is constructive. In 1989, political theorist Judith Shklar was taking on memory when discussing “liberalism of fear” to depict a condition of liberal democracy that is “putting cruelty first”—that is remembering or shaping the present in relation to this violent past—an idea she described elsewhere as “more a recipe for survival than a project for the perfectibility of mankind”.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, she argues a “party of hope” and a “party of memory”, where collective memory of past politics defines the norms of contemporary liberal democracy, define this brand of liberal thought. With that, she advanced perhaps the first reflection on the role that memory plays in defining liberal democracy – as a warning.¹⁰²

The usage of memory vocabularies in strengthening liberalism testify to the fact that, especially in the 1990s, it was much more than consensus, free markets, and individualism. As John Rawls argues, this ideology was primarily a political project of justice, and the attribute

⁹⁹ Chiara de Cesari, Ann Rigney, *Transnational Memory Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ Charles Beitz, “Human Dignity in the Theory of Human Rights: Nothing but a Phrase?”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 41, 3 (2013), 259-290. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12017>.

¹⁰¹ Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Voices* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 34.

¹⁰² See Samuel Moyn’s discussion of Shklar as a Cold War liberal in Moyn, *Liberalism Against itself*, 13-16.

of “liberal” took shape independently from an exclusively economic doctrine.¹⁰³ For Central and Eastern Europe it came with distinct cultural values - of the Cold War, Atlanticism, moralisation of modernisation – that dominated the 1990s.¹⁰⁴ Anthropologist Talal Asad points out, indeed, how “laissez-faire” economy, political liberalism, and different philosophical roots of moral human rights shaped culture, and the modernization of those who aspired to this global condition.¹⁰⁵ In other words, memory contributed to the pull that values had on defining liberalism greater than a political ideology of liberty, exchange and consensus because “at heart, most liberals were moralists. Their liberalism had nothing to do with the atomistic individualism we hear of today. They never spoke about rights without stressing duties”.¹⁰⁶ A “negative memory” defended the accomplishments of the global liberal order and instilled a normative position towards liberal democracy. More recently, Jan-Werner Müller argues the “vergangenheitsbewältigungswille” (a political will to engage critically with the past) was a barometer for the liberal democratic quality of a political culture.¹⁰⁷

Situating a memory of violence on the spectrum of liberalism(s), is useful also in order to showcase the construct of “Europe”.¹⁰⁸ Talal Asad argues that “far from being threatened by internal violence, European solidarity is strengthened by it”¹⁰⁹, meaning that the notion of

¹⁰³ John Rawls, “The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus”, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7, 1 (1987), 34–40. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/764257>.

¹⁰⁴ Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*, 67-71, About the notion of a defensive liberalism, see also Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), specifically the Introduction.

¹⁰⁵ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 14–18; See also von Hirschhausen and Patel, “Europeanization in History: An Introduction”. 13-56; Volker Depkat and Martin Conway, “Towards a European History of the Discourse of Democracy: Discussing Democracy in Western Europe, 1945–60” in Conway and Patel, *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century*, 132–37.

¹⁰⁶ Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Jan-Werner Müller, “On European Memory, Some Conceptual and Normative Remarks,” in Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, eds., *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 25–38, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Volkhard Knigge, “Europäische Erinnerungskultur. Identitätspolitik Oder Kritisch-Kommunikative Historische Selbstvergewisserung” in *Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft E.V. Begründungen Und Perspektiven Europäischer Kulturpolitik*, Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2008, 157.

¹⁰⁹ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 166. See also Siobhan Kattago, “Agreeing to Disagree on the Legacies of Recent History: Memory, Pluralism and Europe after 1989”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 12, 3 (2009), 375–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431009337352>; Claus Leggewie, “A Tour of the Battleground: The Seven Circles of Pan-European Memory,” *Social Research*, 75, 1 (2008), 217–34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972058>; Peter Verovšek, “Memory, Narrative, and Rupture: The Power of the Past

European core values embraces these negative pasts to show the prestige and superiority of Europe in dealing with “accidents” in the history of Europe and promote peace. Such “civilizational” narratives about what Europe brings were instrumental in the pull those political ideals about moving forward and “modernization” had in Central and Eastern Europe. Following the regime transformation in the 1990s, as “Europe” became the symbol of the end of totalitarianism, professing vulnerability and “cultivating” certain memories as a warning represented a measure of newly found liberal democracy. There is a certain fluidity in comparing the murderous character of communism and National Socialism, as a “totalitarian” past of Europe, which makes democracy emerge as a “product of the ideological wars fought against totalitarianism”, as historian Duncan Bell argues.¹¹⁰

In Central and Eastern Europe, this use of the memory of political violence, suffering, and pain – and its role in achieving a political consensus (that is, the ultimate goal of liberal governance) - also gauged the progress of a modern, liberal, “civilized” humanity and the political project of EU accession.¹¹¹ Justice for the repression and injustices of the past and the victims came to be increasingly associated with “European values”, “learning from the past,” and, more generally, “democracy”.¹¹² The narrative of European belonging attached to the ideas of anticommunism was about making the previously ‘captive’ nations whole again. Such a civilizational dimension of (liberal) Europeanness determined the forms of liberal democracy as understood in Central and Eastern Europe. Václav Havel’s Civic Forum (OF) (political

as a Resource for Political Change”, *Memory Studies*, 3 (4), 2017, 208-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017720256>.

¹¹⁰ Bell, “What Is Liberalism?”

¹¹¹ This goes in the line of Asad, for whom liberalism, which is synonymous to the West relies on the idea of political violence, which become a compass in the quest for progress. See for more on modernity, law and relations of subjugation Samira Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 45-56. See also Aamir R. Mufti, “A Response to Talal Asad’s “Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism”, *Critical Inquiry* 41, (2) 2015 428-434, on the idea of violence and liberalism and progress.

¹¹² Georges Mink, “Institutions of National Memory Transitional Justice to Political Uses”, in Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer, eds., *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 155-170.

movement) was perhaps the most famous to engage the “path to Europe” slogan, but it also resonated with other actors in the region.¹¹³

In this context, remembrance played a moralizing role, and new progressive liberal actors mobilized images of problematic pasts to ground a new relationship between “citizen and state” in the liberal polity.¹¹⁴ Invocations of past state actions kept certain demands urgent in the political arena. There was little concern with the fact that mobilizing the remembrance of past political violence was more about change in institutions or political orders and less about social justice.¹¹⁵ Collective memory was, in fact, a central actor in the “transition” on the progressive path towards liberal democracy and the West.¹¹⁶ Refusing to acknowledge or denying responsibility toward crimes of the past was primarily a question of the reputation of the state as “civilized”.¹¹⁷ The victims were invoked when reclaiming institutions and structures from former political groups into the liberal democratic sphere.¹¹⁸ Arguably, the residual influence of this dynamic in Central and Eastern Europe is evident in contradictions that are still visible: in Romania, and elsewhere, despite the flurry of talking about “anticommunism”,

¹¹³ Kim, Seongcheol. “Between Illiberalism and Hyper-Neoliberalism: Competing Populist Discourses in the Czech Republic.” *European Politics and Society* 21 (5) 2020, 618–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2020.1709368>.

¹¹⁴ Teitel, *Globalizing Transitional Justice*, 13–15.

¹¹⁵ Nanci Adler, “Introduction: On History, Historians and Transitional Justice”, in Nanci Adler, ed., *Understanding the Age of Transitional Justice: Crimes, Courts, Commissions, and Chronicling* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 1–11; Dustin Sharp, “Emancipating Transitional Justice from the Bonds of Paradigmatic Transition,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 9, 1, 2015, 150–169. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/iju021>; Teitel, *Globalizing Transitional Justice*, 12–23; Laurel Fletcher, Harvey Weinstein, and Jamie Rowen, “Context, Timing and the Dynamic of Transitional Justice,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 31 (2009), 163–220. https://humanrights.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/context_timing_and_the_dynamics_of_transitional_justice_a_histo.pdf

¹¹⁶ The notion of transition was a political and economic term much used in the 1990s, which built on the notion that the political and cultural fields are heavily indebted to economics. See Noel Calhoun, *Dilemmas of Justice in Eastern Europe’s Democratic Transitions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3–4; Kopeček and Wciślik, “Towards an Intellectual History of Postsocialism”, 12–15.

¹¹⁷ Mark Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory, and the Law* (New Brunswick: Transaction Pub, 1997), 2–13; David Scott, *Omens of Adversity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014), 23–37; Teitel, *Globalizing Transitional Justice*, 3–13; Marco Zunino, *Justice Framed: A Genealogy of Transitional Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 5–14 ; Benoît Challand, “1989, Contested Memories and the Shifting Cognitive Maps of Europe,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, 12, 3 (2009), 397–408, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431009338766>.

¹¹⁸ Zunino, *Justice Framed: A Genealogy of Transitional Justice*, 16–26.

the actual numbers, stories and mechanisms of oppression continue to be severely under investigated. The situation has solidified into an impasse about tainted institutions and paralysis of the state and has exacerbated emerging authoritarianisms that rely on a re-emergence of Cold War narratives.

This moralizing quest driving this paradigm of “repoliticized” memory, also transnationally, opened problematic pathways. The equation between the shared destructive scale of National Socialism and communism today reads as an endorsement of the “double genocide” thesis.¹¹⁹ Jelena Subotić, among others, has discussed such revisionisms in the former Yugoslavia, where she mentions that:

This equation between communism and fascism, and the appropriation of Holocaust remembrance and imagery to delegitimise communism ... has occurred throughout Eastern Europe with much historical revisionism resulting from the attempts of Eastern European countries to deny or cloud their participation in fascist crimes, including the Holocaust, by elevating communist crimes to the level of the Holocaust, by delegitimising anti-fascism, and in doing so legitimising resurgent neo-fascism.¹²⁰

That dynamic has been echoed everywhere in the region and in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, among others, memory politics have been shaped by the idea that victims of the Holocaust are preferred to that of communism. There is little nuance capturing the nationalist or nativist implications of this position and not only does it promote a particular angle where communist perpetrators seem more relevant than fascist perpetrators¹²¹, but it also repurposes

¹¹⁹ Liljana Radonić, “From ‘Double Genocide’ to ‘the New Jews’: Holocaust, Genocide and Mass Violence in Post-Communist Memorial Museums”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 20, 4 (2018), 510–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2018.1522831>. The analyses of competing memories and the rise of the double-genocide paradigm (in wider context of 9/11 and the reconceptualization of the notion of terror in the context of EU's Holocaust-centred memory politics) have been the focus of the Terrascapes project as addressed in Rob van der Laarse, “Archaeology of Memory”, EAC OCCASIONAL PAPER NO.11, 2013, 121-130 and Rob van der Laarse, Francesco Mazzucchelli and Carlos Reijnen, eds., “Introduction”, *Traces of Terror, Signs of Trauma. Practices of (Re) Presentation of Collective Memories Space in Contemporary Europe* (Bologna: Università Bologna, 2014), 3-20.

¹²⁰ Jelena Subotić, *Yellow Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance after Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 6.

¹²¹ Luca Manucci, *Populism and Collective Memory Comparing Fascist Legacies in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 2021), 360; Liljana Radonić, “Post-Communist Invocation of Europe: Memorial Museums’ Narratives and the Europeanization of Memory”, *National Identities*, 19, 2 (2017), 269–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1264377>; Liljana Radonić, “Introduction: The Holocaust/Genocide Template in Eastern Europe”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 20, 4 (2018), 483–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2018.1528743>.

much of the early 1990s defensive liberalism into a helpful narrative for the “illiberal” dimension of democracy.¹²² It can also explain the mechanisms behind the Holocaust becoming an “entrance ticket” to the EU¹²³, because it supports ideas about a “pure” fibre of the nation, destroyed by these two regimes.

Moreover, this bi-dimensional narrative shapes a “banal” Europeanism, simplifies narratives, and avoids a focus on particular actors. Memory politics thus ironically strengthens what it professes to counter.¹²⁴ Consequently, the consensus driving the usable past of political violence for Europe entails a complex puzzle that begs a new analysis of what the concepts of “Europe” and liberal democracy really engendered in terms of memory politics. The binding element then, if we aim to contextualize the current misgivings surrounding “Europeanization”, is how the (re) politicization of memory in a liberal sense happened in the past and continues to develop today – a question that this dissertation aims to analyse.

4. Collective Memory and the “Liberal Script”

The trouble with using memory to instil “tolerance, moderation, and civil respect”, historian Mark Osiel argues, is that these moralizing approaches to history “presume too much moral consensus” and do not confront the “ethical complexity in wrongdoing”.¹²⁵ As political theorist Chantal Mouffe has argued, forging liberalism around consensus hides the fundamental

¹²² The thesis has also been discussed in recent historiography grappling with the uncharted history of the Shoah in Eastern Europe, for instance Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). It also shaped the memory debates in the 1990s.

¹²³ Dan Diner, “Memory and Restitution: World War II as a Foundational Event in a Uniting Europe”, in Gotthart Wunberg and Dan Diner eds., *Restitution and Memory: Historical Remembrance and Material Restitution in Europe*, (New York, 2007), 9–23; Rob van der Laarse, “Beyond Auschwitz?” in Silberman and Vatan, *Memory and Postwar Memorials*, 71-92; Assmann, “Europe’s Divided Memory”, 261.

¹²⁴ For instance, in 2019, shortly after the resolution on 1989, another EPP document, “On the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe”, produces an antitotalitarian narrative, which explicitly uses prevention of extremism in the context of the “totalitarian” narrative, effectively equating far-right and left mobilizations. See “European Parliament Resolution of 19 September 2019 on the Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe (2019/2819(RSP))” (2019), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021_EN.html. Last accessed June 17, 2020. Also see Marlene Laruelle, Margarita Karnysheva, *Memory Politics and the Russian Civil War: Reds Versus Whites* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021) for the emergence of the myth of the “whites” in Russia and abroad.

¹²⁵ Osiel, *Mass Atrocity*, 17–18.

antagonisms (between groups, classes) at the centre of politics that represent the social space.¹²⁶ Consequently, argues Anna Cento Bull, collective memory debates should do justice to the reality of an “agonistic memory”, one which acknowledges the tensions of conflicts and the political stakes, instead of shying away from them.¹²⁷ Scholars looking at memory in conflict through notions such as “competing memories” call for charting negotiations around complicated histories to enable a productive understanding of history.¹²⁸ Indeed, much work has been devoted to “dissonance” and conflicts, especially visible in memory and heritage studies,¹²⁹ because these are always disputed by one actor or another.

This dissertation connects such recent calls for a more complex arena of exhibiting and debating histories of collective memory with a broader reconsideration of the extent to which languages of human rights, order, and personal freedom are still effective in promoting liberal values worldwide, beyond the consensus around these by actors across the ideological spectrum. Sociologist Michael Zürn refers to a “liberal script” to understand these pitfalls. He defines concepts and ideas attached to liberal democracy as “ideas and institutional prescriptions about the organisation of society based on the core principle of individual self-determination”. They rely on certain constructs that seem ahistorical and depoliticized:

Its foundation rests upon implied universal values such as freedom, equality, justice, progress, and tolerance. Its manifestations range from human rights and the rule of law to

¹²⁶ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political (Thinking in Action)* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3-13. See also Balazs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina and Mónika Baár, eds., *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe (Vol II) Negotiating Modernity in the 'Short Twentieth Century' and Beyond, Part II: 1968-2018* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), especially “14-23. 'The Ambiguities of the 'Liberal Consensus.'”, 192-213; Zunino, *Justice Framed: A Genealogy of Transitional Justice*, 57.

¹²⁷ Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen, “On Agonistic Memory”, *Memory Studies*, 9, 4 (2016), 390–404, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698015615935>.

¹²⁸ See Alejandro Baer and Natan Sznajder, “Ghosts of the Holocaust in Franco’s mass graves: Cosmopolitan memories and the politics of ‘never again’”, *Memory Studies* 8 (3), 328–344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698014568247>; Rob van der Laarse, “Europe’s Peat Fire: Intangible Heritage and the Crusades for Identity” in Sigrid Lähdesmäki, Kaasik Krogerus Tuuli, Luisa Passerini and Sigrid van Huis eds., *Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 79–133.

¹²⁹ J.E Ashworth and GJ Tunbridge, *Dissonant Heritage*; Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006); van der Laarse, “Europe’s Peat Fire”, 79–133.

free-market capitalism. As such, it competes with alternative scripts for organising societies, such as fascism, communism, authoritarianism, or Islamic fundamentalism.¹³⁰

Here, he is putting forth a notion of a script to be able to better flesh out the normative interpretations in which liberalism operates. Zürn identifies fascism, communism, and authoritarianism as histories against which the image of the current political order of liberal democracy is being built. Although the concept does not fully depart from a descriptive perspective, the “liberal script” does offer a glimpse into the way other “scripts”, including authoritarianism or communism, fit into an “external” history of liberal democracy.¹³¹ The main takeaway of Zürn’s notion is that consensus of liberal democracy can be prescriptive, and that it reduces, simplifies, or stylizes notions through which broader society operates. Opposing, for instance, liberalism to Islam perpetuates a simplistic cultural and geographic sphere of what it is to be liberal. Furthermore, it does not acknowledge the overlaps between liberal democracy with any of the above. This “script” leads to silencing internal liberal dilemmas, exclusionary discourses in social democracy, or employments of religion, such as Catholicism, as superior and rightfully ‘European’. Equally, these do away with issues of neoliberalism-driven inequality or the culturalist perspectives operating on racialized categories.¹³² Many other facets of histories are either selectively engaged or wilfully ignored.

Given the importance that past political violence plays in interpreting liberal democratic values, this dissertation looks to this notion of “script” in collective memory. It takes this plotment as a root cause of silencing and, by focusing on debates in Central and Eastern Europe, shows how this relation came to be, evolved, and continues to operate. Because of the

¹³⁰ Michael Zürn, “Die Zukunft Der Liberalen Weltordnung,” in *Deutschland Und Die Welt 2030. Was Sich Verändert Und Wie Wir Handeln Müssen* (Berlin: Econ Verlag, 2018), 385–93; Tanja Börzel and Michael Zürn, “SCRIPTS Working Paper No. 1” (Berlin: German Research Foundation, 2019).

¹³¹ Although collective memory is not something that appears in the “liberal script” concept, this addition is important, given the prevalence of memory debates in defining liberal democracy and is consequently further developed in the dissertation.

¹³² See Lars Cornelissen, “Neoliberalism and the Racialized Critique of Democracy”, *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical Democratic Theory*, 27, 3 (2020), 348-360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12518>.

dissertation's focus on this particular region, some other pasts (such as colonialism) are kept in the background. The concept of "totalitarianism", for instance, a concept dating from before the Second World War, avoids the broader history of authoritarianism, beyond National Socialism and communism.¹³³ The European heritage (of violence) of imperialism is also silenced.¹³⁴ Furthermore, the victim-centred legal and social complex of "totalitarianism" takes the attention away from group struggles or institutionalism.¹³⁵ The spectre of the "Gulag", as a shorthand for the Soviet Union, overshadowed the political causes and demands of the 1918 Revolution¹³⁶, the remembrance of the Holocaust left little space for taking discourses of anti-fascism out of more radical fringes, and the memory of slavery eclipsed that of anti-colonial struggles.¹³⁷

The selective de-politicization of histories emerging from this liberal "script" obscures certain pasts. This process affects the history of the political left, where anti-fascism is attributed to Christian Democracy and social democracy rather than to more radical socialist circles.¹³⁸ Historian Enzo Traverso has outlined, indeed, how because communism is reduced to its Stalinist "totalitarian" dimension, it does away with the complex re-interpretations of the left

¹³³ See chapter 1 on this discussion.

¹³⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France," *Public Culture* 23, 1 (2011), 121–56. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2010-018>. Aline Sierp, "1939 versus 1989—A Missed Opportunity to Create a European Lieu de Mémoire?", *East European Politics and Societies*, 31, 3 (2017), 439–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325417697791>; Roger Griffin, "Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age. From New Consensus to New Wave?", *Fascism* 1, 1 (2012), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1163/221162512X623601>. Berny Sebe and Matthew G. Stanard, "Introduction" in Berny Sebe and Matthew G. Stanard eds., *Decolonising Europe?: Popular Responses to the End of Empire* (London: Routledge, 2020), 13–18.

¹³⁵ Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 12–14.

¹³⁶ Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 4–14; Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Celebrating (or Not) the Centenary of the Russian Revolution", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 52, 4 (2017), 816–831. [doi:10.1177/0022009417723975](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009417723975)

¹³⁷ Dan Stone, "A Victim-Centred Historiography of the Holocaust?" *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, 2 (2017), 176–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2017.1304347>; Dirk Moses "The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: The 'Uniqueness of the Holocaust' and the Question of Genocide", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 14, 2 (2011), 215–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2012.677762>.

¹³⁸ Heike Karge, "Practices and Politics of Second World War Remembrance: Transnational Perspectives from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe" in Pakier, Strath, *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, 137–47.

happening in both Western and Eastern Europe after 1965, for example, stripping communism of its much broader political, economic and intellectual Marxist, Gramscian thought.¹³⁹

Similarly, critical investigations of the appeal to and usages of “democracy” by the radical right are absent, as the roots of the dissatisfaction with capitalist democracy in the early interwar period have little visibility today.¹⁴⁰ Debates on the influence of the far-right on conceptions of democracy have been absent until not long ago.¹⁴¹ This selectivity does not do justice to the myriad of constructs in which liberal democracy is contested. For instance, Ryszard Legutko’s book *The Demon of Democracy: Totalitarian Tendencies in Liberal Societies* (2016) argues that liberal democracy and communism are ideologies that “prescribe their followers how to think, what to do, how to evaluate things”.¹⁴² For Legutko, a PiS supporter (and incidentally one of the initiators of the European Parliament’s Declaration mentioned at the outset), both these systems are radical projects ‘where social problems are depicted as solvable through “social engineering”’.¹⁴³ In a similar vein, the 1968 revolution in Poland is contested in the politics of the PiS precisely because of its significance as a moment of the New Left. PiS argues, instead, that the fundamental importance of 1968 resided in the purges within the Party itself, and the consolidation of authoritarian communism. It rejects the transnational history of 1968 as relevant to the Left as a Westernized construct that denies the specificity locally in the countries in Eastern Europe, such as Poland. The argument here is that anticommunism simply represented an imported Western concept.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, 15; Conway, *Western Europe’s Democratic Age: 1945-1968*, 19-21.

¹⁴⁰ Sierp, “1939 versus 1989”; Laure Neumayer, “Symbolic Policies versus European Reconciliation: The Hungarian ‘Status Law’”, in Mink and Neumayer, *History, Memory and Politics*, 209–25.

¹⁴¹ Marta Lorimer, “Europe as ideological resource: the case of the Reassembled National”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27, 9 (2020), 1388-1405. DOI: [10.1080/13501763.2020.1754885](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1754885).

¹⁴² Ryszard Legutko, *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies* (New York: Encounter Books, 2016), 12.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15-17.

¹⁴⁴ David Ost, “Down with 1989!’: The Peculiar Right-Wing Backlash against 1968 in Poland”, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 33, 4 (2019), 843–860. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325419857141>.

My dissertation historicizes these tensions, by adding to views such as those of sociologist Rogers Brubaker that the specificity of the “illiberal” political turn in Hungary and Poland is that it “externalises liberalism” and portrays values like rights as a plural language that opposes the national “specificity”.¹⁴⁵ Arguably, these tendencies are more complex, because particular liberal tenets (rule of law, courts of law, a shadow state threatening democracy) are appropriated and operationalized in “illiberal” politics.¹⁴⁶

By identifying and analysing debates on what we could call a “liberal” identity in Romanian debates and in the regional context, this dissertation seeks to map the extent to which historical appropriations and exploitations in the recent wave of contestations of democracy have adapted ideas central to liberal democracy and Europe, precisely because of their normativity. Contestations of ‘Soros agents’ and conspiracy theories lamenting the undermining of national sovereignty have also occurred here (specifically with the rise of the AUR, a far-right leaning political party), and there is a general consensus that ‘Europe’ denotes modernization and a form of “containment” of the drawbacks of national politics and plays a sort of “defensive” role against national politics. Romanian debates can, moreover, offer an additional angle on the pitfalls of a memory shaped by working with the “liberal script”. In this sense, the political landscape does not contest ideas of liberal democracy, but rather internalizes them through a strong appeal to a type of “modernization” and “development” narratives.

5. Silences and Liberal Values

As already argued, the dissertation creates a frame to understand “silencing” in the memory dynamics within the liberal script, as described by Zürn and others. Consequently, I

¹⁴⁵ Rogers Brubaker, “Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40, 8 (2017), 1191–1226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1294700>.

¹⁴⁶ Andre Sajó, “The Rule of Law as Legal Despotism: Concerned Remarks on the Use of “Rule of Law” in Illiberal Democracies”, *Hague Journal on the Rule Law*, 11 (2019), 371–376. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40803-019-00097-z>.

do not approach silencing as a functional way to describe the authoritarianism of former governments hiding their own actions or a convenient smokescreen contrived to mask their past biographies.¹⁴⁷ Instead, “silencing” is more suitably understood as spectre, conduit and narrative emerging from attempts to construct a memory that can respond to the promises of liberal democracy and being part of Europe.¹⁴⁸ Silencing, in this context, is a process, a continuous negotiation of norms, as historian Jay Winter argues:

there is a difference between the sayable and the non-sayable, or the spoken or the unspoken, and that such a distinction can and should be maintained and observed over time. Such people codify and enforce norms which reinforce the injunction against breaking into the inner space of the circle of silence.¹⁴⁹

Apart from political silence, which denies political crimes or errors, Winter also describes how the memory of war (and violence) became the subject of “liturgical silence” because that matter is too fundamental to a culture to be openly questioned.¹⁵⁰ It implies a sense of reverence to norms, or a codification. Winter identifies two sides of silencing that are specifically relevant for the context outlined so far. He describes “essentialist silence”, a type of argumentation that suggests that only those who lived through an experience are seen to be morally qualified to discuss it. The argument across the six chapters is that memory politics in Central and Eastern Europe have often developed around “silencing”, under many guises, connected to imaginings of democracy, liberalism and what these could entail.

¹⁴⁷ More recently, this concern with politics has been taken further by memory scholar Ann Rigney, who has termed activism around memory as a “memory of hope” [see Ann Rigney, “Remembering Hope: Transnational activism beyond the traumatic”, *Memory Studies*, 11, (3) 2018, 368-380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018771869>. Ann Rigney and Yifat Gutman look at the way trauma in the past is now operative as a political force, instead of changing historical representations or “editing” as the driving force of memory conflicts, in Gutman, “Introduction: Memory and the Future: Why a Change of Focus Is Necessary”, Gutman, *Memory and the Future*, 34-35.

¹⁴⁸ Janine Natalya Clark, “Re-Thinking Memory and Transitional Justice: A Novel Application of Ecological Memory” in *Memory Studies*, 14, 4 (2021), 1388-1452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020959813>.

¹⁴⁹ Jay Winter, “War Memoirs, Witnessing and Silence”, in Philip Dwyer ed., *War Stories: The War Memoir in History and Literature* (London: Berghahn Books, 2017), 29. See also “Thinking about Silence”, in Efrat Ben - Ze’ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter eds., *Shadows of War. A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16-20.

¹⁵⁰ Winter, *Thinking about Silence*, 20

Perhaps the most salient similar dynamic of silencing are the concerns about remembrance during the transition to democracy in Spain in the 1970s.¹⁵¹ There, the imposed consensus that not bringing things to public debate or judicial scrutiny will serve society better than reckoning with it has caused a substantial delay in dealing with far-right history and conservative remnants of the past.¹⁵²

In Central and Eastern Europe, many of the aspects of this transition affected the ways in which the past was retold. The “Europeanization” of the Holocaust, the driving force behind opening debates on the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, created one type of silencing, through deflection. It was not a black-and-white “denial”, but a way of showing that the tragedy also lay elsewhere, for instance in communism, an experience understood only by those who went through it.¹⁵³ Historian Michael Shafir argues that the Holocaust in Romania is less a question of denial, but of “trivialisation”, suggesting it takes away from where the emphasis should lie, that is, communism.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Viktor Orbán’s government has blatantly praised the actions of the authoritarian Admiral Miklos Horthy, the far-right Hungarian leader during the Second World War, as a strongman who could maintain the integrity of state in the face of internal contestation (of the left) and external pressure.¹⁵⁵ The transnational narrative of the Holocaust has also allowed the space to identify national, previously unacknowledged heroes, that are

¹⁵¹ Ignacio Brescó de Luna, “Between the Unbearable Weight and Lightness of the Past. Banal Silence in Spain’s Post-Dictatorship Memory Politics.” *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 53, (2019), 44–56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9428-8>.

¹⁵² Vincent Druliolle, Recovering Historical Memory: A Struggle against Silence and Forgetting? The Politics of Victimhood in Spain, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 9, (2) 2015, 316–335, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijv008>. See also Jason Xidias, “From Franco to Vox: Historical Memory and the Far Right in Spain”, *Center for Analysis of the Radical Right*. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b7ea2794cde7a79e7c00582/t/63816c934f4fdd080002f857/1669426324018/from+franco+to+vox.pdf>.

¹⁵³ Kattago, “Agreeing to Disagree”; David Clarke, “Communism and Memory Politics in the European Union”, *Central Europe* 12, 1 (2014), 99–114. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1479096314Z.00000000018>.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Shafir makes the point that a “denial” of the Holocaust happens not by explicitly refusing to acknowledge its legacies, but by strategies that reduce the number of victims and find victims elsewhere. See Michael Shafir, “Unacademic Academics: Holocaust Deniers and Trivializers in Post-Communist Romania,” *Nationalities Papers* 3 (6) 2014, 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.939619>.

¹⁵⁵ Karl Pfeifer, “The Orbán Regime Takes Horthy’s Hungary as an Example,” *OpenDemocracy*, 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/orban-regime-takes-horthy-s-hungary-as-example>. Last accessed June 1, 2020.

more convenient.¹⁵⁶ The Museum for Holocaust Victims in Budapest, for instance, emphasizes specific victims (non-Jews who died during the war, and non-communists who were victims of the acts of violence).¹⁵⁷ These contradictions testify to a new mode of affirming resistance, self-determination and national sovereignty given the lack of any other option because of the singularity of the region.¹⁵⁸ Jelena Subotić has attributed such dynamics to an “epistemic insecurity”, that is a sense that the democratic norms in themselves are fragile.¹⁵⁹ Narratives that strengthen ideas of the liberal “state” are directly connected to usable representations of history.¹⁶⁰ It is also why these topics emerge and submerge in a triangular manner in relation to Europeanism and are often mainstreamed.¹⁶¹

Heritage and memory in Romania have been useful examples of this dynamic early on and have generally been accepted as a good compromise. More quickly and more aggressively than in other countries in the region, statues of former communist figures were destroyed, and street names and museums changed overnight, as a result of governmental actions but also widespread popular support.¹⁶² Politics was coterminous with the idea of a radical change in both the state and society. On the one hand, following the shorthand of anticommunist narratives often entailed depicting some histories (“development”, for instance) in an urgent fashion. Communism continued to be invoked as the root cause of economic malaise or

¹⁵⁶ Ljiljana Radonić, “‘Our’ vs. ‘Inherited’ Museums. PiS and Fidesz as Mnemonic Warriors,” *Südosteuropa* 68, 1 (2020), 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2020-0003>. Rob van der Laarse, “Muséographies Des Mémoires Concurrentes,” in Delphine Bechtel and Luba Jurgenson eds., *Muséographie Des Violences En Europe Centrale et Ex-URSS* (Editions Kime, 2016), 213–32.

¹⁵⁷ Radonić, “‘Our’ vs. ‘Inherited’ Museums”.

¹⁵⁸ Kattago, “Agreeing to Disagree”; Dirk Moses, “Revisiting a Founding Assumption of Genocide Studies”, 3, 12 (2011), 287–300. <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol6/iss3/10/>; Dick Howard, “The Anti-Totalitarian Left between Morality and Politics,” in Dirk Breckman, Warren Gordon and Peter Moses eds., *The Modernist Imagination* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 331–46.

¹⁵⁹ Subotić, *Yellow Star, Red Star*, 5–6.

¹⁶⁰ Marek Kucia, “The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe”, *East European Politics and Societies*, 30, 1 (2016), 97-119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325415599195>.

¹⁶¹ Michal Kopeček, “Sovereignty, ‘Return to Europe’ and Democratic Distrust in the East after 1989 in the Light of Brexit”, *Contemporary European History* 28, 1 (2019), 73-76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777318000851>.

¹⁶² Caterina Preda, “Postsocialist Statuary Politics in Romania and Bulgaria: An Ambivalent Socialist Heritage” *Comparative Southeast European Studies* vol. 71, no. 2, 2023, 147-168. <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2022-0043>

corruption and was therefore perpetually mentioned in protest movements as well as social and economic reform movements. On the other hand, although “communism” was the preferred culprit in Romanian public debates revolving around poverty or “corruption”, there was virtually no public institutional space of remembrance that engages with this history.

In contrast, representations of (liberal) interwar capitalist democracy continue to be retrieved to speak about the European “spirit”, and as a “golden age” in Romania, and in constant contrast to the liberal democracy after the 1990s. The grip of the left in interwar Romania was faint, and never really enjoyed much credibility. Indeed, the anticommunist narrative insists on this strong liberal tradition that the communists abruptly cut down in 1945, turning it into a useful heritage of an “ahistorical” liberalism.¹⁶³ A voluminous literature has accumulated on the topic of the category postsocialism/postcommunism by directly contrasting liberalism to an authoritarian Left.¹⁶⁴

Building on silencing in relation to democracy, this dissertation relies on the contention that “silence need not only be thought of as the antithesis of speech, but that it can be disaggregated into its overt and covert manifestations”, as argued by sociologist Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi.¹⁶⁵ By overt silences, she refers to an apparent absence of speech and narrative, but also to the fact that only what is visible becomes a narrative. Covert silences, on the other hand, according to her claim, cause silencing particularly because they are too reified and used. Such silences are about the lack of content and excess image, which often become ritualistic. Vinitzky-Seroussi’s typology suggests we should never underestimate how memory is always a political act, and that activism and mobilizations of a certain memory do not necessarily mean breaking

¹⁶³ Janna Thompson, “Apology, Historical Obligations and the Ethics of Memory,” *Memory Studies* 2, 2 (2009), 195–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698008102052>.

¹⁶⁴ The debate has to do with the extent to which political debates about ideological features of liberal democracy have been subsumed under the notion of transition, glaringly emptying out possible critical notions. See Halmi Gábor, “Illiberalism in East-Central Europe”, *EUI Law*, 5 (2019). <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/64967>.

¹⁶⁵ Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, “Silence and Collective Memory,” *Social Forces* 88, 3 (2010), 1103–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0290>.

through silencing, but that some “silences [are] aimed at remembering” and other “silences [are] aimed at forgetting”.¹⁶⁶ Silence is an ample social space that can create both a space for remembrance and for forgetting, which also implicitly makes them susceptible to appropriations. It is a framework that does justice both to the need to debate and examine the inner workings of “consensus” and to the restrictive, often impoverished, sphere of memory debate in Central and Eastern Europe, which has been instrumentalized more recently into problematic political narratives.

Considerations of reifications and absences, curation, and calibration in memory, all of them creating *silences*, build on a number of points already discussed by scholars of memory, in different contexts. There is something to be said about how silences are triggered by perpetually keeping issues of collective memory urgent, always raw but vague, such as the usage of memory in liberal narratives. François Trouillot points to this continuous relevance of the past for the present as one of the mechanisms of silencing, as the past exists because there is a present that perpetually shapes it.¹⁶⁷ This does not only mean that the past exists because there is a present, but that silencing occurs in the process of competition for the narrators' attention.¹⁶⁸ The work of François Hartog is also relevant for a specific feature of “silencing” and “negative memory”: that is, an orientation towards the future, the pull of narratives of modernization, a blurry and inconsequential present and a looming past. This “presentism”, he argues, is shaped this suspension between a troubling past and an unclear future, often formulated as a type of catastrophe.¹⁶⁹ In other words, looking at the idea of the future

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 1110.

¹⁶⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 3-14.

¹⁶⁸ Trouillot is concerned with the various silences that spring up in the process of history-making, and he identifies four different types including the making of sources since not everything gets remembered or recorded and silencing in the creation of archives—the repositories of historical record. See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 46-49.

¹⁶⁹ See François Hartog, “Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time” (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), transl. Saskia Brown. It is a perspective that validates ideas that Yifat Gutman points to when discussing memory as a construct emerging from an anticipatory angle of an emergent future. See Gutman, “Introduction: Memory and the Future”, 56.

encourages a form of “calibrating” memory, making it usable, enabling this type of silencing.¹⁷⁰ This dissertation, therefore, adds several aspects to an ongoing debate about the internal contestations of liberal democracy by showing how “over determinations” of Europeanness, often driven by imaginaries of a better future through memory, have had the opposite effect.¹⁷¹

6. Approach, Sources and Structure

The central methodological challenge of this research was making sense of silences in Romanian debates and in a Central and Eastern European context in order to define the entanglements of memory narratives with liberal thought. To tackle the issue, the path this dissertation takes is to trace the debates about legacies of political violence, over almost nine decades. It does so because histories of political violence have always had a central role in definitions of the state, of citizenship and of justice, and thus visions of liberalism and liberal democracy. The memory of the Second World War was as instrumental for the communist regime as it was for ideas of Europeanization after 1989. Definitions circulating in the interwar period have a strong afterlife, and Cold War liberalism (with its defensiveness and binaries) continues to permeate contemporary political debates. Although numerous studies are looking at the memory of socialism in the region and an equally impressive body of work on right-wing critically approached the constructions of memory in relation to liberal democracy and how notions of Europeanization intersected with ideas about liberal democracy. In this sense, I propose three themes, “modernization”, “resentment”, and “norms”, which I argue were essential “modalities” in which narratives of collective memory of political violence emerged

¹⁷⁰ While aiming to localize this research, the usage of the term post-socialist is intentional because of its presence and invocation in current political discourses and debates, although the question of how long it will be tenable to speak and write about a category of “post-socialism” is imminent. For an overview, see Martin Müller, “Goodbye, Postsocialism!”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, 4 (2019), 533-550, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1578337>

¹⁷¹ Leerssen, “Imagology: On Using Ethnicity to Make Sense of the World”.

and transformed in relation to ideas about liberal democracy. As the dissertation will aim to show, these were all essential in the interpretations of the past and harbingers of *silencing*.

To do justice to the context, throughout the dissertation, the methodology moves from memory narratives (that is, discourse analysis) to archival sources that clarify certain phenomena and events. It does so in order to show how the politics of memory in the present draws upon simplifications, one-sided interpretations and analyses whose very roots lie in a different genealogy than expected, often not at all “liberal”. The aim is not to describe a single historical trajectory, which is beyond the scope of a dissertation in memory studies, but rather to note how shifting cultural discourses in the present imposed certain interpretative lenses on the past. To this end, each chapter starts from a contemporary memory debate, that highlights ongoing tensions with the “liberal” script, and advances through the histories these debates refer to in order to depict the variations of interpretation.

As source material, the analysis mainly relies on archival sources, mass media (newspaper and reports), cultural production and interviews. By recourse to these sources, the dissertation aims to demonstrate how the dynamics of remembrance have changed over time, and have been mainstreamed. Fifteen semi-structured interviews (more open-ended questions, allowing for a broader discussion with the interviewee) with practitioners of memory, researchers, and historians who are relevant for debates on “European” memory (across Eastern Europe and in Romania itself) were also conducted during the research. These are individuals actively involved in how memory is represented in the public space and constructed in the current political debates about Europe. They were selected specifically for their relevance in these debates. Their opinions chart both elite and grass-roots viewpoints, often contrasting. These interviews were used to locate the interpretations and narratives in their specific temporal and geographical context. Many of these interviewees have, indeed, been actively engaged in rethinking remembrance against a normative interpretation. These interviews were conducted

in Romania, Belgium and Germany, face to face or, if not possible, via email. Although not all are featured in the research, they were invaluable in providing further context to my analysis, rather than simply a ‘source’ in themselves.

To fully explore the contradictions and tensions inherent in memory politics, this research also relies on archival historical research in Germany, Romania, and Hungary, in conjunction with fieldwork, where necessary. Sources in Romania include the National Archives of Romania (SANIC), Ministerul De Interne Cabinetul Ministrului 1881-1952, no inv 2322. the Gendermerie, no inv. 1474 (for the history of the repression of the Jewish community, of the communist circles of the Iron Guard during the Second World War), also for the history of the Jewish community, Centrala Evreilor no. inv 2185, Comitetul Democrat Evreiesc no. inv. 2782, fond CC al PCR, Rechizitorii, Declaratii Si Stenograme Ale Proceselor Unor Criminali De Razboi Si Personalitati Burgheze 1916-1961 Inv 3140 (no. inv. 3140), Comitetul National Antifascist din România (no. inv. 3023). The Bucharest Elie Wiesel Institute for the Study of the Holocaust archives (that holds copies of the files on Romania from the US Holocaust Museum) was useful in understanding the history of some of the trajectories during the Holocaust discussed in chapters 3 and 4 (USHMM /EWI), primarily for Transnistria. These archives also support the research presented in chapters 2, 3 and 4. The archives of the CNSAS (National Council for Studying the Securitate Archives) were useful for documentation on the Jewish repression and the early communist repression and the Iron Guard in the 1950s (fond Documentar, various files) (also for chapters 2 and 4). In Germany, I have used records from the Bundesarchiv (fond Transnistria BU 1876) to reconstitute some of the biographies of the protagonists in chapter 4. In Hungary, the Open Society Archives, primarily the records of the International Federation of Human Rights (inv. HU OSA 318-,0-8) were useful for the political history of the communist regime and the early 1990s in Romania. Also here, the archive of the Radio Free Europe (HU OSA 300-120-29) supported research for chapter 1. This archival

research was to illustrate better illustrate how narratives are selective in portraying biographies during periods of repression or other turning points in debates about democracy. The usage of historical analysis is necessary in understanding how narratives circulate and how meanings and usages of certain histories change. Apart from these primary sources, the selection of press articles allowed me to reconstitute a history of memory of political violence punctuated by some essential events in the history of liberal democracy in Europe, and turning points that affected its existence in Central and Eastern Europe. Libraries in Bucharest were particularly useful for press collections, primarily Biblioteca Central Universitară (BCUB) and the National Library of Romania.

I also conducted participatory observation, site analyses, and museum analyses between 2016 and 2018. Furthermore, this study occasionally cites biographies of relevant individuals or even organizations to tease out their roles and agendas, reconstructed mainly from the press and secondary literature.

The three parts of the dissertation develop thematically and, at times, crisscross over the decades discussed. Part I, entitled “Modernization” covers the long rise of anticommunist memory politics in the 1990s and 2000s and a reliance on Cold War readings of liberal democracy and Europe. In this part, I examine what purpose anticommunist narratives had in the 1990s in relation to “Europe”, specifically connected with cultural ideas about economic development, triggered by an implicit reverence for neoliberal narratives. By looking at the subtle and consistent exculpation of the far-right, Part I suggests this notion of modernization also triggered a mainstreaming of far-right narratives.

To ground these arguments, chapter 1 discusses the ebbs and flows of the “anti-totalitarian” European triumph emerging in the 1990s, whose intellectual roots were the conservative anticommunism discourse of the late Cold War. I locate these discussions in the assemblage of ideas about transition, moralizing notions of development, and neoliberalism in

Romanian debates and how these were integrated into the “transnationalization” emerging together with a memory linked to Europe. The chapter shows how silencing was perceived as a virtue of the new liberal society, by much of the political mainstream, and has imposed a restrictive sphere of reflection early on. Chapter 2 looks at the mainstreaming of silences on the anti-Semitic and violent character of the Iron Guard movement, because of the dynamics described in chapter 1 and owing to a restrictive sphere of debate on notions of democracy. While focusing on the memory of the far-right and the debates on the Holocaust, the chapter shows how their memory was determined by concepts such as forms of development and modernization since the 1990s. At the same time, these silences blend in with memorial tropes emphasizing the guilt of the political Left.

Part II, entitled “Resentment”, focuses on the heritage and the representation of conflict and the restrictive histories and historical interpretations that these put forward. Starting from the context described in the previous chapters, I argue that a memory focused on justice and defence framed most of the debates emerging at the time, and these, paradoxically, become conduits of silencing. Consequently, chapter 3 approaches the way memorial perspectives on the Holocaust and communism were constructed, and the narratives they engendered by analysing how they “compete” with each other on two painful heritage sites and the narratives which they create. The analysis unpacks the absences and the overdeterminations in two former spaces of political repression, in Sighet and Târgu Jiu, while showing how memory narratives have entertained a continuous politics of resentment from the 1990s on. Chapter 4 unpacks the selective constructions of the memory of war circulating in Romanian debates today, triggered by modern conflict, especially the wars in Yugoslavia and Transnistria in the 1990s. Focusing on a “geopolitical” imaginary emerging at the time, I tease out how ideas of ethnicity and territoriality became the main frames of interpretations of the Second World War and subsequently of the following conflicts and wars. Consequently, the chapter explores silences

on the past political violence perpetrated by the Romanian government in the region, and how these have been perpetuated.

Part III, “Norms”, focuses on recent memory politics involving normative instruments for liberal democracy, legalism, and human rights. Chronologically, it starts from the contexts described in part I and II but looks at their evolution in the subsequent decades. Chapter 5 looks at the narratives around legal pursuits and transitional justice, tracing several legal cases: the 1990 street protests six months after the December 1989 events, the constitutional response to ethnic Romanian–Hungarian tensions, and the recent memorial laws around the Holocaust, which have been unfinished and formative of memory. The chapter identifies a legalist dimension of memory that constructs a selective understanding of history and is often in danger of being instrumentalized by authoritarian discourses.

Chapter 6 looks at the notions of human rights and identifies how and why these are hijacked by memory politics. It specifically looks at the emerging history of past Cold War refugees, visible during the refugee “crisis” of Europe in 2015. The usage of human rights, in this context, advanced a restrictive narrative of victimhood and identity politics that further led to the normalization of anti-refugee sentiments in Central and Eastern Europe.

This dissertation concludes that a collective memory calibrated for liberal thought has been restrictive and has consequently played into the current historical imagery grounding contestations of liberal democracy. Silencing was the instrument of choice, motivated not by denial but by a belief in some progressive force, notions of prestige, of Eurocentrism, and has been instrumental in creating selective narratives about the “nation”, “state”, and “democracy: notions that circulate through politics of remembrance. Finally, I point to the broader dynamics that such framings continue to promote, particularly to the pitfalls of modernization and Europeanization in driving silences, biases and mainstreaming of ideas of the far right.