On political heritage: remembering and disavowing 1989

Dolghin, D.

DOI
10.1080/13511610.2018.1517300

Publication date
2019

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Innovation - The European Journal of Social Science Research

License
CC BY-NC-ND

Citation for published version (APA):
On political heritage: remembering and disavowing 1989

Dana Dolghin*

*Email: d.f.dolghin@uva.nl

Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture, University of Amsterdam, BG2, Turfdraagsterpad 15 (room 301), Amsterdam, 1012 XT, The Netherlands

(Received 4 April 2018; final version received 26 August 2018)

In 2014, the “reception crisis” [Christopoulos, Dimitris. 2017. “Human Rights in a State of Perpetual Emergency.” Open Democracy, January 5th, 2017. Accessed May 7 2018. https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/dimitris-christopoulos/human-rights-in-state-of-perpetual-emergency] of refugees mobilized several memorial narratives which had been the backbone of European memory. Historian Dan Stone has recently made a detailed foray into the locus of the Holocaust as a historical narrative meant to support the ethical argument for solidarity and conclude that remembrance represents just a small fraction of the necessary historicization. The memorial neglect of its history was at the time a recurrent account of the reluctant political attitudes emerging around the frontiers of Europe. This article traces a similar now transnational difficult history inscribed into the European narrative, 1989, and investigated the conditions in which it became a topic of interest in 2014–2015. I locate their invocation in a longer term perspective on the ebbs and flows of the history of 1989 becoming political heritage. This article argues that 1989, as both consensus and competing memory, has been increasingly polarized through these two opposing perspectives more recently. In order to flesh out and interpret these dynamics, I first contextualize how an initially consensus-driven memory narrative around 1989 had by 2014 solidified into two divergent collective memory discourses, suggestive of the populist abatement. It was in the 1990s that the perspective on 1989 generally consolidated the events into a pre-emptive memory, wherein remembrance represented an act of political citizenship supported by a civic narrative of disobedience which would be able to be called on in anticipation of a threat to the new liberal polity. Yet such “negative” political heritage, otherwise a European transnational memorial perspective, gradually emerged as a prop for identity politics. Here, I focus on the tensions in Romanian and Hungarian memorial debates. Indeed, since roughly 2010, this former pre-emption remembrance is being increasingly integrated into discourses of sovereignty and more recently played into the mobilization of the memory of 1989 as a defensive narrative. I consequently consider its invocation in the recent debate on refugees and a wider spectrum of clashing notions of citizenship, state and the public, all leaning on a narrative of the “authoritarian past. As both sides were (and are) employing an increasingly selective historical imaginary, the competition around the memory of 1989 shows how appropriating a revolutionary heritage is in fact instrumental to authoritarian prone politics.

Keywords: 1989; transnational memory; memory conflicts; negative heritage
Challenging the reconciliatory past

In September 2014, a rising conservative response to the arrival of refugees in “Europe” was solidifying across the continent. At the time, the Hungarian and Romanian governments engaged in a dispute over the Hungarian plans to erect a fence around its borders, to stop what the government termed as potential illegal crossings. Victor Ponta, the Romanian prime minister accused the Hungarian government of “disrespecting European values” by these actions. On his side, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó questioned whether the social democrats across the border had enough political credibility to make such comments, given the wave of anti-governmental protests sweeping Bucharest and other cities at the time. Public responses in both countries read the exchange as an escalation of identity politics, part of the habitual tensions around the Hungarian representation in Romania. But a few months later the debate turned to 1989 and the authoritarian past. By December that year, the Hungarian government claimed the 1989 protests in Timisoara were the accomplishment of the Hungarian government during the 2015 commemoration of the 1989 events. Viktor Orban stressed the central role of Hungary in the Romanian change of regime when arguing “that many are not prepared to accept that the revolution began from a priest of the Reformed church and that an ethnic Hungarian community delivered freedom to Hungarians, Romanians and Saxons alike”. Evidently, memorial debates between Hungary and Romania around 1989 have represented a staple of identity politics along the years and were by no means provoked by the temporary challenge of the borders, but this context did play an important part in the way the politics around humanitarianism and rights were framed. The interplay between tolerance, ethnicity and memory has been visible since the 1990s, yet this new iteration of communism as a “negative heritage” replaced a victimhood perspective with a mobilization of sovereignty, autonomy and antagonic memory (Bull and Hansen 2016).

Around 2014, history was called upon to break through the political stalemate around the “border” thinking throughout Europe. Prominent historians pointed to the trivialization or denial of past politics of exclusion, racialization and genocide which, historian Jan Gross argued, allowed for the relentless pragmatism of Poland, for instance, in responding to the humanitarian emergency. Echoing such link between the past and present needs of prevention, Senada Sabic discussed the Yugoslav wars as a warning that the political exploitation of difference can result in mass murder (Sabic 2017). Although fewer invocations referred to 1989 as a pre-emptive memory, those that emerged focused on the lack of a political narrative of solidarity and opposition towards authoritarianism (Tamas 2000) in the former socialist space.

Indeed, it is an adage to say that the 1989 events, as a point of rupture and change worldwide have been contested ever since in eastern Europe because of its uncertain aftermath (Mark 2010; Pop Eleches 2014; Petrescu and Petrescu 2014; Breuer and Delius 2017; Laczó and Wawrzyniak 2017). In what were largely national debates, the remembrance of the mass civil protests was filtered by accusations of an unsubstantial political change. Romania and Hungary both witnessed such claims as both the initial Antall Hungarian government and the National Salvation Front in Romania in power had shared communist, rather than oppositional political genealogies (Grosescu and Ursachi 2014; Gussi 2011) before 1989. In Bucharest the protests against the new government continued up to 1992, while in Hungary, the November negotiated political change cast its shadow over the Antall government. The early 1989 commemorations were bottom up and evocative of the failure, rather than the triumph, of the political reimagining of the state and together with the contradicting and selective accounts on the history of the repression.
(around 1006 victims were accounted after the street events between 18–25th of December 1989) (Siani Davies 2005; Murgescu 2012; Petrescu and Petrescu 2014) relegated the events to mere political maneuvering. It was difficult for such uncertainties to square to a narrative of 1989 as a credible mass civil political manifestation (Sarotte 2009) and the “icon” of 1989 undermined rather than extolled civic will as 1989 was codified as a real persistent threat. In Hungary, given that the political transformation owed to vocal young members of the communist party asking for a reform, the Fidesz’ Party consequently shaped the memorial perspective on 1989 according to an organic transition from socialism to the liberal market. In this sense, memorial discourses operated by anticipating and already responding to a perceived threat of uncertainty, as a pre-emptive memory which could nevertheless find strength in a transnational and European oriented consensus over the events.

Despite contestations of hijacking or its de-politicization, the experience of 1989 largely featured as a point of convergence regionally and transnationally until recently between the two governments (Tileaă 2012; Laczó 2016), even if joined by a narrative of victimhood. Successive governments in Romania and Hungary, also in order to counter accusations concerning this uncertain history, emphasized 1989 as a shared traumatic past able to support a narrative of civic opposition and political disobedience with the anticipatory memory of 1989. This initial consensus narrative later found a European connotation in the perspective on 1989 as a political pledge against communism binding Eastern Europe to a European legacy of civil opposition to totalitarianism (Mark 2010). Indeed, since the middle 2000s, the events have been being steadily accepted as a political heritage standing for a liberal “state” and an image of the transnational Europeanization narrative (Strath 2002) that operates through involved citizens and participation (Strath and Pakier 2010). Although national debates over the meaning and the history of 1989 never subsided, such transnational pre-emptive perspective on 1989 did often overshadow questions about the unaccounted for victims and equally the usability of anticommunist framings.

The conversation occurring in 2014 nevertheless challenged these perspectives on 1989. Indeed, the negative future is mobilized to flesh out, rather than reconcile an “us” and “them” (Coromines 2016; Peto 2017; Christopoulos 2017) between the two governments in the context of the refugee debate. The perspective on 1989 coming from Hungary instead re-affirmed its extended sovereignty, underscoring a regional threat to the “extended” Hungarian polity. Meanwhile, the Romanian social democrats used a larger “European” political sphere to redeem their own contested appropriation of “1989” as a backbone of the liberal state. This is being legitimized on a “European” political identity as the sole perspective able to weave a narrative of hope, rather than resentment.

The literature on collective memory tends to recently agree on the generative dimension of “transnationalism” in memorialization (Deak, Gross, and Judt 2000; Clarke 2014; De Cesari and Rigney 2014; Touquet and Vermeersch 2016). But a transnational negative remembrance, like 1989, does not counter but in fact generates another type of selectivity of memorial narratives independent of the bias coming from concepts of “nation”. These latest perspectives on 1989 have primarily operated together with a different political imaginary of an active citizenship that achieved the worldwide triumphal switch to liberalism at the end of the Cold War (Ther 2016) and of political rationality more general. In fact, both Romanian and Hungarian public debates articulated 1989 as an “icon” of a restart of “statehood”, rather than nation, and such “negative heritage” was mobilized to support a “good” state which is able to counter the lawlessness, in

D. Dolghin
itself an imaginary attributed to the socialist past. As the recent debate shows, competing perspectives on 1989 however contest notions of “public”, “state” and citizenship, in the background of this transnational consensus around “totalitarianism”. The anticipatory perspective to memory no longer constraints nationalist (ethnic) undertones or rally around a practiced liberal nationalism (Auer 2004; Laegaard 2007; Muller 2007). Sovereignty and exclusion, both discourse which emerged during the debate in fact show how the past can operate both as a transnational political heritage of a civic movement and one of exclusion. All held relevance for more recent debates on the refugee access. In this paper I will focus on three key memory debates that capture the change in the mode of remembering 1989 from a consensus driven anticipatory perspective to sovereignty informed competing memory narratives. In fact, the narrative of 1989 is splintered between an ethno-nationalism meant to fight a paternalistic West in the Hungarian case and the moralistic narrative of successful pathway to liberalism in the Romanian one. These competing perspectives continue in fact to fuel divisions. The mobilization around the 2014 commemoration of 1989, the ethnic disputes between the two communities in 1990 and several debates on minorities during the 2015 border dispute between the two countries give an accurate account of the way “negative heritage” mobilizes discourses of failure and resentment.

1989 And framings of ethnicity

One notable rift around the consensus image of 1989 as a pledge to “European”, liberal credentials and constitutionalism occurred around the award granted to Laszlo Tokes, the Roman Catholic priest central to the protests which de facto sparked the dissent against the Ceausescu regime in 1989. The civic mobilization against his anti-regime messages has been central to discourses of tolerance and co-habitation of the Hungarian minority in Romania. This particularity also bolstered the memorial politics around 1989, both among liberal intellectuals in both countries and transnationally.

In July 2013, however, Tokes suggested that the Fidesz government should build “a system of national cooperation that would grant Transylvania the status of protectorate”, a convenient populist appropriation of the long debate around the co-habitation of the Hungarian community in Covasna, Harghita and Mures, the three Hungarian majority regions in Romania. As a consequence, Tokes was revoked the award given by the Romanian Presidential office in 2009 by then President Traian Basescu for his role in the 1989 events in Timișoara. Tokes countered the demotion by pointing to the current president’s “strive to compensate for this German origin through exaggerated pro-Romanian and anti-Hungarian deeds and expressions”, implying both that contesting an a-priori relevance of ethnicity in 1989 represents in fact as threat and referencing the general over compliance of the post-socialist “weak” state to the liberal European narrative. Such contestation of a shared political heritage of civic will and liberalism was representative of the strong politics of autonomy that the Fidesz government has been practicing in the last decade. A consistent part of this has been the framing of the post-1943 regimes as successive “occupations” which implies that the post-socialist state represents the first sovereign iteration of the state since the Second World War. As such, notions of autonomy and sovereignty find a consistent appeal in contrast to the European construct, which is defined alternatively as a threat to a regional consensus.

This iteration of an exclusive ethnicity contrast what has been an ambivalent memorial dynamics around ethnicity between the two states. An illustrative case has been the remembrance of the March 1990 events, when ethnic clashes erupted in the Romanian city of Targu Mures around the celebration organized by the Hungarian community in Romania
occasioned by Hungary’s national day. The street clashes caused, officially, 5 victims (Dutceac Segesten 2011) and were widely speculated by both governments at the event, especially as they were never properly explained by the Romanian government at the time. Officially, it was an escalation encouraged by the Romanian government and consequently, commemorating the Black March has been a laboratory for contrasting liberal and conservative discourses on ethnicity. Just three months separated the events of 1989 and the conflicts in Targu Mures and the opinion was that the political speculation, especially on the Romanian side, was a sign of increasing authoritarianism of the Social Democrats. The selective investigations show there were appropriations on both sides of the border but the regime change seemed to have only made space for ethnonationalism on the Romanian side. Controversies about the chain of the events made both governments complicit in the nationalist discourse and these early speculations around ethnicity construed, partially, the “negative heritage” of 1989 around ethnicity. This nexus was particularly problematic for the Romanian government, which had been already struggling to contain critiques around the repressive political aftermath of 1989. There were consequent attempts of minimizing the events and tensions, and the National Salvation Front also downplayed allegations and controversies by expediting any juridical inquiries into these events. Since then, the nationalist manifestations around the Targu Mures events have disavowed by both sides. In 2011, Hungarian nationalist Jobbik activists interrupted the commemorations in the city.15 The Association of Hungarians in Romania have since consistently emphasized multinationalism as a framing of the events instead of ethnic isolation. These attempts nevertheless amplified the idea that 1989 in fact antagonized the two groups even further16 Indeed, to liberal intellectuals and the international press the events reified, rather, the lawlessness dimension of the regime change, leading to social disintegration.

In the 1990s, the initial narrative of an emancipatory political transition proved that potential antagonisms were countered by a perspective of collective victimhood on account of the shared communist experience. The political change of 1989 stood for insufficiency rather than triumph, in the pre-emptive logic of commemorating the past. Consequently, it mobilized unlikely memorial images, such as a certain solidarity shared by the Hungarian and Romanian communities during the socialist period.17 As the Nicolae Ceausescu’s regime became growingly repressive in the 1970s, the oppositional political ties between Hungarians and Romanians grew stronger (many students and others from Hungary began to travel frequently to Transylvania, bringing basic goods that were in short supply in Romania).18 At the same time the official politics of the Ceausescu regime aimed to separate the two communities and to diminish the Hungarian influence in Transylvania and Targu Mures in particular became the focus of these policies with many Hungarian professionals being encouraged to move to other regions of the country in order to diffuse possibilities of political dissent (Márton and Csaba Novák 2016). As the opposition on the Romanian side cultivated a politics of solidarity with the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, in the early 1990s, the trauematic reading of the past and anticommunism held the Hungarian ethnicity narrative as relevant for an anti-establishment perspective and emphasized reconciliation around this shared political position.

As the issue of ethnicity was linked to the political success of the 1989 protests, identity politics was at the center of governmental attempts to showcase the success of the political transformation. Subsequently, the Romanian National Salvation Front’s official rhetoric stressed that “the principles of the minorities were guiding the official politics” based on a narrative of “working class” solidarity that the National Salvation Front Party19 was emphasizing as a conservative (and populist) basis. Yet, the Social Democrats in Bucharest
were noticeably eager to discuss reconciliation after the turbulent 1990–1992 period of contestation had passed and consequently actively attributed the responsibility of these tensions around ethnicity to the legacy of Ceausescu regime. This type of framing was carried further into official narratives. In 1999, an official narrative of reconciliation materialized in the Park of Romanian – Hungarian, which, despite its short-lived continuity was one of the moments when both governments speculated its reconciliatory potential to bolster European credentials (Koranyi 2015).

Such reconciliatory perspective contributed to the transnational discourse on 1989 as a civic and collective accomplishment regardless of the more contested aspects. The Europeanization discourse central to both political discourses at the time granted a constitutional dimension to this reconciliation around ethnicity, as affordances of liberalism. In effect, overcoming the rivalries around Targu Mures and, in general, the Romanian-Hungarian disputes around territoriality figured prominently in the “state consolidation” perspective which also considered memorialization primarily an issue of criminalization and justice, rather than remembrance.

Amidst the more recent pan-European resurge in discourses on security, statehood and territorial integrity, the waning Hungarian-Romanian consensus memory of 1989 also disputed the growing transnationalization of the anticommunism liberal overlap. Tokes had actively supported the blanket criminalization of communism in 2006 of the Romanian government (Tileagă 2012; Ciobanu 2011). He was also a prominent voice in suggesting Eastern European dictatorial pasts need to have a place in the “European” narrative of shared histories of violence. Part of a group of activists, he also actively laboured for the European wide “totalitarian” memorial perspective eventually stabilized in the Prague Declaration of European Conscience and the Day of Victims of Totalitarianism in 2008 and 2009. Both the Hungarian and Romanian governments were active in several proposals banning communist symbols after 2004. The binding history of 1989 as a group of citizens mobilized against a regime had allowed for a careful balance between pro-Hungarian political mobilization in Romania and loftier advocacy of rights and liberties. In this sense, victimhood and “negative heritage” around this shared past supported a reconciliatory perspective around present ethnicity debates. The prominence of ethnicity in the anti-communist Romanian and Hungarian memorial agendas had in fact resonated with the European direction of integrating memory in politics about memory rights and representation.

The Hungarian governments (and in particular Viktor Orban’s right-wing governments of 1998–2002 and since 2010) speculated this inclusivity narrative differently. The image of the Hungarian government during 1989 is construed in opposition, as a peaceful and balanced force in the region. By emphasizing liberal notions attached to the very events of 1989, memorial politics emphasized the particular position of the Hungarian government as a space of security and refuge. This angle on the narrative of 1989 saw a substantial turn to narratives of sovereignty. The recent rhetoric of Fidesz discusses Targu Mures as a “Romanian pogrom against its Hungarian population” anticipating in the situation a threatening case for the status of eastern Europe minorities. At the same time, Fidesz’s discourses which forge an emancipatory role to the notion of Hungarian citizenship works to incorporate into an expression of sovereignty much of the European rhetoric around minority rights (Fox and Vermeersch 2010; Berenskoetter 2014). Such appropriation was for instance evident when the 2007 Status Law in Hungary, which promised equal rights to all Hungarians living outside the country, irked the neighbours with substantial Hungarian minorities – Croatia, Slovakia, Ukraine Yugoslavia and the 1.7 million Hungarians in Romania, it was a difficult to contest given past links to narratives of inclusivity. In
2010, the Romanian Government issued a statement describing the law as “discriminatory” and “contrary to the European spirit”. Interestingly, Hungary is among the last countries in the region to pass such law. The inclusion of minorities in the majority of these countries occurred in the 1990s, for instance, when it was meant to underscore the strong liberal polity emerging with the political transformation of 1989, one which recognizes rights of ethnicity, in contrast to the previous regime. Yet, the citizenship law was further speculated in the new 2011 Constitution, where the text attached this citizenship to a victimhood caused by two regimes, and “our country’s self-determination, lost on the nineteenth day of March 1944, from the second day of May 1990, when the first freely elected organ of popular representation was formed”.

The difference in the invocations of 1989 in 2015 suggests that the early transnational 1990s narratives of rights and identity politics, in fact, ended up diffusing an ethnicization of memory into conservative politically minded representations of autonomy. Mobilized now as a legitimate pursuit of the state, autonomy serves as a pawn in discussions around minority right, and tolerance, bolstered by a history of “occupation” and repression. In effect, autonomy and narratives of rights legitimate a “strong polity” by appropriating a transnational narrative of inclusion and constructs of an other constantly and indiscriminately. Such identity politics, which has stood for a self-referential discourse embedded in a post-national, liberal perspective in the last three decades, captures what Etienne Balibar argues is a noticeable change in the imaginary of right, through an “ethical citizenship” that implies depoliticization (2004, 106). The memory narratives forge a new political imaginary of identity politics, which seeks recognition and legitimacy by mobilizing by reinforcing “another” Europe. Both take “resentment” out of the former identity politics to reinforce narratives plagued by nationalism and violence, not only from the victimhood perspective but now attributing a broad dimension of an "other" as a perpetrator and threat.

2014: Reconsidering Communism

The idea that a political heritage can be mobilized to speak and influence the political establishment in 2014 occurred as the representation of 1989 was itself acquiring a new political relevance. The latter was linked to a reconsideration of the remembrance of communism as a whole. The idea that the memory of communism should ideally work to protect from its potential reinstatement stretches back now three decades, but the European 25th anniversary of the 1989 events brought an explicit reference to a political prospect. This perspective was made evident by statements made by Angela Merkel, for instance, who when speaking at a commemoration event marking the 25th anniversary of the Berlin Wall’s fall commented: “We have the power to shape. We can turn things to the good: That is the message of the fall of the Wall. At this time, this [message] is aimed at Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and many other regions of the world. The fall of the Wall showed us that dreams can come true. Nothing has to stay as it is.”

Although such mobilization in the past had triggered memorial debates, in 2014, the visibly more abstract framing of the events was emulated in both Romania and Hungary not by de-politicizing, but rather by appropriating the civil disobedience narrative.

Such type of commemorations held a distinct momentum for a political resentment in the past. 1989 as a narrative of strong oppositional political potential were dominant in Romanian in particular but primarily directed against the now Social Democrat Party (until 1992 the National Salvation Front), as a criticism to the establishment rather than a mode of remembrance. Opposition was a narrative put forth in the immediate aftermath of the political transformation, as the mainstream political discourse retorted to a
conservative – and nationalist – a mix of old communist rhetoric of solidarity that should ensure a “social peace” and a return to an “original democracy”. The aftermath of 1989 was, from their perspective, a time of instability and uncertainty that effectively introduced the new authorities as the most capable wardens of the political environment. Yet this discourse also effectively emphasized the post-1989 difficulty in articulating a narrative of resistance. In this sense, 1989 in the postsocialist space was intrinsically linked to the success or failure stories, owing to a narrative of weak states dominating the early 1990s paradigm of transition (Druliole 2008).

The civic moment of 1989 war emerging in 2015 as a more emancipatory political narrative than in the past and capitalized on its potential to codify a 1989 narrative attuned to liberal transnational notions of citizenship and civic action. The notion of opposition against the communist regime has been disputed, denied but often articulated in historiography and public opinion, and this civic perspective on 1989 retrieved a distinctly more positive political heritage for European liberal norms of remembrance.

Such transnationalization perspective in the Romanian context into a political heritage of the opposition was, in Hungary, triggered by 1989 as a claim for sovereignty, owing to Fidesz, the ruling political party since 2010. The political transformation owed to vocal young members of the communist party asking for change, the Fidesz’ Party consequently shaped the memorial perspective on 1989 according to an organic transition from socialism to the liberal market. Indeed, a consistent “revolutionary” rhetoric runs through the discourse of Viktor Orban, based on the image of the 1989 moment, for instance “more than a governmental change” was the slogan of Fidesz in the recent elections (Harms 2017). This representation provided an arena to expand on the oppositional and revolutionary credentials of this historical legacy. At the same time, in early December 1989, Imre Nagy, the leader of the Communist Party in 1956 was rehabilitated as an act of retrieval of a history of autonomy reconfigured and placed at the centre of the configuration which led the right coalition of Andall to win the first elections (Benziger 2008).

In this sense, 25 years since the events, as much of European perspective emphasized a memorial narrative centered on reunification and political triumph which put forward a unitary discourse on this year as the end of the Cold War, the predominant perspectives post-1989 in both countries were, in fact, calibrating past political representation of the opposition.

In Bucharest, museums integrated the European perspective around “totalitarianism”-placing the discussion about ideology within a more usual discourse of moral judgement on communism as a whole. This complemented the anti-communism discourse that generally defined the moral example of dissidence and opposition. The “1989- 25 years of freedom” exhibition organized by the National History Museum in Bucharest was one of the examples emphasizing the political transformation rather than social turmoil.26 Although careful not to open any controversies, this political perspective broke through a period in which the events of 1989 were discussed exclusively through shortcomings of justice, legalism and the enduring afterlife of the regime, which transformed the moral responsibility for the (unaccounted for) victims and judicial responsibility into a matter of state credibility. The 1989 events in the 2014 configuration evoked less chaos, uncertainty causing loss of life, but rather a narrative focused on the new polity emerging out of the protests. This “civic” perspective naturalized a memorial stance where the history of 1989 is easily integrated into a narrative of collective agency toppling a repressive regime. It consequently bypassed a contested nature of the events themselves and stabilized this memory into a usable “totalitarian” liberal frame. Strengthened by a now mainstream European memorial perspective which is aligned with a rather transnational
direction of placing victimhood (related to the Second World War) and 1989 at the basis of Europe as political community. Similar to Orbán’s intention of re-working the past (evident in the landslide victory of 2010, in the form of a true revolution while 1989–90 was some dreadful compromise with the dictatorship) on the Romanian part, it was perhaps president Traian Basescu that successfully transformed 1989 into a memorial discourse in which anti-communist credentials were particularly emphasized as the type of political ideal to inscript liberalism as a space for defining a functional and legitimate state.

Commemorations of the events explicitly integrated and naturalized notions of ethnicity as the narrative of memorialization continued to mobilize around images of the liberal. In 2014, the Association of Former Political Prisoners from Covasna County in Romanian opened the Museum of Victims of Communism in Sfantu Gheorghe, the central city of the region and predominantly Hungarian, a noticeable event in particular because discussions on representation and visibility of the communist period in museum discourses in Romania have been lingering ever since 1989. Yet, Torok Jozsef, President of the Organization of Former Political Prisoners from Covasna, underscore recently the fact that the countries share the same traumatic historical legacy. Indeed, the museum looks at the communist experience across the region “the communist dictatorship cannot be erased from our souls as long as we do not talk openly about the horrors, about the crimes committed, about the deaths of thousands in prisons and colonies, about the dislocation, expropriation, abuse and house arrests, about the repression actions which state power has committed under the guise of collectivization.” In October 2014, the main exhibition of the new museum was however focusing on the 1956 events.

In the Hungarian case, the 25th anniversary of the events in 1989 marked an equally good occasion to reframe the opposition to socialism in relation to the autonomy narrative, by using the events of 1956. As authors have pointed out, even more so than the October 29, the 1956 repression and Soviet intervention in Hungary represented the central historical event contesting communism in the last 26 years in Hungary (Benziger 2008; Laczó 2016). Whereas the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) framed a transition to a democratic discourse, Fidesz has been intently representing the 1980s as a second Stalinist period, depicted in public mnemonic representations. This was visible following the Fidesz victory in 1998, when 1956 stabilized as the main narrative of opposition behind the Iron Curtain, one which would support and renew the anti-communist credentials of the party. But the public manifestations around the 2015 anniversary encourages a distinctly apolitical anti-communist perspective and a heritage of sovereignty.

This is illustrative of how the discourses discussing the primary role of Hungary as an oppositional political force— and narratives of 1989 have widely contributed to it—reinforce an increasingly authoritarian perspective that reifies different revolutionary images. Indeed, the choice of emphasis in the political developments between 1956 and 1989 often diverges. Istvan Deak even describes a “Hungarian Historikerstreit” (Deak 2011; Benziger 2008) among those who see 1956 as alternatively a socialist, popular, or nationalist revolution. As the political heritage of 1956 grew in visibility, descendants of the Nagy and Bibo generations, Deak concluded, make uncomfortable bedfellows in the ruling coalition of Socialists and Free Democrats. The overlap between older political others, several authors have argued recently (Laczó 2015; Harms 2017, 480), frames the glorification of 1956 at the expense of 1989 and constitutes a backlash against Western Europe’s memory culture, dominated by Holocaust remembrance and the German-inspired urge that societies must come to terms with their pasts (Vergangenheitsbewältigung).
Yet, the overplay of 1956 suggests a perspective on socialism which diverge from the Romanian appropriations of 1989 as a “negative” inscription of socialism in the logic of the “state”. Indeed, in the Hungarian perspective, where 1989 was in fact a more negotiated change, this historical angle rests attached to a debate on state failure informed by the “transition” paradigm of the 1990s which does little to confirm the rather triumphant tone of the Fidesz political imaginary. 1956 represents rather the political discourse strong enough to convey a deep engagement with a strong imaginary of statehood and state-making – different than nation centred narratives of state – as means of its preservation and of a proleptic memory. The process entailed, in contrast, the appropriation of 1956 as heritage of political citizenship.

From 2002 onward, when it became clear that the Socialists would be the dominant party of the left, 1956 became even more strikingly used against them. The fact that the “communists” were not “defeated” permanently – and based on the same significance of 1989 as an incomplete political revolution- that resurrected the significance of 1956. The place of 1956 in the memorial sphere was also strikingly appropriated, with the date of Nagy’s execution, 16 June, declared a 56th Martyr Memorial Day. The 20th anniversary of Nagy’s reburial in 2009 was also celebrated with a special exhibition opened at the Palace of Art, the building which had served as the stage for Nagy’s funeral in 1989 (Harms 2017). The Socialist government continued its more recently discovered public appreciation for 1956, in this case remembering the system change, diametrically reversing its position from 10 years prior when it was the sole mainstream party to refrain from celebrating it. This de-politicization of 1956 has been more clearly evident as the memory of the revolution accommodates democratic visions as much as anticommunism. Such narrative of memory is in direct collision with other political histories, such as the Second World War. This tension however, placed both the position of left and right wing discourses in difficulty of finding a pure identification: right-wing discourses in particular find it difficult to rephrase the post-1956 reformed communists in a favourable light without also having to rearticulate Kadar’s legacy.

In fact, on 9 November 2006, Orbán gave a speech in Brussels about “the Relevance and Heritage of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.” On that occasion, he discussed the Christian lessons of 1956 and asked the European Union to declare 4 November the day of the Soviet invasion, an international day for the victims of communism. “[Without] the sacrifice made by the Hungarians who fought in 1956, the Iron Curtain would probably still be in place, the wall would divide Berlin into two. Europe would still be lying cut in two halves, inert and having stiff points.” Clarke (2014, 110) suggests that despite the fact that 1956 has been the backbone narrative to Orbán’s legitimacy discourse for the last three decades “the role of the communist past in Orbán’s very popular politics, I would argue, is that what began as a means of discrediting a powerful political rival and bringing together opposition political parties in a bid to challenge that rival has become, at a time of economic crisis for Hungary, a means by which the government can present itself in a tradition of Hungarian freedom-fighters, standing up to foreign influence”. Indeed, the link between 1956 and 1989 was a strong dimension of the political transformation of 1989. On October 23, the day the Republic of Hungary was proclaimed in 1989, was also the anniversary of the revolution and the most important national holiday ever since. The first democratically elected president of the country, Árpád Göncz (who died recently at the age of 93), had been sentenced to life for participation in the 1956 revolution.

The fact that Hungarian politics of memory, as Harms argues recently, simply naturalized and simplified a perspective on ethnonationalism into mainstream politics also rewrites its own socialist past. It is the case made around the personality of philosopher
György Lukács, who is undergoing a distinct erasure. This happens literally, as the Budapest City Council decided to be removed from a Budapest park in the 13th district. Currently in Szent István Park, an urban park in an area that once served as the Ghetto where many Jews survived World War II in “protected houses”, the status of the Marxist philosopher is to be replaced by a statue of Saint Stephen, the founder of the Hungarian state. As Jobbik embarked on a campaign against Lukács’s “distractive” Communist past also brought forward nationalist narratives, such as the execution of Hungarian soldiers in 1919, to strengthen the claims. More recently, his memorial house in Budapest has been closed to visitors. The campaign, in this sense combined a Jobbik’s and Fidesz’s anti-Semitic campaign which was disguised into an anti-Marxist dimension that would strengthen some of the claims from the Hungarian left.

Reframing tolerance

During the 2014 refugee entrances, past images and cases of refugees were intensely broadcasted by Romanian and Hungarian public media. Several media campaigns contextualized the political refusal in Eastern Europe by returning the gaze to the refugee crossings before 1989 and to the numerous casualties. In Romania, in 2016, the “Frontieristii” campaign focused on the “illegal frontier crossings and the fact that these are still not investigated and that the victims have not been acknowledged by the Romanian state”. Oriented towards the anticommunist narrative these cases survey, the fact that this memory has been purposefully erased by authorities post-1989 was highlighted by articles such as “How Romanians escaped communism”. This intervention stresses the lack of accountability of the Romanian government and in effect an unwanted memory. In this framing, 1989 was therefore again resurrected as an acceptable terrain for narratives of inclusion, of tolerance and more generally of discourse oriented towards rights where the Cold War refugee was motivated, in contrast to contemporary subjects of humanitarian law.

In Hungary, in contrast, the narrative of the refugee memory was decidedly more positive in tone, focusing on the stories of refugees taken in the late 1980s from elsewhere in the socialist space, in particular from neighbourhood Romania. Indeed, between 1987 and 1989, the condition here prompted a constant stream of illegal border crossings, most of whom made their way to Budapest. These were both natural recruits for the populist perspectives that bundled together notions of humanitarianism only motivated if triggered by a similar historical experience and questions of similarity (among others of religion). In his sense, the narrative of 1989 and political refugees from socialism provided Fidesz with an opportunity to circumvent the potential criticism around Hungary’s current unwillingness to construct a different notion of political emergency. Consequently, the official Hungarian narrative stressed its very tolerance in receiving refugees back then, in a part sovereignty affirming, part tolerance framed memorial perspective. It was a similar notion of victimhood, on which a renewed memorial interest emerged, which deflected attention from the contemporary crisis with a renewed memorial mobilization around histories of past violations of rights in the Romanian case.

That 1989 held significance for European unification has represented a triumph story. As the memory of 1989, transnationally, acquired a strong relevance to support an idea of citizenship of a self-governing, responsible, and politically active individuals in the postsocialist perspective, the European rhetoric of remembrance (Jarausch, Lindenberger, and Ramsbros 2007; Kleist and Glynn 2012; Grunwald 2013) meant a renewed memorial dimension to integration, constructed around tolerance and acceptance. Anna Seleny
identifies 2006 and the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of 1956 as the turning point for political realignment and mnemonic shift around the re-appropriation of 1989 (Selény 2014). In the Romanian case, this re-approachment began with the decisive memory politics concerning communism after the 2004 elections and reached a more consolidated form in the 2007 Condemnation of communism. In both cases, this “negative heritage” informed by a tolerant political ideal managed to transform otherwise disputed national perspective.

The refreshed memory on other conditions of refugees operated as a mediation and naturalized in fact a generalized status of victim, one which needs recognition above the rest. In Hungary, although it would be wrong to argue that the image of pre-1989 refugees in this context was purposefully cultivated as a wider plan to hide the more recent exclusion, the sudden visibility of the late 1980s did in fact quiet the wave of Hungarian refugees that left in 1956. The massive Hungarian wave of refugees that sought shelter elsewhere was silenced in the rhetoric of Fidesz and even replaced by the 1989 images (Harms 2017). In fact, the relative easiness with which the Hungarians were received was an equally positive story for the critiques against the current attitude towards refugees. That particular wave in 1956 did in fact represent the acceptable, Cold War impersonation of the refugee: necessarily a political “dissident” and eager to lose, rather than maintain, an identity. The claims for justice, rights, and responsibilities (largely put forward by discourses of victimhood), were a fruitful terrain to expand an idea of a renewed sense of citizens who had fought and achieved his or her freedom. Pre-emptive memory in this case helped assert this narrative of victimhood as a dimension of sovereignty. In this sense, the articles covering the reluctance of Hungary in 2015 were equally appropriating the predominant anti-communist victim narrative underscoring the liberal tolerance at the time and now.

Images of East German and Romanian refugees in 1989 were filling both media and discourse in Hungary in 2014 to remind of the historical background of the tolerant Hungarian socialism. For Fidesz, its rooting in the revolutionary 1956 and the political and civil struggle for maintaining open borders have been constitutive of its own anticommunism. This revolutionary notion, the same placing 1989 as a discourse of European values in Romanian debates, was reclaimed to strengthen the sovereignty narrative. What is more, they suggest the continuation between 1956 and 1989. The visibility of the political heritage of 1989 operated as an evocation of the failed justice of security forces and state actions – reframing the 1956 events into a popular action standing for sovereignty. In a move against the normative liberal discourses, the ongoing reinterpretation of sovereignty in relation to the credible “strong” and functional state occurred in light of the refugee debate, taps into a dispute between images of the “nation” and that of the “republic” (Egry 2010).

This was made more apparent by a growing “totalitarian” dimension of memory politics (Bauerkämper 2012) would lead to this point. Its central perspective framed by the parallel between National Socialism and Communism as the negative of the contemporary political configuration) supports the “de-coupling of a European collective identity from the collective identities bound to the nation state” (Lagrou 1999; Delanty 2005; Laczó and Wawrzyniak 2017). In this sense, 1989 comes as a constitutional moment of political genealogy (Soysal 2010). The negative political heritage of authoritarianism and commun-ism supported the exclusion what the state portrays as narratives liberalism (Levy and Snaider 2010; Malksoo 2010; Leggewie and Lang 2011). Indeed, European supranationalism has been both an institutional and a political identification meant to impose a balance over the nationally contested incongruous or uncomfortable histories. In Romania the 2015 context, a new focus on victimhood and image of the victim
emerged in this European frame, as authorities in Budapest were accused of challenging standards of “European” citizenship by treating refugees “by club and serial numbered”.39

This was prominent in attempts by Traian Basescu, the former (liberal democrat) president of Romania, of coupling national victimhood narrative with a European political horizon, which also ensured much of his legitimacy basis. Such framings fall into the direction the Liberal Democrat Party, the main governing party for over a decade in Romania, which engaged publicly with the communist past in symbolic and abstract lines of transitional justice. With the Official Condemnation of Communism and the ensuing activity of the newly established Institute for the Study of Communist Crimes, the redress concerning provided a narrative which evinced much of the debate concerning political biographies and accountability concerning the past. In Hungary, it was the supra-national constitutional importance of citizenship which spilt into older nationalist discourses as the foreign ministry’s spokesman explained “the Hungarian people have no reason to celebrate December 1” during the celebrations of the National day in Romania. Minority rights are thus presented as part of the European civilizational perspective on the new political identity as a sovereign state, expressing nationalism through proximate identifications based on resentment. In this sense, the mobilization of memory which often builds the conflation between concepts of the identity politics, the transnational status of the liberal post-socialist polity and different perspectives on citizenship functions within and to support the logic of a strong statehood. It thus gradually became more urgent that liberal symbols – such as the 1989 events – avoid having the good European claims tarnished by nationalism, homogenization and ethnicities. Selectively emphasizing the European dimension and its particular while maintaining the distinct national meanings of the revolution.

Conclusion

In his recent introduction to the issue in *Patterns of Prejudice*, Dan Stone argues that there is a methodological bias that relegated discussions about refugees to the now (Stone 2018). He, in contrast, argues for the need to historicize, relying on Peter Gatrell’s argument that “refugee history cannot just be about refugees”. (2018, 54) If indeed the refugee does not exist in a vacuum, one has also to look at how knowledge about war, plight, violence is constructed and above all made normative. It is based on this knowledge that one reacts ethically and understands urgency or emergency. There is, in other words, much to say about the memory of difficult, traumatic pasts in the way one understands the present. What is more, such dependence between the past and now – mediated by a construction of the future, has been increasingly the concern of memory practice and has extended to other turning points, such as 1989, with different implications and often generating competing memories.

The bulk of this paper has sought to trace how memory dynamics around 1989 fair in the context of codification of memory and aimed to historicize the context in which the socialist past proved to be not an affirmative but a negative counter to the narratives of rights – in 2014–2015 during the refugee crisis. The analysis follows this direction because memory (and representations of the past) influence current politics, in the broadest sense (Olick 2007). If memory political narratives exist in a form or another at present, they do so because of a historical genealogy in both form and usage.

These, in fact are attached to a gradual change, from a consensus driven memorial narrative to remembrance rivalry, around 1989. It has in particular mapped a polarization between Romania and Hungary where representations of 1989 as pre-emptive political heritage have moved from a radically affirmative perspective of liberalism (as imagined
in the early 1990s in the midst of the reconfigurations of notions of the state and citizenship) to more conservative iterations. This reality is an effect of a transnationalization of memory, where 1989 is becoming a symbol of political will, citizenship and dissent after two decades and a half when it enjoyed a decidedly more ambivalent representation.

As the text shows, this transnational narrative represented a solution for an otherwise contested history, but, in fact, it entrenched memorial debates into further conservative and exclusionary constructs. As a populist representation of the past, as a functional narrative of identity politics, long-standing geopolitical imaginaries and ethnic local rivalries and the cosmopolitan identifications which proved to be a dynamic field of contestations.

This transnational perspective on state and polity co-existed with longstanding quarrels, which proves that, despite “European memory” discourses claiming reconciliation around histories of political violence and assigning a redefining role to 1989, disputed memories are reconfigured within such cosmopolitan perspectives on the past to integrate perspectives on statehood that thrive when “our” narrative of the past is seen as having been misunderstood and misrepresented by others (Diner 2003). In this perspective, the remembrance on 1989 ostensibly evaded a negative perception of “ethnicity” and was rather conditioned by a transnational dimension of memory in Europe as a staple of a cultural significance of a European political identity for much of the last three decades.

It was this context which was suddenly made manifest around the refugee debate in 2014–2015, where the European perspective on the recent past has been mobilized by the discrepancy between a largely apologetic European memorial discourse whose political culture relies on a recognition of crimes “politics of regret” (Olick 2007; Ther 2016). To the extent the apologetic perspective prompts a reconceptualization of memory as transcultural, it falls short in acknowledging how this pan-European construct converges older territorial tensions with unwittingly ethnicized models of remembrance (around minorities, for instance). A memory based on the “politics of regret” built through representations of guilt and victims also had the adverse effects on representations and dynamics of states and has turned against the idea of a complex memory debate, by generating competing representations of identity grafted on this politics. In this context, the civic memory around 1989, for instance, did not open the exclusionary imaginary of the refugee as a threat through ideas of solidarity of civic mobilization, but in fact strengthened an imaginary of direct threat being posed to an otherwise precarious political identity which 1989 as memory narrative represents.

Notes
1. Of the simmering nationalist rhetoric employed around the Romanian-Hungarian ethnicity dynamics in Transylvania.
2. http://www.boon.hu/kulfoldi-sajto-magyarorszagrol-roman-es-nemet-lapok-orban-viktor-tusnadfurdoi-beszedero/2607219?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A%2Fboon%2Forszagos%28Borsod%2BOnline%2FOrszagos%29%20FIDESZ’s discourse around 1989 has relied heavily on a generational breed of anti-communism deriving from its beginnings as a youth association and the fact that protests in Timisoara sparked around the attempts to oust Laszlo Tokes has been part of a speculative discourse on 1989 between the two countries.
5. The National Salvation Front, which included many of the former members of the regime was contested by public protests immediately after January 1990 and the repression of these protests
in June 1990 and in 1991 polarized public opinion about the extent to which a substantial change had actually taken place. This initial period of political debate was important for memory debates because most of the transitional justice appeals emerged as counter-discourse at this time.

6. The international perspective and evaluation of the regime changes in both countries were strongly influential in the political configurations. In Hungary, the international support boosted the credentials of the government and consequent politics, despite the wide contestation of its former political trajectory. The opposite occurred in Romania, where the general surprise in the foreign press on the violence of the 1989 events and the repression of the University Square protests in 1990 led to the isolation of the government internationally.

7. The fact that the disappointment in the political aftermath was expressed alongside a mobilization around the unaccounted for victims remained a feature of commemorations. The interest in this individual dimension was rarely replaced with a distinct cultural narrative around the transformation to liberalism.

8. In the idea of pre-emption there is a dimension of a threat elicited by this potentially negative future that makes present memories and remembrance relevant as a precaution.

9. There has been a consistent stream of criticism of the intellectual discourse of “transitology” since, but nevertheless its cultural figurations have endured, and have been revived partially in light of the European “integration” discourse, where particular states were explicitly evaluated as able to “catch up” with their counterparts. For recent relevant work of the long standing implications of this perspective, see Peter Hitchcock. “The Failed State and the State of Failure.” Mediations 23.2 (Spring 2008), Thinking Through Transition, Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Past and Intellectual History in East Central Europe after 1989 (eds. Kopecek Michal, Weislik Piotr. Budapest: Central University Press and Beyond Transition, Memory and Identity Narratives in Eastern and Central Europe (2015), eds. Tornquist-Plewa Barbara, Bernsand Niklas and Narvselius Eleonara, Lund: Lund University Press.

10. Though the term “liberal nationalism” scarcely figures in Romanian political discourse, it has been largely the lived experience since 1989 as the inexorable force of universal liberal values and globalized markets. On the one hand, it would be hard to deny the influence of liberal universalist values on definitions of political imaginary he last 30 or so years: these values are clearly identified as liberal democratic values and, in there has been no particular effort to wrap them in a nationalist idiom or formulation other than to say they are part of democratic heritage. 2 Affirmations of loyalty are to the polity, its political institutions and norms, and to its people, and not to a particular national culture or way of life.’

11. Recently, this has emerged in Orban’s reevaluation of Miklos Horthy as “exceptional statesmen like Governor Miklós Horthy, Prime Minister István Bethlen, and Kuno Klebelsberg.” By whose contribution “history didn’t bury us under the weight of the lost war, the 133 days of red terror, and the Diktat of Trianon. Without the governor there is no prime minister, and without the prime minister there is no minister. Even Hungary’s dismal role in World War II cannot call into question this fact.” http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/minel-tobbet-ad-fel-hitebol-es-a-kulturajabol-europa-annal-gyengebb-lesz/.

12. Laszlo Tokes had been vocally blaming the systematic censorship and infringement of human rights under the Ceausescu regime and had consequently been a person of interest for the Secret Security Forces. In December 1989, after surviving an attempted murder he was ordered to move to a less visible position away from Timisoara. The public mobilization in December in Timisoara began in order to prevent his relocation.

13. “We ask Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the government he leads to build a system of national cooperation in such a way as to provide Transylvania with protectorate status as Austria did with South Tyrol.” July 27, 2013, speaking at the Tusványos Summer University and Student Camp in Bâile Tușnad, source available online: http://itthon.transindex.ro/?cikk=20893. Accessed May 18 2018.

14. The National Socialist occupation at the end of the Second World War and the communist regime (1949–1989) have been both included as successive illegitimate regimes, thus opposing the true “roots” of the state in the interwar period, in the definition of the post-1989 polity in the text of the 2011 Hungarian Constitution.

15. Approximately 4000 individuals joined the yearly commemoration and asked for the reconsideration of the Treaty of Trianon, which has been a prominent memorial narrative for the Hungarian government as a basis for its right-wing politics today. The Hungarian modern territory,
largely the same as that established in 1920 in the peace treaty, was diminished to only a fraction of its pre-war size.

16. The discourse on minorities was crucial in the case of the two countries, and also speculated by both governments for proving and strengthening their status as liberal polities but also to engage with the consistent opposition that emerged against the exclusionary politics, in particular in the Romanian situation.

17. The large Romanian majority is due to the organized settlement of Romanians in major Transylvanian cities before and following the Second World War.

18. In 1952, the so-called Hungarian Autonomous Province was created (Regiunea Autonomă Maghiară in Romanian or Magyar Autonóm Tartomány in Hungarian.) The autonomous province had a 77% Hungarian majority, a total population of 731,387 and incorporated 13 500 sq. km of territory. Hungarian cultural and linguistic rights were much better protected in the Hungarian Autonomous Province than anywhere else in multi-ethnic Transylvania, where a process of assimilation got underway.


20. Debates around the notion of state, strong or weak, have been primarily portrayed as a question of authoritarianism, yet much of the debates in Eastern Europe, which has struggled with a lack of legitimacy of political structures after 1989 requires more nuance. In Romanian recent debates, the notion of the state, public good has reached a new dimension primarily after the 2012 austerity measures, where the predominantly unquestioned neoliberalism was countered by “neo-leftist” redistributive discourses, at their turn contested because of their resonances. In this sense, the “’state’ appears as a positive notion which has not yet been fully vindicated to support citizen initiatives.

21. Laszlo Tokes was among the first members of the group of former European “dissidents” who pursued a more transnational recognition to the abuses of the communist regime.

22. This memorial discourse of criminalization was still central to the latest attempt in 2013 when a group of members of the European Parliament, among them Laszlo Tokes, addressed a letter to the President of the European Parliament, in which they requested a ban of symbols of totalitarian regimes.

23. The idea of forced intervention against the Hungarian minority was also widely publicized at that time, for instance news footage broadcasted by the BBC took for granted the idea that most victims were Hungarian, a fact which was later disproved.


25. https://www.ft.com/content/72c821d0-682f-11e4-bcd5-00144feabdc0. 


27. Among the projects consolidating this perspective is the Memorial for Victims of Totalitarianism, to to be built in Brussels in the following years.

28. Several brochures issued by the local NGOs involved in the commemoration emphasized this peaceful cohabitation as a response to the political escalation of past tensions.


32. It emphasizes therefore the initial Stalinist phase of the regime (under Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej) which also avoids and absolves from questions of responsibility and participation, also implicitly glossing over the more controversial issues of participation or involvement with the new regime.

33. in the Budapest Museum Terrorhaza, that forefronts a problematic historical narrative layering the Nazi occupation after the March 1944 reconsideration of the Axis alliance and the subsequent communist period (glossing over historical specificities) (Creet 2013; Gross 2015) backs the current European “totalitarian perspective”.


35. Rehabilitation is the main focus of the only monograph on the Romanian victims “Frontieriștii. Istoria recentă în mass-media” (The border people. Recent history in mass-media), by Brîndușa Armanca, published in 2011.


37. The events of 1989 only gradually (in particular after 2000) consolidated into an image of the European community both internally and transnationally as the 2014 commemoration around democracy and reunified Europe, as exhibitions underscoring civil participation and a positive political change towards liberalism about 1989 conveyed (XXXX). This was a change from the very early 1990s, when the reunified Europe political imagery was primarily mobilized against the conservative or nationalist perspectives that arose in the midst of the political uncertainty nationally.

38. The official casualties toll has been established at 1.104 people were killed, and 3.352 were wounded.


Notes on contributors

Dana Dolghin is a PhD Candidate in the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture, University of Amsterdam, with a thesis looking at forgetting in memory culture, with a specific focus on the post-socialist space.

References


