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Silence in the age of transnational memory

Recovering political violence in Romanian contemporary debates

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Chapter I:
"How do we move further faster?": Narratives of Underdevelopment

1. A New Resolution

Just a couple of months after the European Parliament passed the "December 1989…" memory declaration discussed in the introduction, in late 2019, another resolution dealing with European collective memory, suggestively named "The Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe", followed.[1] This text went beyond promoting a shared consensus over the memory of political violence as an essential pillar for the resilience of European liberal democracy. In this second resolution, there is a noticeable association between sharing and abiding by (European) memory of political violence and 'socio-economic development' as the text attributes Central and Eastern European subjectivity to economic progress as a value. First, the text identifies a new epistemological category of victims in the individuals wronged by impaired (socio)economic development connected to communism:

> Whereas after the defeat of the Nazi regime and the end of the Second World War, some European countries were able to rebuild and embark on a process of reconciliation, other European countries remained under dictatorships – some under direct Soviet occupation or influence – for half a century and continued to be deprived of freedom, sovereignty, dignity, human rights and socio-economic development.[2]

This framing offers a ready-made reading of this problematic past as an interruption, of sorts, of a progressive liberalism. Secondly, the text posits that "Europe" substantiated the social and economic progress following the Cold War in Central and Eastern Europe and thus reinforces the "liberal script" behind Europeanism: namely, that Europe and liberal democracy come in tandem. The EU narrative equates the triumphant gains brought by liberal democracy

[1] The bill was supported by the same core group of Social Democrats, Renew (Liberals), EPP (Christian Democrats) and conservatives involved in the memory declaration concerning the events of 1989 discussed in the Introduction.
[2] European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 "Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe" (2019/2819(RSP)). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021_EN.html. Last accessed June 12, 2020.

and liberal economics, and the advent of freedom, anti-dictatorship, and democratization in Central and Eastern Europe. Thirdly, references to totalitarianism (here, the correlation between National Socialism and communism as common opposites of current Europeanization) and its remembrance uphold ideas about liberal economics and development. Specifically, it is a notion of 'development' that provides a reconciliatory alternative to communism and resolves potential social dissensus that is central to this declaration. It is also the starting point of this chapter.[3]

In the pages that follow, I focus precisely on such narratives of development and modernization and their usages in contemporary European memory, politics and history. Specifically, I tie them with the prestige enjoyed in Central and Eastern Europe by a certain conservative type of liberalism of the 1990s that has endured until today. In doing so, I aim to nuance approaches where the application of socio-economic narratives to Central and Eastern Europe is neutrally attributed to the "transformation to market economy".[4] Instead, the chapter looks at how, through Cold War liberalism, narratives about the past helped solidify neoliberalism as an ideology that "takes privatization, market and austerity as a given, opposing both the 'collectivism' predominant and the absolute belief in laissez-faire to establish conditions favourable to competition and prevent monopoly"[5] nationally but also at European level. As Samuel Moyn has argued, Cold War liberals:

> Were at one with neoliberalism in castigating modernity as proto-totalitarian, treating the Enlightenment as a rationalist utopia that precipitated terror and the emancipatory state as a euphemism for terror's reign.[6]

[3] See Klaus Muller, "'Modernising' Eastern Europe: theoretical problems and political dilemmas", *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 33,(1) 1992, pp. 109 – 150. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S000397560000638. On the legacy of modernization theory, see Robert Marsh, "Modernization Theory, Then and Now", *Comparative Sociology*, 10 (2014).
[4] For others discussing in the same direction, see Ther, *Europe Since 1989.*
[5] Annelien de Dijn, "Neoliberalism after 1989" in Braat, Corduwener, *1989 and the West*, 88.
[6] Moyn, *Liberalism*, 12.

For Cold War liberals, equality was important, but "liberty faced extinction if calls for economic fairness got the upper hand". [7] Just as for advocates of neoliberalism, for them the Enlightenment had been a rationalist utopia that created more violence.[8] As a cultural discourse about subjectivity, neoliberalism posits that one's capacity to adhere to the moral codes of economic competition entailed accepting "the unavoidability of human ignorance"[9]. This chapter continues some of the strands already previewed in the introduction, in that it follows how national iterations of memory morphed into ideas of a collective memory serving a specific understanding of Europeanism. I trace this developmental notion of 'progress' through its many readings, often portrayed as emancipatory despite its inherently conservative streak.

Cultural narratives of "modernization" have a long history in Central and Eastern Europe and a specific locus in the debate about Europe.[10] Romanian politics of the 19th century were fractured between a camp of "Europeanists" supporting the consolidation of statehood based on rationalism and a closer cultivation of the "West", and more conservative local ('Oriental') visions of democracy.[11] The first camp defined the liberal political factions of the interwar period, making them easily palatable to the far-right politics emerging in Romania.[12] In the 1990s, this particular myth of liberalism seeped into culturalist readings of social transformation and development and seemed to provide a historical backdrop for new reconsiderations of the polity after authoritarianism. Collective memory blended in with identitarian narratives that constructed the parameters of liberalism with Europe as their endpoint – opposed to the fearful prospect that anything regional, 'Slavic' or 'Binflexions about

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[7] Ibid.,13.

[8] This is an idea that is visible in the North American discourse concerning Eastern Europe in the 1990s. See Moyn, *Liberalism Against Itself*, 79.

[9] Ibid., 89.

[10] See Muller, "Modernising' Eastern Europe", Roland Clark, "The Romanian Right: Images of Crisis, the Press, and the Rise of Fascism", in Marco Bresciani ed., *Conservatives and Right Radicals in Interwar Europe* (London: Routledge, 2021), 196-197.

[11] Paul Blokker, "Modernity in Romania, 19th century Liberalism and its Discontents", EUI Working paper, 2/2003. Available at: https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/id/1755/sps2003-02.pdf/.

[12] Sandra Halperin, "The far-right in modern world history", *Globalizations*, 20, (5) 2023, 731-751, https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2021.1984734.

nationalism and Europeanism, subsisted in the state socialist years in Romanians about nationalism and Europeanism, subsisted in the state socialist years in Romania, through Eurocommunism, which entailed a constant negotiation with the internationalist dimension of communism coming from Western Europe.[13] After the regime change in the 1990s, the narratives of development visibly embraced Cold War liberalism, when "the end of history seemed retroactively to vindicate its approach to prioritizing freedom is a threatening world"[14] next to a sense of insecurity about the process of adjustment to a shifting global sphere. With Europeanization as the endpoint of this myth of liberal identity, Romanian collective memory narratives were one pathway by which cultural readings of development made it later into the EU politics of identity and memory, as outlined in texts such as the 2019 Declaration.

Notions of development and underdevelopment, first emerging in Marxist-inspired debates about the Third World's locus in the global (Western) economy, were also co-opted by the neoliberal intellectual circles of the Mont Pelerin Society operating in Europe in the 1970s as a project of selfhoning and individuality, but wary of processes of democracy, rather attributed to the radicalism of the left.[15] By "granting the market (and, by extension, its most powerful actors) superior powers of cognition and coordination", individuals could reach their full potential.[16] Although the ties with socialism were evident in the last decades of the Cold War in discourses about planning and social hierarchies, neoliberalism[17] especially enticed thinkers and politicians alike after the fall of state socialism when discussing cultural hierarchies about the deservedness of ascending to the global order and economy.[18]

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[13] Maud Bracke, *Which Socialism, Whose Détente* (Budapest: Central European University Press), 323-359, Cezar Stanciu "Nicolae Ceaușescu and the origins of Eurocommunism", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 48, 1 (2015), 83–95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2015.01.006.
[14] Moyn, *Liberalism*, 9.
[15] Slobodian, *Globalists,* 125-130.
[16] Dieter Plehwe and Quinn Slobodian eds., *The Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* (London: Verso Books, 2020), 12
[17] For a broader argumentation on the crossings between the emergence of neoliberalism and memory regimes, see Cristian Cercel, "Whither Politics, Whither Memory?". *Modern Languages Open*, 0(1) 2020. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.334.
[18] Jennifer Lawn, Chris Prentice, "Neoliberalism Culture/Cultures of Neoliberalism", *Sites* 12, (1), 2014. DOI: https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-vol12iss1id312.

Emboldened by the defensive streak of liberalism of the 1990s, which coupled self- realization with an antitotalitarian state project, this ideology dominated notions of change in the early days of the transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and galvanized public debates in Romania, although it "offers a historical case when neoliberalism is effectively rejected as a set of theories as well as a policy program.[19] Yet, although it dismisses policy mechanism, its radical distrust of democracy processes, made neoliberalism into a generous chest of identity narratives.

There has been renewed attention on the locus of neoliberalism in Central and Eastern Europe, specifically in its symbiotic relationship with the contestations of liberal democracy more recently.[20] Indeed, the same mainstream right-wing political circles that had supported neoliberal reforms, came to contest those in their populist turn[21], emboldened by what historian Adam Tooze calls the "forgotten" 2008 financial crisis in Eastern Europe[22] Viktor Orbán, otherwise a representative political figure of the "long 1990s" triumph of democracy in Hungary, has indeed argued for national sovereignty against the imposition or even "colonialism" of the EU[23], insisting that "foreign multinationals" are eating away at the structure of the state. This, despite Fidesz's use of an aggressive neoliberal politics in the country.[24] Equally, the conservative nationalist Polish PiS (Law and Justice Party) has criticized the tars of (neo)liberalism on the fabric of the nation, while simultaneously taking advantage of the relative economic comfort based on enduring neoliberal politics, legitimized also by former

[19] Ban, *Neoliberalism*, 29.
[20] Marlene Laruelle, "To understand today's social and moral transformation, study illiberalism", *The Loop*. Available online at: https://theloop.ecpr.eu/to-understand-todays-social-and-moral-transformation-study-illiberalism/.
[21] Michael Cox, "The Rise of Populism and the Crisis of Globalisation: Brexit, Trump and Beyond", *Irish Studies in International Affairs,* 28 (2017), 9–17. https://doi.org/10.3318/isia.2017.28.12; Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 6–20.
[22] Adam Tooze, *Crashed*, London: Allen Lane, 18.
[23] András Szilágy and Anna Bozóki, "Playing It Again in Post-Communism: The Revolutionary Rhetoric of Viktor Orbán in Hungary", *Advances in the History of Rhetoric,* 1, 1 (2015), 153–66. https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/15222756.pdf
[24] Nikola Petrović, "Divided national memories and EU crises: how Eurosceptic parties mobilize historical narratives", *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 32, 3 (2019), 363-384. DOI: 10.1080/13511610.2018.1523710.

dissidents, to strengthen its position.[25] These political groups have juggled such contradictions by reminding the public that the consensus of the 1990s was, in fact, a time of economic hardship, while often using memorial constructs to propose an alternative. The triumphant track to liberal democracy between 1991 and 1995, in reality, featured acute economic austerity and precarity aggravated by lofty economic and social "reformism". In this way, "illiberals" have successfully stoked real and unaddressed grievances about the 1990s and induced a sense of persecution and victimhood in emphasizing how the global "development" of the 1990s did not benefit all in the same way. In the following paragraphs, I trace the antecedents of these discourses, and articulate them in direct relationship with Europeanization.

Memory politics defined by the defensive perspective over liberalism supported iterations of neoliberalism in European memory narratives. It is evident in the way the text of the Declaration returns to a narrative about "backwardness" attached to the past.[26] The EU declaration 'scripts' this dynamic by doubling down on a notion of totalitarianism dear to political debates in the 1990s in the region, but which was problematic since the 2000s, due to narratives of persecution weaponized by various conservative actors. The link is a long-standing one: already for Friedrich Hayek writing in 1944, and for other neoliberal thinkers, freedom from any centralized political entity was about communism and National Socialism, and it was this freedom that was the key to the perfectibility of humankind.[27] It was on those bases that through memory regimes extolling the superiority of the West as protector of rights, anticommunism and liberalism became the only option for individual flourishing; it is through

[25] David Ost, "Authoritarian Drive in Poland", in Jo Harper, ed. *Poland's Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2018), 55–65. Stuart Shields, "Neoliberalism Redux: Poland's Recombinant Populism and its Alternatives." *Critical Sociology*, 41(4-5), 659-678. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513501349.

[26] I use the term in the same vein as Maria Todorova and others working on the Eastern European space, as a lack of "Western" modernity, that has defined the region in conceptual and empirical analyses. See Maria Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism", *Slavic Review*, 64 (1), 2005, 140-164.

[27] Neoliberals were, contrary to assumptions, very interested in the planning dimension of socialist societies, especially Austro-Marxism. See Martin Beddeleem, "Recoding Liberalism: Philosophy and Sociology of Science against Planning", in Plehwe and Slobodian eds., *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism*, 21- 46.

such memory regimes that economic development became inscribed as a marker of identity[28] (it is worthwhile mentioning here that neoliberal thinkers were key to the shaping of the European project since its early days, and this was only strengthened by the Central European variant after the 1990s).[29]

The current chapter takes a history of memory approach and shows how politics and narratives of defensive liberalism prevalent in Central Europe, on the one hand, and narratives of Europeanism, on the other, merged in understandings of collective memory produced by various European institutions, specifically as the memorial languages became attached to ideals of liberal democracy in all countries of the region, including Romania. The chapter zooms in on a portion of that process. By looking at 1990s Romanian debates, it establishes how cultural and social narratives of "development", "backwardness", and "underdevelopment" grew together with an "anti-totalitarian" memory and neoliberal discourses, and later carried onto the transnational European scene. As the tandem of a vulnerability of democracy and the strengthening of the state shaped these ideas of "development", memorial debates were restricted because this very same tandem was the main terrain in which narratives about European memory of "totalitarianism" expanded. The analysis presented here in some ways continues where the introduction left off, namely by attempting to resolve the question of a 'fatigue' with collective memory and Europeanization, and the explicit dissatisfaction with this becoming an ineffective narrative of liberalism by looking at the history of memory of the long 1990s in Romania.

[28] Jan-Werner Müller, "The Contours of Cold War Liberalism (Berlin's in Particular)", in Jan-Werner Müller, eds., *Isaiah Berlin's Cold War Liberalism* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2793-3_3.

[29] See Roberto Ventresca, "Neoliberal Thinkers and European Integration in the 1980s and the Early 1990s", *Contemporary European History*, 3, 6 (2021), 31-47. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000199; Cas Mudde, "Europe's Populist Surge: A Long Time in the Making", *Foreign Affairs*, 95, 6 (2016), 25-30.

The task at hand in this chapter is thus twofold: observing the development of political views in the 1990s in conjunction with both conservative and progressive Europeanism in Romanian and Central Eastern European debates, on the one hand, while also tracking their confluence with dynamics of "European" collective memory, on the other. By looking at the early presence of development in national and regional debates on anticommunism, and the latter's subsequent European trajectory, I show how European 'anti-totalitarianism' helped absorb almost seamlessly the more shadowy neoliberal constructs of the vulnerability and the fleeting character of democracy and the strength of the state, providing a suitable vehicle for later contestations of liberal democracy. It brings memory into this fold and argues that by tracking the cultural narratives of the economic philosophy of neoliberalism emerging in the early 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe, one can also understand the type of silencing that dominated the memory landscape of the 1990s, which set the tone for much of the subsequent debates on political violence. The current chapter starts from this tension between a transnational European memory angle where this type of development is posited (yet again) as a positive alternative, and a national memorial landscape of a profoundly fraught political space.[30]

An engagement with multiple scales in this chapter is essential to understanding how memory politics plays out in liberal democracy. First, the dominance of global neoliberal economics was key to shaping Romanian debates in relation to the early 1990s. Secondly, we can note the influence of the European dimension, which continued to define identity debates in Central and Eastern Europe, and consequently in Romania, together with the global consensus. Finally, there is the national scale, which was intensely reactive to the previous two but also stood out as unique in the region.

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[30] Aliaksei Kazharski, "The End of 'Central Europe'? The Rise of the Radical Right and the Contestation of Identities in Slovakia and the Visegrad Four", *Geopolitics*, 23, 4 (2018), 754–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1389720.

2. The "Return to Europe" and the Heritage of Underdevelopment

In the early 1990, Pavel Câmpeanu, a Romanian sociologist preoccupied with the social circumstances of the end of the Cold War, asked a question that was on many other minds at the time: what needs to be done so that the political change accelerates, how do we move on further faster from the inevitable social crisis of the aftermath?[31] The concern with being unable to relinquish "communism", both economically (and culturally), fast enough pervaded all public debates in Romania. Câmpeanu was a respected Marxist sociologist published internationally, who largely adhered to the "end of history" perspective in that he saw no alternative to the teleological terms of the political change.[32] The end was in sight, and advancement could be achieved primarily through economic and political awakening.[33] For instance, the column entitled 'Marketplace of Ideas' was a staple of the *România Liberă* newspaper and ran daily for several years after 1989 for anyone to pose questions and ponder over essential questions.[34] For Câmpeanu, as for other journalists and academics, fast modernization was vital to 'correct' a broken path imposed after 1945, following the logic of modernization theory. Arguably, political and economic realities, and more generally a form of "oppressed" identity, made anything radical, in terms of social change, welcome, as Mihai Chioveanu argues. [35]

But Câmpeanu also represents a particularly local Romanian perspective: a plan of action was needed to address the political and social inadequacy of national affairs in the new capitalist order. Stepping into liberalism meant emancipation, a "way out" from immaturity. If

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[31] Pavel Câmpeanu quoted in, „Criza la vreme de tranziție", *Tribuna*, March 23rd, 1994.
[32] Pavel Câmpeanu, *Exit: Toward Post-Stalinism* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), 12-16.
[33] Mark, Iacob, Rupprecht and Spaskovska, *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe,* 87-95.
[34] "Piața de Idei" column, *România Liberă*, editions January, February, Bucharest, 1990, 1-2. BCUB, BU 1385, vol. 90-01.
[35] Chioveanu works within the "modernization" frame, and in that he identified radicalism in politics. See Mihai Chioveanu, "The "strike" of periphery: the twisted road from backwardness to political radicalism in Eastern Europe", *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review,* 11(3) 2013, 447-458. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-446504.

curbing the length of "transition" demanded radical action, so be it. Ideas about sending ordinary citizens abroad and calling foreigners to the region, in a type of social engineering, were frequent in the Romanian and Hungarian and Polish press at the time.[36] It seemed to be a project meant to overhaul society at large. Darwinian theorist and philosopher Pierre de Chardin was widely circulated in the press at the time and treasured for his "vitalist" view of democracy. There was a biological and "organic" way of human organization for those able, democracy, argued Chardin.[37] Certain groups were depicted as unprepared or incapable of practising democracy; chiefly among those were post-socialist societies that were behind and unprepared for the democratic spirit.[38] A general "lagging behind" of society was the constant reference in relation to the region in his texts. Indeed, what we read in texts like Câmpeanu's is a hope for radical change, kept alive by a narrative of underdevelopment that pervaded intellectual debates, party politics and general social debate in the area.

At the same time, there was not that much trust in democracy among Romanian commentators, which was rather seen as synonymous with social tension and potential conflict.[39] Instead, economics seemed to garner more social trust in an intellectual space where freedom was the main bind, and notions of market competition and planning evoked choice in reaching personal potential. For instance, the transformation came with its own epistemologies[40], sensibilities and new dimensions to cultivate for the individual: liberal values, a type of "emancipated" mindset, as argues a journalist in 1990.[41] There were the "good" and the "bad", "winners" and "losers" in this shift towards the "new sense of entrepreneurial

[36] Ban, *Neoliberalism*, 23.
[37] The mystically tinged articles of Chardin were often reproduced and translated in the Romanian press at the time, *România Liberă*, January 24, 1990. BCUB, BU 1385, vol. 90-01.
[38] Jeffrey Goldfarb, "Post-Totalitarian Politics: Ideology Ends Again", *Social Research,* 4, 1(1990), 533–56. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40970600.
[39] Timotei Jurjică, "Sfârșitul Entuziasmului", *Timpul*, Bucharest, 21 September, 1991.
[40] Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, "Thinking between the posts: Postcolonialism, postsocialism, and ethnography after the Cold War", *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 51, 1(2009), 6-34. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27563729
[41] Nicolae Macovei, "O fundatură: socialismul liberal", *Cotidianul*, Bucharest, 17 January, 1996.

management of the self", and those personas grounded a social and cultural transformative modernization.[42] For instance, the "transition" demands of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the 1990s in Eastern Europe meant a systemic reconstruction, having to do with cultural notions of identity just as much as economics, as a Romanian journalist argued in 1991.[43] A new identity crystallized in Central Eastern Europe, where the "entrepreneurial" self and market economy were about the flexibility and willingness of the political subject to adapt to liberal democracy.

Consequently, visions drawing on Friedrich Hayek's 1944 *Road to Serfdom* view on economics and social space organized in such a way as to offer the parameters of freedom were highly relevant.[44] They linked up with the central concern of the time in Central and Eastern Europe: the shadow of "totalitarianism" and the limits and potential of the state.[45] What neoliberalism presented was a vision of capitalism which did not need democracy, which, as Quinn Slobodian argues, "focused on designing institutions to inoculate capitalism against the threat of democracy".[46] It was the Mont Pèlerin Society's views, explicitly anticommunist and historically shaped by the Austro-Hungarian ordoliberal tradition, that became relevant for the Central European context.[47] As Cornel Ban argues in the case of Romania, it was a national neoliberalism at work, that has "slightly modified old goals of neoliberal orthodoxy embedded into a protective cocoon of orthodox and unorthodox economic policy instruments

[42] Plehwe, Slobodian, *The Nine Lives of Neoliberalism*, 14.
[43] Costel Ionescu, "Viața fiecăruia să curgă firesc", *Cotidianul*, Bucharest, April 8, 1995. BCUB.
[44] Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London, New York: Routledge, 1944).
[45] Lawn, Prentice. "Neoliberal Cultures, The Cultures of Neoliberalism*"*.
[46] Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of the Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 2.
[47] Emerging in the 1930s and 1940s, neoliberalism's most influential ideologues were associated with the University of Chicago and the (anticommunist) European think tank the Mont Pelerin Society. The American group held different opinions than the Geneva-based MPS. For the importance of the Austrian school and the MPS in Europe, see Slobodian, *Globalists*, especially ch. 3. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5–31; Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism,* 65.

and institutions”.[48] He makes an important point in that value narratives also influenced the imaginary space of this ideology: these also included historical legacies of trauma.

The interesting insight that these conditions offer concerns the type of change that the “progressives” in the region were hoping for, which, if looking at the intellectual debates at the time, feared the inevitable radicalism of the change. In fact, political change was approached with great caution, primarily because of the potential of politics to bring too much, too fast, to an ailing region. Indeed, a weariness in regard to political change and a type of cautiousness when it came to the gains of this process pervaded politics, which revolved around the notion of the frailty and limits of the individual. One of the core dimensions of neoliberal thought is that these limitations were also in line with the type of liberalism circulated in Romania, which challenged the Enlightenment's impetus. This is evident in the debates encouraged by the Romanian *22* magazine, published by *Grupul de Dialog Social*, an NGO that gathered many of the young liberals at the time (or at least anticommunist regime voices), and was a platform for all these societal reflections. Here one could read dissidents, such as Poland's Adam Michnik, calling for an “anti-utopian revolution” that would just “avoid the Gulag”.[49] Normality was also the focus of Czechoslovakia's Václav Havel when he argued the political change “was an opportunity to do away with its abnormality” and he too was often present in the pages of this magazine.[50] “Normality” was not only about a type of desire of the West, it also said something about the imaginary of the political field, which was not really defined as a community alliance, but an individual process of improvement.[51]

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[48] Cornel Ban, Gabor Scheiring and Mihai Vasile, “The political economy of national-neoliberalism”, *European Politics and Society*, 24, (1) 2023, 96-114, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2021.1956241.

[49] Quoted in Roger Cohen, “The Accommodations of Adam Michnik”, *New York Times Magazine*, 7 November 1999. https://www.nytimes.com/1999/11/07/magazine/the-accommodations-of-adam-michnik.html

[50] Quoted in Ivan Krastev, “Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents,” *Journal of Democracy*, 2018. https://doi.org/https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/explaining-eastern-europe-imitation-and-its-discontents-2/. Last accessed March 1, 2019.

[51] Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, “Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents”, *Journal of Democracy,* 29, 3 (2018), 117-28. https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/explaining-eastern-europe-imitation-and-its-discontents-2. The notion of “normality”, however, has a long history and complex narratives in the area, see Licia Cianetti, James Dawson and Seán Hanley, “Rethinking ‘democratic backsliding’ in Central and

Such unassuming ambitions did not impress the European intellectual circles at the time, and the rose-tinted or self-reflexive outlook of the former dissidents contrasted with the scepticism in the 'progressive' nature of these events by the European intellectual community, most famously François Furet and Jürgen Habermas.[52] Yet, Romanian actors at the time did not seem to be bothered by the "catch-up" dimension that Habermas lamented.[53] Instead, they cherished principles of "civil disobedience" and "civilized negotiations" as key revolutionary tools, and human rights, antipolitics and non-politics – a refrain from any deliberative process, specifically involving political parties - as shapers of public debate in the region because these stood apart from radical dictatorship. [54]

So how did commentators reconcile the desire to move faster, to change radically and the weariness of accepting the implications? In Romania, most of these negotiations returned to the transformative political potential of the 1989-1990 events, which were often reduced to "reform". For instance, in an article in 1993, Angela Rogojanu, a journalist, argued that most of the discussions on reform boiled down to "minimal state versus a present state, from economics to social life", which conditioned the extent to which any political power could be contested.[55] The interest in the "state" was conditioned by the narrative of transition, not in the affirmative, but in the negative, as a possible and imminent "failure" of political order.[56] The political liberal mainstream was consumed by the idea that the fate of the Easterners was subsumed in a 'Transition Era', "truly a miracle of epic historical proportion" where capitalism

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Eastern Europe – looking beyond Hungary and Poland", *East European Politics* 34, 3(2018), 243-256. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2018.1491401.

[52] Furet quoted in Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2005), 27. But also more recent interventions show the same scepticism at the time, Wlodzimierz Aniol, "On Three Modernisation Narratives in Poland after 1989", *International Journal of Social Economics*, 42, (9) (2015), 777-790. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJSE-03-2015-0075/full/html.

[53] Jurgen Habermas, "What does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left", *New Left Review,* 183 (9), 1990, 5-7.

[54] Florin Mirgheșiu, "De la antipolitică la politica de stat", *Graiul Sălajului,* September 2 1998. See also Müller, *Contesting Democracy*, 202-205.

[55] Angela Rogojanu, 'Statul minimal și libertatea maximală", *Alternativa (Cotidianul*), February 3, 1995.

[56] Peter Hitchcock, "The Failed State and the State of Failure", *Mediations* 23, 2 (2008), 74. http://www.doaj.org/doaj?func=fulltext&aId=395161%5Cnhttp://www.mediationsjournal.org/files/Mediations23_2_03.pdf. Last accessed March 17, 2017.

“has always been associated with progress”.[57] Ksenia Robbe describes the transition as a time “imbued with endless hopes for freedom and societal transformation, far beyond the claims of a global triumph of capitalism”.[58] A concept “oriented towards the wished-for democratic future, the more optimistic, liberal-oriented 1990s; the time of market and democracy building and the imagined ‘return to Europe’”, as Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik have characterized the transition.[59] It was the one plan that responded to Jürgen Habermas’s contention there was no future thinking in the area about the expectations of 1989.[60] Economic transformation and “development” seemed to concentrate all possible types of transformations, including that of the individual and the citizen whose success was subsumed to economic success.

This identity narrative associated with ‘reform’ was such an ubiquitous discourse that it prompted anthropologists like Katherine Verdery and Daphne Berdahl to argue that 'transition' turned into an intellectual concept with dangerous teleologic and evolutionary undertones.[61] Verdery contends:

> This scepticism comes from being not at all sure about what those central concepts—private property, democracy, markets, citizenship, and civil society—actually mean. They are symbols in the constitution of our own “Western” identity.[62]

The notion of ‘transition’ in fact only accentuated the cultural disconnect between the former East and West, and reinforced narratives of underdevelopment. Berdahl and others hinted at it becoming an ambiguous terrain where the cultural tones superseded political or economic implications.[63] This focus on transition reproduced normative principles concerning

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[57] Edward Tiryakian, “The New Worlds and Sociology: An Overview”, *International Sociology*, 9 (1994). https://doi.org/10.1177/026858094009002001, 23-31.
[58] Ksenia Robbe,"'Anything Is Possible': Rethinking the Politics of Transition through a Poetics of Failure in the Works of William Kentridge and Dmitry Gutov”, *Third Text,* 30, 5–6 (2016), 403–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2017.1355164.
[59] Kopeček and Wciślik, *Thinking Through Transition,* 1.
[60] Habermas, ”What does Socialism Mean Today? 5-7.
[61] See Daphne Berdahl, *On the Social Life of Postsocialism: Memory, Consumption, Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 95–96; Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 15–16.
[62] Ibid.,16.
[63] Berdahl, *On the Social Life*, 37-40.

"modernity" and implicitly modernization, where it seemed people who lived in a space under transformation were not merely at the bottom but also at the beginning.

So central to political discourse was the feeling that the countries needed "to catch up" that the 'interruption' of dictatorship made for a shameful history because it did not meet the demands of liberal democracy and instead perpetuated an underdevelopment attached to the (communist) past. The underlying idea was that the "past" would be corrected by this new ethos of overlapping freedom and economic development creating a sense of the morals (of the markets) in the region. Notions about liberal democracy often relied on emphatic ideas of nation to describe change, reform and making up for lagging behind the "West".[64] The cultural perspective, where transition was bound together with the merits of democracy, wealth, and individuality, might also explain the enduring credibility that this concept still has in Romanian debates. A month after the Romanian revolution, Silviu Brucan, a political scientist active in the former regime, assessed the outcome of the December 1989 events in an interview with French magazine *Le Figaro*, arguing that the country will need twenty years "to learn democracy" and to make the transition possible. "Eastern Europe" should acknowledge that transition is the one path to self-understanding as a new adaptation of Western modernity. Brucan seemed equally credible in September 2014, when the Romanian *Adevărul* newspaper ran an extensive piece entitled: "Why Romania is not different", referencing Silviu Brucan".[65] Although some lamented the broader circumstances that allowed the former chief editor of the communist *Scânteia* (The Spark), the main propaganda news outlet, to be such a credible voice in general, journalist Radu Mitrean commented on the collective idealism of the 1990s politics reflected in the transition.[66]

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[64] Ioan Cișmaș, "România și Occidentul", *Cuvântul*, August 1999.
[65] Redactia, "De ce nu e România altfel. Ce a fost greşit în celebra previziune a lui Silviu Brucan făcută pentru 'Le Figaro' în 1990 ", *Adevărul*, April 3, 2014, https://Adevărul.ro/news/societate/de-nu-e-romania-altfel-fost-gresit-celebra-previziune-silviu-brucan-facuta-le-figaro-1990-1_533d3e140d133766a8772c57/index.html. Last accessed April 17, 2020.
[66] Ibid.

"Democracy", thus, was defined along straightforward lines. In March 1990, the liberal magazine *22* in Bucharest translated one of American sociologist Jeffrey Goldfarb's articles, as a sort of call to arms. Goldfarb ends his article by saying:

> The political projects of the Enlightenment preceded Marxism and socialism and remain vibrant after a new end of ideologies. Now that the Cold War is over, a more sustained struggle for democracy should start.[67]

He argued that ideas of democracy, rights, and rationality should be salvaged and separated from the Marxist experience. Such opinions succeeded in salvaging not only the Enlightenment project, but the credibility of Cold War liberalism. The revolutionary ideas of the Left were particularly discredited in those years by the new, liberal-minded citizens, who could equate such ideas only to oppression and associated change. Historian Robert Brier has argued that it was frequently dissidents who easily lent their critical voice to communitarian and national concerns.[68] For instance, the dissident Hungarian writer György Konrad employed his experience of resistance to propose a political practice where governments that are unwilling to speak to their citizens are obliged to respond to activism: for him, a type of "antipolitics". [69]

Such perspectives contributed to a generalized call for a devaluation of politics. The "cultural" perspective tended to conflate politics with other identity concerns. A vision of "antipolitics" defined a version of the future simply as reconciliation via a notion of innocence and purity of the individual who refuses to participate in the negotiations of politics.[70] Those involved in the debate of the 1990s were indeed trying to understand how the political question could be avoided altogether, in order to encourage a new political alternative in Romania. It fell under what political theorist Wendy Brown describes as the "culturalization of politics" proper to neoliberalism, which applies well to the Romanian context:

[67] Goldfarb,"Post-Totalitarian Politics", 25.
[68] Brier, "Introduction.", 17.
[69] György Konrad, *Antipolitics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984), 227; see also David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
[70] Miriam Ticktin, "A World without Innocence", *Journal of the American Ethnological Society* 44, 4 (2017), 577-590. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1111/amet.12558.

> The culturalization of politics analytically vanquishes political economy, states, history, and international and transnational relations. It eliminates colonialism, capital, caste or class stratification, and external political domination from accounts of political conflict or instability. In their stead, "culture" is summoned to explain the motives and aspirations leading to certain conflicts.[71]

Brown argues elsewhere that this type of politics of neoliberalism brings "inequality, subordination, marginalization and social conflict".[72] Her perspective reveals the trouble with the unfettered rise of (neo)liberalism, which replaced the justice project, central to liberalism, with a therapeutic understanding of politics, that focuses on appeasing collective demands or past histories. Politics is less about societal governance and more about a reaction to contexts of the present or to the past. Depoliticization replaced the political phenomena with an "ontological naturalness or essentialism" and it is these personal vocabularies that have become essential in our understanding of politics.[73] Neoliberal notions of a frail social fabric and the idea that personal limits can be overcome only by honing the self-resonated with the narrative of freedom of the 1990 Cold War liberalism. The boom of neoliberal economics in the 1970s was facilitated by the politics of the Cold War where anti-authoritarian discourses (primarily anticommunist) served the cause of development. [74]

This culturalization of politics was primarily evident in Romania with the debate about "Europe", that took over much of the necessary reconsiderations about the political role of the individual in the aftermath of dictatorship. The notions "Europeanism" and "Europe" had a crucial role in defining a civilizational standard for Romania. For instance, *The Civic Proclamation of Timişoara* (Proclamaţia de la Timişoara)*,* formulated by protesters during the events of 1989, stated that "although we argue for a 're-Europeanization of Romania' we do not want to copy Western capitalist systems":

[71] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 20.
[72] Ibid., 15-16.
[73] Ibid., 15.
[74] David Neilson, "Bringing in the 'Neoliberal Model of Development'", *Capital & Class,* 44, 1 (2020). 85–108, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816819852746.

> The Revolution was not only anti-Ceauşescu, but categorically "anticommunist. (…)" In consensus with the aspirations of millions of people across Europe, we asked for the abolishing of this totalitarian and bankrupt social system. The ideal of our Revolution has always been a return to the authentic values of European democracy and civilisation.[75]

Regionally in Central and Eastern Europe, and specifically in Romania, Europe solidified into a symbol of progress which also seemed to soften the radical political transformation of the 'transition'. 'Europe' added another "value" of moralism to liberalism. Writing about Romanian politics in the early 1990s, anthropologist Katherine Verdery argued Europeanization is "at one and the same time a statement of political intentions and a statement of national identity".[76] In the 1990s, it was about identity in the future tense, what society "can" become, and a specific interest in virtualizations of the future.

It is a framing that could be best described through the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty, who takes Europe as the site of "modernity" of many cultural geographies.[77] A standalone entity, 'Europe' provided a political formulation that could also rhyme with the sovereignty desired by all Central and Eastern European governments. No longer broken into a duality between East and West, it was an alternative suitable for the development project. Europe became the ideal for all parties involved to attain – though not to engage with critically. Historian Tony Judt emphasized it was not capitalism, but Europe signifying the "new" postcolonial.[78] But this "banal Europeanism" solidified a terrain for "development" to become a vehicle for a type of slim version of democracy but with a strong focus on the institutional, which is paramount for the neoliberal sphere. A narrative closely linked to Europe's "modernizing" dimension during

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[75]"Revoluţia de la Timişoara a fost încă din primele ei ore, nu doar anticeauşista ci şi categoric anticomunista. În toate zilele Revoluţiei s-a scandat, de sute de ori: "Jos comunismul!". În consens cu aspiraţia sutelor de milioane de oameni din Estul Europei, am cerut şi noi abolirea imediată a acestui sistem social totalitar şi falimentar. Idealul Revoluţiei noastre a fost şi a rămas reîntoarcerea la valorile autentice ale democraţiei şi civilizaţie europene."Article 1, "Proclamaţia de La Timişoara", 1989. http://enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Proclamaţia_de_la_Timişoara#Textul_Proclama.C5.A3iei. Last accessed February 3, 2020.

[76] Verdery, *What is Socialism,* 105.

[77] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7-10.

[78] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 690.

"the long 1990s" was an abstracted form of cosmopolitanism interrupted by communism. For instance, Gabriel Andreescu, otherwise an incisive writer and analyst of the conservative and extremist undercurrent of Central and Eastern European politics, supports these constructs in his books *Locurile unde se construieşte Europa* (Places where Europe is Built) and *Nationalişti, Antinaţionalişti* (Nationalists, Antinationalists), where he illustrates a belief of public intellectuals that Europe is a 'societal' mobilizer.[79] He sees it as the formative debate of the time, not in political terms of left and right, but simply as a possibility to advance liberal affordances in the country.[80]

Cultural narratives about development relied on and shaped historiography produced at the time.[81] The new debates and horizons offered by liberalism or Europeanization reframed the writing of history and made it blend seamlessly into public policy, personal history, and memory. Representations of the past, or collective memory at large, were defined by notions of transition and catching up from underdevelopment. Deeply embedded in the "transitional" type of discourses, historiography analysed deficiencies in more general terms of "historical differences" that "need to be re-claimed" and reconsidered. Rather, what grounded them was an avoidance of ideology altogether, whether leftist or centrist.[82] This trope endures today in historiography, as it often returns to the idea of "lagging behind', historicizing the notion of the "nation" in relation to Europe.[83] Still in 2015, historian Bogdan Murgescu discussed Romanian economic history in terms of a delay with regard to the West.[84] Political scientist Alexandru

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[79] Gabriel Andreescu, *Naționaliști, antinaționaliști* (o polemică în publicistica românească) (Iași: Polirom, 1996).
[80] Gabriel Andreescu în dialog cu Adrian Severin, *Locuri în care se construiește Europa* (Bucharest: Polirom 2000).
[81] Kristian Petrov, "'Transition' in Hindsight: 1990s Transitology as an Object of Intellectual History", in Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Niklas Bernsand and Eleonora Narvselius eds., *Beyond Transition?* (Lund: Lund University Press 2014), 11.
[82] Trencsényi, Kopeček, Gabrijelčič, Falina and Baár, 45-47.
[83] It is a well-accepted perspective in scholarship, practised by contemporary historians who themselves tend to adopt this developmental outlook. See for instance the publication of historian Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa: Acumularea Decalajelor Economice (1500-2010)* (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2010), especially the Introduction, 2-13.
[84] Ibid., 4-13.

Gussi similarly described the contradictions of the 1990s when he weighed in on the anticommunist discourse, as a mode of action and a tale about the past between modernization and cosmopolitanism.[85] Historian Cornel Ban has also recently discussed this cultural debate as a cultural history of economics in the 1990s where the determination to rethink the national political space and to shape it into something else was essential.[86]

It was a terrain shaped by a particularly selective image of the past. Advocates of pragmatic "scripting" of the past were many. For the circles around *22* magazine the very radicalness of doing away with recent political history was the only way towards liberal democracy. The genre emerging in the 1990s focused on the post-history of totalitarianism functioning not "as a field, but rather prescrib[ing] what needs to be done".[87] Debates saw a growing popularity of autobiographical, political and philosophical polemics that had to do with the geopolitics of the post-Cold War global order. This genre often mainstreamed conservative or reactionary narratives, and a distinct avoidance of the notion of class, socio-economic turmoil or inequality.[88] Take, for instance, Ioan Scurtu's *Revoluția Română din Decembrie 1989 în context internațional* (The Romanian 1989 Revolution in the International Context), a book published in 2009, which professed to be "the first unbiased history of the events and shed light on a painful and controversial topic.[89] The book is centred around the thesis that 1989 goes back to a project interrupted in 1948, and consequently is a "return" to Europe. Also, historians like Gheorghe Buzatu saw the issue of anti-Semitism as an afterthought of imperial borders,

[85] Alexandru Gussi, "Anticomunismul Necesar", *22*, Bucharest, June 2013, https://ziare.com/politica/stiri-politice/alexandru-gussi-in-revista-22-anticomunismul-necesar-1235264. Last accessed March 3, 2019.
[86] Cornel Ban, *Ruling Ideas: How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 116–33. Although very different in scope, also relevant might be Maria Todorova's insightful analysis on the parallel (and its limits) between 'Orientalism' and 'Balkanism' and on the implications "of the Balkans' semi-colonial ideas". See Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.
[87] Igor Barsegian, "When Text Becomes Field: Fieldwork in Transitional Societies", in Hermine de Soto eds., *Fieldwork Dilemma, Anthropologists in Postsocialist States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2000), 19–29.
[88] Ban, "Beyond Anticommunism".
[89] Ioan Scurtu, professor of contemporary history in Bucharest, one of the most visible historians in public debates. See Ioan Scurtu, *Revoluția Română din Decembrie 1989 în context international* (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Revoluției Române din Decembrie 1989, 2009), 5-8.

specifically Austro-Hungarian.[90] He, too, exonerates a form of interwar, progressive Europeanism.

The modernizing times of 1920s and the 1930s Romania were considered prime examples of a prosperous time, driving the recovery of the interwar period in historiography.[91] The violent history of the opposition between right and left lacked in this idealist iteration of the capitalism of the interwar period, and there were few references to the authoritarian monarchy at the time.[92] A critique of collectivism during the interwar period, rooted in the idea of political transformations brought by this "golden age", came to have a crucial role in upholding neoliberalism in the early 1990s. These images were also very evident in the era's cultural production in Romania because many interpretations of history were made to be synonymous with identity. Siobhan Kattago argues that the imaginary line of 1989, in fact, imposed particularly glowing perspectives on liberalism and implicitly on its roots.[93]

Furthermore, while the Romanian "dissident" figure was somewhat absent in the early years, in contrast to Poland for instance, radical anticommunists took its place in Romanian debates.[94] A tightly knit group of "liberal intellectuals", sometimes returning from abroad, were not only memory entrepreneurs but also distinctly "culturalist" (and US-oriented). Individuals like Vladimir Tismăneanu, Viorel Ruse and Stelian Tănase were the young generation of historians. They referenced a "Soviet" time as a 'monolith' phase and identified with a type of late-Cold War conservative anticommunism. Pushing for a modernization idea, they were intriguingly referencing a lost history of liberalism (because of communism) while referring to the (neo)liberalism of the 1970s, the entrepreneurial drive and the new reality of economics as

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[90] Gheorghe Buzatu, *Mareșalul Antonescu în fața istoriei* (Bucharest: Litera, 1993).
[91] Irina Livezeanu, "Romanian Cultural Wars: Intellectual Debates about the Recent Past", 2003.
[92] The complicity of the monarchy (Carol II) with far-right ideologies and the active support for Marshal Antonescu's ascent are particularly not visible in debates on the development of the far-right.
[93] Siobhan Kattago, *Memory and Representation in Contemporary Europe: The Persistence of the Past* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 109.
[94] Iacob, "The Criminalisation of Communism", 3.

necessarily progressive. For many, however, this progressive dimension seemed to be a double-edged sword, a necessity of sorts but also an imposition.

Indeed, the plurality of allegiances to 'anticommunism' as "banal Europeanism" and development unified vastly divergent interests and groups to the extent that the messages of the self-declared liberals or conservatives were often the same.[95] This discourse on modernization brought together divergent political identities and motivations, such as the far-right, the socialist left and the liberals.[96] As liberalism necessarily "required consensus" and therefore one unitary image of the past, the seeds of the Cold War definition still represented a credible perspective. Mirosław Dzielski, philosopher, and an active member of the Solidarity movement, called this a "constructive anticommunism"[97] that merged a past perspective of the Cold War with one directed against the regime's traces in the present. The Romanian opposition to the National Salvation Front relied on the relevance that prominent groups of former dissidents in Eastern Europe granted it[98]. Theirs was a "reconstructive" narrative, where nationalism, liberal democracy and Europe blended into a discourse of transitional reformism.

3. Consensus and the Trauma of Politics

Cultural readings of underdevelopment, that is the mobilization of notions of victimhood, primarily socio-economic, to virtualize progress and rupture with a time of regression in the immediate future, were essential in the 1990s. This distinct focus on identity influenced the prospects imagined for the new liberal democracy. Since the communist past

[95] Alexandru Gussi, *La Roumanie Face à Son Passé Communiste: Mémoires et Cultures Politiques* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2011), 5.
[96] Michal Kopeček, "From Narrating Dissidence to Post-Dissident Narratives of Democracy: Anti-totalitarianism, Politics of Memory and Culture Wars in East-Central Europe 1970s–2000s", in Pavel Barša, Zora Hesová, Ondřej Slačálek eds., *Central European Culture Wars: Beyond Postcommunism and Populism* (Prague: Humanitas, 2021), 44-46.
[97] For a broader discussion see Piotr Wciślik, "Totalitarianism and the limits of the Polish Dissidents Political Thought", in Wciślik and Kopeček*, Thinking Through Transition*, 140-160.
[98] Gussi, *La Roumanie Face à Son Passé Communiste,* 13-18.

was the main problematic spectre, evoking too much politics – agitation, mobilization, activism – this legacy was, first and foremost, seen as a "bad" trait of the revolutionary project of the Left.[99] As shown above, the consensus was that liberalism represented a cultural and social alternative, that radical identitarian change, although unsettling, was the only option that would bring about a new vision of Romanian political options.

Collective memory narratives were from the start invoked in this context by specifically offering a way of conducting public debate, that wished to avoid, or turn away from, controversy. Only certain histories, and even more selective politics of memory, were acceptable. Discourses around the recent past developed around a "thick line" meant to keep the past at a "usable" but safe distance. It is Polish political leader Tadeusz Mazowiecki that voiced this leitmotif for the region when he argued in the Polish Sejm (Parliament) in 1989 that "we will be responsible only for what we have done to help extract Poland from her current predicament, from now on"[100]. It was consequently acceptable for Ion Cristoiu, a prominent Romanian journalist, to argue for amnesty in the spirit of reconciliation since the momentum for trials has been lost. Similarly, debates avoided nationalist political expressions and more generally tried to refrain from a political reflection on the past.[101] Consequently, the "politics of forgetting" were desirable and constructive and guaranteed the "Europeanizing" future.[102]

It was the early Social Democrats and the Frontul Salvării Naţionale (National Salvation Front, NSF) party that practised this "forgetting" in their narrative about reconciliation through "silence" and "equilibrium". To them, political critique was synonymous with a loss of identity, sovereignty or even hegemony.[103] Political turmoil was a threat and only a normative consensus

[99] See here the discourses of the political parties in power at the time.
[100] Quoted in Magdalena Góra and Zdzisław Mach, "The Polish Elites' Struggle for Recognition of the Experience of Communism in the European Union" in Tea Sindbæk Andersen Barbara Törnquist-Plewa eds. *The Twentieth Century in European Memory Transcultural Mediation and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 56-83, 64.
[101] Ion Cristoiu, "Justitie de tranziție", *Evenimentul Zilei*, Bucharest: June 1995.
[102] The term appears rarely in literature on Romania. One notable exception is Gussi, *La Roumanie face à son passé* and Rusu, who refers to "Amnesis" see Rusu "Transitional Politics of Memory".
[103] Called the National Salvation Front until 1992 and then the Social Democrat Party; the main political organization, comprising many of the former members of the communist party. Examined in hindsight, they have

could prevent a crisis that could potentially destabilize a fragile state.[104] For instance, the populist discourses of the NSF referred to the "dangerous intermezzo" that opposition to the government represents. The concern was that too much political activity would weigh on a previously heavily ideologized public sphere. A lack of consensus was synonymous with an impending halt of "progress". The NSF proposed a type of "third way", a compromise between socialism and capitalism branded as an "original democracy" ("democrație originală"). Explained "as an alternative to what "Western democracies" had been since the 1970s (to be read as rife with debate) this model of statism for the Social Democrats was necessarily a compromise. In 1993, the NSF discussed the political options that were available and stated that:

> Social democracy has been the foundation of Europe after 1945, but it was waning in the late 1970s. We, therefore, cannot repeat the same mistakes - and it is of utmost importance we take care of this since there is no social control of the capital in our country.[105]

In fact, underdevelopment drove the NSF's concept of "original democracy" and their fiercely conservative, nationalist agenda that lay behind discourses of "consensus". While the liberals equated the transition with the fight against the "neo-communist" threat and waged presumably a struggle for an ideal of democracy, NSF's Iliescu argued in 1992:

> Stalinism cannot be considered a leftist type of thinking. Soviet Socialism was, in its essence, a state capitalism with a socialist cloak. The 1989 revolution thus was never an anti-socialist revolution. It did not belong to the right. Who was the engine? The communists. Party members were the most active in these events, and the working class.[106]

This restrictive narrative was further aggravated by the fact that much of the debate on the past at the time did not make room for the group of vocal former dissidents or that both liberals and conservatives shared anticommunist views grounded in the Cold War. Romanian

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been the longest-running political group in power since the 1989 transformation. See Siani Davis, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989*, 15-20.

[104] "Information note ahead of the February elections", 300-120-29, box 247/2, 13, Open Society Archives, henceforth OSA, Central European University, Budapest.

[105] Ibid, 18.

[106] "PDSR, Comunicat de Presă, March 17 1992", Records of Radio Free Europe, 300-80-10, Box 234, 14, OSA, Budapest.

debates retrieved stories and histories from elsewhere in the region, such as those of the Polish Solidarity movement and the apolitical notion of resistance to communism found in texts by emblematic dissidents like Adam Michnik and Václav Havel. In August 1990, the Romanian newspapers widely praised the "Polish phenomenon" when referring to Gdansk's political mobilization around 1980-1990.[107] Articles by Adam Michnik dominated much of the oppositional press with a somewhat elusive narrative of past solidarity, that showed little preoccupation with the contemporary concerns of the 1990s.[108]

Indeed, the anticommunism of 1956 and the Solidarity movement mobilized organizations like the Grupul pentru dialog social (The Group for Social Dialogue) and other new political platforms in the region, including Romania.[109] The strength of concepts such as 'antipolitics' showed that public opinion opposed politics altogether. [110] It conveyed resistance to politicization, infusing anything with a political value or even placing topics in the political arena. Antipolitics was, for instance, a concept also often invoked by the Institutul Totalitarismului (Institute for National Memory and Totalitarianism) in conferences and publications in the early 2000s.[111] The intention was to transcend political factions and moralize politics, that is, to imprint it with an identity and value dimension outside the confines of one discourse or another. This vision included a new European "reunification" ideal, which was now finally within the grasp of the East. "You cannot advance towards Europe without taking a firm distance from the Soviet period, and human rights abuse", one author argued. [112]

Here we can recognize a form of Jay Winter's "liturgical silencing" that steered away from the past by perpetuating a narrative where development had been interrupted by

[107] Dorin Teodorescu, "Sindicatele în România", *Radical*, Sibiu, January 12 1991.
[108] Adam Michnik, "După 2 ani" in *22*, Bucharest, June 1992. BCUB BU Z 871, vol. 4.
[109] The *22* magazine is an eloquent example along with *România Literară*, in the early 1990s.
[110] See György Konrád, *Antipolitics: An Essay,* San Diego: Harcourt, 1984. See also Muller, *Contesting Democracy*, 228-232.
[111] Conference organized in 2011.
[112] In Igor Cașu, "Nu poţi să avansezi spre Europenizare fără o voinţă fermă de distanţare de crimele și încălcările flagrante ale dreptului omului din perioada dovietică", *Contrafort*, 1-2 (181-182), 2008. http://www.contrafort.md/old/2010/181-182/1779.html

communism.[113] Silencing occurred because of ambitions of belonging to the Europeanizing sphere, not against these, because the past needed to be recalibrated so that it fit the ideation of European character. Renaming streets, removing inscriptions of the past in the public space were symbols of renewal or deliberate attempts to counter "nostalgia" for the old regime. Much of the 1990s saw debates on whether a vaguely defined museum of communism was necessary, for instance, because it could have triggered unwanted reflections. Journalist Maria Tufan agreed that the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism was enough because it depicted the regime's murderous and illegal beginnings.[114] Mircea Anania, an architect, asked whether the absurdity of the past regime should even be mentioned.[115] The preferred contours of silencing were those moving the focus away from political content and focusing on the moral dimension of victimhood. At the time, the public space was almost violently emptied of any material markers. Statues of communist leaders but also those of anti-fascists of the Second World War disappeared overnight. Importantly, the same reasoning is traceable in recent memory activism, such as Alexandru Groza's (memory activist) 2021 call to support such a project but centred exclusively on surveillance and daily intimidations and "horrors".[116]

Silencing as the centre of affirmations of liberalism began to change in the late 1990s, as the discourses about a victimhood triggered by communism began to emerge at the European level. It provided an alternative to the contested idea of "social peace" of the NSF. The main turning point was the debate that ensued around Stephane Courtois's *Le livre noir du communisme*, which brought forth, albeit controversially, the debate about the numbers of the victims of state socialism.[117] It was the first incursion into the controversy of the Holocaust-

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[113] See Introduction. I refer to Jay Winter's concept of "liturgical silence", see Winter, "Thinking about Silence".
[114] For an overview of the debate, Maria Tufan, "Muzeul Comunismului, un eșec în trei Acte", *Press One*, 2019, https://pressone.ro/muzeul-comunismului-un-esec-in-trei-acte. Last accessed March 4, 2020.
[115] Mircea Anania, "Casa Poporului". *Flacăra*, June 6, 1993.
[116] Interview with Alexandru Groza, 2021, https://culturaladuba.ro/muzeul-ororilor-comunismului-va-fi-un-muzeu-al-vocilor-victimelor-comunismului-alexandru-groza-manager-interimar/.
[117] Stéphane Courtois, *Le Livre Noir Du Communisme : Crimes, Terreur, Répression*, second edition (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1998).

communism parallel, which later provided the grounds for the double genocide thesis and was quite popular at the time of its publishing in the region. It matched the ambitions of having the story of victimhood caused by communism heard in the region, despite the numerous debates which emerged around the numbers it proposed.[118] The volume itself gave legitimacy to a type of "engaged" historiography that should serve a liberal "transformation" in the countries in the region.

4. After 2000: Europeanization and the Politics of Trauma[119]

As argued so far, the 1990s narrative of reforms, modernization and fighting underdevelopment instated a very normative understanding of what democracy is: not a process, but a goal, a moral ideal. A defensive notion of memory emerged, where remembering needed to show the belief in democracy to be an active tool in an always future sense of democracy. Politically, this notion shaped various forms of exclusion, both economically and culturally, because democracy was no longer an (imperfect) process to be set in place, but an already tried and tested moral ideal that needed sacrifices and radical decisions to survive. Ethnonationalism, for instance, was often tolerated and even motivated by this need for security.[120] This envisaged that consensus worked with a pedagogy of memory, that needed to teach and fix some broad strokes of reference of the past. This iteration grounded Europeanism and Europeanization in the narratives about democracy and the state in the early 2000s.

The increasing "transnational" activism for this memory started roughly at the beginning of the 2000s, with a "transnational" network of "anticommunist" entrepreneurs from Central and Eastern Europe, many of them former dissident icons – László Tőkés (a Hungarian

[118] Torpey, "What Future for the Future?", 12.
[119] This subchapter is loosely based on Dana Dolghin, "Institution and Inclination in the Post-Socialist Space: Genocide as 'Memory Intervention'", in Dorota Kołodziejczyk, Mateusz Świetlicki eds., *Trauma as cultural palimpsests* (Wroclaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2017), 59-75.
[120] I refer at length to the case of Hungarian-Romanian tensions of the early 1990s in chapter 5.

priest symbolic for the Revolution in Timișoara in 1989 but controversially pro-Hungarian), Lech Wałęsa and Václav Havel. They took the message of the Europeanization of memory further to the political cause of European belonging. They often relied on their Cold War biographies of dissidence in insisting on the acceptance into the EU "canon" of the memory of the victims of communism as well as those of post-1989 "democracy" champions.[121] Suddenly, a burst of narratives about the credibility of European liberal values that can and should be upheld through memory was produced by Romanian campaigners.[122] To them, they were having only a partial acknowledgement of past suffering inflicted double violence on the survivors of that regime.[123]

A "politics of regret", a term that Jeffrey Olick uses to describe not a defensive mechanism against repetition, but rather a type of collective memory that performs responsibility and acknowledgement (and often leads to certain reifications), shaped European debates after 2008.[124] However, there was minimal trace of anything that could have passed as regret in Central and Eastern European considerations. Countries in the region were joining the EU in the early 2000s, so a form of memorial representation was now turning into a potential transnational political credential. Consequently, remembrance was a protean field of transnational representation and participation.[125] It supported a mobilization against the government, where memory was a catalyst for diverse grievances, on the one hand, but also conveyed a normalized "trauma" where the ghost of the past was keeping countries away from

[121] Laure Neumayer, "Advocating for the Cause of the 'Victims of Communism' in the European Political Space: Memory Entrepreneurs in Interstitial Fields", *Nationalities Papers,* 45, 6 (2017), 992–1012, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1364230.
[122] Bogdan Iacob, "The Criminalisation of Communism", 3.
[123] A point made by many, see Zombory, "The Anti-Communist moment", 21-54. https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-revue-d-etudes-comparatives-est-ouest-2020-2-page-21.htm; Ghodsee, "A Tale of 'Two Totalitarianisms'.
[124] See Jeffrey Olick, *Politics of Regret* (London: Routledge, 2007), 12-18.
[125] Maria Malksoo, "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe", *European Journal of International Relations*, 15 (04) 2009, 653–680. DOI: 10.1177/1354066109345049.

real development, which was also later instrumentalized by illiberals.[126]. Because of a deeply polarized debate, citizens and civic movements often invoked the EU against "silences" by governments regarding victims' accountability and right to memory. This "defensive" framing of Europeanization often referenced an arrested "development" because of this lack of accountability. On the European scene, memory debates were merged with cultural imaginaries of democracy, as many of the former dissidents, now memory entrepreneurs in Brussels, relied on Cold War liberal narratives of anticommunism to strengthen national liberal democracies in the region in the new European context.

One of the main consequences of this debate was the emergence of the monolithic concept of 'victims of totalitarianism' in the recognition of a "European identity" and as instrumental in the process of Europeanization in Eastern European discourses.[127] It was primarily defined by communism and its subsequent 'trauma" inflicted on liberal democracy, and referred to in conjunction with already existing EU memorial standards, such as the Second World War.[128] The concept of "totalitarianism" might have lost plausibility everywhere else, but it came to support ideas of democratic activism, of agency and responsibility nationally, albeit in an equally restrictive manner. It spoke to a memory that necessarily should have been defensive, capable of steering away from the harm inflicted on contemporary liberal democracy. In Romania, improbable concoctions came out of this memorial perspective, such as the 2005 book *Genocidul Comunist* (The Communist Genocide) by Gheorghe Boldur Lăţescu, who presents the entire political history of communism as a deliberate attack on the make-up of a nation.

[126] Peter Vermeersch, "Victimhood as victory: The role of memory politics in the process of de-Europeanization in East Central Europe", *Global Discourse: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Current Affairs*, 9, (1) 2019.
[127] Ghodsee, "Tale of Two Totalitarianisms".
[128] Jörg Echternkamp*, Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe* (London: Berghahn Books, 2013)

Yet, paradoxically, genocide was a successful narrative carrying many of the notions of liberal democracy and human rights in the 1990s, because its very recognition was a sign of a healthy revisitation of past atrocities.[129] Such a climate normalized the exacerbation of the old anticommunism-democracy binary. Indeed, conservative, if not revisionist, history readings backed many of the formulations of 'democracy' in Romania in those years. Articulated already earlier in the late 1990s in Romania, the recognition of being a victim of genocide reached an affirmative future-oriented memory based on 'overcoming communism', and in line with notions of transition and transformation, through Europeanization. Perspectives like those of Lățescu were not even that controversial in those years, and indeed voiced sentiments of persecution invoked more broadly. That language was present in transitional justice processes, for instance in 2003, when the so-called "trial of communism" (procesul comunismului) was beginning to be widely used, by academics, cultural actors and journalists[130], who even invoked a "communist holocaust".[131]

This case shows the early roots of the "double genocide" thesis, which today denominates a rather circumspect perspective of scholarship on the mobilization around victims of communism and its abuse[132] which instrumentalizes Raphael Lemkin's definition of genocide as based on a cultural aspect concerning the rights and expression of minorities.[133]. Indeed, it carries some of the meanings and formulations of Central and Eastern European nationalisms, sovereign logic and conservative stances.[134] The most visible criticism of the totalitarian

[129] See Dirk Moses, "Raphael Lemkin, Culture, and the Concept of Genocide", in Donald Bloxham, Dirk Moses, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies Oxford Handbooks* online, 2010.
[130] See Nicolae Drăgușin, "Procesul comunismului înseamnă cunoaşterea istoriei recente*", Revista Memoria*, 55-56 (2-3), 2006.
[131] Gheorghe Boldur Lățescu, *The Communist Genocide in Romania* (New Brunswick: ABE Books, 2005), 4-19. The term was also frequently used in the press in the 1990s and later.
[132] Primarily in relation to denial of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. See Radonic, "The Holocaust/Genocide Template".
[133] See Douglas Irvin-Erickson, *Raphael Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 152-196.
[134] The term "double-genocide" has been used in the last decade to signal the comparative mindset used in political discourses. See Liliana Radonic, "The Holocaust/Genocide Template", Kristen Ghodsee, "A Tale of Two Totalitarianisms".

perspective has been that the usage and visibility of communism often erase the main history of perpetratorship and Nazism.[135] But the Europeanization of memory has played a role in the perpetuation of this thesis and its dynamic and shows how the liberal Cold War origins of totalitarianism contributed to the excesses of remembrance politics. The Eastern European Cold War warriors' tone had a distinctly mobilizing tinge and helped frame the process of transnational remembrance as a reaction to national politics by emphasizing that their own governments had already neglected their demands. In European fora, these individuals approached the Europe-liberal democracy link as a "defensive" rhetoric.

In 2007, when these advocacy efforts finally started an EU debate about the need for recognition on equal footing of communist crimes and Nationalist Socialist crimes, they were driven by a search for "consensus" at the transnational level. In 2004, when Romano Prodi, the then-President of the European Commission, argued that East European countries joined the European political project as the outcome of "our common commitment to unify our continent"[136], he also signalled a move to define a consensus political identity, and activists in the region felt initially represented. One year later, Johannes Fried, the President of the Association of German Historians, assessed the lack of a consensus around history to be a menace to the European project when ¨national images of memory diverge¨.[137] This perspective drew from the transnational spirit imprinted by the German reconciliation, even though the disputes about memory were divisive.[138.] The attention towards victims was also cultivated by historians working on the area, most notably in the case of Timothy Snyder's attempts to retrieve

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[135] Nikolai Koposov, "Memory Laws and Nationalist Lies", *Project Syndicate*, 2018, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/poland-holocaust-law-nationalist-tool-by-nikolay-koposov-2018-03?barrier=accesspaylog. Last accessed March 13, 2018.

[136] Romano Prodi on 'Accession Day', Dublin Castle, 1 May 2004, Speech/04/221. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_04_221. Last accessed September 7, 2020.

[137] Johannes Fried, *Der Schleier Der Erinnerung* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2004), 41.

[138] Laure Neumayer, "Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: The Mobilizations around the 'crimes of Communism' in the European Parliament", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies,* 23, 3 (2015), 344–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2014.1001825; Neumayer, "Advocating for the Cause ".

both victims' categories (Stalinist and Nazi) and entangled histories of repression in Eastern Europe, particularly Ukraine and place these in an ideological continuum.[139]

Collective memory as a terrain of Europeanization should have alleviated the 'battle ground' of European recognition for parties in Eastern Europe, at least according to the adage that shared (and acknowledged) narratives of the past stabilize European politics and bring reconciliation.[140] Yet, many Eastern European intellectual and political circles were disgruntled with the performativity of this recognition and the little difference this new memory regime made in national politics of democracy and of Europeanness. The recognition of a right to memory in the European narrative did not provide a strong enough recognition to counter a sense of persecution nationally. This "consensus" was not enough because it was seen as glossing over the real dimensions of the communist crimes. In Central and Eastern Europe, some were arguing the ambition was coming from Germany and was driven by an attempt to normalize socialism into debates of contemporary politics.[141] Elsewhere, there was a growing concern about the historical narratives it was triggering. One German commentator argued that the prevailing historical view was a coarse and even dangerous distortion".[142] However, there was consensus that the story needed to be told, and to speak primarily to the success of Europe.

Indeed, the transnational perspective aiming for "consensus" was not regarded with satisfaction by many observers in Romania. Instead, it was interpreted as denying "the real dimension of the repression" as suggested by journalist Matei Martin.[143] He voiced one of the perspectives that put remembrance at the centre of a process to protect the future from a present still tainted by the past. Remembering the past was about preventing more insidious ways of

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[139] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands* (New York: The Dugan Books, 2010), 2–9.
[140] See Birgit Schwelling ed*., Reconciliation, Civil Society, and the Politics of Memory Transnational Initiatives in the 20th and 21st Centur*y (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012).
[141] Malksoo, "The Memory Politics of Becoming European".
[142] David Katz, "Is Eastern European 'Double Genocide' Revisionism Reaching Museums?", *Dapim Studies on the Holocaust*, 30(3) 2016, 1-30.10.1080/23256249.2016.1242043
[143] Matei Martin, " Cum tratăm cele două orori?", *Dilema Veche*, 808, 2019, Bucharest.

infiltrating these histories into contemporary politics. What emerged, accordingly, was not a debate about memory, but about two competing articulations of anticommunism, one about modernization and development, the other via the totalitarian Cold War concept in which both communism and Nazism are the "enemies" of liberal democracy. Although this move has been somewhat contested both at the time and afterwards, a 2018 article about some statues still present today in the city of Galați mentions a "communist type of mystification of history that is dangerous".[144] In short, the polarization of the debate harmed the very efforts of breaking through silences.

For the political establishment, however, the Europeanization angle made remembering political violence bound up, again, with the definition of Europe as "modernization".[145] For instance, President Traian Băsescu passed a "Condemnation of the Communist Regime" in the Romanian Parliament in 2007, which was backed by leading historians and intellectuals, tying it directly to EU accession, rather than accountability or honouring victims.[146] The report "blamed" the former regime for the imperfections of the democratic space, and the *Final Report* has been seen as a document of evaluation and of moral judgement concerning "communist crimes".[147] It operated with a de-historicized and reified perspective on state socialism that simply reinforced the identification of this regime as the main cause of underdevelopment.[148]

[144] Ticu Ciubotaru, "Relicvele de piatră ale comunismului continuă mistificarea istoriei", *România Liberă*, April 5, 2018, https://romanialibera.ro/social/relicvele-de-piatra-ale-comunismului-continua-mistificarea-istoriei-720209. Last accessed March 4, 2020.
[145] Jan-Werner Müller, "Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory", in Jan-Werner Müller ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–36; von Hirschhausen and Patel, "Europeanization in History: An Introduction",18-20.
[146] A "democrat" by his own description, he was active in the memorialization of the Holocaust at the time. Iacob, "The Criminalisation of Communism"; Cristian Tileagă, "Communism in Retrospect: The Rhetoric of Historical Representation and Writing the Collective Memory of Recent Past", *Memory Studies*, 5, 4 (2012), 462-478. doi:10.1177/1750698011434042.
[147] Dorin Dobrincu, Cristian Vasile and Vladimir Tismăneanu eds., *Raport Final* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing, 2007), 45-50.
[148] Totalitarianism was attributed first to Giovanni Amendola in the late 1920s, from an anti-fascist standpoint, when he uses the term to describe Mussolini's aversion to legal codes and liberal norms. See Ball and Bellamy eds., *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, 182.

For intellectuals, the memory of "totalitarian" victims was framed exclusively by its usefulness for democracy and reproduced the simplistic narratives of democracy of the 1990s. One illustrative example happened in 2007, when the Romanian magazine *Echinox,* a reputed cultural debate review in the country, took on the European debate on a joint commemoration of Holocaust and communist victims.[149] Several historians and cultural commentators reflected on this new paradigm, which was inevitably reflected in national historiography. Corneliu Pitulescu 'lamented" following scripts from elsewhere. He argued that anti-Semitism, was not about race, but had to do with economics. Pitulescu implicitly argued here that following the focus on identity gives the wrong impression about the reasons for discrimination against the Jewish population.[150] He concluded that the problem lies in the instruments one uses to look at this past, and therefore the discussion about how and what to tell about a past should be left out of European fora.

In the same issue, historian Doru Pop zoomed in on the European politics of memory in relation to the negation of communist crimes, which was the burning issue at the time. He argued that those who deny them - state authorities, previously high-ranked members of the communist regime- resort to the same ways of denial as in the case of the Holocaust. Consequently, he wondered if the use of these parallels (between the Holocaust and communist crimes) was not detrimental to the purpose.[151] The argumentation shows the traces of the main framing that also endured over time. In these two opinions, one already sees signs of the way the memory of the Holocaust was simply a benchmark, a norm that can be used and twisted to shed light on the communist past. The utility of opening a conversation on the Holocaust, now transnational, was not denied, but viewed as a "step" towards proving liberal democratic

[149] Corneliu Pintilescu, "Gulag și Comunism, Legislație discrimantorie și represivă", *Caietele Echinox*, 1 (2007), 13-24.
[150] Pintilescu, "Gulag și Comunism", 25–78.
[151] Doru Pop, "Negarea efectelor comunismului în termenii denigrării Holocaustului", *Caietele Echinox*, 1 (2007), 157-162.

credentials, and specifically to break with "communist" underdevelopment. A similar perspective was furthered by historian Florin Abraham, who discusses the "Gulag" and the "Holocaust" as necessary bases for a "democratic memory", which, he argues, had not happened.[152] The purpose of remembrance was to solidify democracy rather than reflect on the political roots, victims, or historical understanding.

The debate laid out in 'Echinox' shows that the Gulag- Holocaust parallel was already a memorial language in 2007 in Romania, but that it had less to do with the past and more with contemporary visions of democracy. The intellectual community was evidently looking "grudgingly" at the memorial gesture of remembering on "European" terms but saw its utility. The tone was sceptical about the progressive nature of this move.[153.] It was not indicative of an interest in expanding the memory field but was rather in the spirit of overcoming a history of underdevelopment by following a normative "democratic memory".

The anticommunist stance made it into a more European-wide narrative through the 2008 the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism[154] and with it, a certain intellectual history of the concept of totalitarianism, and its imaginaries, was indirectly referenced. Anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee considers that the memory debates on two types of victims brought together as a new form of the *Historikerstreit*.[155] She argues, however, that the narrative about communism and state socialism in the public space re-emerged amid the emerging discontent with liberal democracy triggered by the 2008 crisis in Europe, "against a

[152] Florin Abraham, "Rezistenţă', 'Gulag', 'Holocaust' şi construirea memoriei democratice după 1989", *Caietele Echinox*, 1 (2007), 40-57, 41-43.
[153] Mälksoo, "Criminalizing Communism".
[154] Initiated and signed by Czech politicians, it was further signed by 50 key political leaders in Europe. It is not a EU-issued declaration. See Neumayer "Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative".
[155] The *Historikerstreit* emerged in Germany in the 1980s, and with it, the idea that communism can and should be placed in the same category as national socialism. It changed the historical and political sphere forever. It was Ernst Nolte's *Sonderweg* thesis that made this parallel into an important one, but the concept saw many iterations in the years that followed. See for instance Klaus Oesterle, Siegfried Schiele, *Historikerstreit Und Politische Bildung* (Berlin: JB Metzler, 1989).

backdrop of growing social unrest in response to the global financial crisis and Eurozone instability in Spain and Greece".[156]

> The Cold War liberals converged on the proposition that it was 'utopias' that led to totalitarianism. In the immediate post-war period, as the West's chief political enemy switched from Nazi Germany to Soviet Russia, anti-totalitarianism served as a 'semantic bridge': it redirected the stock modes of condemnation of (anti-liberal) fascism onto (anti-liberal) communism. But the concern closest to home was the perceived need to combat the threat from the communist East to Western liberties – and to capitalism. Hence, when the Cold War liberals came to fill out the details of what a political theory of anti-totalitarianism might consist in, it was an image of communist totalitarianism that they had foremost in mind.[157]

It was, first and foremost a view that attributed the horrors of the 20th century to Enlightenment rationality and associated it only with the USSR. The memory narrative of totalitarianism, which uses the equality between victims to strengthen and support the present (liberal democracy) in Europe, that the 2019 Declaration invoked at the beginning of this chapter employs, is a testament to the dimension of totalitarianism that today is primarily referenced through collective memory.

Several thinkers shaped this notion, primarily those dealing with the roots of the authoritarian regimes of the 20th century, although much of the residues used today in European narrative owe to the Atlanticist vision. One of the first, Herbert Marcuse, defined totalitarianism based on the transformation of reason to positivism that led to the rise of Nazism, and drew a direction connection with "the monopoly stage of capitalism".[158] Confronted with the reality of the Second World War, later, Max Horkheimer looked at a parallel between Nazism and "state socialism"[159] He labelled these as "authoritarian" and "repressive" regimes and identifying "permanent mobilisation", "arbitrariness" as core political processes belonging to them. In 1941, taking this reasoning further, philosopher Friedrich Pollock simply marked a clear

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[156] Kristin Ghodsee, *Red Hangove*r (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 133.

[157] Richard Shorten, *Modernism and Totalitarianism, Rethinking the Intellectual Sources of Nazism and Stalinism, 1945 to the Present* (London: Palgrave, 2012), 110.

[158] Herbert Marcuse, *"*The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State*"* in *Negations. Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: MayFly Books, 2009[1968]), 1-31.

[159] Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 34–87.

difference between “democratic” state capitalism in the United States and Great Britain to the state capitalism of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. [160] He argued these solved economic issues at the price of asking for total obedience. That connection between authoritarianism and capitalism disappeared in the underdevelopment narrative of the 1990s. Indeed, the careful links between liberal notions and the transformations of politics are less evident in the interpretation of “totalitarianism” used today in European memory discourses.

Anticommunism through underdevelopment made it into the European narrative, but the type of democracy it entertained had restrictive, culturalist and civilization dimensions, based on modernization claims. This evokes Jacob Talmon's concern with the messianism of what he sees as populist anti-liberalism of totalitarian ideologies and what that meant for European political philosophy.[161] Talmon’s *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* played an influential role in shaping and understanding the concept of totalitarianism during the Cold War, and in a different direction than Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*.[162] While Arendt’s reading took the death camp to be the end and the symbol of “total” governmentality, hers was a theory about subjectivity derived from the fact that totalitarianism shaped the individual to the utmost precision. Talmon, however, seemed more attuned to efforts aimed at developing an “empirical democratic theory” that defined the systems of the Western liberal democracy and its constitutive elements in opposition to communist totalitarianism exclusively. But he did argue that both belonged to the European tradition and that the effort should be to find where things degenerated. Both perspectives represented a memorial counterpart to Francis Fukuyama's “end of history” thesis, with its triumphal take on liberal democracy or to Samuel Huntington's “third wave of democracy”, which focused on democratic procedures. Yet, as Scott argues, it was a context that affirmed teleological historical progress of liberal democracy

[160] Friedrich Pollock, “State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations”, in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1982), 71–95.
[161] Talmon, *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy,* 56.
[162] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973[1951]).

over political rivals that offered much solace at the time.[163] Totalitarianism, in a more radical key, where it was separated from any traditional of liberal democracy, provided a middle-ground.

> First, the threat of totalitarianism, represented by the rise of communism, divided emancipatory liberalism into two camps. One of these was a camp skeptical of liberalism's past universalism, and rationalism, suggesting that these were the constituent elements of Marxism— something liberalism should avoid. Another was a development culture, which imagined economic and political transformation as key components in the fight against Eastern communism. Both of these traditions had the same ends: stopping the encroachment of communism through an emancipatory ethic.[164]

It entailed an exclusive look at the initial victims of the communist repression, which fit the interest in the late Cold War, when the concept of totalitarianism had become a "counter ideological" weapon against the USSR. It was a way of marking the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and the US-led NATO as a triumphant force of that change.[165] The anticommunism that followed, and strengthened the type of liberalism of the 1990s, reinforced this perspective. As Siobhan Kattago has argued, centering the notion of totalitarianism around memory further reinforced the post-socialist discourse that tends to take 1989/1991 as the symbolic boundary.[166]

The developmental notions supported by anticommunism have facilitated many appropriations since. The anticommunism from the East – in its developmental form – became European via discourses of prominent intellectuals and scholars elsewhere and played into local politics. For instance, Anne Applebaum, a distinguished Cold War historian, received accolades from the Budapest Terrorhaza, a well know museum practicing the "totalitarian" narrative in December 2010 "for her outstanding efforts to advance freedom and democracy in Central-Eastern Europe".[167] A similarly visible case is that of historian Timothy Snyder's book *Bloodlands* being appropriated by the government of Lithuania to implement what the prime

[163] Scott, *Omens*, 86-89.
[164] Dillon Stone Tatum, *Liberalism and Transformation. The Global Politics of Violence and Intervention* (Ann Arbour: Michigan University Press 2019), 86.
[165] Howard, "The Anti-Totalitarian Left between Morality and Politics", 39.
[166] Kattago, "Agreeing to Disagree".
[167] Quoted in Ghodsee, "Tale of Two Totalitarianisms", 126.

minister in 2012 has articulated as "historical memory policy" and "a unified view on the past".[168] In the same vein, it prompted the Czech Republic in 2000 to choose November 17 as the symbolic anniversary of 1989 to "honour the struggles for freedom and democracy". That date not only marked the end of communism but also recalled November 17, 1939, when nine students were executed for their resistance to the Nazi occupation.[169] These actions were not only about victimhood but hijacking a discourse of memory to ground their own politics of "development".

Furthermore, there are connotations of European memory, in the way these are used nationally, that perpetuate civilizational undertones proper to neoliberalism. For instance, the debates about state "corruption" that shaped the 1990s and later politics in Romania draw sharp lines between a pure market and the imperfect human condition. "Corruption" is associated with the communist past (shadow networks of the former Communist Party) and a certain "Slavic" dimension, rooted in older anti-Russian rhetoric, that continues to signal an incapacity of letting go of "old" habits. In this sense, it was one of the symptoms of the underdevelopment brought on by communism and by the influence of the Soviet Union, which lingers today.[170] It has been consistently invoked as a root cause of inter-EU migration. Recent anti-corruption protests in Romania have also stressed the importance of shunning the past, resolving it, and addressing it, neglecting the cultural and political context of the 1990s as the decade of a

[168] Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 14-20. See debate here Eglė Samoškaitė, "Naciams ir sovietams tarnavę skundikai – verti pasmerkimo ar gailesčio?", *Skaitykite daugiau.*, 2012. https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/naciams-ir-sovietams-tarnave-skundikai-verti-pasmerkimo-ar-gailescio.d?id=50185844
[169] Johana Wyss, "Exploring Populism Through the Politics of Commemoration", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 73 (9), 2021, 1683-1702. DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2021.1991279.
[170] See for instance Brian Whitmore, "Corruption Is The New Communism", *Radio Free Europe*, 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/corruption-is-the-new-communism/27669638.html.

hegemonic neoliberalism.[171] Memory, here, foreshadows a vision of "democracy" as imperfect, fragile and in the end easily replaceable, which is a defining element of neoliberal thought.[172]

This developmental perspective therefore encouraged the rise of radical-conservative interpretations of history that support the idea that the state and democracy are fragile, which have mostly gone unchecked until the more recent visible reactions to the "illiberal" turn. For example, the Romanian writer Horia Roman Patapievici, a reputed anticommunist advocate, wrote, in a book entitled *O idee care ne sucește mințile* (An illusion that Drives Us Insane) about the perils of what he sees as a newly emerging left. He claims here that "Western" outlets still reject the communist experience, and that the experience "exacerbated our national defects".[173] He argues, consequently, that the emergence of a new left (primarily youth-led social movements) is a symptom of this weak democratic spirit. This type of perspective in effect peaked in the conservative after-effects of the "totalitarian" view. The conclusion, another prominent pro-European and anticommunist intellectual, Andrei Pleşu, echoed anti-communist intellectual, Andrei Pleşu, in 2017, is that "Europe will never hold if it does not condemn communism and National socialism" in equal measure.[174]

In other words, the "banal" Europeanism narrative behind anticommunism strengthened the developmental angle about the utility of memory, and thus helped it merge with neoliberal politics. It had been previously criticized exactly for the paradox that, as Boris Buden argues, it is a sense of totality, similar to the transitional ideology, which leaves no room for memory.[175]

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[171] David Witwer, Paula Baker, Mary Berry, Daniel Czitrom, Barbara Hahn, James Kloppenberg and Naomi Lamoreaux, "Interchange: Corruption Has a History", *Journal of American History*, 1015, 4 (2019), 912–938, https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jaz005.
[172] William Connoly*, The Fragility of Things: Self-Organizing Processes, Neoliberal Fantasies, and Democratic Activism* (New Haven: Duke University Press, 2013), 58-80.
[173] Horia Patapievici, Andrei Pleşu and Gabriel Liiceanu, *O idee care ne sucește mințile* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2016), 134.
[174] Anca Vancu and Andrei Pleşu, "Fără o Unificare a Memoriei, Fără o Condamnare Comună a Nazismului Şi a Comunismului, Europa Nu va Fi Omogenă", *Adevărul*, Bucharest, February 17, 2017, https://Adevărul.ro/cultura/istorie/andrei-plesu-fara-unificare-memoriei-ocondamnare-comuna-nazismului-comunismului-europa-nu-omogena-1_58a6bce55ab6550cb88cc80b/index.html. Last accessed April 1, 2020.
[175] Boris Buden, "The Children of Postcommunism", *Radical Philosophy,* 159 (2010). https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/children-of-postcommunism.

Like the Historikerstreit before it, the anti-totalitarian European idea around collective remembrance reinforced particular histories that proved helpful for "performing" European liberalism, without inciting a deeper reflection on the matter. It thus created distinct "publics" of memory invested in "negative remembrances" as a defence mechanism against anything that threatens neoliberalism and accepts anything that might be "modernizing". Many of the radical conservative politicians operating in Europe today profess exactly this ambition of "reform", of change and individualism, directly indebted to neoliberal thought.

5. Conclusion

The analysis presented above has highlighted the political and cultural narratives that underscored the anticommunism of the 1990s and demonstrates how the perspective on "victims of totalitarianism" in Europe today, embedded in cultural narratives of underdevelopment, was a conduit for a conservative Cold War liberalism and neoliberal narratives into crucial discourses about Europeanism. The chapter has also unpacked notions of underdevelopment and modernization that drove the debates about the former regime's memory and traces, and the fragility of democracy. Two general points emerge regarding memorial dynamics. The first is that although the silencing practised by the social democrats in the 1990s was contested by intellectuals and national pro-European groups as authoritarian, these silences were in fact also perpetuated in the Europeanization process, which did not challenge the monolithic narratives of anticommunism. On the contrary, this process strengthened the selectivity of memory, by focusing on the "outcomes" of remembrance: liberal democracy and "Europeanness". The second conclusion, therefore, is that silences were articulated in relation to neoliberal thought and a defensive narrative on democracy which provided normative definitions of democracy related to "transition", modernization and

becoming of the polity, rather than a complex historical reflection. This process has provided a fertile terrain for illiberal or radical conservative interpretations of politics and memory.