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**Second-hand Memories of the Communist Era:
The First Postsocialist Generation in Romania**

by

Daniel Hanu

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of
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*In memory
of our recent past*

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DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work and it has not been submitted, partially or in its entirety, at any institution other than the University of Warwick.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which memories of the communist era in Romania are transmitted to young people with no first-hand experience of those times. It looks at how youth actively contribute to the process of mnemonic socialization, where they are exposed to technologies of memory conveying both nostalgic and anticommunist, state-sponsored, discourses. It argues that in this context young people create their own emotionally imbued versions of the past, ‘second-hand memories’ (Keightley and Pickering, 2012) that result after lengthy and intricate processes of distillation.

Another main argument of the thesis is that the past influences the present. Hence, young people live in societies where the effects of the communist era are still identifiable. Such traces can be found in the built environment, in the material culture, in the behaviour and practices of people or in the state of postsocialist Romanian society. Youth make use of second-hand memories in order to understand past, present and future. The fact that they inhabit *milieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989) could be a reason for their interest in the communist era. By engaging with the recent past, young people also endeavour to explore their own identities, which have, in turn, been influenced by the times that preceded their birth.

Literature on processes and politics of memory transmission and production focuses primarily on media of memory per se and on first-hand accounts of ‘eyewitnesses’. This thesis, whose findings are based on the thematic analysis of 59 in-depth interviews with Romanian young people born between 1986 and 1996, takes individuals as active producers of memories and unravels the ways in which social actors interact with vehicles of memory transmission and with discourses on the past. It thus represents an empirical exploration of how second-hand memories are created in a postsocialist context. By doing this, it contributes to the development of memory studies by extending the theoretical concepts of ‘second-hand memories’ and ‘mnemonic imagination’ (Keightley and Pickering, 2012), and by demonstrating the wider applicability of notions such as Pierre Nora’s (1989) ‘*milieux de mémoire*’, with its ensuing implications, or that of ‘embodied memory’.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago, the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe were falling one by one. Some peacefully, others - violently. Despite social and political unrest, life also carried on, routinely. Children were born into a new world; one that promised freedom, equal opportunities and prosperity. Fast forwarding to the present day: the euphoria of the Autumn of the People (Przeworski, 1991) has long faded; hopes have been shattered partially, but the image of the 'evil' past still remains in collective memory, carefully and skillfully reinforced by the postsocialist regimes and by family narratives. But another version of the recent past has gained ground; rose-tinted memories of (aspects of) the communist era - although not necessarily of the regime - have become mingled with narratives about a condemnable political regime. Even if mostly confined to private, personal narratives and thus distinguished from state-sponsored politics of memory (Boyarin, 1994), manifestations of nostalgia have further complicated the anyway complex and intricate general mnemonic representations of 45 years under a communist regime.

What is of significance for social research is that the past is yet to become 'another country', to turn on its head Tony Judt's (1992) famous phrase that summed up the approach of contemporary Western societies towards the past¹. Not only that it is not 'foreign' in the sense that it is relevant to contemporary society,

¹ A phrase originally made famous by L. P. Hartley in the novel 'The go-between', first published in 1953: 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there' (2000: 5)

but it is neither a ‘country’ in that the past does not have certain fixed characteristics that are to be remembered; it has no borders and its landscape is rather fluid. Reality is perceived in multifarious ways that are subject to change, especially over time. Hence, there is no ‘truth’ about ‘another country’ that one could uncover. Remembering, the only way of gaining access to the past, is a phenomenon that is inherently selective, fluid, and context-dependent (Emmerich, 2011; Fentress and Wickham, 1992; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Zelizer, 1995) which leads to the assertion that the past is constructed on a continuous basis by each and every person that recalls it, either based on first-hand experience or on mediated memories.

However, one needs to have a broad frame of reference when discussing the recent past. De facto, Romania, which is the focus of this study, was under a communist regime² between 1945 and 1989³. The first era (1945/47 - 1965), associated with Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, was characterised by political repression and political prisons, Soviet military occupation (from 1944 to 1958), the nationalization of properties, and collectivization. Gheorghiu-Dej was followed by Nicolae Ceaușescu⁴, whose terms in office (1965-1989), commonly known as

² Throughout the thesis, ‘communist’ and ‘socialist’ are used interchangeably, despite the different ideological connotations they have. In postsocialist Romania, the pre-1989 period is referred to as ‘the communist era’ or ‘communism’ and for this reason I prefer to use these terms. The term ‘postsocialist’ is used here due to its prevalence in Western academic literature although in Romania the period after 1989 is commonly referred to as ‘postcommunist’ or ‘post-decembrist’ (with reference to the Revolution of 1989).

³ During the first years, the governments of The Kingdom of Romania were controlled by the communist party. On 30 December 1947, King Michael was forced to abdicate and The Romanian People's Republic was proclaimed. In 1965, its name was changed to The Socialist Republic of Romania.

⁴ In 1974, Nicolae Ceaușescu became the first president of Romania.

‘national-communism’, were characterised by shortages and limitations on human rights, secret police surveillance, urban systematization and industrialization, as well as the flourishing of the personality cult. The Revolution of 1989 (16-25 December), which killed over a thousand people and left more than 3,000 wounded, ended with the execution of the Ceaușescu couple⁵. Power was assumed by former General Secretary of the Union of Communist Youth (1956-1970) Ion Iliescu⁶ but still, the story - even the one told by young people (see: Chapter 8) - goes, the political system remained unreformed.

These ‘facts’ about the communist era in Romania are no more than the skeleton for innumerable personal accounts of the past as experienced or imagined by individuals with their own socio-historical backgrounds. Confronted with this diverse array of memories, ‘the Children of the Revolution’ are faced with the daunting task of making sense of a past they have not experienced directly. For them, the past might seem ‘another country’ because of lack of first-hand experience of living during those times. The communist era could be perceived as a distant time, as distant as any other historical era. However, due to its impact on micro- and macro-narratives and on practices and behaviours, as well as its social, political, cultural and economic implications for present day postsocialist societies, young people are still experiencing aspects of the communist era. They are thus ‘living’ the communism era, through its traces. Unraveling the tangled strings of

⁵ Elena, Nicolae Ceaușescu’s wife, was, informally, second in charge. Between 1980 and 1989, for instance, she acted as the first deputy prime minister of Romania.

⁶ Ion Iliescu served as President of Romania between 1990 and 1996, and for another term between 2000 and 2004.

memory might thus foster a greater understanding not only of the past, but also of the present.

This research is concerned with the strategies employed by Romanian young people with no first-hand experiences of the communist era to (re)produce, as active mnemonic actors, memories of the socialist period by appropriating, interpreting and reworking memories of that time. Its aim is to look at both memory transmission and production, and by doing that to place individuals at the centre of research. This emphasis is important since much has been written about vehicles of memory transmission and politics of memory but less about people's strategies of engaging with the past (Kansteiner, 2002), not to mention in the specific context of Romania. Thus, the present study is designed to address a topic which only recently scholars have started to research with regards to postsocialism (see, for instance, Andi Mihalache, 2002, 2008; Cătălina Mihalache, 2003a, 2003b)⁷.

Postsocialism is now an established area of study of politics, sociology and cultural studies. While, initially, studies focused strictly on the development of former communist societies in the 1990s and beyond and on transforming social and cultural practices, more recent research has incorporated studies on the ways in which socialism is remembered and affects people from Central and Eastern Europe. Recollection was thus acknowledged among the practices of the present that deserve

⁷ One noteworthy contribution to academic debates on second-hand memories of the communist era in Romania is the research project 'The Memory of Communism in the Young Generations - a case of construction of the public issues through media debates in the Romanian public sphere', undertaken between 2012 and 2014 within the Center for Research in Communication, Faculty of Communication and Public Relations of The National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest; coordinator: Mălina Iona Ciocca.

the attention of scholars. In this way memory studies have extended their scope from a primary concern with the Holocaust to the socialist/communist past. The coming together of memory studies and postsocialist studies has generated a substantial body of work dealing with discursive constructions and politics of memory⁸, lustration and processes of transitional justice⁹, vehicles of memory transmission such as school curricula¹⁰, museum displays¹¹, media¹², and material traces like monuments¹³, built environment¹⁴ or objects¹⁵, commemoration and performativity¹⁶ and intergenerational memory transmission¹⁷. Most studies either analysed cultural products (material or discursive) or were concerned with first-hand memories, partly as an oral history endeavour. Further foci of research have been represented by the way people from particular (minority) ethnic groups¹⁸, from various regions¹⁹ or having (had) specific occupations²⁰ engage in mnemonic processes, to name just a few. Reflecting the recent surfacing of nostalgia in Germany, in the former Yugoslav

⁸ See: Kopeček, 2008; Lehti *et al.*, 2008; Onken, 2010; Tamm, 2008; Verdery, 1999; Wulf, 2010; etc.

⁹ See: Barahona de Brito *et al.*, 2001; González-Enríquez, 2001; Petrescu and Petrescu, 2009a, 2009b; Stan, 2006a, 2006b, 2009; etc.

¹⁰ See: Dimou, 2010; Vodopivec, 2010; etc.

¹¹ See: Lee, 2010; Main, 2008; Mark, 2008; Sharenkova, 2010; Sharpley, 2009; Vukov, 2008; etc.

¹² See: Barney, 2009; Daković, 2008; Dale, 2007; Hodgkin, 2004, 2011; Popescu-Sandu, 2010; Solomon, 2008; etc.

¹³ See: Kattago, 2008; Lee, 2010; Lehti *et al.*, 2008; Nadkarni, 2003; Saunders, 2010a, 2010b; Williams, 2008; etc.

¹⁴ See: Czepczyński, 2008; Main, 2005, Mihalache A, 2003; etc.

¹⁵ See: Berdahl, 1999; Poblócki, 2008; Ten Dyke, 2000; Velikonja, 2008; etc.

¹⁶ See: Czepczyński, 2008; Gook, 2011; Ochman, 2009; etc.

¹⁷ See: Budrytè, 2010; Sarkisova and Shevchenko, 2011; etc.

¹⁸ See: Golubeva, 2010; Klumbytè, 2010; Parla, 2009; Schwandner-Sievers, 2010; etc.

¹⁹ See: Ochman, 2009, for instance

²⁰ See: Petrović, 2010; Vodopives, 2010; etc.

space and elsewhere in the Eastern bloc, research has also started to address nostalgia as a distinct stance towards the past (see: Berdahl, 1999; Gille, 2010; Nadkarni, 2010).

Until the 2010s, remembering the communist era in Romania was dealt with in academia only through the prism of eyewitnesses who suffered during those times and employing approaches characteristic of political sciences. Responding to the dominance of anticommunist discourse at societal level, studies primarily explored and/or justified dystalgia (Janack, 1999)²¹. Research has also briefly tackled nostalgic references from the Romanian media (see: Georgescu, 2010). As for studies of ways people remember the communist era in the context of Romania, these emerged only recently and predominantly within Western academia²², although not exclusively so²³.

Since communism has been structurally - economically, politically, socially and culturally - embedded in societies across four continents and for several decades in the twentieth century, thus affecting the lives of almost half the world's population (Rose, 2012; Outhwaite and Ray, 2005), it is no wonder that its effects evoked the interest of scholars. Being an intrinsic part of both personal and meta-narratives, the communist past cannot be ignored and, for its potential to act as an idealized or demonized alternative system in the eyes of young people but also because it influences the identities of those who live in postsocialist societies, the past, and processes of (re)constructing it, deserve to be better understood.

²¹ Such studies are those of Barbu, 2004; Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008; Dobre, 2011; Petrescu and Petrescu, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Preda, 2010; etc.

²² See: the unpublished theses of Grossman, 2010a; Paulesc, 2014.

²³ See: the studies of Bădică, 2009, 2010.

The current research is a case study of the first postsocialist generation from Romania. The three main research questions that guided fieldwork concerned: the ways in which memories of the communist era are transmitted to young people; how youth make sense of the recent past; and what exactly is remembered and forgotten by the younger generation of Romanians in relation to the communist past. In-depth interviews, intergenerational interviews and walking tours were employed to provide rounded knowledge about young people's relationships with the recent past. While the last of these questions provided a wealth of information on what is and is not remembered, in the thesis the first two questions are forefronted since they facilitate a deeper understanding of not only the content but the process of memory transmission

Instead of making a clear-cut distinction between history and memory, this study adopts an inclusive take on memory as comprising any information about the past. It follows that history, as argued in Chapter 2, is perceived as an institutionalized form of memory. A rigid view on memory and history would only reinforce artificial disciplinary boundaries and would unnecessarily complicate explorations of the way people deal with the past. This broad understanding of memory stems also from the constructivist approach that underpins the research undertaken, which sees the past as being continuously (re)created from present-day standpoints.

The national context of Romania, one of the postsocialist societies in which dealing with the communist era has been undertaken almost exclusively in the public sphere and adopting a negative tone, has been chosen as a fieldsite for several reasons. Despite the proliferation of anticommunist discourse, few museum

exhibitions consider the communist era and, even more importantly, no lustration law has been adopted. All in all, no significant, concrete steps have been taken to provide any kind of closure²⁴. At the same time, the recent past is discussed in radical terms, and social actors engage in passionate debates. The anticommunist stance, as it will be argued in Chapter 4, becomes the only socially acceptable, if not compulsory, positioning (Puzik, 2014). It is precisely this paradoxical mnemonic landscape that makes exploring how young people are mnemonically socialized interesting. Furthermore, the violent character of the demise of the communist regime - the Revolution of December 1989 - adds another layer to the memories about the communist era. Exploring processes of memory transmission and (re)production in this complicated and radicalized mnemonic context can offer valuable knowledge about the effect of politics of memory on young people. Finally, while this study focuses on the Romanian context, it could well act as a building block for a comparative analysis of processes of transmission and (re)production across Central and Eastern Europe.

As for the target group of the research, I have chosen to look at the first postsocialist generation precisely because of their lack of experience of life during the communist era, but also because of their closeness in time to the period under study. As one moves further away in time from the communist era, first-hand experiences become less accessible, traces end up being overwritten by new developments and so the communist era, experiences of the society of 1945/7-1989, becomes less relevant to subsequent generations. As argued above regarding the

²⁴ Apart from the official condemnation of the communist era by president Traian Băsescu in December 2006.

national context of Romania, this research could also represent a first stage in a cross-generational comparison of means of engaging with the past.

None of the participants had significant first-hand memories of the communist era and thus they have created their own interpretations of the past by comparing those times with the transition period they have experienced²⁵. Following accession to NATO in 2004 and to the European Union in 2007, Romanian society has reoriented itself towards the West and towards respecting fundamental human rights. Young people thus compare the experience of a perfectible present with the image of a flawed past or, in a few cases, vice versa. Time and again, they justify the lack of civic action of people under communism through the fact that people allegedly were unaware then that it was possible to live in a better society. Young people do know that the present is better than the past, at least by generally guaranteeing the right to free speech, and, even more, that the present can be much improved. They manifest lucidity and awareness of socio-historical contexts that help them foster a sense of identity and belonging to the present that is informed by the past and that will shape their future.

A primary objective of the research was to determine whether the proliferation of anticommunist discourse actually influenced the production of second-hand memories. In other words, are vehicles of memory transmission conveying the state-sponsored version of the past actually effective? Or are private narratives, acting as nostalgic counter-memories, more important in the process of mnemonic socialization? The overall aim was to identify the relevance of the communist era in young people's lives and ascertain how it came to play a particular role.

²⁵ See: Paulesc, 2014

By illuminating the processes of memory transmission and construction in the context of postsocialism, this research might inform politics of memory and approaches to mnemonic socialization. For instance, a focus on the communist regime and its victims could be complemented by more complex representations of daily life during the communist era. In order to arrive at an in-depth understanding of what the communist era might have involved, young people wish to have access to memories of various aspects of the past. It is precisely because I did not want to restrict discussions to the political dimensions of the communist regime, I insisted on talking about anything Romanian society might have involved in the time frame of ‘the communist era’²⁶.

Apart from its potential implications for policymakers, this research might have also helped participants, as some admitted, to explore their own identity and relationship with the past. Intergenerational interviews were, in some instances, opportunities for giving voice to issues that have long been silenced and that participants were surprised to find out about. The family narratives of a few participants were, in this way, enriched.

The contents of the thesis is split into seven chapters, apart from the introduction and conclusion. In the next chapter, the intellectual context of the research will be discussed, thus placing it within current academic debates from social memory studies. It will be shown how concepts dealing with social memory might help understand the ways in which young people make sense of the past. The

²⁶ Although, occasionally, both I and participants might have used the term ‘communism’ when referring to the past in the heat of conversation, I made it clear both in the information sheet and at the outset at each in-depth interview that for me, discussions about ‘communism’ refer to anything related to the period between 1945 and 1989

rationale for adopting ‘second-hand memories’, a notion coined by Keightley and Pickering (2012), as the best way to conceptualise the memories young people actively construct from a diverse range of sources and discourses is outlined. Furthermore, Keightley and Pickering’s concept of ‘mnemonic imagination’ is used as a starting point to understand the intricate mechanism through which collective / cultural / social / personal memories are transformed into ‘second-hand memories’.

Chapter 3 deals with the research methods and design of the study. Besides providing technical details about access strategies, the recruitment process and the ways in which the research process was undertaken and refined, it also presents the intellectual process of developing an ethnographic approach for studying memory transmission and creation, as well as the underpinnings of employing in-depth interviews as the main - but not exclusive - research method, emphasizing the co-creation of knowledge between participants and researcher. Research encounters took the form of an exchange of knowledge about the past and experiences of engaging with it between participant and researcher, who had both been socialised in several level of mnemonic communities. The chapter also deals with issues of reflexivity, ethics and power relations. The experience of the researcher was employed throughout the research, through reflexivity, to arrive at in-depth understandings of the way participants engage with the past. At the same time, every effort was made to reduce, as far as possible, the power disparities between participants and researcher, inherent to any research process.

Having established the intellectual and methodological premises of the research, Chapters 4 through 8 offer discussions of the empirical data. Part 2, made

of Chapters 4 and 5, considers collective and collected memories and focuses on the polarized discursive constructions of the past identified by young people in Romanian society: state-sponsored anticommunism and private nostalgia. Taking in turn the vehicles of memory transmission that convey the anticommunist discourse, Chapter 4 briefly discusses its effects on young people, as identified by them in a reflexive exercise. Chapter 5 is concerned with the process of mnemonic socialization. Its argument is that whilst families are indeed important vehicles of memory transmission, and also provide the social context of (at least the initial stages of) engaging with the past, the role played by intergenerational transmission of memories is not crucial. Rather, young people are being socialized - and actively contribute to their own socialization - into mnemonic communities of various orders - familial, local, national etc. - by using all sources available to them and, based on specific criteria, they decide which to take into account and which to discard. The result of mnemonic socialization is the creation of a set of second-hand memories, under continuous redefinition, that help young people grasp the meanings of the recent past.

Part 3 brings together, under the heading 'Living memories: The interplay between past and present', Chapters 6, 7 and 8. They deal, in turn, with traces of the communist era left in the built environment, material culture and in the social practices and behaviours of people. They demonstrate that the past is not a matter of what has been and is no more. Rather, the recent past has decisively shaped present-day societies and traces of it are still identifiable even by those who have not lived under the communist regime. If in the case of the built environment and objects it is easier to identify their origin, in the case of practices and behaviours, it

is young people who associate them with the communist era, regardless of when they were actually formed. All three chapters show how young people live in *milieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989), where remnants of the past are mingled with products of the present. In this sense, then, memories are truly ‘living memories’ (Mah, 2010), shaping the society young people live in and their identities.

The concluding part sums up the arguments put forward throughout the thesis and indicates possible lines of further exploration of the process of memory transmission and (re)production. As the past interplays with the present, it is only by exploring the ways in which young people make sense of a period that predates them that one can uncover what lies behind their political attitudes, as well as what motivates the behaviour and practices they manifest in contemporary society.

PART 1

Theoretical and methodological frameworks

CHAPTER 2

Theory

2.1. Introduction

The study of memory as a process that transcends the individual has emerged as a significant object of academic study in the second half of the twentieth century producing diverse theories and conceptualizations depending upon their particular vantage point. In order to avoid the use of terms ‘in an ambiguous and vague way’ (Erlil, 2010: 1), Olick and Robbins suggest employing the umbrella term ‘social memory studies’ as ‘a general rubric for inquiry into the diversity of forms through which we are shaped by the past, conscious and unconscious, public and private, material and communicative, consensual and challenged’ (1998: 112). As evident from the definition they propose, a general category dealing with memory, in Olick and Robbins’ view (1998), would centre on the effect of the past on present and future identities; an issue that will be discussed later in this chapter and that also emerges from the empirical data (see, especially, Chapter 8).

The current research aims to contribute to academic debates regarding the processes through which ‘second-hand memories’ (Keightley and Pickering, 2012) are transmitted and reproduced. It starts from the premise that rather than simply being ‘memory consumers’ (Kansteiner, 2002), young people are agents that actively invest effort into making sense of a time they have not directly experienced. They interact with diverse vehicles of memory transmission and, through the use of mnemonic imagination, create their own, personal memories of

a remote past. In order to understand the mechanisms of these processes, one needs to look at the wider academic debates about social memory studies. In this chapter key concepts such as ‘collective memory’, ‘cultural memory’, ‘social memory’, and ‘postmemory’/‘imagined memory’/‘prosthetic memories’ are explored, indicating how they each cover a specific mode of social remembering and where they overlap. For example, narratives of the past are shaped by discourses, mainstream or alternative, which constitute an element of ‘collective memory’ (Halbwachs, 1992). If we talk about the impact of family narratives, these intergenerational processes of memory transmission might be considered, rather, ‘social memory’ (Fentress and Wickham, 1992) while material culture would constitute what Jan Assmann (1995, 2010) calls ‘cultural memory’. Finally, the accounts of participants, which demonstrate the role of mnemonic imagination (Keightley and Pickering, 2012) in creating a personal view of a past that has not been experienced at first-hand, could be considered an illustration of what Olick (1999) defines as ‘collected memory’. Hence, a discussion of all concepts pertaining to social memory studies would contribute to a satisfactory understanding of the way in which memories of the communist era are created, transmitted and reworked.

In this chapter, besides unpacking these concepts, I will also reflect on the academic debates regarding the ontological status of memory. Memory is a phenomenon that is inherently creative, and does not replicate past experiences; and is selective, fluid and not static in that it is not to be conceived as a resource of narratives about past events that are simply dug out and brought to the present, each time exactly as they happened. Memory is also ‘mobile and formative, not

merely repetitive' (Keightley and Pickering, 2012: 7). This study, through its focus on the way people engage with the past, starts from the constructivist premise that memory is actively constructed, in present day contexts, by individuals, through diverse processes, among which mnemonic imagination (*ibid.*) plays a key role. The discussion moves on to the nostalgic engagement with the past, as a way in which the present shapes memory, followed by the exploration of intergenerational transmission of memories, where nostalgic views can be manifested. This will facilitate a critical exposition of the concepts that form the theoretical basis of this study before, finally, the roles of embodiment and emplacement in acting as technologies of memory are considered.

2.2. Defining social memory

The term most often used to refer to how the past is remembered, on a social level, is 'collective memory'. This concept was coined by French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992) in the 1920s and is underpinned by the idea that memory is a mediated process and collective memory is a social construction. The value of Halbwach's contribution to social memory studies lies in the linkage he identifies between individuals and society during the act of recollection. In other words, recollection is always carried out in social contexts and functions as a two-way process: 'the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories' (Halbwachs, 1992: 40). The standpoint of the group is, in Halbwachs' (1992) view, shaped by the historical context of the

moment. Hence, memory implies interpreting the past from the present point of view, an issue that will be further discussed in Section 2.3.

Coser (1992) notes that the distinction Halbwachs makes between two modes of remembering: autobiographical and historical memory, is relevant to further developments in the area of social memory studies. If the former is represented by personal recollections of the past and is thus perishable, the latter refers to artifacts that certify the existence of certain past events, and it can be enforced through performative acts; historical memory refers to ‘the past [that] is stored and interpreted by social institutions’ (Coser, 1992: 24). There are parallels that could be drawn between autobiographical and social memory and between historical and cultural memory, as will be argued later.

Since the publication of Halbwachs’ study on collective memory, the concept has assumed a life of its own. Nowadays, ‘collective memory’ is commonly employed ‘to refer to aggregated individual recollections, to official commemorations, to collective representations, and to disembodied constitutive features of shared identities’ (Olick, 1999: 336). Wulf Kansteiner defines collective memory as

the result of the interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests (2002: 180)

Kansteiner's understanding of the processes through which collective memory is created provides a useful starting point for looking into the ways in which 'memory consumers' deal with the other two historical factors, how they create their own mediated memories as 'multimedia collages' (*ibid.*: 190). However, this study will challenge Kansteiner's simplification of the circuit of cultural production. This study places young people as its focal point, but it also argues that what Kansteiner labels as 'memory consumers' are actually also memory (re-)producers, by making use of imagination, according to Keightley and Pickering (2012). Hence, there is no clear-cut distinction between 'memory makers' and 'memory producers', as Kansteiner (2002) suggests.

Instead of employing the ambiguous concept of 'collective memory', Jeffrey Olick suggests distinguishing between 'collected memory' and 'collective memory' - two notions that actually form part of Halbwachs understanding of 'collective memory'. Collected memory represents 'the aggregated individual memories of members of a group' (Olick, 1999: 338) and it could well be applied to the image of the past that one forms after being exposed to various narratives. There are several advantages to using this concept. First, it shifts the focus back to the individual, which is also the aim of this research. Secondly, studies using this notion 'do not necessarily begin by assuming the existence of a collectivity which has a collective memory' (*ibid.*: 339). In the current case, it could be argued that the first postsocialist generation in Romania forms a collectivity. However, one might also argue that individuals negotiate an understanding of the past, in their own way, as a result of their exposure to official and alternative discourses, material culture, media, and embodied practices originating in the communist era etc.

If one takes on board the distinction made by Jeffrey Olick, then the concept of ‘collective memory’ should be used with reference to ‘genuinely collective memory, that is, to public discourses about the past as wholes or to narratives and images of the past that speak in the name of collectivities’ (1999: 345). Chapter 4 on the discursive constructions of the past thus deals with ‘genuinely collective memory’.

Another concept used to refer to socially constructed memory is the less popular ‘social memory’ which actually best renders the social nature of mnemonic processes. Memory, Fentress and Wickham argue, ‘can be social only if it is capable of being transmitted, and, to be transmitted, a memory must first be articulated. Social memory, then, is articulate memory’ (1992: 47); it also has the characteristics of being ‘selective, distorted, and inaccurate’ (*ibid.*: xi), which are essential traits of the phenomenon.

Social memory studies also include the cultural memory perspective which refers to artifacts and media products that act as vehicles of memory transmission. Whilst Astrid Erll advocates that cultural memory, broadly speaking, refers to “‘the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts’” (2010: 2), Jan Assmann (2010), one of the scholars to have developed an understanding of this concept, starts by distinguishing between cultural and communicative memory. Thus, in his view, the former ‘is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent’ (Assmann J., 2010: 110-11). Distinguishing between the two forms of memory in terms of the time span to which they refer, Jan Assmann interestingly and ambiguously notes that ‘[c]ultural memory reaches back into the

past only so far as the past can be reclaimed as “ours.” (2010: 113). It is based on fixed temporal landmarks, ‘figures of memory’, which ‘are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)’ (Assmann J., 1995: 129). Communicative memory, on the other hand, is limited to a ‘horizon [that] does not extend more than eighty to (at the very most) one hundred years into the past’ (Assmann J., 1995: 127) and thus is perishable.

One can identify similarities between cultural memory and Halbwachs’ historical memory, and between communicative memory and Halbwachs’ autobiographical memory, although the two views of memory only partly overlap. Jan Assmann notes that the point of divergence between ‘cultural memory’ and Halbwachs’ conception of ‘collective memory’ is that Halbwachs thought that, once objectified, ‘the group relationship and the contemporary reference are lost and therefore the character of this knowledge as a *mémoire collective* disappears as well’ (Assmann J., 1995: 128, original emphasis). Instead, he proposes that in this condition of objectified memory, ‘a close connection to groups and their identity exists which is similar to that found in the case of everyday memory’ (*ibid.*: 128), thus cultural memory remains within the framework of memory.

A further aspect that aids in making a distinction between cultural and communicative memory is the active/passive dualism. Summing up her argument, Aleida Assmann notes that ‘[t]he institutions of active memory preserve the *past as present* while the institutions of passive memory preserve the *past as past*’ (Assmann A., 2010: 98, original emphasis). Active memory - for Halbwachs (1992) ‘historical memory’, for Jan Assmann (1995, 2010) ‘cultural memory’ - ‘is

built on a small number of normative and formative texts, places, persons, artifacts, and myths which are meant to be actively circulated and communicate in ever-new presentations and performances' (Assmann A., 2010: 100). Drawing on Jan Assmann's work, Wulf Kansteiner notes that in terms of the uses of cultural memories in present contexts, they

occur in the mode of potentiality when representations of the past are stored in archives, libraries, and museums [...] [and] in the mode of actuality when these representations are adopted and given new meaning in new social and historical contexts (2002: 182)

Similar to Halbwachs' 'collective memory', 'cultural memory' reconstructs the past from a contemporary standpoint (Assmann J., 1995). Thus, the influence of present-day context upon the process of recollection seems to emerge as a fundamental characteristic of memory that is socially constructed.

The above quote from Wulf Kansteiner suggests that cultural memory is not confined to material culture but manifests itself also through practices relating to it, and to culture in general. The mode of actuality of cultural memory and Aleida Assmann's understanding of active memory thus blurs the lines between conceptions of memory. Communicative memory, then, refers exclusively to autobiographical memories, whilst cultural memory also encompasses narratives about remote times, as long as these are institutionalized. Cultural memory can be shaped through politics of memory (Boyarin, 1994) and by a number of institutions such as: 'governments; authorities; institutions of socialisation and education from

nurseries to universities; the old and the new media; cultural repositories such as museums and archives; but also the sciences (historical studies in their broadest sense) and the Arts, including literature' (Emmerich, 2011: 244). Hence, when discussing vehicles of memory transmission and how discourses are conveyed, cultural memory becomes a highly relevant concept that covers an integral part of the means through which people engage with the past.

2.3. The relationship between memory and history

Having navigated the 'conceptual muddle' (Wertsch, 2009: 117) of social memory studies and identified the relevance of each concept to the present study I will now turn to the fundamental ontological issue of the relationship between memory and history. Whether the two are seen as distinct views of the past, or as interrelated processes of remembrance, the distinction between history and memory has sparked heated debate and been deemed 'a dead end in memory studies' (Erll, 2010: 7). However, overcoming the compartmentalisation of history and memory, it can be argued that history is an institutionalized form of remembering.

Pierre Nora - a leading contributor to this debate - sees memory as 'in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived' (1989: 8). Unlike memory, history 'is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer' (*ibid.*); it 'besiege[s] memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it' (*ibid.*: 12). Both memory and history

are viewed as social constructs that are partial and flawed. In Nora's view, Crane argues, 'history plays the role of invader and manipulator, a force from within collective memory that is self-destructive and that produces prosthetic artifacts to replace natural connections to reality' (1997: 1379-80). Ultimately, history transforms *milieux de mémoire*, 'real environments of memory' (Nora, 1989: 7), into places of memory, *lieux de mémoire*. In the spirit of the distinction between communicative and cultural memory, or between historical and autobiographical memory, *lieux de mémoire* rests within cultural and/or historical memory since they are 'material, symbolic, and functional' (Nora, 1989: 19) repositories of memory, a way of keeping the past alive. As a means of remembering, *lieux de mémoire*, then, 'only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications' (*ibid.*: 19). Although connected to the discussion about memory and history, Nora's conceptualization of *lieux* and *milieux de mémoire* is of particular relevance to the understanding of the role of embodied and emplaced memories.

Going back to what differentiates memory and history, one of the fundamental issues is how each deal with the present-day relevance of the past. It has already been mentioned that social memory studies acknowledge the constructed nature of memories, from an ever-changing present standpoint. Similarly, Pierre Nora argues that '[m]emory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past' (1989: 8). Discussing the distinction between memory and history, Crane suggests that '[i]f history is both the past(s) and the narratives that represent pasts as historical memory in relation to presents/presence, collective memory is a conceptualization

that expresses a sense of the continual presence of the past' (1997: 1373). She further notes that historical memory, as a subcategory of collective memory, has been institutionalized and has taken the form of a discipline, through 'the professionalization of history' (*ibid.*: 1373). Ultimately, memory contributes to the deconstruction of history, conceptualized as a discipline, by:

explain[ing] how history is used and understood, how versions of the past endlessly contend with one another for control over the sovereign present, and how the study of memory is also the study of forgetting – willful, organized, or unconscious (Blight, 2009: 239)

In this sense, memory deals with the past and the processes of recollection, forgetting and silencing (Blight, 2009), whilst history is only an institutionalized form of memory that serves as a tool in putting into practice politics of memory. The historian, then, is no more than a social actor that 'plays a socially confirmed role as rememberer' (*ibid.*: 1382).

Drawing on the work of Jan Assmann, Wulf Kansteiner notes that '[m]emory studies offer an opportunity to acknowledge that historical representations are negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative, while insisting that the experiences they reflect cannot be manipulated at will' (2002: 195). Hence, while historical narratives aim at offering what is meant to be an accurate account of the past, collective memory moulds the past according to present circumstances (Roediger III *et al.*, 2009; Wertsch, 2009), which is another

general point of differentiation between memory and history. Memory also provides a frame for talking about forgetting and the process of engaging with the past.

Aleida Assmann argues, characteristic to memory, the process of forgetting 'is part of social normality' (2010: 97). Assmann and Shortt (2012) maintain that memory and forgetting are two interrelated processes. In fact, Assmann cautions against making a clear distinction between the two phenomena, suggesting that they should be considered in terms of 'crossovers such as selective forgetting and partial or transitional remembering' (2010: 68). Moreover, she distinguishes between active and passive forgetting, the former being 'implied in intentional acts such as trashing and destroying' (*ibid.*: 97-8), which, she argues, 'are a necessary and constructive part of internal social transformations' (*ibid.*: 98). Such acts can most easily be identified in relation to postsocialist politics of remembrance dealing with built environment (see: Chapter 6). Another form of active forgetting is through chosen amnesia, which may represent a solution for overcoming traumatic experiences (Buckley-Zistel, 2012).

In social memory studies it has been argued that, when we refer to the past, we deal with 'representations of past events that are created, circulated and received within a specific cultural frame and political constellation' (Assmann and Shortt, 2012: 3). Indeed, '[c]ollective memories are produced through mediated representations of the past that involve selecting, rearranging, re-describing and simplifying, as well as the deliberate, but also perhaps unintentional, inclusion and exclusion of information' (*ibid.*: 3-4). All of these processes occur through the prism of present social circumstances, which shape, to a certain extent, accounts of the past and result in the creation of heterogeneous memories, which can also

coexist at individual level (Zerubavel, 1996). These conflicting memories can also concern identity claims, identity formation and identity politics (Assmann J., 1995). In this sense, particular accounts of the past can be used to legitimate political regimes, as Connerton argues: ‘our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and [...] our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order’ (1989: 3). One example of conflicting memories is that of counter-memories and normative memory (the version of the past that is officially endorsed by the state), two mnemonic narrative categories which are situated, by definition, in contrast to one another (Assmann and Shortt, 2012; Pine *et al.*, 2004). One way through which normative memory is transmitted is through ‘traditions of remembering’ (Zerubavel, 1996) that regulate, through ‘social *rules of remembrance* [...] what we should remember and what we can or must forget’ (Zerubavel, 1996: 286, original emphasis).

The relationship between memory and identity, rather than history and identity, is an issue that is discussed extensively in the field of social memory studies. Halbwachs (1992) points out a correlation between collective memory and identity, which manifests itself insofar that references to the past shape individual and collective identities. Boyarin argues that ‘identity and memory are virtually the same concept’ (1994: 23). Linde notes that memory ‘is a key to identity, and to the acquisition of identity’ (2000: 608), while Jan Assmann claims that ‘[m]emory is knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one’s own diachronic identity’ (2010: 114). Indeed, Olick and Robbins, along with Fentress and Wickham (1992), note that ‘[m]emory is a central, if not the central, medium through which identities are constituted’ (Olick and Robbins,

1998: 133). Despite these occasional references to the relationship between memory and identity, Wulf Kansteiner bemoans the fact that it has received little attention in memory studies, even if ‘the focus on identity highlights the political and psychological use-value of collective memory’ (2002: 184). This research project aims to look at the ways in which memory shapes various present day layers of identity, ranging from personal identities to transnational forms of identity (see: Chapter 8).

Returning to the relationship between history and memory, more recent debates have emphasised both the commonality and distinction between the two. For instance, Birth argues that ‘[i]n contrast to “history,” the study of memory seems more local, sensual, and cultural’ (2006: 175). Indeed, memory appears to be more closely connected to personal experiences, in contrast to history (Klein, 2000), being conceptualized ‘as more human and subjective’ (Berliner, 2005: 199). History, then, is perceived as ‘objective in the coldest, hardest sense of the word, [while] memory is subjective in the warmest, most inviting senses of that word’ (Klein, 2000: 129); a distinction also made by Birth (2006), Landsberg (2004), and Wertsch (2009). Whereas history is transmitted using textual means, memory is more malleable due to the various textual, visual, embodied and material means of transmission (Birth, 2006), an aspect that is emphasised in this study.

There is common ground between history and memory and academic debates do not overlook this aspect. According to Jay Winter, ‘the act of producing history and the act of remembrance are gestures toward finding meaning in the past’ (2008: 7). Both memory and history represent ‘two attitudes toward the past, two streams of historical consciousness that must at some point flow into one

another' (Blight, 2009: 242), a reason for which, some scholars suggest (Birth, 2006; Erll, 2010; Wertsch, 2009; Winter, 2009), the dichotomy between the two should be relinquished. Instead, they should be placed 'on a continuum, thereby recognizing that they are typically a mixture of both ways of relating to the past' (Wertsch, 2009: 125) or scholars should conceptualise 'different *modes of remembering* in culture' (Erll, 2010: 7, original emphasis), which refer to both how and what we remember. This study deals with memory as a broad category, incorporating its institutionalized forms, pertaining to history as a subcategory of memory, according to some, or to the field of cultural memory, to others; it explores the ways in which memories are conveyed and transmitted through school curricula, museum exhibitions, media and intentional forms of postsocialist urban memory (see: Chapters 4 and 6).

2.4. Nostalgia: A problematic stance towards the past

After having explored the ontological underpinnings of memory, I will now turn my attention to the content of memories, by focusing on discussions of nostalgia; a particular stance towards the past commonly perceived as problematic and frequently associated with its commodification. In this section, I will outline the most relevant characteristics of nostalgia whilst understanding remembrance of the communist/socialist era as resting on a continuum between nostalgia and dystalgia, its opposite.

Nostalgia has long been a subject of social inquiry. In his work, for instance, Ralph Harper argues that nostalgia is 'a moral sentiment of the present

century' (1966: 27), a view also shared by Chase and Shaw (1989). Harper further notes that nostalgia should be perceived in a positive light, representing a beacon of optimism: it is 'the soul's natural way of fighting the sickness of despair' (1966: 28), acting 'as a lighthouse to wave the way back to the homeland' (*ibid.*: 27), to 'the good he [sic!] has known and lost' (*ibid.*: 26). Davis concurs in that nostalgia helps validate ourselves, since '[i]t reassures us if past happiness and accomplishment' (1979: 32).

If Harper sees the object of nostalgia as being a utopian view of 'something we have never had' (1966: 26) that drives people forward, Davis argues that nostalgia actually sheds light on 'present moods [...] [rather than on] past realities' (1979: 10) since it is so much depended on the contrast between present circumstances and an imagined past.

In a more recent study, roored in postsocialist contexts, Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as 'a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed' (2001: 12). In an expanded definition, Velikonja notes that

nostalgia is a complex, differentiated, changing, emotion laden, personal or collective, (non)instrumentalized story which dichotomously laments and glorifies romanticized lost times, people, objects, feelings, scents, events, spaces, relationships, values, political and other systems, all of which stand in sharp contrast to the inferior present (2008: 28)

It is a utopian desire to go back to times which cannot possibly return, to return to a time of ‘stability, peace, purity, security, tranquility, solidarity, naivety, love, and even exoticism’ (Velikonja, 2008: 28). The contrast between past and present is essential in creating a nostalgic view of the past. Ultimately, it represents a stance towards the present as well as a political claim on the character of the past (Hirsch and Spitzer, 2002); it is a phenomenon wherein ‘[t]he dystopian present is [...] put to the test by the utopian past’ (Velikonja, 2008: 27). Its main characteristics are ‘ahistoricity, ex-temporality, ex-territoriality, sensuality, complementarity, conflicted story lines, unpredictability, polysemism and episodic nature’ (*ibid.*: 28). Essentially, nostalgia is less about the past than about present circumstances and the future (Boyer, 2010; Velikonja, 2008). Boym further defines two modes of nostalgia: restorative; and reflective. The former, as its name suggests, ‘attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home’ (Velikonja, 2008: 19), being perceived by those engaged in it ‘as truth and tradition’ (*ibid.*), whilst the latter, a more philosophical stance, indulges in ‘the longing itself, and delays the homecoming-wistfully, ironically, desperately’ (*ibid.*: 19). Other points of differentiation may be useful: ‘[r]estorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory’ (Boym, 2001: 81). In addition to Boym’s categories of nostalgia, Velikonja also distinguishes between personal and collective nostalgia, between “‘materialized” nostalgia (embodied in various old or new objects, products or souvenirs) and nostalgia as a feeling or an idea’, between ‘instrumental and non-instrumental nostalgia’ and between ‘mimetic and satirical nostalgia’ (2008: 29). In discussions on nostalgia for communist/socialist regimes, then, one is to encounter not only

reflective and restorative nostalgic stances, but virtually all forms of the phenomenon. In fact, empirical data shows that there are no clear-cut distinctions between forms of nostalgia and they only act as ideal types.

The current proliferation of nostalgic discourses in the public and the private spheres in (parts of) Eastern Europe has several explanations. Gerald Creed (2010), for instance, advances the hypothesis according to which one can talk about nostalgia only when there are nearly no chances at all of a comeback of the said period and when postsocialist societal progress is manifest. Ultimately, he further notes, '[n]ostalgia signals a rupture between past and present; a separation' (Creed, 2010: 37); a view also shared by Keightley and Pickering (2012) and by Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004). It is precisely this break with the past that makes the commodification of nostalgia possible, where nostalgia acts as 'a revalorization of Socialist-era consumer goods and products [...], a revitalization of some Socialist ideals, and the transvaluation of maligned Socialist material culture (especially that of more propagandistic character) into kitsch' (Creed, 2010: 30). Thus, the commercialization of nostalgia emanates from emotional stances towards the past, having the potential to further reinforce and amplify them (Creed, 2010). Furthermore, Creed argues, nostalgia reinforces neoliberal capitalism through the very way it works: it 'invalidates the complaints of the disenfranchised and traumatized by labeling their desires "nostalgic" (i.e., retrograde and romantic) [...] [and] then encases them in marketable knickknacks and symbols [...]. Finally, it associates all these (mis)recognitions with the entire Socialist system.' (2010: 42). In postsocialist societies, nostalgia is thus generally infused with negative meanings, being 'seen not only as deviant, surprising, and unnatural, but also as

threatening to still-fragile democracies' (Petrović, 2010: 130), a view also shared by Boym (2001) and Velikonja (2008). For this reason, those who are nostalgic for the recent past avoid defining their attitudes as such, argue Creed (2010) and Todorova (2010). However, I would note that this is not the case at least in Germany, where the variant of the term 'nostalgia', 'Ostalgie', does not have negative connotations and it is used in self-references (Berdahl, 2010). Unlike other forms of nostalgia identified in Eastern Europe, 'Ostalgie' and 'Titostalgia'²⁷ (Velikonja, 2008) or 'Yugo-nostalgia' (Luthar and Pušnik, 2010; Majkowska-Szajer and Szajer, 2013) refer not only to a past time, but also to a lost space: Yugoslavia and the GDR respectively.

Nostalgia also brings about widespread fears, precisely because it 'is not (only) something intimate, a romantic memory, an innocent self-fulfilling fairy tale, but it can also be a strong social, cultural and political force, producing practical effects in its environment' (Velikonja, 2008: 28). Or, as Boym argues, '[u]nreflected nostalgia breeds monsters' (2001: 15). Nostalgia can act as a means of '*cultural resistance and cultural survival*' (Spitzer, 1999: 96, original emphasis) if used in order to enforce in people 'broadly shared values and social practices' (*ibid.*). All forms of nostalgia are criticized because they gloss over the complexities and the negative character of socialist regimes (Horváth, 2008; Pobłocki, 2008; Williams, 2008). As such, trauma survivors have 'to split off nostalgic memory from traumatic memory in order to sustain the positive aspects of nostalgia' (Hirsch and Spitzer, 2002: 260) and thus coexisting narratives of a certain experience, negative and positive alike, clash and create ambiguities (*ibid.*).

²⁷ Nostalgia for Josip Broz-Tito and the integrity of Yugoslavia.

Young people are considered the most vulnerable to these ambiguous accounts of the past, especially to interpretations that do not fit the official discourses on the communist/socialist era, i.e. normative forms of memory, because what they know relies on other sources such as ‘family histories, the media, and narratives presented in schools’ (Baeva and Kalinova, 2010: 89). Nostalgia, in this case, has postmemory as its source, being rather ‘*rootless*’ (Hirsch and Spitzer, 2002: 263, original emphasis). To conclude, it is claimed that ‘the hidden memory markers’ (*ibid.*) have the potential to influence young people’s views, who do not have the necessary tools in order to take a critical look at the communist/socialist past. Thus, they ‘might find the current Socialist nostalgia politically appealing’ (Creed, 2010: 41), which is the biggest worry of all associated with nostalgia. Nevertheless, it seems that the attitudes at which young people generally arrive are situated towards the opposite end of the continuum, towards ‘*dystalgia*’, to use a concept coined by Janack, a stance that ‘negatively evaluates the past’ (1999: 42).

Although some forms of it can be acceptable - especially those which are commodified and which fetishize the past (Pobłocki, 2008) - nostalgia interpreted as an ideological stance towards the recent past has negative connotations in most societies precisely because of the risks mentioned above. Nostalgia, viewed as intrinsically associated with longing for the communist/socialist political regimes, thus opposes dominant discourses of anticommunism in Eastern European societies; remembering the positive aspects of the communist/socialist era means, the story goes, justifying the crimes of these regimes. However, being nostalgic about the past in other societies is not seen as dangerous at all; when associated with other (democratic) societies, it is not even regarded as a topic of interest in

academia in its own right. The question that arises is why nostalgia for the recent past in Eastern Europe is conflated with the negative aspects of the period and disregards all of its other various aspects as unworthy reasons for being nostalgic. People certainly had a variety of personal experiences (positive and negative) which happened to be associated with the political regime they were living in. Thus, the totalitarian nature of communist/socialist regimes should not automatically and uncritically invalidate the experience of the rank and file of Eastern European societies²⁸.

As already intimated, nostalgia is a phenomenon that is more complex than it is widely held. Zsuzsa Gille (2010) offers a much needed systematic clarification of the meanings of nostalgia. First of all, she notes, nostalgia is a phenomenon that ‘cannot mean everything for everybody’ (*ibid.*: 279); the character of the regime, she claims, influences the way in which it is remembered. Gille also notes that ‘lamenting the losses that came with the collapse of state socialism does not imply wishing it back’ (*ibid.*: 286); besides, ‘not all post-Communist nostalgia references communism’ (*ibid.*) and ‘not all talk about communism is nostalgic’ (*ibid.*: 287). Furthermore, Gille (2010) argues, silence and forgetting are also legitimate politics of memorialisation. In addition to this, Nadkarni and Shevchenko caution against ‘reading politics into nostalgia’ and ‘reading nostalgia into politics’ (2004: 490). Hence, one should approach nostalgia with an open mind in order to understand its causes, manifestations and effects. In Chapter 4, participants generally demonstrate such an approach, driven by the desire to understand what lies behind various attitudes towards the recent past.

²⁸ For a similar discussion, see: Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004)

2.5. Intergenerational transmission of memories

An understanding of what is meant by ‘generation’, alongside a discussion of the role of family in processes of remembrance facilitates an understanding of processes of memory transmission from witnesses to non-witnesses, which will be discussed in the next section (2.6) and constitutes one of the main aims of this research project.

In Karl Mannheim’s seminal work ‘The Problem of Generations’, he argues that rather than being conceived as a ‘concrete group’, generations are characterised by ‘a common location in the historical dimension of the social process’ (1952: 290), by ‘participation in the same historical and social circumstances’ (*ibid.*, 298) and by its members having similar ‘stratifications’ (*ibid.*) of their lives. The determining characteristic of a generation rather than being its common timeframe alone is actually represented by what that timeframe implies, by the a particular set of social experiences it offers individuals access to, ‘predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action’ (*ibid.*, 291). Furthermore, Mannheim also stresses the importance of the cultural (and mnemonic) heritage, arguing that each new generation enters into ‘fresh contact’ with that of its predecessors and finds ways of dealing with it, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Drawing on Mannheim’s work, in discussing generational shifts in the early 1990s, Shortt defines ‘generation’ as referring to ‘an age-defined subgroup, where individuals are exposed to and shaped by similar historical experiences and events’ (2012: 117). Generational change, which accompanies processes of transition from

a socialist regime to a post-communist society, is made visible with ‘the arrival of a young generation in the public sphere [which] may be accompanied by a rupture of a repressive silence which the older generation had maintained’ (Assmann and Shortt, 2012: 7). Shortt identifies the effects of processes of political transition for intergenerational relationships, noting that ‘it prematurely inverts the parent-child hierarchy’ (2012: 118) in that children adapt more easily to the new set of circumstances and might have to support their parents, who adjust with difficulty, because they have spent more time under the previous regime. Children, on the other hand, being ‘[c]ut off from their dead memories, and placed outside of the experiential community, [...] [have] to rely on the parent generation for authentic accounts on and insights to this past’ (*ibid.*: 126). Hence, families represent mnemonic agents that have the potential to shape the image young people form of the past.

Family narratives seem to be one of the most powerful ways of transmitting memories, especially because of the personal character of this mode of remembrance. In his brief analysis of the role of the family in the process of recalling collective memories, Halbwachs notes that ‘in societies in which the family is strongly established, it tends to resist outside influences, or, at least, to filter and be permeated by such influence only if it is compatible with the family’s mind-set and its modes of thinking’ (1992: 184). Furthermore, according to Jay Winter, ‘the richest texture of remembrance was always within family life.’ (2009: 259). Younger family members are exposed to a process of ‘mnemonic socialisation’ (Zerubavel, 1996): ‘all subsequent interpretations of our early "recollections" are only reinterpretations of the way they were originally

experienced and remembered within the context of our family' (*ibid.*: 286). The collective memory of a mnemonic community 'involves the integration of various different personal pasts into a single common past that all members of a particular community come to remember collectively' (*ibid.*: 294). Thus, the very characteristic of being part of a social group implies appropriating and interpreting family mnemonic narratives, which then constitute, for younger generations, second-hand memories (*ibid.*). Different generations will inevitably have different memories, 'frequently in the shape of implicit background narratives' (Connerton, 1989: 3), and thus individuals of different generations 'may remain mentally and emotionally insulated, the memories of one generation locked irretrievably, as it were, in the brains and bodies of that generation' (*ibid.*: 3) through chosen amnesia. Even if this could happen, and silences within family contexts stand as proof of this possibility, the generation of non-eyewitnesses would eventually find ways to create their own memories of the past that they had not experienced. The following section that deals with second-hand experiences emphasizes the active construction of memories and the productive rather than retrospective character of remembering.

2.6. Memories based on second-hand experience

Alongside interest in the memories of witnesses, there is growing academic concern with acquired memories. The issue surfaced in psychiatric studies on the memories of the offspring of trauma victims, namely those who have lived through the Holocaust (Starman, 2006). Since it proved to be a significant object of study,

the issue has become the focus of other disciplines, including sociology. The process of memory transmission, appropriation and reinterpretation in the case of people other than witnesses of (traumatic) events has been labeled in various ways. In this section, I will look at ‘postmemory’ (Hirsch, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2008), ‘imaginary memory’ (Cappelletto, 2003), ‘prosthetic memory’ (Landsberg, 2004), ‘narrative induction’ (Linde, 2000) and finally argue why the concept of ‘second-hand memories’ has been adopted, drawing on Keightley and Pickering’s (2012) discussion of ‘mnemonic imagination’.

‘Postmemory’ is a concept coined by Marianne Hirsch (1996, 1999, 2001, 2008) that refers to ‘the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created’ (1996: 662). Postmemory is ‘a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience’ (Hirsch, 2008: 106, original emphasis). Rather than being a process based on recollection, it is formed through ‘an imaginative investment and creation’ (Hirsch, 1996: 662), which is ‘often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible’ (Hirsch, 2001: 9). The concept, as it was initially developed by Hirsch, refers to the relationship of children of Holocaust survivors to the traumatic past that was experienced by their parents, a relationship that is emotionally imbued (Hirsch, 2001; 2008). The main characteristics are ‘its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary, or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness’ (Hirsch, 2001: 9). It resembles survivor memory, or first-hand memory, in that both indicate ‘an

affective link to the past, a sense precisely of an embodied “living connection.” (Hirsch, 2008: 111).

Francesca Cappelletto suggests using the phrase ‘imaginary memory’ as a more suitable term for the same phenomenon. However, she extends it to encompass not only the parents-children relationship, but also members of the same ‘mnemonic community’ who share ‘a group memory in which the recollections of individuals are intermingled and permeated by each other’ (Cappelletto, 2006: 247). In other words, she is interested in ‘the fusion of autobiographical and historical memory, so that the story with all its descriptive minutiae can be recounted by those who were not witnesses as if its events had been experienced by them in person’ (Cappelletto, 2003: 243). People who do not share personal first-hand memory experiences form images of particular brief, ephemeral traumatic, episodes based on the memories of witnesses, and these images ‘are themselves part of an emotional memory’ (Cappelletto, 2003: 255). Such ‘imaginary memories’ make it possible for people other than witnesses ‘to live through the events in the form of the emotional experience’ (Cappelletto, 2003: 255). Imagined visual images, Cappelletto notes, are essential mental products in bridging the gap between first-hand and second-hand memory.

Since both Cappelletto (2003) and Hirsch (2001) refer to visual images as essential to the production of memories, a few words should be dedicated to this sensorial technology of memory, when it is used in its material form, as photographs or films, rather than only imagined by non-eyewitnesses. Photographs, Hirsch argues, are essential technologies of memory within families, ‘the family’s primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation’ (1997: 7).

As such, this type of memory transmission was expected to be particularly relevant to the present study. Kuhn (1995) argues that ‘memory work’ is necessary in order to uncover the family narratives that photographs from personal archives encompass. It is through this process, namely through ‘searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions, patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence’ (Kuhn, 1995: 4), that one can unravel ‘connections between ‘public’ historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and ‘personal’ memory’ (*ibid.*: 4). The photograph, the object of memory work, ‘is an object of complex emotional and cultural meaning, an artifact used to conjure memory, nostalgia, and contemplation’ (Sturken, 1999: 178). The great potential of photographs is that they can ‘evoke memories that might have little or nothing to do with what is actually in the picture. The photograph is a prop, a prompt, a pre-text: it sets the scene for recollection’ (Kuhn, 1995: 12). The rest depends on the viewer, on the ‘interlocutor’ who finds him/herself in a dialogue with such images. Ultimately, photographs ‘are perched at the edge between memory and postmemory, and also, though differently, between memory and forgetting’ (Hirsch, 1997: 22). It should be noted that images store/‘remember’ only an infinitesimal part of the past, and even that through ‘the lens’ of the photographer; photographs create the illusion of depicting a ‘true’ image of the past, even if they are, in reality, only partial traces of the past.

Alison Landsberg argues that modernity has created a new type of cultural memory, namely ‘prosthetic memory’, which refers to a process through which ‘the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more

personal, deeply felt memory of a past even through which he or she did not live' (2004: 2). By giving rise to 'a portable, fluid, and nonessentialist form of memory' (Landsberg, 2004: 18), mass media enables the creation and dissemination of such memories, which are thus available to everyone. Landsberg uses the concept of 'prosthetic' because the memories it refers to 'originate outside a person's lived experience and yet are taken on and worn by that person through mass cultural technologies of memory' (2004: 19). Furthermore, Landsberg suggests, 'these memories, like an artificial limb, are actually worn on the body; these are sensuous memories produced by an *experience* of mass-mediated representation' (2004: 20, original emphasis). They are interchangeable, not to mention their uses in that 'they help condition how a person thinks about the world and might be instrumental in articulating an ethical relation to the other' (2004: 21).

'Narrative induction' is another, less popular, notion that could be linked to those discussed above. It is defined as 'the process by which people come to take on an existing set of stories as *their own* story' (Linde, 2000: 608, original emphasis). More specifically, it 'is a process of being encouraged or required to hear, understand, and use someone else's story as one's own' (*ibid.*: 613). However, this notion mainly refers to the personal narrative of exemplary individual people, elements of which are appropriated by other people. Instances of 'narrative induction' emerge from interviews, when participants recount stories of their families using first person plural pronouns. Even if it is useful when explaining how some young people make sense of the past, the concept does not cover the complex area of memory transmission and construction by non-eyewitnesses, based on second-hand experience.

Out of all the conceptual tools already available, for the purpose of this study I had to weigh the advantages and drawbacks of the main three concepts discussed above. What resonates with Cappelletto's studies is the quality of these 'imaginary memories' of having an emotional dimension. The same also goes for postmemory, which explicitly and exclusively refers to familial intergenerational transmission of memories of traumatic events as part of the process of socialisation, thus shaping the following generation from a tender age (Hirsch, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2008). At the same time, 'postmemory' has the disadvantage of situating the memories of subsequent generations as inherently inferior to the memory of eyewitnesses; it is not memory, it is something else, something that comes *a posteriori*. 'Prosthetic memory' (Landsberg, 2004) brings a new dimension to the discussion since it refers to the transmission of information about a remote culture exclusively through media, thus implying no personal ties, the emotional stake being more distant and more abstract than in the case of postmemory and 'imaginary memories'.

Young peoples' memories of the communist era are a mixture between prosthetic memory and Cappelletto's 'imaginary memories' or 'postmemory'. Such remembering also contains additional dimensions, since it takes into account technologies of memory that non-eyewitnesses employ in order to produce, through mnemonic imagination, second-hand memories. The studies which led to the development of these three approaches regarding the way people remember an event or an experience, without having witnessed it, and the way they are emotionally involved in the process, were concerned with the creation and cultural transformation of memories (in the case of Cappelletto's 'imaginary memories')

and of ‘postmemory’ - the testimonies of witnesses) when they are passed on to non-eyewitnesses, either through narratives or through media. None of the studies specifically refer to the ways in which remote people make sense of the past by using a whole range of sources. Keightley and Pickering (2012) fill this knowledge gap by discussing ‘second-hand memories’, as memories based on second-hand experience and, most of all, on imagination. They argue that it is imagination that helps construct memories of second-hand experience:

The remembering subject engages imaginatively with what is retained from the past and, moving across time, continuously rearranges the hotchpotch of experience into relatively coherent narrative structures, the varied elements of what is carried forward being given meaning by becoming emplotted into a discernible sequential pattern. It is that pattern which is central to the definition of who we are and how we have changed (Keightley and Pickering, 2012: 43)

Second-hand memories, constructed through their nature, become part of one’s identity; through mnemonic imagination, people produce a sense of identity that aids them in dealing with the present and the future. Furthermore, mnemonic imagination also has the role of helping individuals ‘navigate the areas actually or potentially held in common between personal and collective remembering’ (*ibid.*: 87).

This study draws on the theoretical work of Keightley and Pickering (2012) and aims to explore the ways in which second-hand memories are actively created *inter alia* through the work of individuals’ mnemonic imagination. It thus places

young people in the spotlight and explores the venues and means through which they appropriate, rework and interpret memories. In terms of sources, these range from family narratives to mass media, from books to school curricula, from built environment to sensations. Since no direct, unmediated experience is one-dimensional, it is to be assumed that no experience of non-eyewitnesses is either. Especially when the memories refer to a long period of time (1945/7-1989), rarely perceived as traumatic, sometimes banalised, and at other times assigned too much importance. When knowledge about the past is not confined to a few witnesses who are family members, the rich information that is available, intrinsically filtered through countless interpretations, is transmitted through varied means. In this context, 'imaginary memories' and 'postmemory' bring with them the acknowledgement that indirect memories can be appropriated and contribute to the formation of identities of non-eyewitnesses, whilst 'prosthetic memory' brings media into the equation. Yet, memory transmission, reception, appropriation, interpretation and retransmission are far more complex processes which involve numerous elements in varied ways.

As we have seen, memory is, by definition, a mediated process. All accounts of the past are at least second-hand; only witnessing an event, exclusively then and there, would count as first-hand appropriation of memories through direct sensorial experience. Recounting an event that was witnessed involves layers and layers of time, interpretations, emotions, assumptions about audiences etc., processes that would fall under 'mnemonic imagination' (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). Hence, the mediated nature of memory. Unlike memories of eyewitnesses, second-hand memories are also based on second-hand experiences. By making it

clear that those times had not been experienced per se by participants²⁹, the concept of ‘second-hand memories’, as used by Keightley and Pickering (2012), is considered the most appropriate of those discussed in this section. Ultimately, sensorially experiencing life under the communist regime, as it happened between 1945/7–1989, (still) is impossible for postsocialist generations.

The memories of young people tap into collected memory (Olick, 1999) and into collective / social and cultural memory alike. The importance assigned to individual accounts of the past by each participant indicates that they are not merged into the ‘collective memory’, which could define the official discourses about the past that are transmitted through varied means. Collected memory is formed from individual, specific, detailed accounts of personal experiences and not from providing a general view of the past.

2.7. Memory emplacement

Having discussed the nature of memory and the process of creative (re)construction, I will now turn to alternative means of memory transmission to narratives. Memory, be it collective, social, or cultural, manifests itself through various means, often called ‘technologies of memory’ (Kilbourn, 2010; Sturken, 1999). As such, it does not exist (solely) on an abstract level, but it also has to manifest itself in order to survive, be reinforced, reshaped and transmitted. Narrative (verbal, scriptural and visual) transmission is the most explicit method of

²⁹ Second-hand memories do not rely exclusively on mediated experiences. They are also formed using first-hand memories that are projected onto the past, as it happens with memories from the childhood of participants (see, for instance, Chapters 6 and 7)

perpetuating accounts of the past. I would also argue that the written and the spoken word are essential to processes of memory transmission. This is not to claim that memory does not also come across through embodied practices or through material remnants of the past; on the contrary, both technologies of memory have a great deal to offer those pursuing inquiries into the past. Nevertheless, it is much more difficult to make sense of these traces of the past without a narrative to flesh out their meanings. As Zelizer notes, regarding material culture and its potential to act as technology of memory, '[n]o memory is embodied in any of these artifacts, but instead bounces to and fro among all of them, on its way to gaining meaning' (1995: 232). Collective memory is thus a very flexible phenomenon in that memories are produced by those who remember on the basis of material remnants of the past; memories are not stored in objects. Material traces become effective technologies of memory once they are integrated through mnemonic imagination into broader webs of memory and into personal or social narratives. In the following sections, I will focus on emplacement and embodiment as two promising methods of memory transmission.

To start with memory emplacement, the concept of 'urban memory' 'indicates the city as a physical landscape and collection of objects and practices that enable recollections of the past and that embody the past through traces of the city's sequential building and rebuilding' (Crinson, 2005: xii), where the city's layers of history are meaningful to both insiders and outsiders, connecting the past with the present (Hayden, 1999). Hence, the urban environment, and indeed any human dwelling, acts as a repository of layers and layers of memory, as an effect of the generations that have shaped it. Expanding on this idea, scholars argue that

the cityscape is similar to a palimpsest of sorts (Huysen, 2003) with history being written more than once on the same territory and the traces of its layers having remained visible. Although I find the metaphor of ‘palimpsest’ compelling, it implies that previous layers of history have intentionally been erased and then ‘re-written’. I would argue, then, that human dwellings, such as cities, act more as *transtemporal collective manuscripts*, in which parts are ‘edited’, added or erased with the intention of taking the whole to the next level.

Among material traces of the past to be found in cityscapes, such as ‘monuments and museums, palaces, public spaces, and government buildings’ (Huysen, 2003: 1), ‘statues, ruins, and even stretches of vacant land’ (Ladd, 1997: 2) and so on, it is possible to distinguish between ‘unintentional’ and ‘intentional’ memory (Ladd, 1997). As Crinson (2005) argues, monuments, as such, have the explicit role of acting as a memory landmark in that they are intended to work as a durable cure for forgetting. An abundance of monuments, however, might lead to an interesting phenomenon, as noted by Huysen: ‘[t]he more monuments there are, the more the past become invisible, and the easier it is to forget’ (Musil, cited in Huysen, 2003: 32), not to mention that monuments are ‘transformable and transitory’ (Huysen, 2003: 7) forms of memory. One is ultimately bound to forget, even societies as a whole; collective memory cannot be an all-encompassing function of society, yet it can only embrace what is deemed relevant in the present (Crinson, 2005). To sum up, monuments should be perceived in their complexity; they are ‘monuments to both remembering and forgetting’ (Saunders, 2009).

Urban developments act as technologies of memory, as ‘theatres of memory’ (Boyer, 1996), which might refer to ‘forgotten memories that have long been

dormant' (*ibid.*: 19) or indeed to sites whose 'original function and purpose have been erased, allowing the viewer to substitute invented traditions and imaginary narrations' (*ibid.*: 19; see also Huyssen, 2003). The concept of 'theatres of memory', coined by Samuel (1994), is particularly relevant here because of the *bricolage* nature of images of the past, triggered by urban material remnants: '[o]ur memory of the city is especially scenic and theatrical: we travel back in time through images that recall bits and pieces of an earlier city, we project these earlier representations forward into recomposed and unified stagings' (Boyer: 1996: 32). These stagings – or coherent narratives of the past recomposed by individuals – contribute to the creation of a sense of identity (Crinson 2005; Ladd, 1997). It is not only buildings per se that have this role, but also the way in which 'these structures are seen, treated, and remembered' (Ladd, 1997: 2). The erasure of layers of history that are to be found in a city, such as that which was attempted during the communist regimes, has the role of preventing the city functioning 'as a kind of guide or exemplar for the people living in it' (Crinson 2005: xiii). If urban landscape creates a sense of identity, then, its destruction and its absence are as relevant to processes of remembrance and identity formation, argue Leach (2005) and Todorova (2010). Todorova (2010) discusses the implications of the demolition of the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, in Sofia, Bulgaria, a similar case to that of the Berlin Wall (Huyssen, 2003; Ladd, 1997). Although physically absent, Todorova argues, '[i]t seems to be still there—no longer as a site of historical memory but still as a marker for everyday orientation' (2010: 393). Therefore, although absent, the monument 'may still qualify as a *lieu de mémoire*, or, rather, *lieu de mémoire détruite*, a curious site of destroyed memory with the

preserved memory of the destruction’ (426-7, original emphasis). It will cease to be a *lieu de mémoire* only when the people for whom it had acted as a material, physical memory landmark disappear, Todorova (2010) and Czepczyński (2008) argue. Until then, it will remain in the minds of those who have witnessed it and who, in the absence of visual perceptions of the physical monument, rely on emotional responses to it (Todorova, 2010).

The issue of the removal of monuments is also discussed at length by Palonen, who focuses on statues and street names as ‘commemorative city-text’ or ‘city-text’ (2008: 219), arguing that they have been subject to a series of alterations as a result of political change, precisely because ‘[t]he city-text functions as a system of representation and an object of political identification’ (*ibid.*: 220). She further argues that in ‘the act of naming and replacing political symbols, people are engaged in political acts that invest objects and sites with positive and negative connotations’ (*ibid.*: 220). Similarly, Czepczyński (2008) argues that removing material remnants of the past is fundamentally a political act. Even removing inscriptions can bring about forgetting: ‘[m]onuments without inscriptions became insignificant and practically forgotten relicts [sic!] of the past’ (Czepczyński, 2008: 123). But even a textless sculpture conveys a message, one of absence, of the lost relevance of the past to the present.

Environment and human bodies are to be read as significant means of memory transmission only by acknowledging that they are fundamentally socially constructed in that meanings are ascribed to them (Hamilakis and Labanyi, 2008). Indeed, ‘[w]herever human beings live, they endow the things around them with cultural meaning’ (Ladd, 1997: 10-11). This brings us back to the claim that, in

whatever form, narratives are essential in deciphering material traces of the past; without situating themselves within a discourse, objects remain not void of, but lacking in meaning.

A perspective that includes body memory would add more value to an analysis of processes of recollection through the built environment; the argument goes like this: ‘the shared experience of dwellings, public spaces, and workplaces, and the paths traveled between home and work, give body memory its social component, modified by the postures of gender, race, and class’ (Hayden, 1999: 145). Hence, body memory is strongly connected with emplaced memory and with collective memory more generally.

2.8. Memory embodiment

As noted, it is not only physical environments, natural or artificial, which act as technologies of memory. Traces of the past are also inscribed on bodies – human or animal alike – as anthropologists have long acknowledged ‘bodies and their actions are shaped by, give form *to*, figures drawn from cultural memories’ (Counsell, 2009: 8, original emphasis) or, as Sturken puts it, ‘[l]ike a memorial, a quilt, or an image, the human body is a vehicle for remembrance’ (1997: 220), whose interpretations are open to change depending on the context in which bodies are ‘read’ (*ibid.*). Unlike the case of emplacement, memories may require a ‘conscious effort and labor’ (Hamilakis and Labanyi, 2008: 12) in order to be expressed through bodily practices, an effort ‘that goes into producing mnemonic effects, into creating the material conditions for the sensory and bodily enactment

involved in remembering, whether through daily routines and practices or through momentary, often staged performances' (Hamilakis and Labanyi, 2008: 12). Embodied memory is conceptualised both as bodily performance, but also as being transmitted through the senses, appearance, and internal characteristics.

Paul Connerton (1989) argues that memories, which act as a means of legitimizing the present political and social order and influence the way we act here and now, are expressed through 'bodily performance'. Hence, bodies act as pieces in a memory chess game; they 'stylistically re-enact an image of the past, keep the past also in an entirely effective form in their continuing ability to perform certain skilled actions' (Connerton, 1989: 72). Embodied memory manifests itself, it is argued, through 'incorporating practices', which implies that bodies play a role in transmitting memories through their physicality, and through 'inscribing practices', those endeavors of memory transmission which require the body to act in order to operate 'modern devices for storing and retrieving information' (*ibid.*: 73). Following Connerton's argument, Roach uses the term 'genealogies of performance', a concept which refers to

the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds, not prior to language but constitutive of it, as psychic rehearsal for physical actions drawn from a repertoire that culture provides (1996: 26)

He then goes on to classify embodied practices in three categories: kinesthetic imagination, vortices of behavior, and displaced transmission (*ibid.*). Kinesthetic imagination ‘is a way of thinking through movements – at once remembered and reinvented – the otherwise unthinkable’ (*ibid.*: 27); it is shaped by written and unwritten social rules, but it also transgresses these set boundaries. ‘Vortices of behavior’ refers to the means through which ‘to canalize specified needs, desires, and habits in order to reproduce them’ (*ibid.*: 28), while ‘[d]isplaced transmission constituted the adaptation of historic practices to changing conditions, in which popular behaviors are resituated in new locales’ (*ibid.*: 28). All three types of embodied practices, which might only be artificially determined, are to be identified in the case of members of postsocialist societies. To conclude, the approach illustrated by Connerton (1989) and Roach (1996) conceptualizes embodied memory as strongly connected to bodily practices, which are themselves expressed through performance.

There is yet another approach to the analysis of the means through which memories are transmitted through the medium of the human body, which will prove useful in understanding how some young people create a sense of identity. This approach is illustrated by Nicoletta Diasio (2013) who argues that family narratives are also inscribed on the body. Therefore, ‘the body is not an object - a support for representations, a machine producing metaphors or a blank page on which identities are written down - that is exterior to the individual’ (2013: 390), yet, it is to be perceived as ‘the medium for the subject’s experience. As such, it produces social relations, affiliations, cultures: experience is always incorporated’ (*ibid.*: 390). Body resemblances within the family, for instance, are a form of

‘sensitive’ memory: ‘[t]he tone of one’s voice, or the color of one’s eyes and hair are not only signs of heredity and the marks of proximity [...], but also indicators of the shifts and changes in a nation’s history’ (2013: 393). Furthermore, ‘[t]he senses of taste, smell, hearing and sight do indeed all play a part in bringing back memories buried deep in the mind’ (2013: 397). The body, then, is to be seen as a medium of memory in all its complexity, involving appearances, senses, practices etc. It is also a means of exploring the process of forgetting (Diasio, 2013; Narvaez, 2006).

2.9. Conclusion

Rather than being a static resource of information about the past, memory is a process through which the past is actively (re-)constructed in present-day contexts. It is characterised by selectivity, fluidity, and partiality. Mnemonic imagination contributes to the creation of memories that are based on second-hand experiences and which constitute ‘collected memories’ (Olick, 1999). Second-hand memories are thus formed through putting together and reworking discourses about the past, which would fall under the ‘collective memory’ category (Halbwachs, 1992), family narratives, i.e. ‘social memories’ (Fentress and Wickham, 1992), and cultural products, part of ‘cultural memory’ (Assmann J., 1995, 2010). Embodied and emplaced memories also act on a sensorial level and play the role of technologies of memory. Second-hand memories ultimately help people create a sense of identity and make sense of the present and the future, according to Keightley and Pickering (2012). For this reason, they are also emotionally imbued,

an issue that will be discussed at length throughout this research, and especially in Chapter 5.

Thus, the theoretical framework of this study places individuals, rather than a collectivity, at the centre of the discussion about the nature of second-hand memory (re)creation. In this way, it overcomes a tendency to over focus on the vehicles of memory transmission, as major theories of social memory do (see: Section 2.2), and not on the ways in which individuals actually make sense of the past. By acknowledging the agency of individuals in actively reworking memories each time they engage in acts of recollection, this research challenges the dichotomy between memory producers and consumers that Wulf Kansteiner (2002) discusses. Furthermore, the concern of the present study represents the ways in which non-eyewitnesses manage to form their own memories about particular past times of which they have no first-hand experiences, in this way emphasizing the active role of individuals as memory producers.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

3.1. Introduction

The current research project, from its inception, rested on the premise that memories are not solely encoded in narratives, i.e. in texts; rather, memory finds itself in a perpetual process of (re)construction by those who engage in acts of recollection. Memory transmission involves more than the passing on of narratives; it also takes place through embodied and sensorial practices and through material objects, which act as vehicles of memory transmission. For this reason, the research has aimed from the start to go beyond the current academic interest in the content of postsocialist memory discourses and to focus on the process through which young people engage with the past.

The research design of this project starts from the position that knowledge is produced, or rather coproduced, by participants and researchers. As such, I have adopted an ethnographic approach that involved an open and holistic exploration of processes of memory construction and transmission. Data was produced through conversations and in-depth interviews and was analysed using a multi-grounded theory approach (Goldkuhl and Cronholm, 2010). In this way, theoretical insights were drawn inductively from empirical data, but also theoretically and internally grounded.

In this chapter, I will first explain the rationale for adopting an ethnographic approach whilst drawing on in-depth interviews as the main source of

empirical data for analysis. Then, I will reflect on the practical aspects of the research process, on the way analysis and writing up were conducted, and finally on the ethical implications of conducting research with peers. The latter necessitates a discussion of power relationships between participants and researcher, the question of positionality and, more specifically, of my potential to also act as a participant in the current research. I conclude that this very blurring of the boundaries between researcher and participant in itself might bring value to the project, if accompanied by reflexive practices.

3.2. Adopting an ethnographic approach

As argued in the previous chapter, memory is not to be found on a single level, and any discussion of it should focus not only on what is remembered but also on what is forgotten and/or silenced, on both communicative and cultural memory (Assmann J., 2010) and on what is articulated and what is unspoken. Given the sheer complexity of the issue under study (the process of memory transmission) the ethnographic approach is the most appropriate methodology since it envisages the gathering not only of verbally expressed memories (through in-depth interviews) but a more holistic engagement with respondents in a way that facilitates the understanding of the process of the embodied, sensorial and material communication of memories.

This study was not ‘an ethnography’ but research undertaken employing an ethnographic approach in as much as it allowed for the inclusion of all relevant elements of everyday life. In the current mnemonic landscape, where there are

virtually no groups of young people with no significant first-hand memories from the communist era who regularly engage in acts of recollection, a traditional participant observation (or fieldwork) based ethnography that ‘usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3) was impossible. Besides summer schools/universities, which brought together groups of young people for limited periods of time, there were simply no pre-defined groups that, as a researcher, I could identify and access. The nature of the field thus prevented research in which I could become part of a small social group with the ultimate aim ‘to uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives’ (Jorgensen, 1989: 15), as ethnographers strive to do. However, due to my identity (age, nationality etc.), I was already part of a shared generational group with potential participants. This allowed me to envisage the research field as unlimited; I came to perceive Romanian society as a whole as my field site and opened myself to any acts of recollection in an approach similar to the one adopted by Grossman (2010a). Ultimately, what I took from the ethnographic tradition was its characteristic of being ‘a way of conceptualizing as well as a way of looking’ (Wolcott, 1999: 17). That is, a way of perceiving the social world through all senses, what Les Back calls ‘the art of listening’, ‘a listening for the background and the half muted’ (2007: 8).

Constant reflection on my own experiences, recorded in a research diary or not, both as a young person of Romanian origin who has been, and still is, exposed to vehicles of memory transmission and to discourses on the communist era, and as a researcher, has influenced the research design of this study throughout the

process. My role as potential participant in an (auto)ethnography has informed all the other decisions I took regarding the steps I would take as a researcher. For instance, I constantly sought answers to my own questions before asking them of participants. I constantly questioned my engagement with the past and the information and practices that I linked to the communist era. It was only by adopting this approach and immersing myself in the field, the postsocialist Romanian mnemonic community, that I could start to understand the complex trajectories of young people's mnemonic socialisation. I could have included my experiences in the research, as Limerick *et al.* (1996) and Yost and Chmielewski (2013) have done. In that case, however, the data would have been subject to reconsideration on epistemological and ethical grounds. More specifically, the question to be posed would have been: how does 'a new kind of knowledge' (Limerick *et al.*, 1996) thus produced have an effect on knowledge co-produced by researchers and participants? The research could even have transformed into an auto-ethnography. Clifford Geertz puts forward a critique of what he calls 'the I-witnessing approach to the constructions of cultural descriptions' (1988: 78) or "'diary disease'" (*ibid.*: 90): placing an overemphasis on the self at the expense of participants, which is meant to produce a credible image of oneself as ethnographer. Wishing to avoid transforming the research into an account of my personal journey, in the analysis stage I chose to focus on the participants' narrativised articulations, whilst acknowledging the co-produced nature of knowledge that was based on a sense of immanent auto-ethnography that was built into the project since its inception and which manifested itself through the constant (re)shaping of the research process.

As argued above, ethnography is a fitting approach to investigate how memories of the communist era are transmitted, how they are made sense of and, ultimately, what is remembered and forgotten by the younger generation of Romanians. It is suitable for an exploratory study, which aims to engage with participants without any preconceived ideas of the issues to be explored. I did not have any a priori hypotheses; before commencing fieldwork, I was acquainted with theories of memory social construction and transmission, and also with ways of engaging with the past identified in postsocialist societies. Other than that, I was driven by the desire to understand what the mnemonic processes that young people engage in are. Moreover, ethnography provides the ground to gather data unconstrained by a hypothetico-deductive research design, with participant observation acting as a flexible, 'unstructured' means of data collection, that 'does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3). Ethnography is an inductive approach, allowing for theory to grow out of data; it thus 'aims to build theories grounded in concrete human realities' (Jorgensen, 1989: 18). Ultimately, ethnographic research entails a malleable approach in the context of which 'what is studied is subject to redefinition based on field experience and observation' (Jorgensen, 1989: 23). Going into the field with no preconceptions regarding participants or outcomes, I constantly adapted the research design and, more generally, my approach in order to get to grips with the social and cultural processes of memory transmission and (re)production.

Fundamentally, an ethnographic approach provides fertile ground for the researcher to experience, inquire and examine in order to grasp the meanings

people ascribe to their actions; an outcome that is achieved through participant observation, as well as conducting interviews and other complementary research methods (Wolcott, 1999). In this particular project, this approach meant going beyond answers given to direct questions relating to processes of memory transmission, which would be asked in one-off interviews. It facilitated the understanding of more nuanced interpretations of a wide array of means through which memories are transmitted, reworked and reproduced, in a variety of contexts. The research design allowed ‘for objects, visual images, the immaterial and the sensory nature of human experience and knowledge’ (Pink, 2007: 22) to be part, alongside verbal and written texts, of the data to be analysed because they are an intrinsic part of social life. Ethnography is thus an approach that facilitates the integration of elements of social life often neglected in other types of social research and this quality is clear in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. It was by adopting an ethnographic and reflexive approach and encouraging participants to have a similarly open and reflexive attitude, not only during walking tours, but also during discussions, that I could get to the sensorial ways in which young people engage with the past and, more generally, to the theme of the interplay between the past and the present.

3.3. Interviewing as co-production of knowledge

Although the data I gathered during fieldwork was wide-ranging, it is primarily data from in-depth interviews that are used in this thesis. These interviews, I would argue, are ethnographic interviews in the sense that the interview is ‘a moment of

engagement, a site of participation in the life of the person we meet and talk with' (Hockey and Forsey, 2012: 75), and ultimately 'an important form of participatory research' (*ibid.*: 85). While ethnographers are used to thinking about field diaries as containing the 'thick description' from the field, this is not always the case. As Skinner notes, whilst doing ethnographic research in his early career, '[t]he interviews overshadowed my fieldnotes and became the core of the writings, leaving the fieldnotes to become timelines and context points' (2012: 2). This illustrates the value of interviews, which can only increase if one approaches the research process with an open mind, in 'ethnography-mode', so to speak.

Rather than taking a specific methodological stance by arguing that the interviews I conducted were structured, semi-structured or unstructured, Rapport (2012) and Yates (2013) suggest conceptualizing the roles that both the participant and the researcher take in an interview as influencing one another and shifting on a continuum throughout the process (Yates, 2013). It could be argued that the interviews conducted as part of this research were semi-structured in that they were based on a list of themes that I wished to discuss at some point during the interview. Rather than constricting the area covered by the discussion, they were meant to 'serve as a path we [researchers] suggest for them [participants] to point out landmarks and markers they think are important for us to understand and map the journey' (Dilley, 2000: 133). These research protocols, as Dilley calls them, that are revised on an on-going basis during the research process as a consequence of reflexive work, serve 'to provide an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues, and not be confined by predetermined agendas' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 123). The ready-

made list of themes I used during interviews only acted as a reminder for me, and the participants, of the various areas in which memory work might be identified.

One could put forward an alternative view regarding the approach I took when conducting interviews; because of the freedom I allowed participants to shift the discussion towards any topic they were interested in, I conceptualized the interviews as ‘conversations’. Hence, following Burgess’ theorization of ‘interviews as conversations’, it could be argued that I engaged in this form of ethnographic discussion; ‘[w]hile I had decided the main topics to be covered the actual direction of the conversation was partially determined by the pupils [i.e. participants]’ (2006: 90). Even if I have aimed to reduce power differences in the research context, one should not gloss over the fact that these discussions were meant to feed into the research project I was undertaking and that I was the one who was directing the conversation, according to a ready-made interview schedule (for a detailed discussion about power dynamics in the research, see: Section 3.6).

Interviewing represents the means through which researchers and participants set off on a collaborative encounter, with the end result of co-producing knowledge (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, Yost and Chmielewski, 2013). Instead of perceiving the interview process as a way of uncovering ‘the truth’ about the experiences of the interviewee, as the ‘vessel-of-answers approach’ suggests (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997), the constructivist epistemology determines a different take: since all knowledge is socially produced and is context-dependent, interviews represent encounters in which two or more people construct a particular account; variations in any of the elements that carry weight in the interviewing process would result more or less in an alternative set of answers (see: Kvale and

Brinkmann, 2009). Knowledge that results from interviews, Kvale and Brinkmann argue, is ‘produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic’ (2009: 47). Most importantly, knowledge is co-produced at the time of the interview. Holstein and Gubrium argue that both researchers and participants ‘are necessarily and ineluctably *active*’ (1997: 114, original emphasis) during the interview encounter, and the role of researchers extends far beyond it; knowledge is further constructed in the stages that follow the encounter in the field up to the publication of reports (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Thus, the knowledge that is produced on the basis of qualitative interviewing represents the result of a collaborative process between researcher and participant.

Taking an ethnographic approach to the social world, and by adopting a qualitative interviewing tradition, constructing knowledge through collaborative work proved to be effective and resulted in a research design that suited the sense of immanent (auto)ethnography that has characterised, from the outset, my stance towards the research topic.

3.4. Practical aspects of the research process

Turning to the technical details about the ways in which the research was conducted, it should first be noted that this study aimed to generate a purposive sample that would provide a broad cross-section of the local youth population in relation to how they engage in memory work regarding the socialist/communist period. For reasons already mentioned in Section 3.2, my initial contact was with young people who had engaged in memory work. I was also interested in the ways

other young people engaged with the past, who might not necessarily be interested in history, as a study topic, and who might also offer more positive views of the communist era. Thus, I also sought people not displaying an interest in the recent past, but nonetheless willing to take part in the research, and people with positive views of the communist era. It was important to include the latter among the sample since it would have been impossible to attempt to explain what underpins positions that err towards the nostalgia end of the spectrum without engaging with young people who held more positive attitudes towards the communist period.

In terms of access strategies, I initially contacted young people who had engaged in memory work by taking part in summer schools/universities on the communist era organised in recent years. There were five such gatherings each year. Most of them were organised in relation to former political prisons by state institutions such as The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMRE) or NGOs dealing with the politics of memory in postsocialist Romania and financially supported by The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (see: Figure 3.1).

Event	Location	Organiser(s)	No. of events held³⁰
<i>The Sighet Summer School</i>	Sighetu Marmatei ³¹	The Civic Academy	15
<i>The Râmnicu Sărat Summer University</i>	<i>Râmnicu Sărat</i>	The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMRE)	6
<i>The Făgăraş - Sâmbăta de Sus Summer School</i>	Făgăraş & Sâmbăta de Sus	The “Negru Vodă” Făgăraş Cultural Foundation, The Memorial of the Anticommunist Resistance “Țara Făgăraşului” and The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMRE) (main organisers)	4
<i>The Romanian Institute for Recent History Summer School</i>	Moeciu de Sus	The Romanian Institute for Recent History	2
<i>The “Pitești Phenomenon” Summer School</i>	Pitești	The Centre for Studies in Contemporary History and www.fenomenulpitesti.ro	1

Figure 3.1. Summer Schools and Universities about the communist era organised in Romania by December 2012

³⁰ By December 2012.

³¹ The official name of the city is ‘Sighetu Marmatei’ but it is commonly referred to simply as ‘Sighet’.

I assumed that participants in these annual summer schools/universities had an interest in the recent past, most of them being either high school students with an interest in history, as in the case of The Sighet Summer School, or those with an education at university-level, as in the case of all the other summer universities. I managed to acquire the email addresses of over 150 participants from the 2007-2012 summer schools/universities through four sources, as outlined in Figure 3.2.

Access routes	
1	Through the organisers of the summer schools
2	By becoming a member of the Facebook groups of summer schools/universities, where such groups existed
3	Through some of the Romanian young people who took part in the 2012 Râmnicu Sărat Summer University that I attended
4	By being referred to young people who had attended similar events in previous years by two gatekeepers, participants in the summer university mentioned above

Figure 3.2. Access routes to participants

I sent a personalised email to all the addresses I obtained, inviting young people to take part in the research (see: Appendix 1). In this way, I accessed 30 participants, most of whom were current university students reading history, but also political sciences, social sciences, anthropology, economics etc. at BA, MA or PhD level.

Due to the aforementioned characteristics of the young people who had attended summer schools/universities, relying solely on their experience would have provided a specific depiction of young people's engagement with the past. For this reason, I sought, through other routes, young people who were interested in the past. One of these was the '*History Beyond Words*' project, run by The Centre for the Investigation of Communist Crimes, a project that afforded 150 students from four high schools in Bucharest the opportunity to visit a former political prison, the Jilava Fort 13, currently administered by the Bucharest-Jilava Penitentiary. Two history teachers involved in the project acted as gatekeepers and put me in touch with some of their students. In this way, I accessed eight young people, of whom six were still in high school and two were undergraduate students at the time the interviews were conducted.

Another access strategy, which would have offered the possibility to engage with young people who were not necessarily interested in the socialist/communist era, was initially intended to be through taking part in visits and thematic history classes organised at The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance from Sighet, a former political prison and at that time the only museum in Romania entirely dedicated to presenting aspects of life under the socialist/communist regime. Recruiting participants in this setting where they engage, willingly or not, in memory work, would have thus included in the research project a number of participants who were still in secondary education and who may or may not have considered continuing their studies. For this part of the research design, I contacted the Civic Academy, the NGO which is the administrator of the museum, and they directed me to the museum curators who, in

turn, put me in touch with one of the high school history teachers from Sighet. During the visit I made to the memorial in mid-December 2012, in order to get acquainted with the field site and consider the possibilities it offered for research, the history teacher who had acted as gatekeeper enthusiastically asked, at short notice, fellow history teachers from various high schools in Sighet to organise visits to the memorial with groups of students. The plan was to observe their interaction with the museum exhibits and their behaviour in the group and then have a discussion with them in the conference room. This impromptu pilot study made me realise that such visits would actually not reveal much about young people's engagement with the past because they would not occur naturally, since they were organised in order to facilitate my research, and would be time-constrained to one or two classes. Rather, observing these staged school events would have shed light on the dynamics of groups of students that are given the opportunity to skip a class and do what they please in the space of the Memorial, within a time-frame of approximately one or two hours. Furthermore, the large numbers of students, more than 30 in each class, would have made observation difficult to manage and ethical concerns would have been difficult to address. Due to the disadvantages of this access strategy, I decided against pursuing it. However, I did hand out invitations at the end of the discussions to take part in one-to-one interviews and in the end I managed to interview one high school student who had taken part in a visit to the Memorial in December 2012.

To compensate for the inability to undertake fieldwork at the Sighet memorial, I sought alternative access strategies that would offer me the opportunity to engage with young people who were not necessarily interested in

the socialist/communist era, and less likely to have been significantly exposed to official anticommunist discourses. As already mentioned, to my knowledge there are no venues or events in which young people can get involved in alternative memory-work that did not conform to official anticommunist discourse. Hence, I turned to various access strategies, among which the most successful were: snowballing young people who were either nostalgic or not interested in the past, starting from the participants that took part in the first phase of the research; and asking the administrators of a Facebook page called ‘The childhood of the ‘80s-‘90s’ to post an invitation to fans to take part in the study. I attempted to make use of other access strategies as well, such as handing out leaflets in the Sighet memorial and in cinemas screening ‘I’m an Old Communist Hag’ (Gulea, 2013), a film that does not entirely reflect the anticommunist discourse, but I was unable to gain the approval of gatekeepers. In the case of the Sighet memorial, the board allegedly found the text of my invitation - which was aimed at young people with both positive and negative memories of the past - inappropriate for the memorial, as one of the curators of the memorial disclosed to me. The Civic Academy officially justified their refusal by saying that they preferred not to act as a recruitment centre for my research³², even though they were still very open in terms of permitting me to conduct the research in the memorial with their visitors. As for the screening, the distribution company of the film agreed to let me distribute flyers, but the decision rested with individual cinemas, whose representatives did not reply to my emails.

³² During my second visit, copies of an invitation to take part in another student’s PhD research were available next to the ticket office

Fieldwork was conducted in three waves: between December 2012 and January 2013; in May 2013; and between July and September 2013. During the first fieldwork phase I focused on interviewing former participants in summer schools/universities, whilst in the second and third I attempted to access young people who were not necessarily interested in the past but who were willing to take part in the study. In addition to this, I worked on developing a deeper relationship with some participants that would ultimately facilitate a greater understanding of the ways they engage with the past. Fieldwork was divided into three stages for several reasons, most importantly because I required time to regularly reflect on what I had achieved. At the end of the first period in the field I was about to prepare for an ethnographic study of school visits to the Sighet memorial. After discussions with the museum curators and the history teacher who acted as my gatekeeper, we decided that the most appropriate period would be the first week of April, when at national level the normal schedule of primary, secondary and high school students is replaced by a programme of extra-curricular activities, titled 'To know more, to be better'. During this week, the memorial becomes a focal point of teachers in search of alternative activities. However, after reflection and discussions with my supervisors, I decided against pursuing this path. Hence, the second and third periods of fieldwork depended upon the arrangements I could make for further stages of the research. It was also essential to let time pass so that participants with whom I wished to engage in supplementary ethnographic work would be less reluctant - or more willing - to accept.

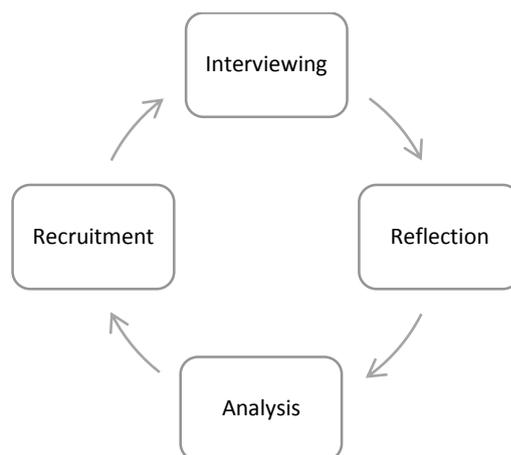


Figure 3.3. The iterative nature of interviewing

All in all, while not seeking a ‘representative’ sample of young people, I engaged with 59 participants, 24 males and 35 females, born over the timespan of a decade, between 1986 and 1996. The main criterion of selection was young people’s age; they had to be no older than 26 years old at the time the interview was conducted. This ensured that they would not have any significant first-hand memories from their early years of life even if they had been born just before the fall of the communist regime. No other criteria, besides those noted above, were used since the aim of the study was to reveal *how* Romanian youth engage with the past, an issue that could be explored only using qualitative research methods, rather than to investigate *whether* they engage with the past and what motivates them to do so (which could have been approached through a quantitative or mixed methods study).

Due to the selection criteria discussed above, special care was taken not to over-generalise the findings of this study to the whole population of Romanian young people. Notwithstanding, the arguments that were based on a significant number of in-depth interviews with a broad cross-section of young people

manifesting an interest in the past, do offer a compelling empirically-grounded illustration of the ways in which young people engage, if at all, in memory work. As argued above, relying on a representative sample would have shifted the focus of the research to the virtual absence of (acknowledged) mnemonic practices and thus it would have shed light on a generational social issue rather than on the intricacies of memory transmission and (re)production.

In terms of its structure, this thesis is based on the 59 in-depth interviews which lasted on average between 1.5 and 2 hours and were digitally recorded. They were mostly taken in Bucharest, but also in other cities such as Iași and Cluj-Napoca, together hosting the most important regional universities (see: Appendix 2). Participants came from all over the country, both rural and urban areas³³, but no sampling criteria were employed in terms of geographical area of origin. Participants were offered the freedom to choose to meet with me in any place that they would feel comfortable. Elwood and Martin suggest paying attention to the effects of space on the interview process, arguing that ‘[t]he microgeographies of the interview reflect the relationships of the researcher with the interview participant, the participant with the site, and the site within a broader sociocultural context that affects both researcher and participant’ (2000: 650). Handing over the decision-making to participants regarding the interview site could act as a way of minimizing power disparities. It could, however, also be perceived as a minor detail. Since most of the participants in this research chose cafés, it is to be

³³ Two participants, Andra and Raluca, were originally from The Republic of Moldova, formerly part of the USSR (see: Appendix 2). Both had come to Romania for high school and then university several years earlier, so had been exposed to the public discourses on the communist era both from Romania and Moldova. Furthermore, both came from families of Romanian ethnicity.

assumed that location did not play a significant role in the view of participants. Out of the 59 interviews, only four were conducted in the homes of the participants. Upon being asked why they did not choose a café closer to their home, most of them justified their decision to meet in the city centre, which happened in almost all cases, as being more convenient for both of us, since it would be easier to get to no matter where I was travelling from. This could well be the reason why participants preferred not to meet in their homes. Furthermore, cafés represent a neutral terrain in which they can evade the potential involvement of other family members in the interview encounter. In the case of Lucreția's interview, the presence of her parents in the house at the time of the interview disrupted the flow of the discussion, an effect that both of us felt. It was more difficult for me to ask questions about her family, as it was for her to answer them. This situation reflects Elwood and Martin's observation that microgeographies are 'affecting information that is communicated in the interview as well as power dynamics in the interview itself' (2000: 652).

Interesting alternatives to cafés as interview locations included discussing on a bench in the park, which happened with three participants, and discussing in an empty seminar room in the faculty of law or in the office of the assistant of the dean of the theology faculty, across a desk. Other interesting examples were when the participant and I sat and spoke on a kerbstone, behind a curtain of blocks of flats that sheltered us from the busy traffic of the Civic Centre (see: Figure 3.4), or the suggestion to have the discussion in a cathedral, on a Sunday morning. To take the latter example, knowing about the participant's work on the experiences of local people that had suffered during the communist era, as well as her religious

inclination, I was curious to find out the reasons for her choice of location. We met in front of the Orthodox Cathedral in Cluj-Napoca and went inside, but eventually decided to find another space out of the wish not to disturb the service and also because it would have been difficult to communicate in such a vast space. Upon asking for her reasons for choosing the cathedral, she said that she felt comfortable in that space, but confessed that it was also one of the few places she actually knew in the city (to which she had come to study for her UG degree). She assured me she had no religious interpretation of the topic we were to discuss.



Figure 3.4. Location of the interview with Liviu. For more than two hours, we sat on a kerbstone in the shade of the tree that is depicted in the middle-lower part of the picture.

Photo taken a few days after the interview, on 12th September 2013

The research was not confined to in-depth interviews. Besides the initial interviews I had with participants (always referred to as ‘discussions’ for the reasons noted above), I also engaged in further work that aided my understanding of the ways in which young people interact with the past, even if due to space

constraints and the choice of thematic analysis rather than narrative analysis the data is thinly represented in the final thesis. First of all, for further clarification I conducted additional interviews with four participants. I also took 8 inter-generational interviews with the parents or grandparents of 7 participants and engaged in walking tours led by 6 participants of various sites, depending on their interests: one of a flea market, four of cities in order to identify remnants of the past, and two of former political prisons, Sighet and Râmnicu Sărat. During all of these tours I took photographs, some of which are included in this study in order to illustrate young people's sensorial engagement with the past. Integrating walking tours into the research design allowed for a more ethnographic engagement with the field site and with key participants. Fieldnotes and the data thus gathered, alongside reflections on the interview process, informed the following interviews and the analysis I undertook (Dilley, 2000; Yost and Chmielewski, 2013). Hence, this stage of the research was context-driven rather than imposed on participants; the choice of research methods and practices depended on my prior experience with each participant.

3.5. Analysis and writing up

The epistemological underpinning of the current research project, as already indicated in the choice of the research design, is rooted in social constructionism. In order to make sense of the data, I engaged in an inductive process of thematic analysis that finally led to the elaboration of theory on processes of remembrance. Instead of using grounded theory, as prescribed by Glaser and Strauss (1967),

which would have involved an analytical approach purely based on empirical data and not taking into account any pre-existing theories, which could have led to ‘an obvious risk of knowledge isolation’ (Goldkuhl and Cronholm, 2010: 188), I chose a more flexible approach. Since fieldwork had been constructed with knowledge of existing academic debates on memory construction and transmission, in contrast to the premise of grounded theory (Goldkuhl and Cronholm, 2010), research practices and interpretations, as well as coding, have all been somewhat informed by the chosen theoretical framework. However, coding was done bottom up and then exposed to existing theories, which acted ‘as a building block that supports the empirical data forming the new emergent theory’ (*ibid.*: 191). My approach would be best described by Goldkuhl and Cronholm’s reworking of grounded theory that they call ‘multi-grounded theory’ and which includes, apart from a grounding in empirical data, theoretical and internal grounding. In this way, the production of theories still emerges from the empirical data that is produced – together with participants – ‘inductively with an open mind and [...] as free as possible from pre-categorizations’ (Goldkuhl and Cronholm, 2010: 194), but it also enters into a dialogue with current academic debates.

Analysis has been a continuous process throughout all stages of the research, first through reflexivity, and secondly through the analysis of the data as it was gradually gathered. All initial interviews, adding to approximately 100 hours of recordings, were transcribed by myself in the periods between fieldwork and also over seven months after I left the research site. Engaging myself in this process helped me to produce an initial coding frame consisting of categories and concepts that covered most of what was discussed during the interviews. The next

step was axial coding, a process that sometimes follows open coding in order 'to begin the process of reassembling data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 124), but it can be undertaken on its own. Axial coding was the process through which I made sense of the data, since '[i]t looks at how categories crosscut and link' (*ibid.*). At this stage, by thoroughly going through each transcript, changes were introduced to the coding tree – not only the expansion of it, but also the merging of nodes or sub-nodes. Coding was undertaken using software for qualitative analysis, namely Nvivo10, and had as its starting point the list of themes produced during and immediately after transcription. The coding tree that resulted was then scrutinised once again in order to link current theory on mnemonic practices with the categories and concepts which were produced thus far. This final process led to the identification of themes and the creation of original theoretical understandings that are grounded in ethnographic data.

All interviews were analysed in Romanian and only in the last stages of analysis, once included in a draft of a chapter, were excerpts translated. As Temple and Young argue, the decision to leave the translation of interviews to the end of the analysis process was 'based on a political recognition of the ontological importance for people of their first language' (2004: 174). Ultimately, through translation, 'the ties between language and identity/culture are cut to the disadvantage of non-English speaker' (*ibid.*). The translation process proved to pose many more problems than expected. Despite living in the UK since 2008 and undertaking my UG and PG studies in English, I had no prior experience of translating in such a way as to remain close to the original articulations in Romanian. First of all, once translated, the answers of participants started to seem

less coherent, because of hesitations, breaks in speech and reformulations. For clarity purposes, I decided to delete such utterances that would only distract readers and to signal them through ellipses surrounded by brackets, the graphic signs that also indicate the omission of more significant passages of interviews. There were several instances when I could not think of a suitable English word equivalent to the Romanian word and eventually settled on a word that would preserve the meaning that the Romanian word had for me. At this point, it should be highlighted once more that as the whole research represents a co-production of knowledge between participants and researcher, the translated excerpts bear my mark even more; they represent the linguistic choices that I made, altering the meaning of the original choices of words made by participants in Romanian (see: Temple, 1997).

A similar point has to be made regarding the photographs included in the analysis. They were all taken by me rather than by participants. As co-producer of knowledge, I took upon myself the task of illustrating what participants were showing me *in vivo*. Despite being aware of ethnographic approaches in visual sociology that are centred around the empowering of participants by giving them cameras to shoot whatever they find relevant (Chalfen, 2008; Mizen and Ofosekusi, 2007, 2008), for practical purposes I chose not to follow their prescribed research practices. First of all, handing out cameras to participants would have shifted the focus from experiencing the urban environment, and from furnishing me with the chance to experience the field site in an ethnographic way, to the artificial process of taking pictures as part of a commitment. No doubt the pictures I took were, once again, my constructions, since I ultimately decided what to

photograph, from what angle, what to include in the final draft of the thesis and what to write in the captions. It is my hope that these pictures, taken with the incipient forms of the broad picture of the ways in which young people engage with the past through the built environment in mind, integrate in the analysis and trigger a dialogue between written text and images. The images ultimately represent my own contribution, as a privileged potential participant in the research, to the articulation of how young people engage with the past.

3.6. Ethics and power relationships

In terms of ethics, the current research followed the guidelines on ethical practice, as approved by The University of Warwick (n.d.), and by The British Sociological Association (2002). All necessary measures were taken to secure the confidentiality, anonymity, safety and wellbeing of participants, as well as my own protection.

Research participants were all aged 16 or over, the age at which young people are legally considered to be capable of making decisions on their own both in the UK and in Romania. All people involved in the research project, gatekeepers and informants alike, were advised in writing about the aims and objectives of the study, as well as about what taking part in the research implied. From the initial stages of the research, when I first made contact with potential participants, it was made clear that they could withdraw from the research process at any time and that, if necessary, the interviews could be paused or halted altogether. Informed consent was thus requested from the outset and was given by all participants in

writing (see: Appendix 3). Furthermore, all participants agreed to have the discussion recorded, although in some cases it took longer to gain their trust by assuring them that the sole purpose of the recording was to act as a memo and to reduce the risks of them being misunderstood due to poor note-taking skills.

In order to ensure the safety of participants, all names were changed. All interviews were numbered and dated and there is no document linking the number of the interview to the real name of participants. In any case, all documents relating to the research were stored in a locked cabinet and/or on a password-protected computer, thus complying with the data storage regulations that are in force in the UK. The data obtained during the research was solely used for the purpose of completing the PhD research, which involves writing the PhD thesis, and of disseminating the findings of the research through publishing academic articles and presenting conference papers. As mentioned above, participants were briefed from the outset on the ways in which I would be employing the data collected during fieldwork.

Conducting ethical research has implications that influence the research practices, the research design and, ultimately, the data that is co-produced with participants during fieldwork and in its aftermath. Complying with ethical standards of good practice involves the well-being of participants taking precedence over any other issues relating to the research. At the same time, qualitative researchers are expected to build rapport and trust with participants so that they feel comfortable enough to take part as fully as possible in the research. Yet, this relationship is built mainly, if not exclusively, for research purposes, since the actions of the researcher are instrumental – the reason why researcher and

participant communicate about the research topic is because the former would like to understand the views and practices of the latter with regard to it (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002; Kvale, 2006). On this basis, Kvale (2006) criticizes conceptions of interviews as encounters between equal partners that engage in a conversation. He argues that the concept of 'interview dialogue' 'gives an illusion of mutual interests in a conversation' (Kvale, 2006: 483) and fosters 'a fantasy of democratic relations' (*ibid.*: 482). Rather, '[t]he qualitative research interview entails a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution of interviewer and interviewee. It is a one-way dialogue, an instrumental and indirect conversation, where the interviewer upholds a monopoly of interpretation' (Kvale, 2006: 484). Hence, researchers ultimately engage in encounter(s) in order to produce data that serves the purpose of the research rather than (mainly) personal interests. And it is through the instrumental doing of rapport that people might feel secure enough to share with researchers experiences they otherwise, or in hindsight, would have preferred to keep to themselves (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). Although I consciously engaged in building rapport from the initial stages of getting in touch with research participants as a way of minimising power differences (Limerick *et al.*, 1996), I would argue that the way I dealt with the product of each individual encounter has been in line with the trust that participants invested in me.

Taking a step backwards and reflecting on my positionality and the power dynamics within research encounters, I would note that throughout the process I have been self-aware that any of my actions could influence the well-being of participants. I have strived to be as open-minded as possible, to accept any views, in

order to understand the standpoint of participants. Nonetheless, I have found myself in situations in which I had to find a diplomatic way out. During the interview with Sergiu, for instance, he overtly manifested xenophobic and racist attitudes. His reason for admiring Nicolae Ceaușescu as a leader was precisely because of his nationalist politics. Upon being asked what system he would prefer, he mentioned a hybrid system of ‘democratic fascism’ and he expanded on the criteria of the eugenics of such a system; citizens would be selected based on several tests. It was difficult to share his enthusiasm for such a political project, yet during the interview I was as open as possible, manifesting genuine signs of interest – rather than approval. After finishing the interview, he made sure that everything was over and then immediately questioned me regarding the communist era and my views about the past. Regarding the latter, I told him, diplomatically, that I did not have a definite stance that I could articulate in terms of nostalgia or anticommunism; I was trying to accept both positive and negative views and create a complex, multifaceted view of the past, which actually described my approach. In this way, I avoided challenging his views that bracketed human rights and I also avoided deceiving him by lying about my pro-human rights stance. As for his wish that I, his peer, should act as memory transmitter for him, he thus manifested what Coar and Sim identify as ‘a perception of the interview as an educational process’ (2006: 253). Despite my insistence on the fact that I am not a historian and that my role was not to test the knowledge of the participants about a static past, several participants expressed their anxiety regarding the interview process, based on their self-perceived lack of (satisfactory) expertise in the history of the communist era. Coar and Sim caution that in peer-to-peer interviews, there is a danger for ‘the interview being perceived as

a test of factual knowledge' (2006: 252). Moreover I had chosen to emphasise, at this cost, the fact that we were actually peers, so that they would not perceive me as an authoritative figure, but as a co-producer of knowledge, as someone who shared (some of) their experiences of mnemonic socialisation.

Despite my efforts to reduce power disparities between myself and participants, be they women or men, younger or around the same age as myself, educated at secondary school level or university level (BA, MA or PhD), as a young person doing research with young people I encountered a whole array of responses, ranging from nervous and deferential to attitudes of superiority. During our 'discussions', I tried to be as informal as possible, to avoid asking questions in a pretentious manner. I also attempted to be open about my own experiences, memories and my own views. I hoped to gain the trust of participants and to create a genuinely relaxed atmosphere. Karnieli-Miller *et al.* concur in that the sense of security participants should ideally have stems from 'the unstructured, informal, anti-authoritative, and nonhierarchical atmosphere in which the qualitative researcher and participants establish their relations in an atmosphere of power equality' (2009: 280). By gaining the trust of participants, they become more at ease in the research context, and it also allows the researcher 'to make an assessment of the accuracy and truthfulness of the observational data collected and the effects of the observer's presence on the observed situations' (Johnson, 1975: 86) and thus maximize the validity of the data.

My approach based on trust and openness - facilitated by pertaining to the same age group - proved to be successful. Participants were apparently open to voicing their thoughts, having accepted on their own accord to take part in this

reflexive exercise of sharing their knowledge and experience of engaging with the recent past. Apparently, they did so without being afraid that they would be judged. For I do not have any experience of the recent past, and hence no positive or negative memories of it that I might feel the need to defend during discussions. I was aware throughout of what I was not; an adult with direct social and / or cultural (direct) roots in the communist era, which helped me to capitalize on this nonidentity, as Reinharz (2010) sees it, but also realize the problems I faced because of it, as discussed above.

Although important, age is just one cog in the complex mechanism of doing research. Power relations are also based on gender, 'race', ethnicity, educational background, area of origin etc. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As Padgett notes, the effects of these social, economic and cultural background characteristics 'can either be disastrous or negligible' (2008: 86). In the case of this research, I would argue that my positionality has worked more towards conducting research, and less against it. Gender, for instance, could have contributed to the shaping of power relations. Any theories regarding the potential effect of my gender on the research would only advance stereotypes and work towards strengthening the status-quo. Given that there were more female than male participants in my respondent set, had I been a female researcher, it might have fostered greater trust. However, since gender is just one aspect of a person's identity, one could infer that any change in any characteristic would have influenced – for better or worse – the research process. There are other elements of my identity that require closer reflection.

Throughout the research I have been aware of the stigma I was carrying as a Romanian PhD student who had studied in the UK and who chose to have a say about the communist era. I could have been perceived as an outsider for not taking part, and sides, in the academic debates around the communist era. Furthermore, a number of participants told me that they were surprised by my attitude, having expected me to be arrogant, precisely because I am originally from Bucharest, from the capital city, because I was studying in the UK, and because I was doing a PhD. Layer upon layer of socio-demographic characteristics that could have worked against me did not prevent people from taking part in the research. My life philosophy of valuing what brings human beings closer together more than what is driving people apart may have gone some way to help build rapport and trust and thus break down preconceptions.

Another problematic issue was my background in sociology, and not history, which could have provided further grounds for scepticism. Encouraged by my supervisors, I held my ground, explaining that I was most of all interested in the process of memory transmission and only secondarily in the communist era, and that I was more curious about present day practices than about what had actually happened before 1989. Although some participants looked up to me, as a potential educator on the topic of the communist era, as already noted, others, and especially those participants who had a background in history (BA, MA or PhD studies), might have been uneasy about my seemingly superficial approach that did not centre on 'facts'. Thus, power dynamics were complex. On the one hand, I was advocating an inclusive approach, manifesting a curious detachment from the emotionally-imbued debates about the communist era, on the other hand my

approach could have seemed superficial, in which case participants might have felt superior knowledge-wise.

Having had no experience in taking in-depth interviews other than the limited exercises of my UG degree, I required time to improve my research skills. Despite constant reflection on the strengths, and mostly on the weaknesses, of my approach in each encounter, improvement proved to be much more difficult to achieve. The three main difficulties had to do with interrupting participants, not providing participants enough time to think through the answers they would give, and asking leading questions, i.e. offering participants possible answer choices, in order to make sure they understood what the question was referring to. If the first problem was addressed by forcing myself to hold back, the two other issues related to much more deeply-ingrained self-perceptions. At one point, I did learn that I had to offer participants the option to further explain my question, but most only needed more time to think, which, as Dilley (2000) notes, is typical when it comes to silences encountered by inexperienced researchers. Holstein and Gubrium argue that ‘the consciously active interviewer intentionally provokes responses by indicating – even suggesting – narrative positions, resources, orientations and precedents’ (1997: 123), which is exactly what I had attempted to do, as a response to the self-perceived pressure of having to clarify my intended question. However, my interviewing skills were gently criticised by several participants who assumed they were better trained. In hindsight, such challenges of the authority of ‘the researcher’ instead of undermining my confidence even further could have been a sign of the complex power dynamics of what I was considering a peer-to-peer discussion, of my successful challenge to my own authority as researcher and building of rapport and

trust. In this way, the interview did become a process of knowledge co-production between peers with shifting power roles.

A collaborative approach that would have aimed at minimising power differences would have also involved seeking feedback from participants on the results of the research - the written thesis. However, due to difficulties in managing logistics under time pressure, I chose to rely on my ‘‘skills, experience, and ethical commitment’ in a way that best serves the research goals’ (Karnieli-Miller *et al.*, 2009: 285). Hence, it is ‘critical adherence to methodological thoroughness and transparency that endows the research process with credibility’ (*ibid.*). Any misinterpretation, is, in the end, part of the result of a collaborative process and it should be regarded as such, as it has been argued throughout this chapter.

3.7. Reflections on identity

It has already been noted that the social and cultural background of the individual conducting research is likely to influence the process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Burgess, 2006; Padgett, 2008). Given my age and background, I could have been a participant in a similar research project and it is on this issue that I wish to focus in this section. For this reason I am making a distinction between the roles of researcher and participant, although this is purely an artificial separation.

Shulamit Reinharz identifies three identities any ethnographer has whilst in the field: ‘**research selves, personal selves, and situational selves**’ (2010: 5, original emphasis). Rather than glossing over the complexity of the various layers of identity one has during the research process, I would argue that Reinharz’s

typology has precisely the role of bringing this issue to light; each individual brings with her- or himself a specific baggage of characteristics that shape the research process. In my case, the personal self Reinharz identifies becomes more than that: the participant self. In other words, it is *I* the researcher guided by a certain agenda, and it is *I* the individual whose experience influences the way the research is going through reflexive work.

Fostering this symbiotic relationship between identities - that, again, are actually overlapping and only artificially separated, as a result of reflexivity - gave me, as a researcher, the opportunity to take advantage of insights into the subject matter. This resulted from reflexive work on my relationship as an individual with the recent past. My experience as a young person living in a postsocialist society guided me throughout the whole process: from deciding what areas to focus on, to choosing appropriate research methods to tackle those issues.

Before attempting to understand how others make sense of the past, I had to delve into introspection. What did I know about the past? Where from? How did the communist past influence present day Romanian society, in my view? The answers not only informed my research, but also helped me to achieve a better understanding of where I stood in terms of how the communist era is remembered and foster a stronger sense of identity. Ultimately, they helped me understand myself and the society I grew up in, as Reinharz (2010) notes that all research does: it is not only that researchers influence the research process and the setting, but they are also shaped in turn by the research process. Hence, deciding to do research on the ways in which memories are transmitted to young people like myself made me engage in an introspective process, as a potential participant,

which then fed into the way the research was conducted; the discussions I had with participants brought new elements and perspectives which made me think further about my personal understanding of the past. Moreover, this cycle repeated itself several times, helping me to better understand myself, postsocialist Romanian society and also shape the research.

Thus far I have argued that I was both a researcher and a potential participant. My positionality as an insider/outsider further complicates issues. Having lived most of my life in Romanian society, I considered myself an insider. Whether doing research in one's own culture is desirable or not has long been a topic of debate. Whilst traditionally ethnographers in the anthropological tradition were studying remote communities with the aim of gaining insider knowledge, and thus providing emic interpretations (Gregory and Ruby, 2011), The Chicago School with its focus on urban communities signaled a shift in approach which was then pursued by adepts of the postmodernist turn in ethnography. Researchers started to engage in studies as insiders, as members of researched communities or as having common characteristics with existing members. So, they faced the challenge of defamiliarizing the familiar, which was mainly achieved through reflection, so that they could produce reliable knowledge. Researching as an insider has the advantage of gaining access more easily to a research setting and being invested with the trust of participants. However, Gregory and Ruby (2011) argue that the very role of the researcher represents a point of differentiation, which participants tend to focus on more than on issues of commonality, and so one could hardly be perceived as an insider. As for the disadvantages of the 'insider' role, there is a danger of the researcher overly focusing on his or her

experience, during research encounters and analysis, at the expense of the experience of participants (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Furthermore, sharing too many of the experiences of participants might obscure the meanings *they* attach to their actions. A way of dealing with this danger is through '[d]isciplined bracketing and detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one's own personal biases and perspectives' (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 59). By engaging in a continuous reflexive process I hopefully managed to defamiliarize myself with their experience, at the same time letting participants know that there was common ground between us. It seems that providing emic interpretations in accordance with the perspectives of participants is an easier task for outsider researchers, who benefit from the offset from a distancing from the experiences of group members.

If ethnographers run the risk of going native, it could be argued that from the very start I was native in that I belonged to the broad research setting; it took me 18 years and a further four on-and-off to achieve this status. Those last four years, in which I was exposed to a different culture, the British one, together with constant reflection made me able to distance myself from the field and critically scrutinize what I was experiencing – both during discussions with participants and in society in general. Furthermore, the bottom-up approach I utilised to tackle analysis placed more emphasis on empirical data than on pre-existing theories and/or personal judgments, which countered the risk of having my own insider perspective on engaging with the communist era overly influence data analysis, as argued by Coar and Sim (2006). As already mentioned, and echoing the proposed solution of Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009), being an insider coupled with constant reflexive

work added towards the on-going adaptation and improvement of the research design. In the end, Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) note, the binary distinction of the roles of researchers is purely artificial, and researchers occupy a position somewhere on the continuum between the two points of reference.

Defamiliarization, as a constitutive element of reflexivity, played an important part in this process, especially considering my prior immersion into the Romanian society and culture. My research setting represented a familiar environment, my experience of growing up in postsocialist Romania partly reflected the experiences participants had. As a researcher, and especially as an ethnographer, I had to distance myself from the social environment I was working in by taking a step back and trying to comprehend the whole picture in the social setting (O'Reilly, 2009). As Hammersley and Atkinson note, 'in researching settings that are more familiar, it can be much more difficult to suspend one's preconceptions, whether these derive from social science or from everyday knowledge' (2007: 81). Failing was indeed a danger; the danger that my 'very familiarity with the environment blinds [me] [...] to perspicacity' (Sanger, 1996: 8). I worked towards evading this pitfall by adopting a constantly reflexive approach throughout the research process regarding my role, the research practices I used, and the data that were co-created by participants and researcher during interviews and walking tours.

There are also drawbacks to being too much of an insider. Being a young person and doing research on the process of how memories are transmitted, appropriated and reworked by other young people implies talking to peers about a period neither of us have any first hand memories of, thus being difficult to identify a reference point, a common ground, except for the experience of

reconstructing the past. One advantage of this situation was that I was able to better comprehend the processes through which young people make sense of those times. I had no first-hand memories to make it difficult to isolate information I obtained from external sources/stimuli. Unlike the people who had first-hand memories from the communist era, I shared the same experience with participants, young people, knowing what it is like to interpret, appropriate and rework memories as the only way to make sense of the past.

Regardless of the amount of information they accumulated about the communist period, all participants were reconstructing, through different techniques, an image of the same society. But the end result was invariably - and rightly so - a highly personal take on that period. However, if 'anything goes', how can one identify instances of silence and forgetting, two processes that go hand-in-hand with remembering? Acknowledging the value of the variety of constructions of the past should not overshadow the fact that something happened at some point in time. Every single person perceived that reality in a different way, but still, there was such a reality. Not having first hand memories of the past makes it impossible to discern those facts, as few and dry as they are. The only ways to identify instances of forgetting and silencing were by trying to form an image of the past based on the accounts of other participants - including myself - and compare that with each account, and by conducting intergenerational interviews and then confronting the stories of parents/grandparents, potential sources of information, with those of the young members of the family. Ultimately, I engaged in the same practices as participants in order to make sense of second-hand memories (see: Chapter 5, on mnemonic socialisation).

Sharing the same experience with the young participants in the research had both its advantages and disadvantages. Not having an anchorage in the reality of the past was counterbalanced by sharing the same type of experience in creating second-hand memories. In the end, the aim of the research project was precisely to understand how young people make sense of the past; and having common ground with participants in this process proved to be beneficial.

3.8. Conclusion

Conducting in-depth interviews and participant-tailored ethnographic work, coupled with constant reflection on the research experience and my own personal and professional identities, has led to building knowledge on the process of memory construction and transmission. Through the research practices that were carried out as part of this project, knowledge was constructed by both participants and researcher, in a collaborative process. Participants were encouraged to be reflexive about their engagement with the past and to adopt as open an approach as possible and take into account any possible vehicles of memory transmission that might have influenced the second-hand memories they created over time. This leads on to the issue of power relationships within the research. In the context of the current research, the researcher was an insider of sorts of the Romanian society, if one can at any point be an insider and thus share understandings with participants. This positionality of the researcher and the underpinnings of the project both lead to a sense of auto-exploration regarding the process of mnemonic socialisation. However, instead of turning into an auto-ethnography per se or damaging the research in the sense of

diminishing awareness due to taking for granted personal motivations, explanations and experiences, these particular circumstances have been made use of through constant reflexive practices that informed the research design – and facilitated the arrival at emic understandings of the phenomena under study. Action was taken to minimize power imbalances, inherent to any research, so that participants would feel comfortable and share their experiences in an open discussion. Nevertheless, each research encounter required a different approach, since power relations are never the same between researcher and any two participants.

PART 2

Collective and collected memories

CHAPTER 4

Discursive constructions of the past

4.1. Introduction

The process of remembering, as argued in Chapter 2, shapes the past that is being remembered. It follows then, that a multitude of alternative accounts concerning the same period or even the same event co-exist. These accounts might well vary to such an extent that they contradict each other. Because of their potential to legitimate or challenge a specific set of present-day circumstances (see also Pine *et al.*, 2004), state institutions and social actors alike might have an interest in regulating the ways in which the past is remembered.

This chapter will focus on the ways in which the ‘will to memory’³⁴ (Eyal, 2004) manifests itself in postsocialist Romanian society. Centering on the criminal and restrictive nature of a totalitarian regime, normative state-sponsored narratives adopt an anticommunist approach to the past, claiming to depict the past as it truly was. As opposed to the public discourse on the communist era that dominates the public sphere, non-regulated personal narratives - counter-memories - present a much more diverse image of the recent past, ranging from anticommunism to nostalgia and usually based on the experiences of those that engage in the process of remembering. Young people, with no reliable first-hand memories, are faced with the dilemma of how to make sense of the past, an unknown territory, out of

³⁴ ‘The will to memory’ is a concept coined by Eyal (2004) that refers to the potential institutional investment in memory, as a social construct, with the expectation of either reinforcing post-socialist identities or healing psychic trauma suffered during the socialist period.

the patchwork of narratives that reach them. Is there one way to know that ‘other country’, as the proponents of state-sponsored discourses suggest? Or do young people, instead, have to find a way out - or deeper into - the realm of remembrance that would involve certain criteria of judging what to rely on? Before answering these fundamental questions, this chapter will present the polarized mnemonic culture of postsocialist Romania and the perceptions of the young people that participated in the research regarding the manifestations, reasons and actors that adopt the public anticommunist discourse or the alternative nostalgic stance. It will also look at the means through which public discourses are transmitted to young people and whether they are considered effective or not. The analysis that follows is based on interview data and supported by academic literature about remembering the communist/socialist era in Romania and throughout Eastern Europe.

4.2. Overview of discursive representations of the past in Romania

Since the Revolution of December 1989, discursive representations of the communist era in Romania have focused, in the public sphere, almost exclusively on the negative character of the communist regime. After 42 years (1947-1989), the ‘truth’ had to finally be spelled out and acknowledged. Any alternative discourses that did not focus on the crimes or the shortages that partly characterised the communist regime were to be condemned. Positive memories are seen to negate, at a discursive level, the negative aspects of the past. The monopoly of anticommunist public discourses had to be attained and preserved in order not to forget ‘the truth’, even if this phenomenon actually negated the experiences of

millions of people that had to be silenced, at least in the public sphere, because they might have included positive elements.

The evolution of the mnemonic manifestations of the public discourse has been steady since 1989, culminating with the official condemnation of the communist regime preceding the Romanian accession to the EU in January 2007. Preda (2010) notes that in the early 1990s, remembering the past was not a major concern; the only official acts of memory in that period were related to the Revolution of December 1989, rather than to the communist era in general. The newly established authorities favoured a silencing of the questioning of the socialist past (Bădică, 2010), thus benefiting ‘by a general tacit, *de facto*, amnesty, which is the result of a pact of silence – an authentic social contract – concluded between politicians and citizens’ (Cioflâncă, 2001: 109, original emphasis). Bădică argues that it is precisely this attitude that eventually ‘pushed Romanian anti-Communism into a radical realm which focused mainly on Communist crimes and described the whole era as a criminal era’ (2010: 84). As a consequence, most historical texts nowadays focus ‘on prisons, surveillance and shortages’, Petrescu and Petrescu (2009b: 155-6) argue. These narratives make nostalgia impossible to support in the public sphere, where, when present, ‘it is restricted to the largely discredited former nomenklatura’ (Petrescu and Petrescu, 2009b: 167); nostalgia finds, nevertheless, a place in the private sphere.

The memory landscape in Romania is thus dominated by a bitter anticommunist perspective that is meant to be cathartic for postsocialist Romanian society. Although perceived in these terms, certainly by ‘a small group of intellectuals and former political prisoners who had been trying for years to make

their ideas heard' (Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008: 279), it is only recently that the past came to be widely regarded as such (i.e. also through public discourses) in Romania. Remembering the revolution involved an acknowledgement of the fact that the communist regime was rightly dismissed, yet the political class could hardly condemn a regime of which they had been a part. In December 2006, however, the Romanian communist regime was officially condemned by president Traian Băsescu on the basis of *The Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania*³⁵, as part of the process of regularization or ritualization of the past (Olick, 1998). This symbolic act, performed before the reunited Chambers of the Romanian Parliament, was indeed the most visible manifestation of anticommunist discourse.

Politics of remembrance have also been institutionalized. In January 2006, the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes was established, which later expanded its activity by merging with another institution and thus becoming the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMRE). Its mission statement does not greatly differ from that of its Polish counterpart, which Main argues has the role 'to institutionalize and [...] to situate in a dominant position a particular version of Polish history' (2008: 396). It claims that the narrative they 'uncover' represents 'the truth' about the past which 'should' be remembered (*ibid.*), namely 'the totalitarian nature of the system, its repressive character, and sometimes, its imposition from outside' (*ibid.*: 399).

³⁵ Published in 2007; see: Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România (2007)

The mission of these institutes reflects the neo-positivist stance outlined by Neamțu (2010) which purports that post-communist societies, and especially scholars dealing with the past (historians, political scientists, sociologists etc.) have the responsibility to uncover the ‘truth’ about the ‘traumatic events’ (2010: 9) so that people can finally come to terms with the recent past. Officially, IICCMRE is concerned with ‘constructing a culture of remembrance about the communist past’ (Tismăneanu, 2010: 2), yet this ‘past’ is actually conceived as ‘the communist dictatorship in Romania (institutions, ideology, repression, economy, society, culture, exile, minorities etc.)’, as a ‘traumatic and highly controversial’ period (*ibid.*). Hence, IICCMRE focuses on the effects of the ‘totalitarian’ communist regime, giving the impression that this aspect is of utmost importance and defines ‘the past’; any other experiences are belittled. The sole focal point of state-sponsored politics of memory is represented by the crimes of the communist regime; the communist era per se, its social history, is, in the end, ignored. People only know ‘the truth’ about the past if they know about the crimes, rather than if they know about both negative and positive aspects of that period, thus illustrating the vast array of experiences people had during those times.

The preferred version of the past is constantly transmitted through particular technologies of memory. Politics of remembrance are enacted through educational policies (state-sponsored or NGO-sponsored) and cultural policies, as manifest in museum displays and media, namely mass-media, films and books/written texts. Whether they are effective or not, is for young people to say.

4.3. Young people's perceptions of the postsocialist Romanian discursive field

Being exposed to both normative and alternative discourses about the communist era and having to find a balance between all accounts of the past, young people are accurate observers of the memory discursive landscape in Romania. First of all, they note that there is an extreme polarization of opinions and in this game of chess one can legitimately play only with the black pieces. And black *has* to win, there is no other way:

the public sphere is mostly structured by the anticommunist attitude which... sure, also being part of the official discourse... [...] somehow dominates the other part [...] I mean it's also a scheme like anticommunists are good, nostalgics are bad (Andreea)

The discursive landscape about the past is marked by binary constructs. Thus, normative anticommunism is counterposed to the undesirable, partial and deformed nostalgia. And these discursive positions are perceived as being radically different, 'two different species...' (Andreea). There is no middle way. You are either for or against 'the truth':

Every time when they talked, they made pronouncements. You know? And this was a problem for me, I didn't start out from pronouncements. I started off from a curiosity that was completely unsatisfied, 'cause I wasn't happy about being told 'it was bad'. Yes. The end. (Izabela)

Anticommunism becomes compulsory, as also argued by Puzik (2014). And both extreme standpoints - nostalgia and anticommunism - seem to be deeply rooted in people's consciousness. Young people seem to suggest that instead of aiming to find out as much as possible and thus being able to create a complex view of the past, people stick to their own radical views. Their reasons for doing so are dealt with later in the chapter.

4.3.1. Reaction to the discursive field

Young people offer an aggregated critical perspective on the discursive constructions of the past identified in Romanian society. First of all, they note that the communist era constitutes an unavoidable topic that is over-discussed. Once young people become saturated, they become annoyed, bored and fed up with the subject; preconditions for creating repulsion towards the topic and rejection of anything that evokes the recent past, regardless of whether it is part of the normative or alternative discourses.

Saturation is, then, one of the main characteristics of the discursive field on the communist era: 'It had already become a topic that is too large, I mean with too much information [...] I don't know, it seems like an explosion of anticommunism things at the moment...' (Olivia). Both Stela and Laurențiu confessed that they got bored of the topic because of its proliferation. It is impossible, participants argue, not to be exposed to discourses about the past:

You hear unintentionally about communism. [...] Everywhere they talk about communism and probably they will still talk [about it] a long time from now and I think that [this is going to happen] more and more. (Leonard)

Yet, the proponents of anticommunist discourse would argue that as long as young people remain nostalgic, the politics of memory have not achieved their aim of reaching young people and revealing to them ‘the truth’ about the past³⁶. Pavel agrees, when it comes to media representations; he argues that they should not be confined to the month of December, but broadcast more often: ‘but it’s too little, I say, to say that only once a year. Say it in July, say it in, anytime, on any day of the year’. Variations in standpoints could be explained not only by the will to engage with the past, but also by looking at the socio-historical background of participants. Being immersed in debates about the past due to studying history or politics at university level, some participants might perceive an oversaturation of the topic. Others, being exposed only to media coverage of the past, for instance, might wish for it to be tackled more often, as Pavel notes.

If some young people are tired of the communist era, others note that politics of memory are not pervasive enough. If they are, they are not effective, as in the case of school curricula as will be discussed later. In order to address this issue, which would only create stronger rejections from those that identify an oversaturation of the topic, new ways of dealing with the past have to be found. In

³⁶ The results of a survey conducted by the Soros Foundation Romania in 2010 on a population of 5861 young people indicate that 38 per cent of the respondents consider the communist era as having been better or far better than contemporary times (Gheorghită, 2010)

the end, discussions about the recent past should aim, as several participants argue, to provide closure to what is ‘like that scar you keep scratching’ (Liliana) in order for traumas to heal, to use Felix’s terms. Running in circles does not help: ‘if things would clarify, man, alright, we’ve had a history of communism... [...] it happened and all that. But it’s solved, we can move on [...] It’s exactly like when you break up with someone...’ (Luca). Young people do not see the point in perpetuating discussions about the past, especially from an anticommunist perspective, since healing requires closure. Other participants, such as Lidia, react to the saturation of the public sphere with the recent past by arguing for assuming the past and moving on, since there is no need to dwell on it: ‘it only annoyed me. Man, now I’ve understood, [...] those were the times, try to move on. This is our history, simply move on’. Lidia suggests a different kind of closure based on active forgetting (Assmann A., 2010); people need to put a stop to discussions and simply leave everything behind. Unlike Luca, Felix and Liliana, Lidia considers that lessons have already been learnt and there is no need to dwell further on the topic.

Currently discussing too much about the recent past poses some risks. People could end up forgetting, Olivia argues, because, judging by the intensity of debates, the topic will soon be exhausted: ‘I have the feeling it will, it will stop because they won’t have, they won’t have anything to say, and then everything will be forgotten’. Active forgetting, then, is unnecessary since passive forgetting will occur anyway. An alternative is a belief that the recent past will soon become a trivial topic of discussion:

Normally, I think it's good to... not to forget, to remember, but I think that it isn't good to talk in excess about this either because it loses its importance, in the end, if it becomes a topic that is discussed by anyone at any time.

Like us

Yes... [WE LAUGH] (Flavia)

Hence, Flavia implies the degree to which a society remembers should have its limits.

Young people thus identify two radical discursive positionings when it comes to remembering the communist era. Referring to discussions held in the anticommunist register, they note that the communist era represents an unavoidable, over-discussed topic that might lead to young people becoming annoyed or bored with it. The quality of approaches should receive more attention and in this way closure - and not forgetting – will be achieved. Whether satisfying the need for closure at the discursive level would actually mean leaving the past behind is open to debate. Later in the thesis, in Chapters 6, 7 and especially in Chapter 8, it will be argued that memories are embodied and emplaced and even without a narrative that explicitly refers to the communist era to accompany them, they still continue to have a life of their own in postsocialist Romania.

4.3.2. Young people's preferred approach to the past

Young people do not stop at deploring the current state of discursive approaches about the communist era. They also put forward suggestions regarding more appropriate ways of dealing with the past. The common denominator is inclusiveness.

Participants would prefer a more balanced view of the past, that would take into account both positive and negative experiences, the myriad of personal takes on the past. Such an approach would also implicitly be less emotional, less radical, since discursive positionings would not be ideologically imbued and, at the same time, would not be counterposed to others, such as anticommunism is to nostalgia in the current discursive field on the memory of the communist era. Darius and Gabriel suggest to:

take what was good from communism and reject what was bad without rejecting communism in its entirety (Darius)

look at communism in a different way, look at it more objectively. And don't perceive it exactly how you were taught and told fibs in school about it (Gabriel)

Young people acknowledge the fact that the past is constructed, on a discursive level, by each individual and by social institutions engaged in the process of remembrance. Experiences are diverse and this very complexity prevents one from 'uncovering the truth', as the state institutions of remembrance aim by

manipulating students in school, for instance, as the quote above from Gabriel suggests³⁷.

The collective memory of the communist era should thus incorporate and accept all accounts of the past, rather than having the past viewed through a specific lens that renders invisible certain aspects of those times. The binary discursive approach to the communist era - alternative nostalgia and normative anticommunism - only limits the possibilities of remembrance. Furthermore, they also negate the experiences people went through, as Izabela argues. Positive experiences simply cannot sit alongside negative experiences in this black-and-white construction of the past: '[socialist art] it's part of the social experiences, of society, of people's experiences. You can't negate people's experiences, can you?' (Izabela). 'The truth' would then become a more inclusive and virtually borderless category. We do need to know 'the truth', but each account of the past represents one piece of a multidimensional jigsaw. Accounts could, indeed, contribute to 'a truthful' image of the past, if one is to adopt the neo-positivist stance that claims there is 'a truth' to be uncovered (Neamțu, 2010). This stance would need to be incorporated into a constructivist approach, much more appropriate to memory studies – and to conceptualizing memory processes in general. In this way, 'the truth', as an ideal type, can be achieved only by summing all possible accounts; but even then, since memories are ever-changing, 'the truth' would still be subject to change at any moment.

³⁷ This finding reflects the difficulties faced by young people who were part of the MYPLACE study (Popov and Deák, 2015).

4.4. Public discourses

Whether or not they accept it, young people are exposed to the public discourse on the communist era due to the diverse means - including, *inter alia*, 'state institutions, archives, researchers, funds, textbooks and the media' (Marcheva, 2010: 253) - available to memory makers writing history from the position of victors. Historical accounts can nonetheless be challenged by the plethora of witness accounts available throughout postsocialist societies (Apor and Sarkisova, 2008). Nostalgia might well be expressed through media, but even so the scholarly literature does not identify any traces of it in public discourses.

The public anticommunist discourses tend to focus primarily - if not exclusively - on the criminal character of the regimes in question. They are present in most - if not all - postsocialist societies and they are, Dimitrova suggests with regards to the Bulgarian context, 'organized around the notions of crime, punishment and unreason' (2010: 154). They see communism solely as 'an experiment and a violation of a series of fundamental types of orders: social, economical [sic!] moral, juridical, historical, aesthetic etc.' (*ibid.*: 159-60). Romania is no exception to black and white representations of the past, where black is the preferred shade of lenses through which the past is viewed in the public sphere.

Young people are exposed to the public anticommunist discourse which represents the approach of current public politics of memory. Such discourse not only condemns an ideology, but in its extreme forms it also promotes hatred towards the past in the name of preventing communist regimes ever being

established again: ‘I’ve met people in cities who hate... for all they’re worth everything that communism has meant’ (Gențiana). Participants emphasize the radical nature of anticommunism, which is deeply ingrained in society. They talk about ‘the anticommunist fanaticism’, about ‘this deep-seated anticommunism’ (Filip) which is promoted by ‘toxic’ people and ‘has intensified systemically and structurally’ (Izabela)³⁸. Public discourses thus do not go unquestioned; the efforts made to present an utterly negative image of the past are evident, at least to some of the young people that took part in this study: ‘they’re trying... with superhuman powers to expose it and condemn it, to subject it to... to the public vilification (Darius). This type of ‘anticommunist fanaticism’, to use Filip’s phrase, runs the risk of doing more damage to society than good. Whilst the intention behind promoting a politics of remembrance centred on an anticommunist discourse might have to do with the progress of society, it could, in effect, end up becoming a form of extremism, as Felix argues: ‘Anticommunism [...] unfortunately tends to become what antifascism is, namely an opposite form of extremism...’. Condemning a regime which imposed restrictions on human rights, amongst which is the right to free speech, could actually deny, in its extreme forms, those very rights; the right to have a view of the past that does not entirely fit into the dominant anticommunist discourse.

The public discourses are sometimes perceived as propaganda, and this is particularly noticed when reflecting upon the approach taken in summer

³⁸ For instance, Liiceanu, a Romanian philosopher, notes how ‘I believe that, living ‘during those years,’ I have known hell, even if I was not among those put to boil in cauldrons. But the vapors of hell, the sulphur and its stench I know too well [...]’ (2014: 102)

schools/universities (see: Section 4.4.2.6): ‘the anticommunist ideology [...] somehow criminalizes everything altogether’ (Izabela). In the process, yet again, an ideological stance towards a political regime ends up dragging with it everything that is associated with the period between 1947 and 1989³⁹. Sergiu, a supporter of current efforts to re-establish a communist party in postsocialist Romania, claims that the very terminology used, ‘communism’ instead of ‘socialism’, has the aim of discrediting an ideology that otherwise is viable. The argument is that ‘we shouldn’t turn our mind and sight towards this system because this system hasn’t brought anything good. Or that [line of thinking] is wrong’ (Sergiu). The anticommunist public discourse which has been adopted as a public politics of memory could well have this aim. It can also serve as a way of supporting the politics of the transitional period, as Assmann and Shortt (2012) and Connerton (1989) argue.

Being exposed to anticommunist discourses can also have other effects, not necessarily intended, such as uncritically condemning the communist regime:

maybe I went through, I lived in a medium and in a period in which... communism was so virulently condemned, which isn’t a negative thing, on the whole, that young people, even I, involuntarily, have ended up associating communism with everything that’s bad, with everything that’s obsolete... (Letiția)

³⁹ Regarding the conflation between politics and nostalgia, see: Gille, 2010; Nadkarni and Shevchenko, 2004.

The discourses young people are exposed to within their social milieu can thus have a significant influence on them. Anticommunist propaganda, through repetition, achieves its aim in the end: ensuring young people see the communist era in a negative light.

We have seen thus far that politics of memory seem to find an exclusively anticommunist approach sufficient. Yet the past and its recollection are far more complex than that. The question that follows is why is it that anticommunism appears a credible discursive positioning towards the recent past?

4.4.1. Justifications for anticommunism

Changing the focus to those who appropriate the anticommunist discourse, participants put forward several explanations for this approach. First of all, anticommunism seems to come naturally, if one is educated:

if you're interested more in the spiritual things than in the material ones... [...] it's somehow normal to get to this... (Antoanela)

the anticommunist attitude is... sure... somehow more justifiable than the nostalgic attitude (Andreea)

[it's] imposed by common sense, yes (Cecilia)

Being educated might not necessarily refer to having a more open attitude, but it can refer to the fact that the educational system is *par excellence* a medium through which anticommunist discourse is propagated. It follows then, that it is more likely to become anticommunist after being exposed to such discourses.

Other participants argue that anticommunism has nothing to do with common-sense. Remembering the past does not automatically lead to adopting an anticommunist stance. On the contrary, some argue, those that are radically anticommunist are considered to exaggerate or be narrow-minded people: ‘Those who [...] are anti communism seem to be more blinkered, more ignorant people, people who don’t have as much... culture and so on’ (Leonard). Why then are people buying into the dominant anticommunist discourse? Participants suggest the inability to adapt to those times, going through traumatic experiences or holding specific political views as possible explanations:

I think that their anticommunism either comes... [...] because of some... [...] stories, of some life trajectories [...] of their families, of theirs [...] which communism... has influenced... most probably in a very powerful, negative way and... they remained [...] like that... or because of very strong beliefs, values which [...] are situated in opposition to communism, to put it that way (Octavian)

It should be said that these explanations mirror justifications for adopting nostalgic standpoints, discussed in Section 4.5. In any case, anticommunism seems to be associated with progress, rather than being stuck in the past: ‘I assume or at least I

hope that, in general, anticommunists hope for something better, fight for something better' (Sorina). By contrast to restorative nostalgia (Boym, 2001), anticommunism strives for a more inclusive and tolerant society. However, the same could be argued by nostalgics, who see in communism more advantages than in capitalism. Hence, these similar justifications for political positions based on otherwise opposed representations of the communist era illustrate the artificial polarization of the discursive field on the recent past. Despite the similar arguments in favor or against nostalgia or dystalgia, there is an imbalance between the technologies of memory through which the two are propagated. In the remainder of this section on public discourses, I will look at the vehicles of memory transmission employed by state institutions to promote anticommunist discourses.

4.4.2. Technologies of memory: Conveyors of public discourses

Marcheva (2010) argues that it is the victors who are in control of most technologies of memory and thus can establish a particular politics of memory. The state-sponsored anticommunist discourse finds its way into the public sphere through educational and cultural policies. Unlike alternative discourses that are expressed solely through personal accounts - written or oral - all other technologies of memory - school curricula, mass media, films, books, museum displays etc. - that are visible in the public sphere convey the dominant anticommunist discourse. To most of these, young people are involuntarily exposed from early years. Whether they are effective or not is a different matter.

A few points of commonality should be emphasized from the outset. First of all, all technologies of memory have the potential to act as triggers of further engagement with the past. Participants note how participating in summer schools, reading books, watching films, and, in a few cases, history classes provided such a starting point for them⁴⁰:

Yes, [the summer school was] my gate towards... my knowledge in the area of communism [...] it really helped me to, to develop through [...] what I was accumulating from the speakers, through the discussions with, with other people, with other students that came there and with teachers (George)

after [you read a book] [...] you start wondering, you start asking yourself various questions and you get to... other books, to... other information (Marcela)

A second point would be that any vehicles of memory transmission can elicit an emotional response, but, more than anything, it is first-hand experiences, encountered through hearing testimonies of eyewitnesses or visits to spatial settings such as former political prisons, that impress young people (see: Chapter 5). Moreover, emotional reactions render memories more relevant to individuals.

⁴⁰ Museums as well, as one of the participants in the study of Paulesc (2014) notes

Having stressed two common points for technologies of memory, I will now turn to look at those participants who spoke of the public anticommunist discourse.

4.4.2.1. Mass media

The mass media represents one of the most pervasive vehicles of memory transmission favouring anticommunist discourse. It seems that, regardless of the initial topic of discussion, in the media, people virtually end up tackling the communist era: ‘no one can leave behind what has been and they still end up there, discussing this [in current affairs programmes]’ (Mirela). December, though, is the month in which people have to remember, first and foremost, the Revolution and, secondly, the communist era and the role Nicolae Ceaușescu played during the communist era. At this time of the year the media becomes saturated with films, talk shows and reports commemorating the pre-1989 period, even from the early 1990s. Inevitably, media products are recycled and broadcast again and again each year, which contributes to the saturation of the public sphere, as discussed above:

They are the same [LAUGHS] reports that have been broadcast since then. They’re not making others. [...] Well [LAUGHS] mainly there would be... the reports from the 25th of December, 22nd-25th, the moment in which absolutely on all TV channels they are discussing, they are discussing again about those things (Leonard)

and there was the TV which showed, continuously showed documentaries, talk-shows... [...] bang, bang, bang, one after the other, so... (Iustin)

Media representations become part of the ritualization process of remembering⁴¹. It becomes a duty to ‘remind’ Romanian society what happened in December 1989 and why it happened. Rarely do discussions touch on aspects that are not exclusively viewed in a negative light. Recollecting daily life during those times might include such positive memories, yet they are marginal and irrelevant in a sea of reports focusing on the crimes of the communist era.

Young people either stumble upon such TV programmes, as some used to even when little without comprehending much, as happened with Luca and Mirela, or they are called by their parents to watch with them the TV broadcasts dealing with the past, in an effort to educate their children, as was the case for Violeta (see: Chapter 5). Educating, in this case, implies making them aware of the negative aspects of the past – shortages and limitations on human rights – on the basis of media representations, supported by the comments of family members.

Yet, is mass media an efficient agent of disseminating public discourses on the communist era? Despite acknowledging having seen broadcasts about the past, a significant number of young people note that for various reasons they do not watch TV and, if they do, they do not trust the information they receive through this channel of communication. Any other sources, especially eyewitnesses, are preferred: ‘TV corporations lie a lot and [...] everything’s a lie, so to say, on the

⁴¹ See: Connerton, 1989; Olick, 1998.

surface [...] I trusted my parents and my family that were there and they told me. Why would I trust someone on TV?’ (Olga)⁴². Family narratives are more reliable, due to the trust built between family members, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.4.2.2. Films

Other media products dealing with the recent past are fictional and documentary films, which flourished especially after the mid-2000s. The release of a series of internationally acclaimed films on the communist era and/or the Romanian Revolution of 1989⁴³ contributed to politics of memory that otherwise would have relied solely on school curricula, historical documents and documentary films and reports. Popular culture thus contributed to making a dull story about a totalitarian past that was characterised by shortages and limitations on human rights come to life and reach larger audiences. Fictional narratives still focused in their majority on negative aspects of the past, even if they did not take a dark angle; documentary films likewise.

⁴² Popov and Deák (2015) observe a similar rejection of the institutionalization of memories.

⁴³ *The Afternoon of a Torturer* (Pintilie, 2001); *Bless You Prison* (Mărgineanu, 2002); *12:08 East of Bucharest* (Porumboiu, 2006); *The Paper Will be Blue* (Muntean, 2006); *The Way I Spent the End of the World* (Mitulescu, 2006); *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (Mungiu, 2007); *Silent Wedding* (Mălăele, 2008); *Tales from the Golden Age* (Uricaru et al., 2009); *The Fighter's Portrait in His Youth* (Popescu, 2010); *Adalbert's Dream* (Achim, 2011); *Somewhere in Palilula* (Purcărete, 2012); *Three Days Till Christmas (The Last Days of the Life of Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu)* (Gabrea, 2012); *I'm an Old Communist Hag* (Gulea, 2013); *Quod Erat Demonstrandum* (Gruzsinski, 2013); *Closer to the Moon* (Caranfil, 2013); *White Gate* (Mărgineanu, 2014); *Trading Germans* (Georgescu, 2014); etc.

Young people are exposed to films produced during the communist era and which serve as sources of information and as visual illustration of how life was during those times, and also to films produced after 1989. It is mostly recent films that had an impact on participants. Some note that recent films, rather than providing new memories for them, only add texture to an image that they already have of the recent past. Visual stimuli add flesh to the structures based on narratives:

They confirm a lot of the information I've had, but new information, which I would get from films, again, there is very little because I already know some things from what I've read, but the fact that they present, that there are images from the era helps a lot and these have a great impact. (Călin)

I don't think we're talking about new things, but about an atmosphere... (Lucian)

George and Camelia go even further, claiming that seeing a film about the recent past transposes one into a period they have not experienced. Moving images can thus achieve much more than a narrative; they provide the setting in which young people can easily immerse themselves, if they wish to:

yes, I can say it was a film that for me mattered a lot and it offered me the chance to... to live, in one way or another those moments that those people have lived during... during communism (George)

Yes, it takes you for an hour, two, however long the film lasts, I don't know, it takes you into another world, it takes you into that world and at least through... through the eyes of a director, through the eyes of a film you can see how it was back then, you know?... [...] Visually it's different, you can't say it bears comparison (Camelia)

Written or oral narratives achieve their role of vehicles of memory transmission, yet films have the potential for a sensorial, in-depth experience of remote times.

Films thus convey a particular construction of the past, generally the state-sponsored one and, by doing this, they also provide texture to the memories young people might already have⁴⁴. That is not to say that for some young people, they have no effect at all.

In one of the few studies of Romanian films dealing with the pre-1989 regime, Preda argues that the films about life under the socialist regime are means of 'artistic *re*interpretation of the recent past' (2010: 137, original emphasis); the past is used only as a pretext, not as 'an obsession' anymore. However, I would argue against this view. Seeing the number of films produced in the latter years about the communist era, it seems that now more than ever the subject acts as an

⁴⁴ For a discussion of complementary sources of second hand experiences, see: Keightley and Pickering, 2012; see also Chapter 5.

obsession for the new film directors – and this could be the case for several reasons (e.g. exoticism of the topic, personal experience etc.). Conveying the dominant discourse of the past and displaying a certain set of clichés, young people might end up annoyed by the same approach to the recent past and avoid watching them, in which case films are bound to fail from the outset as potentially effective technologies of memory. Films are thus vehicles of memory that illustrate the oversaturation of the anticommunist discourses discussed earlier:

these have already become cliché. They're the same, you know? [...] already those I think I'm rejecting from the start and they're annoying me, you know? (Florentina)

it's as if it's been an oversaturation of the topic, communism. The films we are producing in Romania are really annoying me because almost all are about communism [...] they annoy me so much 'cause it's as if we can only talk about this. As if there's no... no other topic, everything refers to communism (Liliana)

Indeed, a significant number of participants note how they are aware of several of the films dealing with the recent past, yet they have not watched them. Reasons range from lack of time to the refusal to watch or not considering them to be entertaining, as suggested by Rareș: 'they aren't made to be catchy. They're boring. The frames are boring. You fall asleep at some point...'.

Those who have watched films have either done so unintentionally, stumbling upon them on TV, or intentionally on TV, at the cinema, on the internet or as part of summer school programmes. They might act as a trigger for discussion where either participants have the occasion to offer the context of the plot to the people they are watching them with, or, like with mass-media, where family members can add their personal take on the particular representation of the past, that is anyway filtered through the gaze a particular director and screenwriter. One such instance is that of Iustin, who saw the documentary film *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Ujică, 2010) which is solely based on archive images and no commentary, together with his parents:

I watched it together with my parents and they were commenting. [...] it was a commentary that was much more interesting than if someone would have said something there [in the film] like on tele-encyclopedia (Iustin)

Most films that deal with the communist era in Romania reproduce the public anticommunist discourse, focusing on the negative aspects of the past⁴⁵. Film directors presumably attempt to represent how life really was back then, ‘the truth’, but their representations of the past are all partial versions that ultimately draw attention to the negative aspects of life during those times. They actually

⁴⁵ The same goes for *Tales from the Golden Age* (Uricaru *et al.*, 2009), in which the past is viewed through a nostalgic lens. However, *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Ujică, 2010) and a few other documentary films, such as *My Beautiful Dacia* (Soto and Constantinescu, 2009), *Metrobranding: A Love Story Between Men and Objects* (Vlad and Voicu, 2010), and *Chuck Norris vs Communism* (Călugăreanu, 2015), could be considered an exception.

take part in the game of discourses about the communist era on the side of dystalgia. Even if the pill is sweetened and the negative aspects - prison experiences, political crimes, shortages and lack of human rights - are only part of the context or are not the explicit focus of the film⁴⁶, the anticommunist discourse still pervades. One is not to be expected to form a positive image of the past as a consequence of watching any of these films. Propaganda thus works in multifarious ways, sometimes more subtly, at other times more glaringly, when the anticommunist cliché discourse becomes evident and can thus lead to the distancing of young people from the vehicles of memory conveying these forceful messages.

The cinematographic discursive constructions of the past are thus dominated, it seems, by an anticommunist perspective, as participants observe: 'I don't think there's a film from now that portrays communism in a positive way' (Letiția).

The public discourse also finds other channels to reach young people. Books, fiction or non-fiction, published during the communist era or after the demise of the regime also represent technologies of memory to which young people are exposed.

4.4.2.3. Written texts

The Romanian publishing industry has produced both fictional texts whose plots take place during the communist era, and also non-fictional texts, biographies of various people, especially former political prisoners (Petrescu and Petrescu, 2007),

⁴⁶ This could be argued to be the case with *The Way I Spent the End of the World* (Mitulescu, 2006), *Adalbert's Dream* (Achim, 2011), *Closer to the Moon* (Caranfil, 2013) et al.

textbooks and history books. The category of non-fiction has contributed therefore to a particular discursive construction of the past in line with the state-sponsored approach.

As one stumbles upon media representations of the past, similarly young people seem to read, also by chance, texts that refer to the communist era. Any keen reader of post-war Romanian literature would find it virtually impossible to avoid texts dealing with the communist era. Moreover, young people could seek out such texts at the recommendation of history teachers, because they are part of the university curricula or out of a pure interest in the past.

For some young people, written texts only provide, similarly to films, details that they can then piece together with the memories they have from other sources. For others, though, written texts represent the main source of information: ‘unavoidably it means a lot [...] the things I read they ended up replacing, let’s say, a part of... the memories which I had... received’ (Andreea). Participants use the information they get from books to check what they learn from other sources of memories. For those young people, written texts and especially history books represent a trustworthy source of information that conveys what apparently is ‘objective’ information, but which still is a particular construction of the past. Books hold ‘the truth’ and that truth is a result of the public anticommunist discourse: ‘So you went and read or went to the library to see, ‘man, are they right or are they making fools of us?’ (Florin). Books can provide complementary perspectives to the ones young people are exposed to. Several participants note how they were first exposed to the anticommunist discourse that focuses on repression and shortages through written texts:

I was surprised to find out about concentration camps, about prisons, about... I mean there wasn't, no way around my house, to put it like that, around my school, not in the family either the perception of the communist crimes (Laurențiu)

What's true, actually... the memory of the repressive apparatus I only have from... from readings (Filip)

Written texts, besides acting as a trigger of engagement with the past, can offer alternative memories to young people that are considered by some to be more reliable than oral accounts or memories transmitted through other technologies of memory.

4.4.2.4. The educational system

Of all the technologies of memory discussed so far, the educational system is the one in which the state invests the most as a means of conveying a particular politics of memory. Young people should find out 'the truth' about the past, reason for which the communist era is part of the compulsory curriculum for history classes in the final years of secondary school (the 8th grade) and of high school (the 12th grade) and is also included in the potential topics of the history exams students take at the end of these educational cycles⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ The equivalents of the GCSEs and the A level tests in the British educational system.

In Romania, history textbooks only provide succinct sections on post-war history: '[t]he 40 years of dictatorship are practically translated into a void within the school syllabus' (Groşescu, 2007: 7) and even what is featured in the textbooks on the topic is often neglected by history teachers since it is the subject of the last classes of the school year (*ibid.*). As a consequence, IICCMRE developed 'an optional course for studying the history of the ex-dictatorial regime, focusing [...] on a dialogue centered on the values that were annihilated during the communist system and on real-life stories' (*ibid.*: 9). The course is slowly being adopted in schools, but most participants finished their formal education in school before the introduction of the course, which makes it difficult to assess its efficiency in transmitting what seems to be a radical version of the public anticommunist discourse.

Young people point out the ineffectiveness of school education as a means of memory transmission⁴⁸. First of all, as already noted, the lessons concerning the communist era are placed at the end of the history textbooks: 'Man, in textbooks, communism is probably on the last five pages and this means that it's in the last week of school, so I don't remember having been taught in school...' (Brânduşa). The experience of Brânduşa is shared by most participants. Classes dedicated to the history of the communist era seem to be overlooked in secondary school and in high school:

No, at school it was like this: 'we've got in the textbook a topic that is called 'communism', a... a chapter that is called 'Communism'; we

⁴⁸ For similar findings, see: Paulesc, 2014; Popov and Deák, 2015.

won't go into details because you already know the reality of the year

'89. [...] If anyone has any questions?' And that was it (Genjiana)

In the best case, the narrow focus of school curricula adds information to the complicated puzzle young people create in order to make sense of the past. Yet, the memories transmitted through the educational system solely illustrate the anticommunist discourse. Furthermore, they focus on political history rather than social history. Echoing Peter Vodopivec's (2010) observations with regard to Slovene and Croatian textbooks, Augusta Dimou observes that German history textbooks focus, like the Romanian ones, 'primarily on factual and political history, leaving social and/or economic history underrepresented' (2010: 294). The dry data young people are told in school can barely have an influence on their view of the communist era or on their interest in the period:

In [secondary] school we've studied a bit, but... I mean they haven't told us [...] things that I'd remember. There were just some statistics... And some years, when the leaders changed, those in power and... otherwise... (Flavia)

What seems to compensate for the lack of focus on the communist era, or for a clearly anticommunist approach in dealing with the past, are personal narratives. Teachers - notwithstanding their socio-historical background - do have to endorse the public account of the past that is presented in textbooks and made compulsory through curricula. Golubeva's study (2010) shows that it is not that easy to centrally

prescribe the way in which socialism should be remembered, since individuals do have agency and can influence the way messages are put across. Students are also exposed to private narratives, coming from teachers of diverse subjects, not confined to history classes. Teachers refer to the communist era virtually at any point, making comparisons between the present and the past or between the communist era and the historical period they are otherwise teaching about: ‘we haven’t talked about communism necessarily in the classes that were reserved for communism’ (Mirela). Personal narratives also act as supporting material for students to understand the historical discourse centering on the communist era: ‘they focus a lot on historical data, but specifically in order to make us understand better they were also focusing on the personal side of things’ (Violeta).

It is only a few young people that claim to have been influenced by school curricula in their knowledge on, or interest in, the communist era. As already argued, the organization of the topics, as well as teacher’s reluctance to deal with the topic for fear that it might be interpreted as a political discussion – which in a way it is since the anticommunist stance is an ideological one – render the educational system an inefficient instrument of politics of memory. If it is efficient, it works towards the transmission of a negative version of the past, which it naturalizes since it presents it as ‘the truth’, and not as a partial perspective.

4.4.2.5. Museums and prisons

In the case of Romania, like in that of Bulgaria, as noted by Sharenkova (2010) and Vukov (2008), one would observe the virtual absence of any state-sponsored

museum representation of post-World War II history (Bădică, 2010; Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008). It is as though history ceased to exist after the instauration of the communist regime, as in Romania (Bădică, 2010), both societies entering what Bădică termed ‘a black hole’ (2010: 84). The old exhibitions displaying a certain narrative illustrating the state ideology were deemed unfit for museums in a democratic society, so they were closed down (Bădică, 2010; Sharenkova, 2010). Conversely, temporary exhibitions⁴⁹ do not compensate for the absence of permanent displays that would offer a narrative of the recent past, in Sharenkova’s (2010) view.

The situation with regard to museum memorialisation in the Romanian mnemonic landscape is characterised by ‘immovability, perplexed silence and low-quality uncontroversial exhibitions, if any’ (Bădică: 2010: 95). However, at the time fieldwork was conducted there were two significant exceptions⁵⁰: the Romanian Peasant Museum in Bucharest, which has two rooms dedicated to the

⁴⁹ Exhibitions such as *Understanding History*, held by Dragoș Burlacu at sub_Cărturești (16.07 – 15.08.2009); *Despre Elena în general* (‘About Elena in general’) held by Marilena Muraru at the Simeza Gallery (11-24.05.2011); *Second Life în communism. Oameni, atitudini, locuri* (‘Second Life in Communism. People, Attitudes, Places’), organized by Oana Macrea Toma, Cristina Anisescu, Iosif Kiraly, Simona Dumitriu, and Bogdan Bordeianu at Platforma (MNAC-Anexa) between 04-19.05.2012; *Fără titlu* (‘Without Title’) held by Alex Gălmeanu at StudioARTE (25.06.2012), to name just a few

⁵⁰ In the meantime, several other museums have been opened, some as the result of private initiatives of NGOs or individuals, like *The Permanent Exhibition Space of the Sighet Memorial in Bucharest*, *Memory as a Form of Justice* (opened in May 2013) and *The Museum of the Communist Consumer* (opened in May 2015 in Timișoara), whilst others as the result of state-sponsored initiatives, such as *The Metamorphosis of a Place of Memory*, a permanent exhibition of *The Royal Court* National Museum Complex (opened in September 2013 in Târgoviște, in the former military base where Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were tried and executed in December 1989)

communist era, situated at the basement level, and the Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance⁵¹, located in Sighetu Marmăției, in the north of the country, in a former political prison (Bădică, 2010; Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008). The latter was established by an NGO, The Civic Academy; a private counterpart to the more recent state-owned institute of remembrance IICCMRE.

The two museum exhibitions have certain common traits: '[e]stablishing distance' (Bădică, 2010: 98) in that neither of the two spaces are very accessible; '[d]elegating responsibility' (*ibid.*: 98) meaning that visitor identification with the victim is assumed from the outset; and '[p]roviding the unique story' (*ibid.*: 99), seeing that interaction and interpretation are discouraged. And this 'unique story' is precisely that promoted through the public anticommunist discourse and is the one-sided version of victims (Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008).

Most young people that took part in this study have only visited the Sighet memorial as part of the Summer School programme organized by The Civic Academy. Similarly, other participants have visited the Râmnicu Sărat Prison, which is currently under the administration of IICCMRE and is not open to the public, as part of summer universities or educational programmes organized by the institute of remembrance. The Jilava Fort 13 prison is more accessible to organized groups wishing to visit it. The fourth political prison that can be visited is the one in Pitești, which, again, is normally visited by groups of young people organized by an NGO. Access is thus granted by state-owned or private institutions that have

⁵¹ The Memorial 'was considered by the Council of Europe at the seminar of Delphi (October 1998) as an example "of good practice" for the European places of memory, alongside the site of Auschwitz (Poland) and the Peace Memorial in Caen (France)' (European Institute of Cultural Routes, n.d.)

the aim of promoting a particular discursive representation of the past. If one wishes to find out more about the communist era, the only options available, difficult to get at anyhow, are spaces that have the most visible traces of the criminal character of the communist regime.

The young people who have visited the Sighet memorial note their extreme reactions to a space that allegedly aims to offer a comprehensive view of the past, even if it actually focuses on political history and the social history of those who suffered:

the museum is organized in such a way in order to fill one with disgust for that period, for communism... and fear and... it's as if it's a museum of suffering, this is how I see it [...] Basically [it presents] almost everything, this is how it seemed to me.

And everything it's in a negative light...

Yes! In an obvious way. No... it seems alright to me for things to be like that... (Raluca)

Some participants note how emotional the sensorial experience of visiting the museum was. In this sense, the anticommunist discourse is most effective:

And... I don't know... somehow I felt in a very emotional way all this story and I've tried to put myself in the shoes of those that have been

there and... [...] I shuddered because of how awful things were...
[PAUSE] [...] I don't know, it simply was... moving because I was
there, in that place and... I somehow could connect better to all that
suffering. It was effectively overwhelming for me to be in that place
(Antoanela)

On the corridor there are those pictures [...] they're really small [...]
[and of] a lot of people [...] And I can say that I've been really
emotional, I mean... a lot of us were shedding tears unintentionally
[...] That was the moment when I felt that I should find out more and
to do something about it (Bianca)

Finding out about victims of repression can be an emotional experience. It can
influence participants so much that this experience might constitute a trigger for
further engagement with the past. Not only information, but the building itself
seems to be a monument of suffering and thus a temple of anticommunism:

it's as if the memorial is transmitting... that sort of feeling of
communism because... I don't know... it's really cold, but I'm not
referring to the temperature, to... everything. [...] I mean it can show
you how it was back then (Narcisa)



Figure 4.1 The abandoned interior of The Râmnicu Sărat political prison, which is administered by IICCMRE. Photo taken in August 2012, whilst taking part in the Râmnicu Sărat Summer University



Figure 4.2 One of the rooms of The Jilava Fort 13 prison, part of the Jilava Penitentiary. Photo taken in August 2012, during a trip organized on the last day of the Râmnicu Sărat Summer University

Whilst the Râmnicu Sărat and Jilava prisons still preserve the atmosphere of those times, since they have not been altered except for the degradation that naturally occurred over time (see: Figures 4.1 and 4.2), the Sighet prison has been renovated and most cells host panels with information about the past (see: Figure 4.3). In this sense, some participants did not find the focus of the memorial sensorial enough: ‘I’d have placed more the emphasis on this emotional part, they seem... a lot... that are only information... [...] You go into a hall and you don’t feel like... in a prison... you feel like in a museum...’ (Bianca). Presenting too much information and only a few artifacts makes the memorial a pretext for the display of information that would otherwise form a book about the history of the communist era. This approach ends up discouraging visitors to try to read what is written on most of the panels, and it also distorts the atmosphere that the political prison would have had if the focus had been on its role and on sensorial experiences. But it also provides a space for transmitting memories that otherwise would not find their way to young people: ‘there’s a lot of information... honestly, you can remember only those that are general and that you know some things about’ (Eliza). Or, on the contrary, the approach is welcomed by young people who thus have access to memories that are rendered ‘reliable’ because they have passed through the filter of a memory institution:

I was feeling that shiver, that desire for knowledge, to stay there for a whole day and to take all the cells one by one [...] to find out as much as possible... because before that I didn’t have anywhere to find out information from (Pavel)



Figure 4.3 The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance from Sighet. Photo taken in August 2013, during fieldwork

For some, the Sighet memorial is indeed impressive and leaves a mark on its visitors. For others, though, it has less of an impact. Stela, for instance, notes that lack of period artifacts undermined the curatorial effort: ‘Nothing has stayed with me’. Narcisa notes another setback: visits in a hurry, organized by schools or with families and friends, are not conducive to an efficient transmission of the preferred negative version of the past, that which is presented in museums.

The summer schools and universities organized by IICCMRE, The Civic Academy and other NGOs all take place in the vicinity of former political prisons and include visits to them. They all focus on the criminal character of the past, which should not be forgotten.

4.4.2.6. Summer Schools

Summer schools and universities represent another form of mnemonic educational policies that are addressed to high school or university students that already manifest an interest in the past and who ‘absorb everything’ ‘like a dry sponge’ (Miruna). Their aim is to further the anticommunist stance that is fostered in school by focusing in detail on the repressive character of the communist regime, as Andreea argues.

Young people who have taken part in summer schools or universities argue that these provide a biased, unilateral view of the past that presents a negative version of those times. As it has been argued, the effort to transmit the preferred view of the past is assimilated to propaganda:

but I didn't like it from one point of view: they were focusing too much on the idea that only harm and harm was done in communism. It's rather unilateral... [...] a bit, a bit out of place... yes, it has to be condemned, it has to, but one has to see, on the other hand, also the positive sides of communism... (Darius)

Summer schools and universities represent educational projects that aim to promote an extreme version of the anticommunist discourse. Regardless of this, it seems that for some participants summer schools and universities had the desired effect, mainly because of their emphasis on the emotional factor. Andrei notes how at the end of the summer school, he was ‘[...] under the impression that

communism has been a sort of calamity of humankind'. By interacting with other vehicles of memory transmission, he eventually adopted a less radical view of the past. Mnemonic imagination (Keightley and Pickering, 2012) thus prevents young people from falling into the trap of uncritically appropriating radical discourses about the past, both anticommunist and nostalgic. Chapter 5 will deal with the processes through which young people produce their own memories of the past.

To conclude this section, the public anticommunist discourse is perceived as repetitive regardless of the vehicle of memory transmission it uses. The Romanian society seems to be saturated with the discursive construction of a negative past, a version of history that claims to be 'the truthful one' and that focuses on repression and shortages as the most important aspects of the communist regime, even of the communist era. Young people are exposed to this discourse from a tender age, through mass-media, books, films and the educational system, and they can then choose to delve more thoroughly into this version of the past by taking part in summer schools and reading fictional or non-fictional texts. Anticommunism does represent the normative discourse on the recent past that dominates the public sphere. However, there is space for nostalgia as well. The intergenerational transmission of memories occurs in the private sphere and is open to a whole array of approaches, as it cannot be regulated by state institutions. Before moving on to exploring the role of family narratives in the next chapter, the following section will deal with nostalgia as an alternative or counter discursive position.

4.5. Nostalgia as alternative discourse

To reiterate some of the characteristics of nostalgia that were put forward in Chapter 2, nostalgia signals a utopian desire to go back to a remote time only when such a return is no longer possible (Creed, 2010; Keightley and Pickering, 2012; Nadkarni and Shevchenko, 2004). It usually manifests itself through contrasting present dystopian times with an idealised past (Davis, 1979; Hirsch and Spitzer, 2002; Velikonja, 2008). Nostalgic discourses, confined to the private sphere, focus on social welfare, on employment and on material advantages. People resort to comparisons with the present in order to depict an ideal past, such as the case of nostalgic people in the Baltic states: ‘rural and urban residents invoke socialism as a space and time of security, social welfare, prosperity, a sensible way of life, and a moral and just order. Conversely, the present is narrated in terms of decline, chaos, and destruction’ (Klumbytė, 2010: 296).

In most postsocialist societies, nostalgic attitudes are associated with negative meanings (Boym, 2001; Creed, 2010; Klumbytė, 2010; Petrović, 2010; Velikonja, 2008; etc.) because they gloss over the negative aspects of the communist regime (Horváth, 2008; Pobłocki, 2008; Williams, 2008); those who adopt it run the risk of being stigmatized. This is also the case, to some extent, in Romania, where any positive reference to the recent past would be a disrespectful act towards the victims of the regime (Petrescu and Petrescu, 2009b). However, Zsuzsa Gille (2010) notes that the diverse forms of nostalgia should not be collapsed into a single general category. She notes how nostalgia has a different significance for different individuals, and how it does not necessarily have political

implications (*ibid.*). Participants generally manifest such an open approach, as will become evident in the following part of this section.

Why would one adopt a nostalgic standpoint towards the past, especially seeing that it brings with it stigma? Participants claim that this discursive positioning is mainly manifested by ‘labourers’, people living in the rural areas and elderly people, by ‘living room grannies, I mean let’s be serious...’ (Izabela), by people not to be taken seriously, as Izabela seems to imply. In a more complex attempt to understand ‘the others’ (see: Welzer, 2005), Tatiana argues that nostalgic people are those who used to have advantages during the communist era or who are unaware of the negative aspects of those times:

they are either the ones that knew everything that was happening, but were benefitting from certain advantages of the positions they were having, so many advantages... so that they don’t care and they are nostalgic because they then had a social position which they have now lost. Or they didn’t know about all those abominations that were taking place. And then it’s normal, we can’t blame them because... they were happy whilst others were in prison and were suffering (Tatiana)

Nostalgia has an explanation, then. People are excused because they were unaware of the atrocities that were happening back then: ‘they were only seeing their own situation’ (Tatiana). Harald Welzer (2005) notes how young German people find similar excuses for their elders taking part in the Nazi apparatus.

It is those who consider material advantages more important than the lack of rights who adopt a nostalgic approach towards the past:

Ordinary people were pleased only with that, family, a job, home, but the intellectuals who knew what was really going on and had connections with the outside and were hearing what was happening in other states, because they sometimes heard... knew that it wasn't alright, but maybe the ordinary person didn't really understand the phenomenon (Pavel)

Nostalgia, however, does not imply that people regret all aspects of the communist era, as Zsuzsa Gille (2010) also argues. They might regret aspects of the past, such as social security (Brândușa). Furthermore, people might be nostalgic for that period rather than for the regime, as Octavian observes. If people actually regret a period of their lives, their youth, nostalgia represents a normal reaction:

And it's somewhat normal for them to be nostalgic for a period when they were young or younger, when they had beside them, I don't know, a family, when... they were... at the top of their careers, when they were very active people, when basically they had a meaning in life [...] Now they're just a person, like, pulled over and no one shows them any sort of recognition (Letiția)

Ultimately, if this is the case, then even people that are adopting the anticommunist discourse might actually be nostalgic, Luca argues:

I think they're nostalgic too, only that they don't overlap that with communism. [...] Purely because they don't consider it a... frame of the picture, you know? You buy a picture and 'man, what frame should I get? I won't get one of those red ones, I'll take something else'
(Luca)

Nostalgia, if referring to the communist period, thus represents an acceptable approach towards the recent past. Some participants also manifest an open attitude towards other forms of nostalgia, arguing that they ultimately refer to the way individuals perceived a time they lived through:

I can't actually accuse them because they've lived a life. It's as if we come and say that their past was... was nothing and that it's... everything's shit, to put it like that (Bianca)

it's, it's normal, you can't forbid someone to think what they think. I mean if we'd enact that all people should condemn communism, were would we end up? Would we be any different from communism?
(Letiția)

The freedom of speech and of thought is questioned by others, however. If anticommunism might figure as a natural ideological stance one should have, for some participants it is incomprehensible how people can adopt a positive view of the past:

I don't like them at all. I mean I can't understand [...] how you can be pleased to be henpecked, simple as that, not to be allowed to speak, to get everything on a ration, not to have electricity, not to be able to live almost anything, like you're living in a cage (Narcisa)

Some participants argue that nostalgia represents a sad phenomenon that, unlike anticommunism (see: Section 4.4.1), creates the premises for societal regression, thus reflecting Boym's (2001) conceptualization of restorative nostalgia⁵²:

Every person has the right to think what they please. They have the right to regret, but it isn't alright. [...] For the society because... this refusal to... to continue to live on can mean a regress... for society in general... (Rareş)

The reasons why nostalgia can become a standpoint so difficult to envisage lie in the claim of having a broad knowledge about the communist era. Since people suffered back then, how can one wish to relive those times? Nostalgia then becomes an act of selfishness, as several participants note:

⁵² See also Davis (1979) for a discussion on the relationship between nostalgia and social change

I don't know, it's as if someone is staying there at his table, happy, and sees through the window a lot of people that are starving, who haven't done anything to deserve that, it's an unfair thing and you, I don't know, possibly play music so that you won't hear them screaming and you keep eating there. You can't do that. It's as if they were happy whilst others were utterly suffering (Paula)

Knowledge about the crimes of the communist era would make people change their minds. It is notable how broader knowledge should invalidate the personal experience of those who lived well during the communist era. Personal experiences do not matter anymore; the greater good should have precedence. Yet, no one argues that one should be critical of the current society and reject their positive memories because there is no social equity in their society, not to mention the world at large. Would one's personal positive experiences be considered less important because of the state of poverty of a part of the world's population? Yet, thinking about the communist era, this is how the argument goes:

yes, in a way they have the right, 'cause I'm certain that they lived in their small society. Anyway, I don't think they're people that would inform themselves, people with a rich culture that would... (Florentina)

nostalgia comes easily when you're unidimensional, when you think only about one aspect (Luca)

To sum up participants' attitudes, then, those people that adopt alternative views of the past and not the public anticommunist discourse that focuses on the criminal character of the communist regime are superficial, selfish people, unlike the educated anticommunists. This argument is articulated, it should be borne in mind, by young people who share the dominant view that the past was a negative period in the history of Romania.

Ultimately, regardless of whether young people are open towards nostalgia or, on the contrary, antagonize it by stereotyping those that adopt this discursive positioning, the past is still being continuously (re)constructed and each individual has their own rationale for choosing to depict the past in a particular way, at a certain moment in time.

4.6. Conclusion

In a society dominated by dichotomous discursive constructions of the past – anticommunism and nostalgia – young people have to find a way to make sense of the past. First of all, they try to understand the reasons behind choosing a particular stance towards the past. Some participants manifest an open attitude, accepting any stances towards the communist era as stemming from valid particular personal experiences of the recent past. Others, however, contribute to the stereotyping of 'anticommunists' and 'nostalgics' and in this way strengthen the status quo. Nostalgic people are seen as superficial, selfish and less educated, with their gaze turned towards the past, whilst people adopting an anticommunist stance hold

progressive views, value the spiritual more than the material aspects of life and ultimately hold what becomes the ‘natural’ stance towards the recent past.

The two extreme positionings participants identify, which are actually only the two ends of a continuum, have disproportionate means of memory transmission at their disposal. State-sponsored anticommunism is transmitted through educational and cultural policies – and all vehicles of memory can exert an influence over young people – and is perceived by some young people as too radical, verging on extremism. Nostalgia, on the other hand, is mostly confined to the private sphere, the space in which young people are socialized in the postsocialist Romanian society and in specific mnemonic communities and where they are exposed to both private narratives and public discourses. Mnemonic socialisation depends on how they deal with the variety of memories that reach them. Chapter 5 will focus on the intergenerational transmission of memories that occurs in the private sphere and on the ways young people make sense of memories originating in various sources and pertaining to diverse discursive positions.

CHAPTER 5

Mnemonic socialisation

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen how accounts of the recent past in Romania are commonly assigned to anti-communist or nostalgic discourses, two extreme discursive stances that reinforce rather than evade the politicization of the past. We have also discussed young people's perceptions of these discourses and of the people who adopt them. Furthermore, we have looked at young people's views of the vehicles of memory that are meant to transmit the official anticommunist narratives. In the following pages, we will consider the process of mnemonic socialisation, focusing on the intergenerational, interpersonal transmission of memories, even though this is just one component of the process of memory transmission and appropriation. Unlike the other vehicles of memory transmission, which have been discussed already, the intergenerational transmission of memories allows for alternative discourses to blossom rather than necessarily reiterate an anticommunist version of the past. Furthermore, it is argued to be the essential building block in the process of mnemonic socialization. This view will be challenged.

Socialisation within mnemonic communities occurs from an early age, and the form it takes might make the whole process go unnoticed. People grow up in particular mnemonic communities and the long-term process of becoming their member, i.e. ending up sharing a particular set of memories with others, involves both conscious and unconscious acts of memory transmission and reception.

Mnemonic socialisation within a particular community - family or any other type of group - becomes a precondition for being accepted as its member, Zerubavel (1996) argues. Young people are thus gradually socialised into several layers of mnemonic communities that share a similar heritage: familial, local, regional, national, international, global etc. By becoming part of such communities, young people engage in the construction of identities.

In the case of the first postsocialist generation, young people are being socialized in several mnemonic communities that might have to do with the recent past, since the communist era has left marks in society at large, and at family level. The past is thus part of both meta- and personal narratives and discourses reflect this duality. If metanarratives mainly represent the domain of official discourses that focus on the negative aspects of the communist era and which circulate in the public sphere, being reproduced chiefly in the educational system and in the media, as argued in the previous chapter, personal narratives remain the domain of private encounters, or of individual accounts spread through diverse media – e.g. (auto)biographies, fiction, etc. Unlike the public discourse, private narratives are more flexible in terms of the version of the past they present.

Young people are often exposed from a young age to private narratives in the social setting of their families, through stories or references to the past. Memories are transmitted to young people by adults who have lived during the communist era, particularly family members such as parents and grandparents, but also other relatives: aunts and uncles, great-grandparents or siblings. The process of mnemonic socialisation also involves discussions with various other people, usually acquaintances they trust, namely teachers or eyewitness of traumatic

events. Friends can also become vehicles of memory transmission, yet in this case, the process usually takes the form of an exchange between young people of similar ages, due to their shared lack of first-hand experiences in the communist era⁵³. Based on having access to various technologies of memory that are put forward as varied discourses, young people, as active agents of memory transmission, engage in episodes of challenging or educating peers and eyewitnesses alike.

Within the family setting or in other social contexts, people represent a valuable source of memories, an alternative medium of memory transmission to the media used to propagate official discourses. Social encounters also represent alternative sites of memory transmission, where young people play an active role. Families, for instance, have the potential to create an environment for the younger members that sets in motion, maintains and sustains the whole process of engaging with the past. The social setting, as Zerubavel (1996) argues, in which one finds him/herself impacts on what is being remembered. To be more precise, it is not just the accounts of experienced others that are part of the process of mnemonic socialisation, but the discourses that circulate in the public and in the private spheres where young people carry out their lives create a particular attitudinal and emotional context that has the potential to leave its mark on young people throughout their trajectories of mnemonic socialisation.

In the last part of this chapter (Section 5.8), the focus will shift to the ways in which young people make sense of the past as a fundamental component of mnemonic socialisation. By then, we will have explored the most important vehicles

⁵³ For discussions of horizontal or intragenerational transmission of memory, see: Erll, 2014; Hirsch, 2008; Levinsen and Yndigegn, 2015.

of memory transmission and have seen that young people need to find strategies of weighting memories with respect to their source, quality of information etc. Relying on participants' reflections, I make a first step towards unpacking what 'mnemonic imagination' (Keightley and Pickering, 2012) might actually involve.

5.2. The role of inter- and intra- generational transmission of memories

Zerubavel (1996) argues that family plays a crucial part in the process of socialisation within mnemonic communities. He further suggests not only that family narratives play a significant role in the bricolage of second-hand memories, but they also shape whatever form the secondary order account of the past might take throughout the life of those who lack first-hand experience (*ibid.*). That is to say, if one is exposed to nostalgic discourses about the communist era from an early age, s/he will have no other option but to look at the past through this particular prism; there is no way out. Second-hand memories thus truly become prosthetic memories in that particular sets of memories 'are taken on and worn by that person' (Landsberg: 2004: 19), 'like an artificial limb' (*ibid.*: 20).

The discussions I had with young people seem to contradict Zerubavel's theory. Yes, family narratives can have a great impact on young people, triggering and sustaining their interest in the past, and they can also shape their views on it. Personal memories can be inscribed on the bodies and in the minds of those young people that are exposed to them. Yet, it is ultimately each individual who weighs the accounts of the past that reach him/her through various media and creates his/her own memories. Placing too much emphasis on the role that 'experienced

others', i.e. people with direct experience of the times that are recalled, play in the creation of second-hand memories would minimise the extraordinarily complex processes young people themselves engage in. Having said that, private narratives *do* play a role in the vast majority of cases, even if not necessarily an essential one, as Popov and Deák (2015) argue.

Consequently, the literature on second-hand memories places an emphasis not only on narratives, but also on elements that belong to the sensorial and embodied realm that are being transmitted between generations (see: Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Postmemory, the concept coined by Marianne Hirsch, represents 'a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience' (2008: 106, original emphasis), a process formed through 'an imaginative investment and creation' (1996: 662) (see: Chapter 2). Hence, second-hand memories, or postmemory, are not confined to the narratives that reach members of a post-event's generation, but they are also formed within the social context created by eyewitnesses, by members of the mnemonic community. Furthermore, emotions, which are associated with family histories, can surface through other means, not just through personal narratives, in the site of remembrance represented by the familial setting.

5.3. What is being transmitted?

What exactly is being transmitted to young people? Is mnemonic socialisation centred on narratives which happened to take place during the communist era, or do members of the mnemonic community consider it important to convey a more

general image about the recent past, or even to teach lessons about the communist regime? Then, is mnemonic socialisation a process that unwittingly takes place over time or is it based on an agenda and is supposed to happen at, or by, a particular time? Ultimately, the answers to these questions might reveal what the process of becoming part of a mnemonic community involves.

There are two distinctions that participants make when they recall what they know from their families about the recent past. Discussions usually focus on the period rather than the political regime and on the daily lives of people, not on extreme experiences. In terms of the period referred to, most narratives take place during the years their parents lived through, namely the Ceaușescu era (1965-1989), even if they refer ‘to the communist era’; ‘transmitters’ seem to assume that young people would not leave generalisations unquestioned. Apart from the narratives of parents, there are those of grandparents who also talk about the beginnings of the communist regime, and especially about the collectivization process.

Some participants make a distinction between narratives about the lives of family members and narratives about ‘communism’ or ‘the communist era’; an issue which links to the discussion about nostalgia from the previous chapter. For instance, Letiția notes how her grandmother’s stories are ‘generally about her life, less about communism, specifically communism, you know?’ Indeed, life stories are not necessarily narratives about the communist era, some participants suggest: ‘Not related... Not related... [...] they simply happened to take place in that time. But not... with the commenting of that time or of the regime or of society. Just experiences’ (Felix). On repeated occasions, I asked participants whether their families had talked to them about the communist era. If they initially answered that

they had not, when asked if their parents and grandparents had ever talked to them about their lives, they admit that over time they have actually been exposed to life stories. Perhaps the distinction Felix makes between personal narratives, that happened to take place during the communist era, and critical comments about the society of those times is key to deciphering what types of memories young people associate with the communist era and therefore what they would find relevant to mention in a discussion focused on the recent past.

Thus, some participants seem to isolate life stories from the political and economic context, in this way depoliticising the past. For instance, Stela notes how she was told about the hardships her parents had to live through, but emphasises that this was due to their family circumstances which led to adopting a particular life style, and had nothing to do with the broader political or economic context. Similarly, Brândușa mentions expropriations, but the whole narrative is framed as part of her family's story rather than as an illustration of a policy of the communist regime. And, yet, even if framed as being exclusively about the history of the family, it is up to young people how they rework the memories that are being transmitted to them.

There are indeed those young people who separate personal narratives from metanarratives. Others, however, discuss the ways in which the communist era impacted on their families, and also about what memories their parents and grandparents have seen fit to pass on to them, in what form and for what reasons. They perceive personal stories as illustrations of a particular way of living that is characteristic to the communist era. These narratives often focus on routine rather

than on exemplary events and thus some participants found it difficult to recall specific stories told by their families, as is the case for Octavian:

I want to think now a little if, to find a different type of reference...
[...] You realise that it can't be important if I haven't found it by now
[LAUGHS]. In general, [...] these are... the links, the relations with
the communist era, punctual, belonging to the routine, to the mundane
(Octavian)

Yet these narratives about day-to-day life help them form a particular perspective on the recent past. Stories of the childhood of Margareta's brothers, or the anecdotes heard by Florentina and by Eliza in the family setting all form the foundation for the construction of an intricate web of memories about the communist era. Sebastian clearly illustrates how personal stories are not exclusively about the life of specific individuals, but they ultimately refer to general issues: 'Mostly this, the standard of living, education, access to culture, access to... I don't know... sports, several things, practically things related to everyday life'. If life stories can serve to illustrate the specifics of social life during the communist era, at least for a section of people, they can also illustrate negative aspects of the regime, thus reinforcing the public discourses.

Family narratives can thus support the anticommunist politics of memory by portraying day-to-day life as an extreme experience. Some participants seem to see fit to stress that the negative perspective they have on the past is not due to their families having gone through any traumatic experiences; it is 'routine' life

during the communist era that has had a more serious and long-term impact on them: ‘Daily life... during communism. I think this is what... marked them more, I think this was more disturbing for them than the experience at the Canal⁵⁴’ (Antoanela). The trauma of daily life, of common experiences, seems to count more in the personal narratives of Antoanela’s family. Although her grandfather was sent to a forced labour camp, this topic is rarely discussed within the family; Antoanela even minimizes its importance: ‘but he hasn’t been in prison or they didn’t die or something like this, and... [...] I don’t think it is such a big tragedy as if it would have been if they had gone to prison or...’. Her interpretation is based on the silence of her grandfather about the suffering he might have endured in the forced labour camp. Nonetheless, silence does not necessarily imply absence⁵⁵.

Wounds are to be found in the life stories of the families of young people. They may be caused by violent episodes or by enduring difficult living conditions. It is the emotional charge of memories that makes them memorable. In this case, suffering. However, such traumatic experiences might be downplayed both by those who transmit these memories and by young people alike. Conversely, everyday experiences might be considered ‘traumatic’ and thus of more relevance to some young people, since they can relate better to daily life, about which they have more memories. Finally, traumatic experiences might not be brought out into the open at all. Actually, it seems that some ‘eyewitnesses’ do not get involved at all in the process of mnemonic socialisation, regardless of what they went through.

⁵⁴ In 1949 construction started at a canal that would link the Danube to the Black Sea, and eventually ended in 1984. Between 1949 and 1953, political prisoners were used as a labour force.

⁵⁵ See: Assmann A., 2010; Assmann and Shortt, 2012. See also Chapter 2

5.3.1. Silences

Memory transmission within families is not as straightforward a process as it might seem. Young people need to navigate their way between what is being said, either directly to them or overheard, and what is forgotten, misremembered and silenced. As Paul Connerton argues, individuals of different generations ‘may remain mentally and emotionally insulated, the memories of one generation locked irretrievably, as it were, in the brains and bodies of that generation’ (1989: 3). This seemed to happen to several participants; sometimes ‘experienced’ others remain silent regarding a particular life event, or they might adopt silence as a general approach towards memory transmission.

Public discourses that reach young people through various vehicles of memory can reveal to them a novel set of memories about aspects they had not heard in other contexts, especially as part of family narratives. Confronted during a summer school with the discourse on the crimes of the communist regime, for instance, Andra remained puzzled. Once she got home, she asked her family why they had never spoken about the political aspects of those times:

They said that maybe... ‘we simply didn’t want to pay too much attention to that given fact and to the given period, rather due to habit’; just simply that it was, like... some silent agreement... to omit the given fact⁵⁶ (Andra)

⁵⁶ Harald Welzer identifies similar avoidance tactics used by young people so as not to name the subject matter: ‘actors and the contexts of events are not named, but are called “that,” “they” [sie, “se,” die], or “that stuff” [das da]’ (2005: 24)

Amongst the information that was omitted was also the experience of her grandfather who had been part of the local nomenklatura. She does know about his pro-communist views, yet she is having difficulties in reconciling the image she has about him and the atrocities she heard about at the summer school courses. He was a just man with strong principles that could not possibly do any harm to people - or if he did any, it was because of his ideals, so he should not be blamed:

but anyway he got involved, I mean in the 70s, not in the... worse period, so to speak. He had already been when things got a little [rough]... [...] some things he was hiding from me because he was a very correct and very severe man, if one may say so. And he was a man of ideas. He really believed in what he said (Andra)

As Welzer (2005) argues in his study, young people tend to find justifications for the participation of family members in the persecution of the Jewish people during the Third Reich. This is mostly due to family loyalty which determines the 'cumulative heroization' of family members, through applying judgement values based on their own memories with the family members in question to events from a past young people have not experienced. This process can drive one 'to ignore the actual content of the original tale' (Welzer, 2005: 12) and can also lead to 'the invention of ethically motivated behaviour' (*ibid.*: 13). In the end 'plots become rearranged to reshape the nuanced, ambivalent, often troubling tales by the eyewitnesses into a morally clear attitude on the part of the protagonists - a clearly positive one' (*ibid.*: 11). The same process goes on in the case of family members

that have been part of the communist nomenklatura, if their involvement is not passed into silence.

Other participants mention how family members silence particular personal experiences - being part of the nomenklatura, being locked up, sent to labour camps, the collectivization process, moving house as a consequence of the nationalization and demolition of their property etc. Some families only focus on their lives, as it has already been discussed, or they avoid talking about the past altogether, thus preferring 'chosen amnesia', a phenomenon Buckley-Zistel (2012) speaks of. The latter seems to be the case for the families of Călin, Valeria, Liliana and Felix:

Seldom, I mean not in the conversations I witnessed, maybe because of the idea of 'leave it, if he missed it, why should we... why should we tell him? Leave him, it's better for him not to know' or something like that... I honestly don't know. [...] What is certain is that, I mean, with me there were never any such talks, only in answer to my specific curiosities (Felix)

Participants end up asking their parents and grandparents questions about the past and initiating discussions themselves in order to overcome the lack of personal memories that would help them make sense of the past by complementing the public anticommunist discourses they had been exposed to, on social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the recent past.

Why do young people that otherwise manifest an interest in the past face the resilience of parents or grandparents to talk about their lives and the society in

which they lived before the birth of their children? As already mentioned, memories about particular experiences might still be hurtful, as in the case of Miruna's father, who has avoided talking about his father and the collectivization of their lands, preferring to focus on the positive aspects of the past:

When you talk a lot about something and you only talk about the nice side, it's obvious that there's something else which you are avoiding talking about [...] For me, this topic is one that I have long buried because I've realised that I am treading a [dangerous] path... too...

(Miruna)

Young people can become complacent with the silence of their parents or grandparents, even if this runs the risk of memories being lost forever. But how do they make sense of silences within family contexts that have not been marked by traumatic events? Some participants claim that parents or grandparents are not highly educated, so it is difficult for them to offer any views on the past, since they can only refer to their limited life experience. Lack of knowledge and ability to analyse might be an answer. But people also take conscious decisions not to talk about the past, thus pursuing what Buckley-Zistel terms 'chosen amnesia' (2012). Brândușa offers an interesting interpretation of the reasons why her parents stopped talking about the communist era in the 2000s, when she was about 16 years old:

including for their intimate, personal experiences, for absolutely everything they somehow feel as if they were accomplices in a criminal project... [...] they are somehow always conditioned to [...] code their own memory as being a negative experience (Brândușa)

She argues that even their personal, intimate memories have been deformed by the dominant anticommunist discourse, since they render her parents unwilling to recall them. Private discourses do not exist in a vacuum; they can represent alternatives to official discourses, but they can also be influenced by them. In the case of Brândușa's parents, she considers that positive personal memories had become unacceptable in a society in which one should remember the communist era as a time of 'an illegitimate and criminal' regime.

An alternative perspective is offered by Margareta, who justifies the silence of her parents in the early 90s through the fear they still felt of being overheard by someone who could do them harm, even in the domestic environment:

I think they've been left with a certain fear to talk about this issue... about what communism means [...] 'cause it has only been a few years ago that... they started talking like more openly about this thing... in a way (Margareta)

Luckily for her, Margareta was able to somewhat compensate for her parents' lack of private narratives by appropriating the stories of her elder brothers, who had no such problems recalling their childhood during the communist era.

Silences could also occur due to lack of opportunities. For instance, young people can have few occasions to spend time with grandparents (or even with parents, as in the case of Gabriel), and when they do meet, ‘the communist era’ is not considered the most pressing matter to be discussed; they prefer to talk about current experiences. Yet, some participants regret not having had the opportunity to ask family members about the past before they passed away – to find out more about their life history, including their account of life during the communist era.

Silences might also be gender specific – and this situation can be identified in families in which other members do engage in the process of mnemonic socialisation. If there is someone who does not take part in the process, it is women who seem to be those outsiders – either because they refrain from it, or because they are excluded by other members. Such is the case of almost one sixth of participants, whose mothers or grandmothers play at most a minor role in their mnemonic socialisation: ‘women weren’t getting into... [WE LAUGH] into politics’ (Irina). By contrast, Cairns and Silverman argue that women are ‘acting as archivists of their own lives and the lives of others who are central to their self-definition’ (2004: vii) by keeping and treasuring objects related to family history. It seems, though, that when it comes to macro-narratives, women prefer not to get involved. A possible explanation for this situation might actually be the one put forward by Irina: since memories about the communist era are perceived of as political issues, women would not get involved in such general discussions about the previous regime. Women’s traditional role in Romanian culture and elsewhere has been linked to domestic affairs rather than issues that concern the public sphere or society in general. Levinsen and Yndigejn (2015) concur that political

socialisation is dominated by male social actors, both family members and friends. However, women might focus on personal narratives rather than discussions about the regime, as Cairns and Silverman's study implies (2004), and participants might not identify them as significant actors in the process of memory transmission regarding the communist era, since their narratives concern family history.

Whether it is male or female family members that take the lead in processes of mnemonic socialisation, the narratives they present to young people would occupy a position on the continuum between nostalgia and dystalgia. The next section shows how young people make sense of memories acquired in families by referring to the polarised discursive field discussed in Chapter 4.

5.3.2. Stance of families towards the communist era

As already discussed, mnemonic narratives are partial. They present a particular version of the past. The stance that eyewitnesses, be they parents, grandparents or acquaintances, adopt towards the past influences the narratives they pass on to young people. It also has the potential of creating conflicts within families and problems for the non-eyewitnesses in the process of making sense of the past in that they have to reconcile several competing accounts. The two main discursive positionings, nostalgia and anticommunism, are only two ends of a continuum where people might place their attitudes. Furthermore, narratives can be considered ambiguous or even neutral by participants.

Nostalgic narratives are to be found in the families of about half of the participants. They mainly focus on the economic security and predictability of the

communist era, stemming from comparisons between the present and the past⁵⁷. Some also focus on social and cultural aspects of the communist Romanian society. Nostalgic narratives are condemned in the public sphere, so participants accordingly find excuses for family members that lay out such memories of the communist era⁵⁸. Illustrating the discussion from Section 4.5 of the previous chapter, the most common excuse is that they do not know better, so that is why they regret the communist era. For instance, Călin's mother, 'she has a rather simplistic reasoning', which is why she only takes into account the fact that people had jobs during the communist era and disregards any other aspects. They might buy into 'these automatisms...' (Brândușa) without truly wishing to live again in the communist era, as Miron repeatedly argues with regard to his family that he does not think that they would like that period to return. Or, if they regret those times, it is understandable, since they lived in the rural area and strictly speaking their lives were better back then, as Silviu notes about his relatives.

Sometimes family members are indeed excused for exhibiting any forms of nostalgia, yet some young people are really critical of their relatives who hold such views. For instance, Miruna is antagonized by the fact that her father only offers a positive account of the past and 'loses sight of particular details':

Those parrots that keep jabbering that it was alright, that they had jobs.

And that's about it [...] I've already got to the point of presenting counterarguments to him... directly: crimes... Including when I took

⁵⁷ See: Boyer, 2010; Velikonja, 2008

⁵⁸ See: Welzer, 2005

oral history interviews, I gave him them to listen to, things that one cannot deny, they are tragedies that have been experienced during that dream and paradise time... which he is imagining. [...] And he cannot challenge them. Already he can't challenge them anymore (Miruna)

She thus claims to have a more in-depth understanding of the communist period that is not solely based on the positive life experience of one person or of a category of people. Similarly, Irina expressed her disdain towards her grandfather who holds a positive view of the past: 'I cannot say about my grandfather that he is narrow-minded, but I think that [LAUGHS]'. Dismissing the nostalgic attitudes of those that provided them the conditions to follow a particular trajectory in terms of becoming a member of postsocialist mnemonic communities might be too simple a solution. Irina's grandfather has his own reasons for being stubbornly nostalgic, as does she for being anticommunist. Adopting an inclusive approach, as argued in Chapter 4, might be a solution.

It seems that lack of first-hand experience does not deter young people from contradicting and even engaging in efforts to educate members of their families. Thus, second-hand memories become superior to first-hand experience. Young people make use of the memories they have appropriated from diverse sources, interpreted and reworked in order to fight against nostalgic stances of family members, and rarely of outsiders. Once they became a member of their familial micro-mnemonic community, and also of larger mnemonic communities, young people themselves become agents of memory transmission, despite their apparent disadvantage of not having lived during the communist era. They thus

demonstrate to others their agency as producers of memories of the communist era. In some cases, young people are successful in determining their parents or grandparents to have a broader view of the communist era:

I've started to contradict them myself, to say 'man, it's not like that [LAUGHS] you know? I mean I know certain things as well' or... 'look what I've been told and here's the deal...' But it's only very rarely that I start... polemics with my grandparents because they already believe what they want and you can't tell them that... it's white when they see it black. Or that it's black when they see it white
(Miron)

Only in the family setting do young people themselves feel confident enough to become agents of memory transmission for their (grand)parents who might not have access to as many technologies of memory and discourses on the past as young people do. Young people become so involved in the memorialization of the recent past that they use second-hand memories as an educational tool that supersedes personal, first-hand experience in order to make their family members aware of other aspects of the past that might have gone unnoticed. The past thus becomes an issue of contention for new and experienced members of mnemonic communities alike. Furthermore, discussions usually have the aim of counteracting nostalgia and thus promoting the anticommunist discourse, which illustrates how memory is a political issue (Boyarin, 1994; Connerton, 1989).

Nostalgia and anticommunism, explicitly or tacitly expressed, do not have the monopoly of possible stances towards the past that young people identify in those that engage in processes of memory transmission. Some participants note that their families hold an ambivalent view, taking into account both negative and positive aspects of the past. They might actually consider their view neutral or detached; indeed, some family members normalise aspects of the past that otherwise are being challenged in the public sphere, ‘talk[ing] with an extraordinary nonchalance about certain events that I find fantastic and unimaginable...’ (Rodica):

They haven’t stressed anything, just like that... They were talking about it like I’d tell you what happened yesterday [...] ‘Yes, yesterday I ate [LAUGHS] This was the situation’ [LAUGHS] [...] They weren’t focusing on [UNINTELLIGIBLE] ‘during my time, Dan, look, it was like that’, you know?, no.... (Gabriel)

Yet not all narratives are as detached as some participants argue. Differing stances towards the past within families give rise to conflicts that young people witness and might also take part in⁵⁹. Ultimately, faced with competing accounts of the past, young people need to make sense of them. It is either a divergence between nostalgic grandparents and anticommunist parents (but never the other way round, a reason for which could be found in the motivations young people ascribe to adopting a nostalgic stance, which have been discussed in the previous

⁵⁹ See: Popescu-Sandu, 2010; Popov and Deák, 2015; Sik, 2015

chapter), or a conflict between the two parents or the two grandparents, or between the two families of grandparents. In some cases, the conflict is ignored, 'the final conclusion being that it is a difference of mentalities', as George notes. In Izabela's family, 'these issues have never been openly discussed amongst them' precisely because the family members from the two sides of her family know about their divergence and thus choose silence as a means of avoiding conflict. In other families, however, the two parties clash, which can end up creating a confusing situation for the non-eyewitness of the communist era: 'I was thinking, man, I can't have any opinion at all because I don't know, I've always tried to be relatively objective' (Gabriel).

Faced with various narratives about the past, young people have the privilege of being in a position to put together elements of each account so that they can create a more complex view of the past rather than appropriate a unilateral narrative. Young people have to find a way to deal with the confusion created by conflicting accounts. Differing from Popov and Deák's findings (2015), participants generally manifested confusion only through signs of uncertainty, as discussed in Section 5.8. Otherwise, participants appear to be confident with the mnemonic narratives they arrive at.

5.4. Situating of memory transmission

Mnemonic socialisation occurs over long periods of time and its mechanisms are often hard to pinpoint by young people, as it will be discussed later in this chapter. One constantly produces, transmits, appropriates and reworks memories. Yet,

transmission might go unnoticed. Explicit, purposive discussions about the communist era, specific ritual performances, as Connerton (1989) would name them, rarely take place. First of all, mnemonic socialisation occurs through discussions about various issues that at some point refer to life experiences during the communist era, such as family memories or current affairs. These can take place between family members and / or acquaintances and can be overheard by ‘the not-initiated’ young people or can sometimes end up being directed towards them:

you know how in families people gather for celebrations and people start talking about anything and... [...] they bring into discussion aspects related to communism, to life as it was back then (Letiția)

the thing is that you were hearing without intending to... and you always thought ‘man, what happened back then, in the end? What is...?’ Curiosity attracts you towards this thing, you know? (Miron)

That is not to say that all young people have paid attention to discussions about the past from an early age. On the contrary.

What seems to be a common occurrence, though, is for conversations to end up addressing the communist era in one way or another, even conversations young people have with those that have lived during the communist era, which echoes an observation some participants made regarding intragenerational discussions and debates in the media: ‘I, at least, get to communism by chance... [...] when I discuss politics’ (Leonard). This is the way mnemonic socialisation occurs within

families: unexpectedly. This very presence of the recent past in conversations stands proof of how much the communist era is ingrained in people's identities. Memories of the past are truly 'living memories' (Mah, 2010) in that they surface naturally in the present day context.

Most participants observed that in their families they never had a discussion with their parents or grandparents that was meant to focus specifically on the communist era, as a kind of history lesson to be taught and learnt:

I mean my parents haven't sat down to teach me a lesson about communism (Andrei)

it was never a discussion, 'look, now we're talking about communism'.

There has been general discussion about how it was back then. And that 'back then' for them was communism (Gențiana)

As already argued, young people are exposed to narratives about the past rather than explicit discussions about the communist era. In some cases, though, such purposive discussions did take place and inculcating the ideological stance of anticommunism became an objective for family members. Such discussions took the form of history lessons meant to convey a particular message about the communist era and the communist regime. For instance, Antoanela's father had told his daughter about political prisons since she was a child, thus working hand in hand with all other technologies of memory that convey the anticommunist official discourse. It seems that his approach achieved its aims:

[...] when I was four or five, [...] [LAUGHS] from my mother came traditional stories and from my father came anticommunist stories [...]
And then it became, like, a part of me, it seemed to me normal to wish to find out more. [...] Maybe if I had found them out on my own I wouldn't have been that passionate and... if I hadn't have started when I was so little... (Antoanela)

More commonly, the parents of Miruna, Sorina, Narcisa and others, all had the intention of making their children appreciate the conditions they have nowadays, by contrasting them to what they experienced during the communist era:

[...] [my aunt] tells me about those things because she finds it important that I know what they went through. And she is also telling me because she finds... [...] unacceptable for us, young people, in a way, to waste what we have because we don't understand... how important it is to... to be able to go to the supermarket at any time to buy anything you want... to send a letter abroad without it being read... (Gençiana)

Memories of the communist era can thus pop up in daily conversations within families, or they can be transmitted to young people with an agenda in mind, usually to make them appreciate the situation in which they currently live i.e. postsocialism.

5.5. Triggers of memory transmission

The trigger for discussions about the communist era could be the sharing of personal memories, or commenting on current issues that might be brought to the attention of family members or acquaintances through the media. If the latter is the case, people usually compare the present with the past, as Letiția notes.

Besides current issues, the transmission of memories about the communist era might also be triggered by flipping through family photo albums or by other sensorial stimuli. Filip's recollection about his mother demonstrates how memory is thus embodied: '[...] yes, various analogies are being made. I think that it's this way we get easiest to this topic. Let's say, I don't know, she's got an ache I don't know where and she remembers 'when I was carrying bags [...]' (Filip). Zerubavel argues that '[t]he family photo album and the television archive, indeed, are among the major modern sites of social memory' (1996: 293). Indeed they are, if one is to cast a broad look at the repositories of cultural memory. However, in the process of memory transmission in the context of the postsocialist Romanian society, photographs do not seem to be as important as narratives. The absence of visual images in discussions about mnemonic socialisation is significant, but the fact that second-hand memories are mainly visually represented indicates that images are acquired and reworked, maybe not consciously, from various sources young people interact with (films, media reports, period photographs etc.).

Conversations about the communist era can also be the result of targeted questions asked by young people at some point during the process of mnemonic

socialisation. About half of the participants had attempted to find out more about the communist era from those that have first-hand experiences of living during those times. Some were successful, others were not. Some began engaging with the past by asking general questions about the communist era, Nicolae Ceauşescu or the Securitate, others started asking questions once their interest in the past had begun to develop and they wished to find out about the perspective and experiences of those people they knew. Octavian provides a reason for asking questions about the communist era:

at one... point [...] there were some questions coming from me, with an interest, like you are asking me now, in all sorts of ways... I was trying to understand all kinds of realities... that were part of that period and... I was asking them specific things (Octavian)

Young people thus actively contribute to their mnemonic socialisation in the postsocialist Romanian society through what Kuhn (1995) calls ‘memory work’. Usually, the period when those that ask questions begin to seek out information from living sources is in secondary school, even when they are only 12 or 13 years old, or in high school, yet it is difficult to pinpoint the starting point of this process, since mnemonic socialisation is such a long-term phenomenon, as Smaranda notes.

An interesting case is that of Bianca, whose parents had become fed up with her questions about the past and refused to talk to her about ‘her communism’:

my mum isn't telling me anymore, she says 'leave me alone, you're driving me crazy with your communism', that 'no more, I'm not telling you anything because you've driven me to despair'. [...] I really can't get anything else from them, unfortunately, this is the problem (Bianca)

Questions might be posed to family members to satisfy personal curiosity, but also because young people had to carry out oral history projects for school or university. Some young people also asked teachers, professors or acquaintances that they trusted about their experiences during the communist era. Furthermore, several participants also conducted interviews with people that had gone through traumatic events, which elicited a more structured account of specific life episodes of eyewitnesses.

The main advantage of asking questions, Călin argues, is that young people are able to access not only surface memories of people who lived during those times, but also memories that might have been buried in people's minds and which required effort to be dug out. Furthermore, 'eyewitnesses' have the opportunity to expand on stories that might already only be vaguely familiar to young people, as Andreea notes. Yet, one has to remember that actively engaging with the past by asking family members, accessible eyewitnesses, to recall how life was during their youth eventually leads to the drying up of this source of memories:

there wouldn't be much they'd have to tell me, they are the same stories. In the past few years I've got fed up with them. No, I don't ask,

there wouldn't be any point in asking because I already know... what their view is and... what they know about that (Sebastian)

A significant number of participants thus manifested an active engagement with the past by digging out information from family members, acquaintances or even random people who lived through the communist era. It should be borne in mind that the criteria for selecting the young people who took part in this study was for them to be interested enough in the past in order to be willing to be interviewed about their engagement. Nevertheless, some participants noted that they have never asked their (grand)parents questions about the past, either because of lack of interest, because they did not have the opportunity or because they respected their family's privacy, as it is the case of Antoanela: 'they are avoiding discussing it too much ... Maybe I should respect this and not try to find out more'. Active engagement is thus not forced on experienced others who do not wish to talk about the past for any of the possible reasons discussed earlier in the chapter.

5.6. Value ascribed to personal narratives

Personal narratives of family members are generally considered reliable accounts of the past, even more so than books, since young people trust that their (grand)parents have no interest in lying to them: 'My family [...] wouldn't have any reasons to lie. [...] they wouldn't have anything to gain from this' (Olga). On a more general level, young people seem to value testimonies much more than textual or multimedia repositories of memories of the communist era.

First of all, personal narratives represent perspectives that are complementary to academic discourses. Similarly to the sources discussed in Chapter 4, they help young people add other layers of meaning to a remote period they might learn about in broad terms in history:

They have a bigger impact on, I don't know, our generation because the historical dates we already know, we have them as the basis, but in order to study even more in-depth and in order to know newer things and to, I don't know, to really understand what it meant, what those people felt, I think personal experience matters more (Miruna)

The communist era is not a historical period that should be forgotten since it has no effect on the present, but is a part of personal, familial, local, national and broader identities (see: Chapter 8). Personal narratives bring the past to life by adding flesh to the bones, the official dominant discourse. As Jay Winter argues, 'the richest texture of remembrance was always within family life' (2009: 259). Personal narratives, then, provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which people and communities were actually affected:

for me it's the most important part because... it seems closer to reality, even if it's truly subjective, it has its nuances [...], but it's more living than history and I understand these things easier than 'on that date I don't know what happened' (Luca)

Personal narratives foster more profound emotional engagement with the past because of their personal nature and their relevance to young people, especially in the case of family narratives: ‘it had a personal touch and a subjective touch and [...] I was much more involved in the story’ (Miruna). If the transmission of memories occurs face-to-face, the impact is even greater. Young people are thus able to empathise with other human beings that actually lived during the communist era, a time that might seem mythical to those who have no first-hand experience of life during those times (see subsequent chapters):

I was craving experience. I was first of all craving experience... [...] it’s one thing when you read - I mean it seems a huge difference to me - and it’s something else when you have a talk with that person who lived. So you actually look at him [sic!], you feel how... he [sic!] lives, you feel the emotions [...] (Bianca)

you somehow get into his [sic!] story, you know? And... you realise [...] how real their stories are when they tell them, through the way in which they, they manifest themselves, maybe from remembering they were shedding tears and stuff like that (Lidia)

The interpersonal intergenerational transmission of memories thus becomes an important part of the process of mnemonic socialisation. Besides filling in gaps by offering alternative or more detailed perspectives of the past, it is also due to their

emotional charge that personal narratives have the potential to shape the mnemonic socialisation of young people.

5.7. ‘Significant others’ and peer memory transmission

Intergenerational, interpersonal transmission of memories is not limited to the memories transmitted by family members. Other people that have experienced life during the communist era can also act as vehicles of memory transmission. Such ‘experienced others’ are acquaintances of their families, teachers or people they interviewed, but also taxi drivers or people they only meet once by chance. Virtually every member of the postsocialist Romanian society is a carrier of memories that young people can at any time tap into:

I’ve talked to other people as well over time, I mean... [...] a lot, I have always liked [SHE SMILES] to talk to elderly people and they are telling stories about everything and... they explain to you in their own way [SHE LAUGHS]. You understand a lot of things (Ligia)

Examples are numerous. Yet there are only a few cases in which ‘experienced others’ had a crucial influence in determining the perspective of young people. Curiously, in the case of three participants, it is private teachers that greatly contributed to their mnemonic socialisation. It seems that young people need to trust ‘experienced others’ in order for their testimonies to become significant for them and be appropriated and reworked as second-hand memories, as also argued

by Paulesc (2014). In most cases, trust comes hand-in-hand with familial relationships – even if alternative memories gathered from other sources could actually shake the trust that young people initially invest in the accounts of their elders, as will be argued later on. In the case of social actors that do not belong to their families, trust has to be gained; and teachers, through their authority as knowledgeable people, seem to easily contribute to the process of mnemonic socialisation that young people go through. Trust can also be associated with the victim status of the ‘experienced other’. More specifically, the traumatic experiences of political prisoners which young people either read about or have the opportunity to find out about in a face-to-face context also figure as important instances of intergenerational memory transmission. That is because they are highly emotional, but also because participants do not assume victims would have any stake in lying about their experiences. What is noteworthy here is that the whole anticommunist discourse focusing on victims (Bădică, 2010; Preda, 2010) mostly relies on the accounts of those who suffered. Then, it is not surprising that young people do not challenge traumatic narratives; they are not encouraged to because if they did, then the whole public discourse would be challenged as well.

Going back to the people who have had an influence in shaping participants’ views on the past, peers are also mentioned, despite their lack of first-hand experience of the communist era that would legitimize their narratives⁶⁰. People from the same generation might either tell participants stories about their families, especially if they are traumatic, or have general discussions with them

⁶⁰ Levinsen and Yndigejn (2015) also discuss the role played by peers in the process of political socialisation

about those times. Approximately one sixth of participants mention their friends as sources of brief, specific memories about the past. Some participants have been greatly influenced by interpersonal intragenerational instances of memory transmission. For instance, a discussion Gabriel had had with a friend not long before I met him led him to completely change his mind about the role Nicolae Ceaușescu played during the communist era. Having been convinced that Ceaușescu had been a praiseworthy Romanian historical figure, Gabriel ended up forming a more complex view of the past that focused on the suffering of people. And all this due to ‘a discussion effectively over a glass of wine’ that at some point got onto the topic of the recent past. What is interesting is that Gabriel trusted what this friend said, even if this was based only on their relationship and on his friend’s background of working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

And he explained... he could not show me fact-based [evidence], but effectively he asked me to believe him, and I believe him because [...]
he couldn’t show me anything, like documents and things (Gabriel)

A casual discussion with what seems to be a more knowledgeable friend - or a person that is better integrated into the Romanian postsocialist mnemonic community - thus has the potential to direct one’s stance towards the past, to change the very axis that his or her view is formed around. Trust, once again, features as a significant element in determining whether the memories young people are exposed to should be appropriated or not. In the case of Gabriel, lack of first-hand experience becomes irrelevant, as long as there is trust between the two peers.

Participants note that most people from their generation are not interested in the past and hence there are no opportunities to talk to them about it. Yet, some have a core group of friends with similar interests and with whom they talk about the communist era, especially if they are studying similar subjects. Discussions can happen spontaneously or can be dedicated to politics or the communist era per se:

I think that where some things captivate me, I end up talking about them. Yes. Even with the kind of friend I'd meet once for a coffee I'd be making, I don't know, a comparison or an idea comes to my mind that takes me to something and then I expand on the topic and if they are truly interested and I don't make them too bored [LAUGHS]... (Eliza)

If some participants, such as Felix, note that their discussions of the past do end up boring their friends, discussions with peers can also have other effects. Young people can find themselves in the situation of educating or contradicting friends; acting as agents of memory transmission, as we have seen in relationships with 'eyewitnesses'. Young people are either asked for information, as in the case of Laurențiu, they can intervene in discussions in order to provide accurate information about the past or simply share memories they have found interesting:

[...] my friends who aren't studying history, again they have certain pieces of information about communism which are not in their entirety the ones that should be there [...]; their information is relatively truncated and again I happen to explain to them certain aspects (Călin)

People from the same generation can also create a site for remembering and foster further engagement with the past. Marcela, for instance, has started to read autobiographical literature by political prisoners as part of a trend taking place in her class in high school: once one had read ‘The Diary of Happiness’ by Nicolae Steinhardt⁶¹, others became curious and read it too and then they all discussed it. In the case of Marcela, this paved the way for an in-depth engagement with the autobiographies of some of the people who suffered under the communist regime. Hence, friends can also transmit memories, even if they are second-hand, but they can also provide the social context for engaging with the past, like families.

So far in this chapter we have focused on the topic, occurrence, triggers and values of interpersonal transmission of memories. Young people are exposed to such personal narratives, in the family setting or elsewhere, but they also live in ‘living’ sites of memory, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Yet, how is it that people who have no direct experience of the communist era end up forming their own memories of the past which they then make use of in order to make sense of the past, present and future of their society?

5.8. How do young people make sense of the past?

As already argued, memories offer a fragmented and partial image of the past. When it comes to remembering a first-hand experience, people recall it filtered

⁶¹ Nicolae Steinhardt (1912-1989) was a Romanian intellectual of Jewish origin who was imprisoned on political grounds between 1960 and 1964. He converted to Christian Orthodoxy whilst in prison and in 1980 he became a monk. His main work, *The Diary of Happiness*, based on his experiences in prison, is one of the most acclaimed contributions to Romanian ‘concentrationary literature’

through the passing of time and through the current context of the process of recollection (Keightley and Pickering, 2012); in other words, what and how is remembered depends on the filters applied at the moment of recollection by the person engaged in acts of remembering. Yet, in the case of second-hand memories, young people are exposed to such various personal and fragmented accounts, which they somehow have to make sense of in order to create, as active agents, their own memories of a past they have never directly experienced. They do so, Keightley and Pickering argue,

by mnemonically imagining and confronting the past that haunts the present, creatively arriving at new understandings, stimulating alternative ways of representing or communicating the past in the present, facilitating cross-temporal reinterpretation or generating critique and action based upon it (2012: 91)

Non-eyewitnesses, then, produce second-hand memories that have relevance in the present, as it will be shown in the next three chapters, especially in Chapter 8.

Participants also dwell on the partial character of memories that is emphasised in academic literature (Emmerich, 2011; Fentress and Wickham, 1992; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Zelizer, 1995), and on the drawbacks of the view on the past they can create using them: ‘I have some memories that are like, really, really small and really... they’re either over detailed, or very vague [...] that do not build a complete image’ (Liliana). The same problem that was identified with regard to media, namely that it offers only fragments of information and never a coherent

account of the past, that would presumably help young people find out ‘how life really was’ during the communist era, affects all technologies of memory. Some participants thus feel the need for an account of the past that would set their second-hand memories right:

the fact that... I find a little from here and a little from there means that it's never the whole picture and it's not an informed one... [...] And here being bombarded by diverse little pieces of information... no... I can't put them together, I don't have a chronological order for them [...] no one has taken us aside to tell us: ‘look how everything started...’ (Liliana)

Yet, this is precisely the aim of official discourses: to offer a coherent, ‘true’ narrative about the past, a narrative that would expose ‘the criminal’ character of the communist regime. Any alternative discourses that might focus on positive aspects of the past only act, the story goes, to confuse young people and to blur ‘reality’ (see: Chapter 4). It is through school curricula that young people are meant to be presented with such a view of the past that would cover all essential elements; a comprehensive view, one might argue, in the sense that it covers all aspects that support the anticommunist official discourse. We have already seen how inefficient history classes seem to be for most participants, including Liliana. Furthermore, Liliana stands out by being the only participant who could not identify an official discourse regarding the communist era, being genuinely surprised that the regime has been condemned as ‘illegitimate’ and ‘criminal’.

Rather than not having been influenced by the dominant discourse in her mnemonic socialisation, it could be argued that she had not noticed the propagandistic and programmatic forms that it takes.

As in the case of Liliana, identifying specific sources of memories and retracing the trajectory of their mnemonic socialisation become complicated processes for young people, due to the fragmentary nature of memories and also to the long time span over which their mnemonic socialisation occurs: '[...] maybe no one remembers when and how exactly they have... gathered [memories] from any source' (Filip). Mnemonic socialisation is thus a complex process that is not confined to history classes, hours spent in front of the TV or at cinema, reading books or having discussions with people that have lived through the communist era. It occurs gradually, over time, and it is influenced by all kinds of discourses and media of memory, for which reason it can hardly become the focus of short-term ethnographic exploration.

A strategy for dealing with the characteristics of memory and the process of mnemonic socialisation that young people adopt in order to create their own memories of a past that they have not experienced is represented by the selection, putting together, linking information and filling in gaps through deduction or, some might argue, mnemonic imagination (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). In the words of Lucian, 'they [memories] inspire you, you pick, you choose, you dissect, you grow up a bit, understand things differently...'. When it comes to the selection of the memories that are to be appropriated and reworked and which are to be discarded, it depends on their source, whether it is trustworthy or not, on their

relevance for the young person and also on the context in which they are transmitted. The process is complex and takes place over time.

Memory work can be likened to the process of putting together your own puzzle, as Mirela argues, of creating a collage, according to Lidia, or of connecting threads:

Well, I've put them together. I've made a picture from all of them. Everyone has their own story [...] It's like, you put pins and you link them with threads and see where they cross. It's rather unlikely for that to be a coincidence, at five people, you know? That might be a real point. And then I basically confront them with what someone else has said, with what others have said [...] So basically I was trying to... to re-tie them myself, to... to create a conversation between two people who lived during that period (Luca)

Fragmentary memories are thus put together in order to form a coherent personal account of secondary order⁶². But memories are linked together over time. Memories are sedimentary. Filip puts forward the view that partial memories, impressions and feelings gradually accumulate over time: 'after that they've kept telling me stories; it's true that a lot of times I haven't remembered really everything and then, then I've heard again and again the discussions until... information had sedimented'. Memories are (re)produced or assigned meaning at any point in the process of socialisation that members of a community

⁶² For a similar argument, see: Paulesc, 2014

continuously go through. Triggers originating in the public sphere could, for instance, facilitate the recollection of private narratives. Memories might actually be assigned a meaning once new memories help young people make sense of the initial ones. For instance, Octavian recalls how the history courses that he took during university helped him make sense of his family history which he had known since he was a child. Linking information is essential for young people to create their own memories of the communist era. But since the memories that are transmitted are not comprehensive, memory work also involves each individual's (mnemonic) imagination. Based on the information they already have about the past, young people attempt to make sense of a much more nuanced reality. They thus fill in the gaps using their imagination in order to add details, and by deducing how certain aspects actually were, creating a view of the past that for them is ultimately coherent and makes sense: 'you can't find something and not imagine, you try to create an image in your mind, I mean...' (Sergiu). Once again, the importance of visual images is implied, even if participants did not reflect much on how they acquire such visual images that they then rework.

Another characteristic of memories is that due to the fact that they are partial, they can also be complementary. Young people might consider all sources important, since each offers a particular view of the past, yet others could value some sources more than others. As already shown, some participants trust family narratives more than official discourses, whilst others rely more on vehicles of memory transmission that convey the official discourses. No matter what sources young people consider more trustworthy, one can identify the practice of using alternative vehicles of memory transmission in order to check the credibility of

memories: ‘Then I checked the information in books written by several authors, but written on the same topic, in order to find out different views...[...].’ (Călin).

Another practice in which young people engage is using different sources in order to form a more complex view of the past. As already discussed, family conversations could provide a useful context or specific illustrations of particular issues that young people find out about from the media, for instance. In this case, young people are not only interested in checking whether the initial source is reliable, but actively seek out alternative sources of memories that could help them create their own view of the past.

it was from there that my personal information came, but in order to understand that personal information there has to be at the base something strictly historical over which subjective things to come (Violeta)

What happens, though, when the memories young people are exposed to are contradictory? Without having a grounding in the past or any kind of benchmark, unlike people who have had direct experiences during the communist era, young people are faced with the challenge of reconciling conflicting memories: ‘I was asking for more opinions’ (Marilena). Having access to several accounts of personal experiences can reveal patterns and thus help young people make sense of the diverse manifestations of the Romanian heterogeneous society during the communist era. Yet, it should be noted that young people are aware that memories are subjective and thus people continually construct their own version of the past.

There is always room for doubt or for an account that does not fit in the current frame. Then, the frame has to be adjusted. Being exposed to as many memories of the communist era can lead to the creation of a more complex view of the past, or, as Lucreția calls it, ‘a more objective image’.

Ultimately, there is no truth about the past to be uncovered by, or revealed to, young people. Yet, there is a whole array of memories that illustrate various discourses transmitted through various media. If first-hand memories are subjective, second-hand memories are inherently so as well, since they represent at most the result of the process of putting together direct memories that are being transmitted to non-eyewitnesses. The strategies employed for this process do not render the resulting memories less flexible and partial. In the end, the past is not a static resource, yet it is recalled through memories that are socially constructed by all individuals each time they engage in the process of recollection.

The creation of second-hand memories, due to lack of first-hand experiences, comes with a series of drawbacks. Once part of a mnemonic community, young people, as active creators of second-hand memories, note how they cannot actually ever know how life was during the times in question, a reason why, some argue, they cannot have a political stance towards the past, especially a nostalgic one (see also Liiceanu, 2014):

anyway, everything I know about communism are opinions of other people. Not living during that period, I don't, I don't know anything for sure, how it was. It's all... a view of mine formed from the views of other people (Lucreția)

It follows that second-hand memories, due to their collage-nature, cannot have the quality or texture that the first-hand recollections of the people who have lived during the communist era have. Even if they can form a complex image of the past, used in order to contradict or educate ‘eyewitnesses’, due to lack of first-hand experience, they will never be sensorial and thus rich enough in detail so as to resemble first-hand memories.

Another drawback of possessing only second-hand memories, but one which might affect people who had first-hand experiences during the communist era as well, is the difficulty of comprehending how society could function in a certain way, especially if the situation is judged from a present-day vantage point: ‘it’s quite difficult [...] for someone who lives nowadays to understand what has happened back then. I mean it’s almost impossible for me’ (Gențiana). More specifically, first of all participants could not understand why communism came to power. Secondly, how people could actually live or ‘survive’ back then, seeing that they had to cope with shortages and constraints on their human rights. But most troubling of all, participants found the lack of political (re)action of the Romanian people:

And... I’ve asked my parents a lot of times, I’ve told them ‘well, why haven’t you, why weren’t you getting upset, why weren’t you revolting?’ [...] And they said ‘well, we didn’t know that there was something else as well’ (Paula)

Despite in-depth knowledge of the extent of the Securitate network and of the ways it worked, some participants could still not comprehend why there were no

dissident movements, or at least no critical voices, as emerged in other societies of the Eastern Bloc.

Second-hand memories seem indeed to be characterised by generalisations and signs of uncertainty. Participants repeatedly use phrases like: ‘I don’t (exactly) know (anymore) (if)’, ‘I have no idea’, ‘it’s not clear to me’; ‘I think’, or ‘it seems that’, ‘as far as I’ve understood’, ‘as far as I know’, ‘as s/he puts it’, ‘it seems’, ‘probably’, ‘I’m not sure’, and ‘I forgot’, ‘I don’t (exactly) remember’. During the interviews, participants also sought my confirmation when unsure whether their knowledge was accurate. Second-hand memories thus create instability - because they could be contradicted at any point by first-hand memories. Again, this is not to contradict the argument put forward earlier in the chapter that second-hand memories can be used in order to educate ‘eyewitnesses’.

Participants also argue that they face difficulties in creating mental representations of Romanian society during the communist era, having no first-hand memories of those times:

I try, but no, I can’t imagine, not having been there and not having lived before, I can’t imagine, I mean I know that all those who were there are considered heroes and I can understand why, but I can’t feel. [...] Well, I haven’t lived there, I haven’t, I have no way of understanding all these things (Florentina)

Lack of first-hand experience can be compensated through the sensorial and embodied engagement with the past of young people, especially their

childhood (see: Chapter 7). In order to understand the past even better, several participants note that they wish they could go back in time to find out how life really was, and thus cease having to rely on the accounts of others:

If I were to have a time machine, I'd have liked to go back to see, but I don't think I'd have liked to go back and to live, I mean... like, to stay there for a year, to go around in... all the areas of the country, to see what was happening and to... to be able to have a different perspective
(Mirela)

Despite their lack of first-hand experience, young people manifest a clear emotional involvement with the past. In this sense, second-hand memories do not seem to differ much from the results of direct experience, mainly because they can also be based on sensorial stimuli, not only on narratives; they retain their emotional charge (Cappelletto, 2003; Hirsch, 2001, 2008). Young people note how their engagement with the built heritage of the communist era (mainly political prisons) made them emotional, how they were impressed, even shocked by it (see: Chapter 4). Testimonies of political prisoners can also represent traumatic experiences that lead to shedding of tears and other embodied manifestations, such as trembling. When it comes to the feelings young people associate with the past, all of them could be considered a reaction to the anticommunist version of the pre-1989 period: sadness, fear, disgust, repugnance, anger, hatred, annoyance, but also respect, regret and pity for the people who lived back then. The vocabulary they use when referring to the past is also telling: 'sad', 'ugly', 'bad', 'tragedy', 'very

dramatic', 'hurtful', 'sombre', 'infernal', 'malefic', 'demonic', 'horrible', 'odious', 'abhorrences', 'awful', 'historical terror', 'an atrocity', 'traumas', 'ghastly', 'shattering', 'sinister', 'disaster', 'bloody communists', 'the most dire years' etc. Second-hand memories are thus imbued with emotional content.

5.9. Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the process of mnemonic socialisation, focusing on the intergenerational transmission of memories, which occurs particularly in the family setting, yet it is by no means confined to it. Mnemonic socialisation occurs over time, unnoticed, a reason for which identifying sources of memories becomes difficult. Discussions within the family context somehow end up tackling the communist era, and young people happen to overhear them (which does not necessarily imply that they pay them attention from an early age). Most participants maintained that they were never explicitly told about the communist era, as a history lesson of sorts. There are exceptions however, when family members wished to make young people appreciate their current circumstances by engaging them in discussions within the anticommunist discourse. Other triggers of discussions, more widely identified, are the sharing of personal narratives, the commenting on current issues, the action of sensorial stimuli or the questions asked by young people, as active mnemonic agents. Regarding the value of family mnemonic narratives, participants note that they are more trustworthy than other sources, probably due to family loyalty ties. In terms of their contribution to the creation of second-hand memories, they add layers of meaning, bring the past back

to life, and facilitate deeper emotional engagement, having a greater impact than alternative technologies of memory.

It was argued at the beginning of the chapter that families do not play an essential role in processes of mnemonic socialisation, but even so, they are still part of it. Narratives of ‘significant others’ and of peers also contribute to the process, alongside the technologies of memory discussed in Chapter 4 and those dealt with in the remaining three empirical chapters. Family mnemonic narratives are inscribed too into the polarised discursive field of postsocialist Romania. Moreover, there is a politics of family mnemonic socialisation at play: in some cases, women, who are otherwise considered ‘archivists’ of family memories (Cairns and Silverman, 2004), do not seem to play a role in the process of mnemonic socialisation, in general discussions about the communist regime.

After discussing the conditions in which interpersonal transmissions of memories occur, we went a step further, questioning the very nature of mnemonic socialisation and of second-hand memories. In terms of making sense of the past, participants note that memories are partial, reason for which some felt the need for a comprehensive account of the past. However, through the strategies they adopt, such as selection by checking their credibility, putting together, recalling and assigning memories new meanings, young people end up making sense of memories of the recent past. Their memories - now personal - are themselves emotionally imbued and they help them make sense of the past, present and future society. There are also drawbacks to relying solely on second-hand memories; one cannot ever know, sensorially at least, how life was during the recent past and in some cases cannot even imagine. For these reasons, one cannot have a political

stance either, especially nostalgia. Furthermore, relying on second-hand memories leads to resorting to generalisations and expressing uncertainty.

The central argument of this chapter has been that instead of being ‘memory consumers’ (Kansteiner, 2002), young people actively contribute to their mnemonic socialisation. They are active producers of memories based on various sources, which they then use in order to educate both peers and people with first-hand experiences in the communist era. Second-hand memories cannot have the same rich texture as first hand recollection but they can cover a broader area and derive their ‘legitimacy’ as a result of work of synthesis. In the next three chapters it will be argued that young people live in *milieux de mémoire* through which they can add sensorial layers to the second-hand memories they produce, thus somehow experiencing what they identify as aspects of the recent past.

PART 3

Living memories:

The interplay between past and present

CHAPTER 6

Sensorial engagement with the past through the built environment

6.1. Introduction

Remembering is a social process that is never carried out in a vacuum; besides the contemporary context of recalling, the particular socio-historical backgrounds of those who remember influence the ways in which the past is (re)constructed. Hamilakis and Labanyi concur that once ‘we think of memory as a practice (work in the sense of reworking), the fact that it changes the past can be seen as its strength’ (2008: 14). At the same time, one should also keep in mind the fact that the past shapes and informs understandings of the present. Making sense of both past and present involves a continuous back and forth process. Hence, the interplay between past and present is constantly at play in the mechanism of recollection.

The aim of the following three chapters is to show the multiple ways in which the past permeates the present and of how young people make sense of these phenomena through second-hand memories. Memory is, in this way, not confined to a narrative form; rather, memory has its own life and is *experienced* by people, as its active producers. Alice Mah (2010) proposes a useful perspective for broadening the understandings of the level and ways in which memory permeates the present. The concept she uses, ‘living memory’, refers to their present relevance ‘as dynamic and changing processes’ (Mah, 2010: 403) which are not solely text-based, but also emplaced and embodied. That is why remembering calls into action all senses. The vehicles of memory transmission, which trigger the

active processes of making sense of the past, present and future, are to be found everywhere in social - and natural - contexts.

To begin with, I shall attempt to shed light on how this two-way process takes place with regard to one of the most visible remnants of the past, the remnants of the socialist built environment which can act as vehicles of memory transmission. In postsocialist societies, as elsewhere, the built environment, with its palimpsest-characteristic (Huyssen, 2003), presents itself as ‘a memoryscape’, to extend the meaning of the concept coined by Edensor (1997). Besides representing traces of the past, we invest the spaces we inhabit with particular sets of meanings: ‘[w]e conserve our recollections by referring them to the material milieu that surrounds us. It is to our social spaces [...] that we must turn our attention, if our memories are to reappear’ (Connerton, 1989: 37). Spaces thus play an important role as sensorial triggers of first-hand memories. Yet the same occurs with second-hand memories as well, as argued in this chapter. Furthermore, space aids in creating identities, as Leach argues: ‘[w]e are [...] the sum total of the places we have visited, lived in, and formed attachments to’ (2005: 178)⁶³. For these reasons, the effect of built environment on young people, with both its unintentional and intentional forms of urban memory, should be taken into account in a discussion about the (re)production of second-hand memories.

The role of memory in processes of (re-)orientation in contemporary society can be acknowledged or neglected by young people. However, one cannot overlook the fact that young people live, consciously or unconsciously, in spatial structures that have been defined during the communist era and which act as

⁶³ For a discussion on identities, see: Chapter 8

memoriescapes. As a remnant of the past, the built environment is directly experienced by young people who can use their first-hand experiences in order to provide a concrete context to narratives about a remote past they have only mediated memories about. The built environment can also function as a trigger for further engagement with the past. As already argued, we are dealing with a back and forth process that creates and consolidates young people's mnemonic engagement with the past and the present alike.

This chapter focuses on two forms of urban memory that illustrate Pierre Nora's (1989) distinction between *milieux* and *lieux de mémoire*. In the first part, after providing some context about urban development in socialist Romania, I will look at the role played by unintentional forms of urban memory, primarily blocks of flats but also the transport system and various other material remnants of the past. It will be argued that what makes mass housing speak about the communist era are, with few exceptions, negative characteristics; not only their appearance, and especially degradation, but also their structure and the poor living conditions they offer. Similarly, degradation characterizes all other unintentional forms of urban memory. Their importance in mnemonic processes lies in forming *milieux de mémoire*, spaces where memory lives on, without having been artificially altered. The second part of the chapter will shift focus to forms of intentional urban memory, created during the communist era as *lieux de mémoire* for future generations. Of these, The House of the People stands out, but the memories it transmits run counter to those intended by their creators. As for anticommunist monuments, they prove to be a failed project of postsocialist politics of memory. The discussion then moves on to the erasure of cultural memory, as enacted by

both the socialist and postsocialist regimes. If the demolition of entire neighbourhoods and heritage buildings is condemned, the removal of monuments and the change of toponymies that came with the political change of 1989 seem to have been effective. Regarding the latter, participants challenge the role of toponymy as a form of cultural memory in the first place.

6.2. Urban planning in socialist Romania

Going back to the idea that the built environment acts as a palimpsest in which layer upon layer of material traces of the past are to be found (Huysen, 2003), it could be argued that Romanian postsocialist cityscapes are the result of the quasi-total erasure of previous strata, through large-scale demolitions and the implantation of another type of urban architecture (Velescu, 1997). The socialist architecture had to illustrate the ideological paradigm of those times, as Zahariade argues: '[f]rom the outset, the *harmonious development of the country* was a fundamental ideological issue, along with the *erasure of differences between the centre and periphery*' (2011: 36, original emphasis) and '*of the traces left by the capitalist society founded on exploitation*' (*ibid.*: 36, original emphasis). Thus, urban development represented an important desideratum for the communist regime.

Urban planning was guided by two principles: those of 'standardization and economy' (Ghenciulescu *et al.*, 2009: 24), without great variations of aesthetic or functional aspects. The pure focus on the building of large numbers of dwellings over short periods of time and at low costs, Panaitescu (2012) and Zahariade

(2011) note, led to the production of ‘a huge volume of constructions, mostly architecturally inexpressive’ (Panaitescu, 2012: 39).

From the current vantage point, one might argue that cities have become almost exclusively *milieux de memoire* of the communist era. The building of a new city, in accordance with communist ideology involved the expansion of the city. If the development of urban housing meant the expansion towards the outskirts of cities at first ⁶⁴, in the 1970s, high rise apartment buildings began to be planted wherever there was room, as part of the so called ‘cramming operation’ aimed at economizing on land use (Zahariade, 2011: 61). In addition to increasing the density of the population, this policy led to large parts of old city centres being demolished.

In a society in which the urban environment was profoundly shaped during the communist era, these buildings that are reminders of the past have the potential to act as unintentional vehicles of memory transmission. Or, on the contrary, they might be taken for granted and thus play no mnemonic role at all. In any case, young people, like those born during the communist era and who have witnessed the transformation of their surroundings, live their daily lives amongst the built heritage of the communist period.

Exploring whether built environment acts as a vehicle of memory transmission for young people, most participants answered without hesitation that it is blocks of flats that are a constant reminder of the communist era. However, answers varied greatly, from associating the urban environment in its entirety with the communist era to not identifying any traces at all. If the latter is the case, some take the environment for granted; it is a familiar setting in which they grew up and

⁶⁴ See: Giurescu, 1989; Heatherley, 2015; Panaitescu, 2012; Zahariade, 2011

which they might associate more with their own life in the post-1989 period than with its origins. Others argue that the cityscape has changed significantly from what they remembered from the early 90s, when it was still unaltered by postsocialist developments. Cityscapes, even if apparently setting memory in stone, concrete or bronze, find themselves in a perpetual process of change, together with the mnemonic values attached to them.

In the following sections I will explore young people's relationships to urban memory and their attitudes towards the process of memory erasure that occurred both during the communist era – through the destruction of large areas of old buildings – and after 1989, through the process of changing the names of public spaces which had been associated with the regime.

6.3. Unintentional urban memory

All the buildings that form the postsocialist memoryscape could be considered as part of '*milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory' (Nora, 1989: 7). As Julie Scott explains, *milieux de mémoire* represent 'landscapes which embody memory as lived experience - intimate, unreliable, unselfconscious, characterised by improvisation and spontaneity' (2002: 221-2), unintentional urban memory, as defined by Ladd (1997). By contrast, *lieux de mémoire* represent constructed forms of remembrance, which compensate for the absence of *milieux de mémoire* and serve to 'mediate, sanctify and intellectualise lived experience' (Scott, 2002: 222). I will firstly discuss instances of *milieux de mémoire* or forms of unintentional urban memory, i.e. vehicles of memory transmission which were not part of a

policy aimed at shaping the cultural memory of Romanian society. In this category I include the most widespread form of socialist realist architecture, the block of flats, alongside still standing or derelict industrial constructions, and other remnants of the past that are to be encountered in the built environment of postsocialist Romania.

6.3.1. Mass housing under communism

Young people born around 1989 have lived their lives in a society in which traces of the past have been visible in cityscapes. These can act as vehicles of emplaced memory transmission, or ‘theatres of memory’ (Boyer: 1996; Samuel, 1994) and as *milieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989). Whether they fulfil any of these functions, and if so, how, is a matter of dispute among young people.

6.3.1.1. Deconstructing ‘communist’ blocks of flats

As already argued, traces of the past are insinuated in the built environment and, in participants’ views, they become synonymous with blocks of flats. These constructions were mentioned by most participants as being a constant reminder of the past that is to be found in virtually any postsocialist cityscape, even in unexpected locations⁶⁵. They act as landmarks of the ‘golden age’ that were

⁶⁵ Hatherley (2015) also discusses the ubiquitous character in Eastern Europe of built environment originating in the communist era

necessary in the process of transforming the bourgeois Romanian society into a socialist one, as argued earlier in the chapter (see: Zahariade, 2011):

Eh, there, in the heart of the mountain and the forest... what do you think I found? A block and [EMPHASIZES] an ‘alimentara’⁶⁶. I thought it wasn’t true. [...] I find it incredible how they achieved this performance of destroying... of reaching even there... (Laurențiu)

Young people not only encounter blocks of flats simply as observers. The majority of the youth who took part in this research also inhabit flats that were built during the communist era. In this way, they still have a permanent link to the communist era in that they live in the same spaces or types of spaces that have been inhabited by people with unmediated experiences of the pre-1989 period. Time might have brought changes to those spaces, yet the structure remains the same. For instance, Marcela identifies the units in which she lives as originating in the communist era: ‘I live in a communist block of flats... [LAUGHS] in a communist neighbourhood...’. It is clear here that the respondent extrapolates from the fact that her surroundings are ‘communist’, that they impart also a certain experience of ‘communism’. These built constraints, over which she has no control, act as material remnants of the communist era and have the potential to facilitate a better understanding of the past through all senses.

⁶⁶ ‘Alimentara’, trans. ‘grocery store’, was a term used during the communist era that gradually fell out of use after 1989, eventually being replaced by the English term ‘supermarket’ or, sometimes, ‘hypermarket’. Nowadays, the term ‘alimentara’ solely refers to grocery shops from the communist era

The question that arises is what exactly makes mass housing ‘communist’. Young people certainly do not refer to all blocks of flats when they talk about material remnants of the communist era. Rather, they seem to notice nuances. Some participants only associate particular blocks of flats with the recent past and even amongst ‘the communist’ blocks, they make distinctions between several types that illustrate different social or political approaches.

Indeed, there have been several types of blocks of flats, built in different periods. In terms of living conditions, there were strict rules in place: ‘**the surface of the apartment and the number of rooms were established according to the number of family members**’ (Panaitescu, 2012: 62, original emphasis), and the quota was 8 m² / person until 1968, with an increase to 10 m² / person afterwards. If in the late 1960s there were four types of blocks, after 1977 the system was replaced, at least in Bucharest, with only two options; both were comfort I blocks ‘with two categories, A and B, between which there was a surface difference of 5-10%’ (Panaitescu, 2012: 64). Regarding the layout of flats and the aspect of mass housing, Ghenciulescu *et al.* also observe how styles differed in terms of the areas in which blocks were built, ‘ranging from heavily prefabricated ones which sprawled outside the city centre, to the rather pompous style of (better built) blocks with spacious apartments’ (2009: 24)⁶⁷. Yet, despite variations in terms of aspect or comfort, differences were not significant.

⁶⁷ For a discussion on the prefabricated components in the construction of socialist blocks of flats, see: Hatherley, 2015.

One interesting case is that of Octavian, who takes more recent blocks of flats for granted, but not the so-called ‘Stalinist’ ones⁶⁸, which were the first ones to be built during the communist era:

they don’t look [...] like the workers’ residential quarters from the sixties, seventies, eighties... [...] which I am very familiar with and [...] I don’t perceive them as some communist things. The neighbourhood in which I live, you can imagine... isn’t really... or for me at least it isn’t communism anymore (Octavian)

This participant is superimposing the personal meaning he has ascribed to the more recent style of blocks on their characteristic of originating, if not belonging, to the communist era. His own personal, direct memories make other types of blocks ‘his own’, from his period, whilst the Stalinist ones are viewed as reminders of the communist era due to their distinctive character and remote emotional significance. It seems that urban environment has to be ‘othered’ in order to become a remnant of the past.

Such ‘othering’ is articulated also by linking different styles of blocks to their locations. Some participants insist that the ‘communist’ blocks are the ones at the outskirts of the cities, those which offer poorer living conditions and which show a more evident state of degradation, an important element, as will be

⁶⁸ Panaitescu argues that the blocks built in the mid-50s ‘were organized after the soviet model, in groups of quartiles or/and prospects, with flats of low height, P+3, mostly P+5, underlined by entrances with portals formed by monumental arches’ (2012: 98). Note: ‘P + n’ means that the block had a ground floor and ‘n’ other levels.

discussed later. Once again, it is ‘the other’ type of blocks that are ‘communist’, not the ones familiar to young people; a stance that stands in opposition to Marcela’s perception of her own neighbourhood, which she sees as ‘communist’.



Figure 6.1 Picture taken on 22nd August 2013, during a walking-tour of Curtea de Argeş with Miron. He showed me the places he considered to be representative remnants of the past, amongst which was this block of flats, on the façade of which remained a shop sign reading ‘Arta’ (trans. ‘Art’) that also dates from the communist era. The picture illustrates the state of degradation of the blocks of flats, and also the ways in which inhabitants made changes to their living environment (closing up balconies, installing individual boilers etc.), but did not alter what have become irrelevant shop signs because they do not belong to anyone (see the discussion about sharing responsibility in blocks of flats later in this chapter)

However, some participants note that they live in a ‘communist block of flats’ or in ‘a dormitory neighbourhood’, but emphasise that they are using these phrases because they are in circulation rather than because they associate the blocks with the communist era. At most, they say, it represents a shorthand for a

chronological localisation of the construction, and not a reference to the regime or any other aspect of those times: 'I call them 'communist blocks of flats', but I don't call them that for any particular reason, like, but simply as... they were built then, in that period' (Liliana). Apparently, no acts of recollection go together with using such phrases. What seems to be considered a remnant of the past is actually only referred to in a particular way out of habit. The adjective 'communist' loses its reference to a particular regime or period, but remains in use.

One question that arises is 'what makes blocks of flats 'communist'?', when 'communist' refers to the recent past. For some participants, it is not the blocks of flats per se that are associated with the past, but rather a certain aspect that part of those buildings have. Yet, for others, the key characteristics have to do with the living conditions people have in blocks of flats, with structural issues, rather than with their exterior appearance which can relatively easily be changed. Flats from the communist era have tiny rooms, thin walls which limit privacy⁶⁹, and some have no central heating systems. Another characteristic element that is mentioned in the interviews is the limited communal space between blocks of flats. All these elements create neither physical, nor 'mental comfort', as Miruna notes:

They are awful. [...] I stayed in a flat in [NAMES NEIGHBOURHOOD] where I had upstairs some Hungarian neighbours and I heard them arguing every morning. And I was remembering very well the case studies, of what we were saying in the

⁶⁹ Drakulić argues that in communist blocks of flats, '[t]he living conditions kill all privacy - or spread it out to the whole community, if you wish. Apartments are too small, too crowded, or too divided [...]' (1993: 183)

11th grade about private life [...] that the thin walls of these blocks had precisely the function of... of taking away your privacy... I was thinking about that every time I heard that... (Miruna)

For Miruna, living in such a flat has been a difficult experience, which she made some sense of by recalling memories appropriated from other sources, specifically from history classes.



Figure 6.2 Photo taken in Sighet, during fieldwork, on 31st July 2013. This block stood out in the area due to its above average height

Some young people share Miruna's view. The poor living conditions make life, if not difficult, certainly uncomfortable: 'the flats that are shitty, in

which you have no space, in which you have no light, in which you have cockroaches, you hear how your neighbour goes to the bathroom...’ (Brândușa). By contrast to the dystopian view offered by Brândușa, Silviu offers an alternative, idyllic, view on life in blocks of flats: ‘I could say that’s a pleasure... [...] it offers you all that you need: it offers you comfort... silence’. For Silviu, the living conditions appear to be an advantage. He seems to have adopted the same discourse used during the communist era in order to praise the construction of blocks of flats. Silviu’s involvement in the revival of the communist party and the wooden language specific to the communist era he uses could support this theory. More generally, one could argue that it is not only how each individual perceives the living conditions in flats, but also the discourses they have been exposed to and the second-hand memories they have created about the past that influence their take on the built environment that originates during the communist era. For most, these would belong to the anticommunist discourse.

A similar view focusing on the benefits of living in a flat is offered by Paula, who has lived all her life in a house on the outskirts of the city in an area that offered poor living conditions – no gas, no running water and thus no central heating. When she was little, she had an idyllic view of life in a block: ‘I thought that, I don’t know, if you live in a block, you have no reason to be sad in life. To have... an indoors bathroom... We didn’t have all, all these facilities [...]’ (Paula). Even the miserable conditions Miruna and Brândușa, amongst others, talk about seemed modern in the eyes of little Paula who had no access even to those facilities

that people living in blocks of flats had. The perceived quality of any possessions is relative and aspiring for more only makes considering what one has worthless.

The blocks of flats that are most often associated with the communist era are those that offer poor living standards. Furthermore, there are other criteria for identifying a 'communist' block of flats. They refer to the materials used to build it and the resulting dominant colour: the grey that is caused by the use of cement / concrete, and sometimes also dark green or blue paint. The specific grey is associated with negative feelings, with murkiness, darkness, oppressiveness, sadness etc.:

First of all the depressing grey colour which... Look, I associate grey with communism because I could say that it was a grey society in that period (Eliza)

I don't know, that appearance of... old, of dirty, and [...] it's an aspect like that, weather beaten, of something neglected, literally, you know? [...] It's a... an improvised thing that remained like that, you know? (Luca)

It is not the colour per se that determines young people's association of particular blocks of flats with the communist era but what lies behind the nuances of grey: feelings, the passage of time, neglect etc.



Figure 6.3 Photo taken in September 2013 in a neighbourhood of blocks of flats in Bucharest, whilst doing fieldwork



Figure 6.4 Photo taken on 22nd August 2013, during the walking-tour Miron took me on in Curtea de Argeş. The block of flats is in an appalling state, illustrating the process of degradation, and also of segmentation. There is a diversity of ways in which inhabitants deal with the built heritage of the communist era; they make changes as they wish, using a variety of materials, building unauthorized extensions and ultimately altering the appearance of the block as a whole

There is a reason why all blocks of flats were grey and during a walk around his city, Silviu, a proponent of the communist regime and of socialism in general, as noted earlier, demonstrates the quality of the materials by knocking on the plaster made of concrete:

all of these living spaces, all of these blocks... have only one colour of grey. Because... [...] the plaster itself that was used in the exterior is an extremely special plaster. [...] If you have a look, these blocks were built in the eighties. They are 30 years old. I want you to check one thing. You show me where it starts to peel off. [...] [It] holds good in any type of weather. [...] Look at this type of plaster... [GOES AND KNOCKS ON THE WALL] You couldn't break this... it would take you some time (Silviu)

Even if the grey colour is due to the use of more durable materials in the construction of the blocks, it is mostly disliked by participants and it makes them associate the blocks with the communist era, a time of difficulties.

Participants identify additional characteristics of blocks of flats that they perceive as reminders of the communist era, namely their rectangular shape and the similar or identical design of the blocks that are built in the same area. Another key element is represented by the visibility of the signs of age that some blocks show. Their state of conservation, or, to be more precise, of degradation is, for some young people, a determining factor in associating a building with the communist era or not. Indeed, Ghenciulescu *et al.* (2009) and Zahariade (2011) note the

process of degradation that the built environment is going through, which only accentuates the feeling of living in a ghetto (Panaitescu, 2012; Zahariade, 2011). The postsocialist urban environment is marked by degradation, the sense of being old – but not old enough to have a cultural value conferred by their age. The cause of the decay is either attributed to the communist era or the postsocialist times, yet even if the latter is the case, degradation suggests a significant age, more than 20-25 years, the period that has passed since the change of regimes. Degradation does not exclusively refer to the aesthetics of the constructions dating from the communist era. Andra, for instance, offers a profound reading of decay: ‘It’s just a... it’s a hurtful memory [...] of the things that happened because it makes me think of losses... [...] their degradation makes me think of pain, of broken families, of lost lives...’. Degradation can thus trigger memories acquired from other sources, but it can also simply act as a signpost for the origin of the building.



Figure 6.5 An illustration of the degradation of blocks of flats. Photo taken during the walking tour with Miron of Curtea de Argeş, on 22nd August 2013. Next to the ventilation gap for the basement, someone scribbled on the wall ‘Pute’ (trans. ‘It stinks’). The trace of rust on the wall probably comes from a water drainage pipe that is not there anymore. On the left of the picture, fragments of plaster have fallen and in the lower part of the wall there are signs of moss

The mnemonic character of constructions seems to lie, for some, in their appearance. Renovating blocks of flats makes traces less visible and offers a sense of security (as in the case of Andra), if it does not erase them altogether. This suggests that the buildings are not associated per se with the communist era, only *degradation* and maybe *improvisation*, if one takes into account the way in which residents have done whatever they wished with the part of the façade ‘they own’; people’s creativity/resources of closing up their balconies is a case in point (see: Figure 6.4). This inventiveness, ‘a matter of anarchic and random individual intervention’ (Hatherley, 2015: 379), results in ‘an orgy of individual changes’ (Ghenciulescu *et al.*, 2009: 32) that started during the communist era and

continued after 1989 (Hatherley, 2015; Panaitescu, 2012). It ended up becoming a showcase of '[p]ersonal taste and (particularly) social status [which] are expressed by the materials and techniques used' (Ghenciulescu *et al.*, 2009: 32). Ultimately, through alterations, balconies stop having their initial function, and they 'become glazed loggias, extensions of rooms, superposed [sic!] gardens, storage spaces, etc.' (*ibid.*). In the past few years, centralized works of thermal insulation have been undertaken, as Hatherley (2015) also observes throughout Central and Eastern Europe⁷⁰, but, for some participants, these changes made no difference - structural problems remain; besides, the construction date cannot be changed:

It doesn't change anything. [...] they paint over the poverty... [...] this is the problem (Felix)

Yes... I keep saying that it's a smattering and that's all. Yes, communism is there, in those blocks; they have, they are imprinted, I don't know, through the people (Radu)

⁷⁰ In Romania, these works of 'thermal rehabilitation' are partly funded by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, partly by local councils and partly by Residents' Associations or through other sources of public funds. If they decide to, local councils can cover the costs borne by to Residents' Associations as well. Works include fitting double-glazed windows, as well as applying polystyrene insulation on exterior walls, replastering and repainting them.



Figure 6.6 Photo taken on 12th August 2013 during fieldwork in Hunedoara. The part of the façade corresponding to the flat whose owners had not contributed towards the thermal insulation of their flat is left out of the programme. This chaotic approach to thermoinsulating blocks of flats has resulted in an interesting mix of the grey that participants consider specific to communist blocks of flats, and joyful shades of orange meant to cover traces of the past. The picture illustrates well the contrast between old and new, and between appearance and essence

Ultimately, despite their appearance, blocks of flats played a functional role in twentieth century society. Statistical data presented by Zahariade (2011) indicate that the urban population of Romania increased from 3,487,995 (22 per cent of the total population) in 1948 to 11,540,494 urban dwellers in 1985 (50.6 per cent of the whole population), with millions of flats having been built during the communist era. Some participants focus precisely on the part the building of blocks of flats played in the process of modernization. Blocks are also viewed as solid buildings, offering comfort and shelter to large numbers of people, which makes them practical, functional constructions that would have anyway been built by any regime, out of necessity:

It's a typically modern project and [...]... how should I put it? It's spread all over Europe. It wasn't invented by Dej or Ceaușescu, you know? [...] (Izabela)

Just think what it would have meant, for instance, [...] for four million one hundred thousand apartments to be houses. What area would they have occupied? (Silviu)

Taking the modernisation project of the communist era further, to a level that one might consider exaggerated, several participants note that everything that has been built in Romania, as they put it, has been built during the communist era: '[...] all infrastructure, everything that is done, everything that represents buildings in Romania [...] the majority are built in that era. [...] They are a consequence of... the regime' (Rareș). The very extent to which blocks of flats were built all over the country, as already noted, seems to stand proof of the theory put forward by Rareș and others. Yet, should all major infrastructure and residential developments be associated with the communist era? This generalising stance could indicate the disappointment young people feel regarding the potential of the current political class to live up to the standards set during the communist era. After 1989, the rhythm of implementing major works has considerably decreased, and so young people might be associating any achievements with the communist era.

Having seen what characteristics of the built environment young people associate with the communist era, the important issue that remains to be addressed refers to the role the built environment, or material traces of the past, play in the

construction of second-hand memories. Cityscapes do not simply act as reminders that some parts of it originate in the communist era. They also act as memoryscapes, as vehicles of memory transmission.

6.3.1.2. Blocks of flats and second-hand memories

As already argued, in the process of memory production, one can identify a two-way process between the sensorial interaction of people with the built environment and the memories that are transmitted through alternative, more traditional, means. The information young people thus possess - and rework - helps them make sense of the environment they inhabit. At the same time, the experience of dealing with material traces from the communist era on a daily basis also has the potential of helping them better understand how life was during the communist era or what the policies of the regime were. The young people that took part in this study spoke about the process of urbanization, of social homogenization, of exercising control, and of isolation, amongst others.

Urbanization was made possible through the intensive construction of blocks of flats that would provide dwellings to people migrating from rural areas to cities (Panaitescu, 2012). One participant, Darius, astutely notes that ‘communism brought... people per square metre’. This process is perceived in negative terms, because, participants argue, it damaged the social structure of cities. Urbanization involved mixing up different social categories of people who had to find a way of living together (Mihăilescu *et al.*, 2009). Participants note that isolation represents

the way people deal with living in blocks of flats, an observation also made by Panaitescu (2012).

In block of flats, and here participants actually refer to communist era blocks of flats, there also seems to be a clear distinction between responsibilities: the flat represents one's private space, which nevertheless does not offer complete freedom in terms of what one can do because of its structural features (limiting the extent of privacy) while the block of flats in its entirety, the common areas and the surroundings represent 'no-one's space' (Antoanela); responsibility, instead of being shared, becomes diluted:

It's [...] a completely different way of life than it would be if you lived in a house and you'd have to have the responsibility for the space around your house, for instance [...] In the apartment it's your space; once you got out on the landing or in front of the block, that already is no one's space and you are have the option not to respect it (Antoanela)

Hence, the very design of blocks of flats had the effect of forcing people to adapt their lifestyle so that they became concerned only for their limited property, and not for the wider community (see: Chapter 8). Ghenciulescu *et al.* argue that inhabitants transformed blocks of flats 'into some sort of vertical villages' (2009: 34). As already noted, the focus on their private space and disregard of the common areas meant that

every block has become a collection of private spaces on which all improvement efforts are focused – from the closing of balconies and windows renewal [sic!], to the remodeling of one's interior and the appropriation of communal property by partly closing hallways, painting or even lining interior or exterior walls corresponding to one's apartment with insulating panels. (*ibid.*: 34)

The comfort of the private space thus becomes of utmost importance and is sought by all means at the expense of the preservation of communal areas, and especially of the facades (Iosa, 2006).

Whilst some found shelter in their private flat, blocks of flats were meant to fulfil another role; the creation of the conditions for control to be exercised over people. As historian Dinu Giurescu puts it, the urban environment in its entirety had this role: '[e]ncompassed by massive volumes of concrete and bricks, humans could be alienated, crushed and choked by these buildings that were meant to bring about a better quality of life' (1989: 5). Drawing on the interview data, there were three possible means of exercising control over people, namely through: water, gas, electricity and heating shortages; the danger of being under surveillance by one's neighbours, due to the structural characteristics of the constructions (thin walls, blocks that were built close to one another etc.); and the construction of dwellings for larger numbers of people, since a higher density of population makes it easier for control to be exercised or for people to have the feeling that it is exercised, as Foucault's (1979) understanding of power as self-regulatory suggests. And participants do sense the ways in which power was supposed to manifest itself

through urban planning.

The uniformisation of living spaces that resulted from the construction of blocks of flats that offered unsatisfactory living conditions also had ideological motivations. Social control was to be achieved through the very structure of the blocks of flats, Iustin observes, putting forward an argument he heard from someone else: ‘psychologically speaking it was an attempt to shrink Man, to make him slavish, to make him submissive, [...] to diminish his importance in... the world that was happening outside him’. Here, again, one can identify the complex process through which second-hand memories are formed, namely through cross references and intertextuality.

The social mixture was ultimately intended to lead to the homogenization of Romanian society (Mihăilescu *et al.*, 2009; Panaitescu, 2012). All inhabitants, regardless of their social status, profession, educational level etc. had no other option but to share ‘the same living space for all, the same problems and, finally, almost the same desires’ (Mihăilescu *et al.*, 2009: 36). Some did resist, as we have seen, by taking radical decisions regarding the limited space they owned. But did they succeed in creating their own enclave and protecting themselves from the impact of the socialist urban environment? Young people still dislike ‘communist’ flats and cannot comprehend how one can be happy in such a dwelling.

6.3.1.3. Valorification of the unintentional memoryscape

In the previous sections, the focus has been on the types of aesthetic and structural features of blocks of flats that young people associate with the communist era, and

on the ways in which the built environment and the personal experience of dealing with it help young people create or refine perceptions about the recent past. Participants' attitudes towards the built environment also represent a valuable resource in exploring their relationship with the past and its material traces. Before proceeding, it should be stressed that their attitudes originate from a privileged position; they interpret aspects of the pre-1989 period from the early 2010s, almost 25 years after the fall of the communist regime.

The only positive perspective on blocks of flats refers to the quality of the constructions and their functionality, as already noted. Usually participants emphasize, on the contrary, how unlucky people who live in blocks are: 'who would ever want to live in those grey and ugly blocks?' (Lucreția). The phenomenon of urbanization is viewed solely through the prism of dislocation. There were no other advantages envisaged to moving to a newly built flat; it was perceived solely as a means by which the communist regime enacted socialist ideology in practice. Sebastian, whose view is an exception to the rule, argues that people were thus offered better living conditions, so the construction of mass housing becomes a necessary and laudable policy. All in all, living in blocks of flats triggers a whole range of categorical attitudes from participants, most of them negative. The adjective most widely used is 'horrible', Bianca noting that 'these blocks are horrible, so I don't like living in a block... [...] I feel awful... [because of the lack of privacy] [...] I don't like it, I don't like [living] in a block'. Negative feelings are also expressed through other adjectives that come up again and again in interviews: 'ugly', 'shitty', 'ghastly', 'old and bad', 'dingy' etc. Participants also refer to the feelings they nurture towards the built environment; they perceive it as

‘desolate’, ‘(very) gloomy’ or ‘depressing’ (because the majority of people live in flats with poor facilities, as Justin observes). Because of the standardized poor living conditions, as well as the way they were built, flats are called ‘matchboxes’.

Costin expands on the latter:

[...] there are a lot of blocks of flats that were actually built from matchboxes. They are prefabs and placed one on top of the other and they don’t have any kind of [earthquake] resistant structure, nothing, nothing, nothing (Costin)



Figure 6.7 A photo taken in Hunedoara on 12th August 2013, on our way to meet Olga’s grandparents. She mentioned these blocks of flats in the initial discussion I had with her. They were left in this state after the fall of the communist regime and were a common sight for Olga during her early years, due to their location in the vicinity of the school she went to

Another participant notes how everywhere there are ‘only tiny squares like these, [...] everyone lives in a cube, you know?’ (Gabriel)⁷¹ while a third has an even dimmer view of life in such flats: ‘Yes, I’m from a cage. [LAUGHS] I live in a cage [LAUGHS]. Yes, and... I find these blocks ghastly...’ (Margareta). So, people are reduced either to insignificant pawns or to quasi-prisoners of a form of confinement. Even if taking a softer view, Tatiana is critical of the potential of flats to really represent ‘a home’:

you don’t have a place to call home because it doesn’t seem to me that a really small flat where you’ve got a room and a bathroom can necessarily be a ‘home’, where you have no space to do anything
(Tatiana)

Living in such a flat, a repository and a vehicle of memory transmission alike, is a daily struggle for some participants; they have to make do with the disadvantages of living in a block of flats on a daily basis. And these traces of the past seem to be enduring, as Laurențiu observes: ‘these aren’t going to disappear; they look horrific and I think they are affecting the collective psyche’. The same does not apply for the transport system, though, even if degradation which leads to poor conditions of travel is considered characteristic to means of transport originating in the communist era.

⁷¹ Similarly, a participant in Kelly’s study calls flats ‘little cubby-holes [zakutochki]’ (2011: 73)

6.3.2. The transport system: Vehicles of memory transmission

The transport system represents an integral part of cityscapes. Although most participants cannot think of any characteristics, some do mention trams, buses, metro stations, and metro trains as reminding them of the communist era. A brief discussion about the criteria of judging whether these means of transport have a link to the communist era would help further understandings of what makes material culture ‘communist’⁷². In the case of dwellings, participants refer to their appearance - colour, state of conservation - and to their structural characteristics, namely the living conditions they offer. For some, the very prevalence of these types of structures in certain areas reminds them of the communist era.

When it comes to public means of transport it seems that their existence as such is not associated with the communist era, even in the case of the metro system which was mostly constructed during those times. And, even if it is, the association has no negative connotations, unlike in the case of blocks of flats; on the contrary:

And when you travel on the metro you have to remember communism.

[...] And when you see trams you have to remember communism...

[...] When I travel on the metro, the first thing that comes to my mind when I go in is that if it weren't for Ceaușescu, we wouldn't have had it
(Leonard)

⁷² See: Section 6.3.1.1

The metro is something truly extraordinary. Poorly made, because water still leaks through... [...] in thirty thousand places, but... it's great that they've done it, [...] an extraordinary investment (Sorina)

Even if it has flaws, the existence of the metro network is viewed as necessary – and it is by virtue of the communist regime that Bucharest has one. With blocks of flats, the story is different: the communist regime ‘destroyed’ the city by building blocks with flats that are not comfortable and spacious; as most participants imply, there is no merit in building the blocks of flats even if they are still populated – and thus continue to fulfil their purpose.

Transportation is an aspect of city life that has been marked by change since 1989, especially in large cities, but also at national level, if one thinks of the railway system. Participants note how old means of transport still in operation a few years back - buses, trams, metros, trains etc. - reminded them of the communist era. Thus, they associate the memories of the transport system they have from their childhood with the pre-1989 period, more than the current means of transport or transit networks per se.

The state of conservation is, again, a significant indicator; the means of transport they remember from their childhood showed clear signs of age: they were cold, uncomfortable, rusty, emanating plenty of exhaust gases, as several participants remark with respect to buses:

Some very, very old and rusty buses which produced a lot of smoke
[...] (George)

there were those old buses which rattled from all their parts [...]

(Lucian)

Besides buses, trams are also associated by some participants with the past, for the same reasons: they were crowded, with cold creeping in during the winter (Adina).



Figure 6.8 An old tram photographed in Bucharest, on 12th September 2013, during fieldwork

From the way participants report the (overground) transport system, if they do at all, it seems that more than with built environment, it is that which is old and flawed or is inherently bad that reminds them of the communist era. This oversimplification of the characteristics of what comes from the past will be discussed in the following two chapters in relation to material culture and mentalities.

6.3.3. Scattered material remnants of the communist era

We have seen that blocks of flats are the most widespread unintentional vehicles of memory transmission. Other such ways in which the past permeates the present that are identified by participants are, besides means of public transport, factories, either still in use or privatised and subsequently dismantled, where now only industrial ruins remain⁷³, but also old shops and old shop signs, and interior designs of flats or public buildings. All these traces of the past stand proof of the changes that occurred since the fall of the communist regime in the everyday life practices of production and consumption.

To begin with, the industrial ruins of the communist era, which Horia considers ‘the real ‘monuments of the communist era’, offer a dystopian image that is more effective than intentional forms of urban memory: ‘Go through Dobrogea⁷⁴ on the train to see [...] the deserted towns, you’d say you’re in the Wild West, in America, like it’s sinister, it’s sinister...’ (Liviu). Interestingly, participants talk about the ruins of factories as if their current state only makes more visible their inherent negative characteristics, as if it shows how unnecessary their construction was in the first place. Few explicitly condemn their privatisation and consequent destruction. Like with the degradation of blocks of flats, its causes are not dwelt upon; what is significant is what they reveal – and they always reveal to participants something about the communist era, like in the case of Horia:

⁷³ See: Giurescu *et al.*, 2010

⁷⁴ A region in South-East Romania

you realise that [...] people were working, were producing there. [...] Romania had an industry [...] The only thing is that they didn't have products for consumption... products that would make [...] people's life easier, nicer [...] (Horia)

Horia draws attention to the contrast between the living conditions people had during the communist era and the illusion of a booming economy conveyed through the construction of numerous industrial sites.



Figure 6.9 The abandoned signal control point at the Orșova train station, in the South-West of Romania. Photo taken on 4th August 2013



Figure 6.10 The Orșova train station, photographed on 4th August 2013, remained mostly unchanged since the communist era, when it was built

In ‘Kombinat: Industrial Ruins of the Golden Age’, Andreșoiu notes that industrial buildings are purely a result of forced industrialization, having been ‘[b]uilt in badly chosen places accordingly to absurdly conceived designs, with poor quality of both the materials used and the way the entire project was carried out [...]’ (2007: 11). He further notes how these ruins are ‘perhaps the most severe expression of a criminal mythology’ (*ibid.*: 12) and their current ruinous state just reflects the place of ‘this sinister ideology’ in contemporary society (*ibid.*: 13), a metaphor implied by participants as well, as Horia’s answer above indicates.

Another instance of unintentional vehicles of urban memory transmission are old shops (including ‘alimentara’). Participants can still identify such shops, where display racks, uniforms of shop assistants, scents, and concrete mosaic flooring are just a few elements young people associate with the communist era and with long gone practices of purchasing and consumption. Participants even

experience the excitement of being able to do their shopping in such places in the 2010s:

There are some in the countryside and in [NAMES CITY] there's one [ENTHUSIASTIC] which I've discovered.

Did you?

Yep. [...] it's written above 'Butcher's shop'⁷⁵ with those kinds of letters, of iron, but actually inside it's an 'alimentara' and it's like that, with those old types of displays and with a lady that is dressed in a white robe. I don't know how it remained a relic [...] I liked the fact that one can find such an 'alimentara' in our times [LAUGHING] and instead of going to a supermarket, I can make a trip like this, 20-30 years into the past (Antoanela)

Antoanela's answer shows her enthusiasm for having the opportunity to directly experience fragments of life as it used to be under the communist regime. Entering an alimentara equates with a priceless return to the past that helps young people reposition their second-hand memories in a more meaningful way, as discussed in the previous chapter on mnemonic socialisation.

⁷⁵ 'Băcănie' in Romanian, a word not in use anymore



Figure 6.11 A shop window of a contemporary alimentara, photographed during fieldwork on 6th December 2012 in the centre of Iași

Other remnants of the past that participants identify in cityscapes are old shop signs (especially those using the old orthography that was changed in 1993 – replacing ‘î’ with ‘â’ in most cases):

[...] I still see from time to time a really old and rusty kiosk on which it’s written ‘Pîine’⁷⁶ with ‘î’ from ‘i’⁷⁷ which I associate with communism [LAUGHS] And those cooperatives which are still present in the countryside, [...] as it’s written on, on some shops ‘cooperativa’ and this makes me think about communism (Luca)

⁷⁶ Trans. ‘Bread’

⁷⁷ In spoken Romanian, the ‘î’ letter is called ‘î’ from ‘i’ and the ‘â’ letter - ‘â’ from ‘a’; the two letters are phonetically identical.

Not only them becoming vintage, but also the obsolete orthography rules that have never been used by participants indicate that shop signs come from the communist period, from a remote past.



Figure 6.12 An old shop sign from Sighet. Picture taken during fieldwork on 1st August 2013

Farmers' markets are also associated with the communist era, whilst bullet holes from the December 1989 Revolution are associated with the demise of the regime. The interior design of some flats or buildings that have mostly remained unchanged also reminds participants of the era in which they seem to have remained stuck:

I stayed at someone's overnight and that house was almost, not really, it was almost completely unrenovated and [...] I was feeling, mad... I

was apparently sensing [...] a strange smell, of something boxed [...] it was a sort of strange feeling (Bianca)

Yes, and the mosaic which was on the floor. And... inside I think it's still like this and... it's massive and cold, like that, sombre... those kinds of dark colours... [...] a dark green or a dark blue, closer to black, grey, smoky. [LAUGHS] You'd say you're going into a morgue (Pavel)



Figure 6.13 The staircase of a shopping centre from Curtea de Argeş, a building that originates in the communist era. The photo was taken on 22nd August 2013, during a walking-tour with Miron

A diversity of elements reminds participants of the communist era and creates a *milieu de mémoire* for daily lives in postsocialism. For some young people, these settings facilitate a deeper engagement with the past and allow for bringing in personal sensorial experience in the process of memory (re)production, through mnemonic imagination (see: Chapter 5).

6.4. Intentional urban memory

Cityscapes do not solely represent *milieux de mémoire*. Built environment does have the potential to act as a sensorial remnant of the past. Yet, urban areas also include designated *lieux de mémoire*, or memoryscapes in the sense in which Edensor (1997) originally coined the term, that are spaces intended to contribute to the politics of memory – and it is usually the state-sponsored official discourses that are transmitted through yet another medium, materiality. Victors usually monopolise the official discourses, as Palonen argues: ‘[t]he winner takes all and the history-writing becomes rather one-sided and aims to provide an “official” history’ (2008: 221). Yet, in cityscapes, likened to palimpsests (Huysen, 2003), the present comprises traces left by several generations of victors. More specifically, in the context of exploring the current potential of material traces that were intended to act as vehicles of memory transmission, postsocialist cityscapes offer two narratives: that put forward by the communist regime; and that which is being promoted by the current regime, mainly through the creation of monuments and memorials dedicated to the anticommunist movement. Furthermore, one should bear in mind that the meanings of material traces are by no means fixed (Hamilakis

and Labanyi, 2008; Huyssen, 2003; Ladd, 1997; Zelizer, 1995); the mnemonic function of whatever has been set in concrete, stone or bronze is subject to change.

Discussing the postsocialist built environment, Ioana Iosa notes how these [totalitarian] ideologies have tried to impose themselves on posterity through durable traces [...] [whose] main role was to constantly remind people of the presence and the strength of dictatorial power (2008a: 7)

These ‘hurtful scars’ (*ibid.*) characterise postsocialist and, more generally, post-totalitarian cityscapes⁷⁸. The intentional urban memory of these societies includes monuments and memorials, but also emblematic buildings, as discussed in the following sections.

6.4.1. Statues, monuments and memorials

When it comes to intentional urban memory, there are only a few instances of statues, monuments or memorials that remind participants of the communist era. In this sense, the past does not successfully permeate the present. A significant number (10/59) of participants could not identify any such forms of intentional urban memory. The effectiveness of monuments as technologies of memory is

⁷⁸ Curiously, the material heritage of imperial powers is not at all perceived as that of post-totalitarian regimes. As long as post-colonialism is embraced at a discursive level, it is acceptable to treat material remnants of imperial powers as cultural heritage.

challenged by some participants, and the fact that none discussed them at length seems to support this observation.

Relating to the communist era, the monument from Carol Park in Bucharest⁷⁹ is associated by several participants with those times, and their varied reasons are telling. Originally ‘The Monument of the Heroes for the Freedom of the People and of the Motherland, for Socialism’ was meant to function as the pantheon of the top communist nomenklatura (Panaitescu, 2012). The significance of the mausoleum was changed in 2006, when it was decided that it should be dedicated to the heroes who fought in the 1877 Independence War and in The First and Second World Wars (*ibid.*), thus becoming ‘The Memorial to the Heroes of the Nation’. Some participants know about its initial role and its changed meaning, whilst others do not and are only reminded of the communist era due to its style, as illustrated by Felix’s reflections:

[...] there’s a monument. [...] it’s that monument with those arcades...
which it seems to me... incredibly communist. [...] I have no idea
what... what it’s meant to represent. I never knew. [...]

And what is it telling you about that period?

Megalomania... maybe (Felix)

⁷⁹ Formerly known as The Liberty Park



Figure 6.14 The Memorial to the Heroes of the Nation from Carol Park. Photo taken on 12th September 2013

However, it is not the mausoleum from Carol Park that is most recalled when talking about intentional forms of urban memory. Rather, it is the monument in Revolution Square in Bucharest⁸⁰, unveiled in 2005, officially named ‘The Memorial of Rebirth’ (Figure 6.15) that comes to mind mostly due to its visibility in the city centre. Another reason would be the notoriety it received through the nicknames that circulate referring to it as ‘the spike’, ‘the potato’, ‘the potato on a straw’, ‘potato stuck on a spike’ or ‘the stork nest’. Only one participant tries to offer a serious explanation of what the monument might symbolize: ‘my initial perspective [on it] was [...] that [it symbolizes the] revolution which managed to drive a spike through, I don’t know, the regime, something like that’ (Adina).

⁸⁰ Formerly the Square of the Republic

Criticising the monument, Ioan notes its intended meanings did not get through for several reasons, among which its ‘too religious’ connotations that have little connection to the events that took place there; and even if this symbolism were to be accepted, ‘the references are symbolically incorrect (walking on the cross, for instance [...])’(2013: 16). The monument thus seems to have failed to reinforce the anticommunist politics of memory: ‘it doesn’t say anything about the revolution because [...] it’s... extremely abstract and before it can tell me something about the revolution I remember the jokes that were made about that monument’ (Tatiana).



Figure 6.15 The Memorial of Rebirth, Revolution Square, Bucharest (photo taken on 23rd August 2015). In the background, the former headquarters of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. On the first floor balcony, Nicolae Ceauşescu held his last speech in front of crowds of people, on 21st December 1989, which provoked unrest. After the revolution started in Bucharest, not being able to exit the building otherwise, the Ceauşescu couple fled on 22nd December in a helicopter from the rooftop of the building

If anticommunist monuments are ineffective, statues originating in the communist era - and that can be linked to the regime - are virtually absent from Romanian urban memoryscapes. Some participants assume that there are no (more) statues on display that originate in those times:

No... they mostly removed them, you know?... [...] After 89 all, all, all this capitalist and anticommunist tide necessarily came together in a sort of negation from the public sphere of this past. [...] and the production was rather evacuated [sic!] in most part; the artistic production from the seventies to eighties [...] it's lying in storage (Izabela)

Art, thus became the victim of the postsocialist politics of memory and of forgetting, as did pre-communist art depicting political figures during the communist era. Indeed, Czepczyński (2008) and Hatherley (2015) observe how the removal of material traces that reminded people of the communist era has been a common practice in postsocialist societies. Yet not all people are content with the 'remove and destroy' approach that has been adopted (Czepczyński, 2008). Like Izabela, Felix deplores the absence of ideological monuments dating from the communist era: 'This seems very sad to me, the attempt to [...] completely erase every trace of the... the period' (Felix). If they would not have been removed, Izabela puts forward a scenario in which ideological statues and artifacts remained in the public sphere and thus would have been open to interpretations; they might have reminded people of the communist era, and, more generally, that there is an alternative system to capitalism, one that young people might have found appealing:

But think about the fact that nowadays, in our present context, in 2012, people in general in Europe are talking about the fact that we have no options, there's nothing we can do [...] Well, imagine what would happen if you kept just one teeny-tiny shit of a statue of, of, of Lenin. Maybe someone remembered that 'man [...] there might actually be another way'. [...] this idea of a political alternative has disappeared from the collective imaginary, you know? (Izabela)

Politics of memory seem, then, to have been effective in removing most forms of art that could remind people of the communist era, but they have been inefficient in offering monuments that would support an alternative, anticommunist, view of the past. In postsocialist Romania, the main concern seems to have been with remembering the victims of the December 1989 Revolution, even though the effectiveness of monuments dedicated to the victims of the Revolution in socialising young people into a particular mnemonic community is questioned by participants.

6.4.2. Reminders of the past: Emblematic buildings

A different situation can be identified regarding emblematic buildings originating in the communist era. Since these constructions have remained mostly unaltered, even if their functions might have changed, they act as more efficient forms of

intentional urban memory and represent the most explicit *lieux de mémoire* of the communist era.

The early 1950s saw a focus ‘on building edifices that would represent, at a monumental scale, the communist regime that had recently come to power’ (Panaitescu, 2012: 47). Participants did name a few emblematic buildings at local level that had the potential to act as vehicles of memory transmission, such as a prison used during those times for political dissidents, administrative or functional buildings from Bucharest (The Romexpo Exhibition Centre, The Ministry of Transport, The Intercontinental hotel) and buildings housing cultural institutions (The Palace Hall⁸¹, The National Theatre⁸² etc.) or media companies (The House of Scînteia, currently The House of the Free Press⁸³). To take the latter example, which in the eyes of Tatiana ‘evidently is communist’, it served, in the 1950s, the role of symbol of the new power, being featured on the highest value banknote of those times, as Panaitescu (2012) notes. The building largely remained in its original form, with few alterations having been made in the early 2000s; the hammer and sickle bas-reliefs were torn down, as Ioan (2013) observes, thus

⁸¹ A grandiose concert and conference hall that was built during the Gherghiu-Dej era as an addition to the former Royal Palace, on Calea Victoriei, Bucharest. It is remembered for hosting congresses of the Romanian Communist Party

⁸² Built in 1973, the building of the I.L. Caragiale National Theatre of Bucharest was reshaped in the 1980s, and this latter form is what participants were familiar with at the time the fieldwork was carried out. Since then, the building has undergone construction works coordinated by one of the architects who worked at the original project of the theatre, Romeo Belea. Nowadays, the façade of the building resembles the original façade, while the interior spaces have all been modernised. For these reasons, young people might not associate the National Theatre with the communist era anymore.

⁸³ The House of Scînteia was intended to be a smaller scale version of the main building of Moscow State University (Panaitescu, 2012). Scînteia [trans. ‘the spark’] was the main party newspaper and the building was used, among other functions, as its headquarters

enforcing an act of erasure of cultural memory, a topic that will be discussed in the final part of this chapter. However, despite efforts to remove communist symbols, Liviu suggested one should pay close attention to the side of one of the building's towers, where such a bas-relief is still visible.

By far, The House of the People was referred to as the most visible and representative material remnant of the past in all Romanian cityscapes (Figure 6.16). Together with its surrounding buildings, the House of the People⁸⁴ was meant to host the main administrative institutions of Romania. The whole project of the Civic Centre, in which The House of the People was the central point, was meant to 'represent in a monumental fashion the communist power' (Panaiteescu, 2012: 55). For its realization, the built - and natural - environment of the area changed. The House of the People was placed on an artificial hill, at one end of a large boulevard named 'The Victory of Socialism'⁸⁵, meant to surpass the Parisian Avenue des Champs-Élysées in its widths - and grandeur. Similarly, the dimension of The House of the People impresses⁸⁶, some participants being proud of it, as Leonard confesses:

It doesn't attract me so much, but the very idea and the conception...

and the fact that it's the second biggest building in the world attracts

⁸⁴ Or the House of the Republic, as it was officially named during the communist era (Iosa, 2006)

⁸⁵ And colloquially referred to, according to Giurescu *et al.* 'The Victory of Socialism against the Capital' (2010: 43)

⁸⁶ According to Tom Sandqvist (in Sandqvist and Zahariade, 2003), it covers 6 hectares of land, being the second-largest building on the planet, with a built area of 330 000 m², and the third judging by its volume approx. 2 550 000 m³ (Iosa, 2006, 2008b)

me. And it makes me feel proud that I am Romanian, no matter that it was built by Ceaușescu or not (Leonard)

Regardless of whether it acts as a *lieux de mémoire* or not, The House of the People fosters, for Leonard and for others, a sense of national identity. Megalomania can thus be embraced no matter when it originates.



Figure 6.16 The House of the People. Photo taken on 23rd August 2015

Discussing the intention of some to erase this trace of the past as well, Dinu notes how, despite its ugliness, it cannot be destroyed, since ‘it is so huge... it’s too significant an investment [...]’. Leonard cunningly continues by observing that ‘everyone wishes, from the start, like this, to remove absolutely everything... to completely erase history [LAUGHS]. But this won’t ever be possible. Not as long as the House of the People is there’. This is because of its sheer size, which makes its trace of the recent past the most visible – even ‘from the moon’ (Pavel) - and

hence most difficult to remove. Participants consider it ‘enormous’, ‘huge’, even ‘a monster’, but some also think it is ‘beautiful’ due to its significant size.

Due to its size and location, some participants note how they can see it through the windows of their flats, thus acting as a constant reminder of the communist era, a reminder that has its place in the limited perspective on the world they have access to from their ‘cages’. Leonard interestingly notes how he passes it daily, yet he would not visit it. Engagement with the past, in this case, is limited to what cannot be avoided; further engagement is not desirable because, one might argue, young people do not wish to interact more than necessary with *lieux de mémoire* of the communist era that could be inscribed in alternative discourses.

Participants also acknowledge the touristic and functional potential the building has, although none is fully exploited, despite it being, according to Iosa (2008b), the most visited building (in Bucharest). Some participants, though, note that its construction was a waste of resources, as its maintenance still is. Even if it is the second largest building (see: footnote 86), its construction was pointless (Stela) since it does not serve any major purpose, proportional to its size and consumption of resources. Furthermore, in order for it to be constructed, an entire neighbourhood had to be demolished, as discussed later on, residents were forcibly expropriated, and workmen even, allegedly, died on the construction site.

The House of the People represents, for some, the epitome of the socialist architecture. Despite its aim, in the end it only showcased the megalomania of Nicolae Ceaușescu, being a product of his personality cult (‘a folly’, ‘a stupid ambition’ (Liviu)), as Iosa (2006), Panaitescu (2012) and Sandqvist (in Sandqvist and Zahariade, 2003) also discuss. Not only its size stands proof to this, but also

the sumptuous and luxurious interior designs that were made using exclusive materials of Romanian origin, a feature that is praised by some. Czepczyński (2008), Hatherley (2015) and Iosa (2006, 2008b) confirm that the discourse about the building focuses on the native origin of the materials it was built from, without any reference to traumatic experiences of the people who lived in the neighbourhood that had to be demolished in order to make space for the House of the People.

There is an alternative view among participants. Some argue that, altogether, the building ‘has nothing to do with... architecture and with our Romanian ethos [...] there’s something unnatural there, you know?’ (Dinu). Despite its 100 per cent Romanian origin, the building is rejected; it is as if it was planted there without any chance of it integrating into the cityscape and into the history of Romanian architecture.

Whilst most perceive the House of the People as being ‘ugly’, ‘horrible’, ‘odious’, or, as Gențiana puts it, ‘of no value at all’, some participants do like it, even having knowledge about the demolitions that took place in order for it to be built, demolitions which they disapprove of, such as was the case of Tatiana: ‘When I visited... [...] the building I didn’t, I didn’t think [of demolitions]. I simply rejoiced about what I was seeing because what I was seeing was beautiful’. Tatiana also notes that she associates the building with its current function, as the seat of the parliament, and not with the communist era. The mnemonic role played by any one construction in the built environment, as it has already been argued (Hamilakis and Labanyi, 2008; Huyssen, 2005; Leach, 2005) is thus fluid. As Huyssen observes: ‘the permanence promised by a monument in stone is always

built on quicksand' (1995: 250). Even if meanings are apparently set in stone, in concrete or in bronze, they shift throughout time. In the case of The House of the People, its current function has replaced in importance its origin and intended role, at least for Tatiana. Czepczyński (2008) maintains that the change of function is a fundamental stage in sinking into oblivion. Yet, in the case of the House of the People, an exception in the Eastern Bloc together with its counterpart in Sofia, the new function actually represents an update of its former (intended) role: it is still being used as an administrative building (*ibid.*). Czepczyński states that '[u]sing huge, sometimes uncompleted and mentally connected to the hated system buildings can be a difficult task for local and national governments' (2008: 126), yet for some participants, for whom the building has always had its current role, it did not represent a problem. The House of the People is, and has always been, for Tatiana, Lucian and other young people, The Palace of Parliament, a *lieu d'oubli* of the communist era.

As argued above, participants do not solely root their views in the appearance of the building, but rather take into account its significance as well, both that which was intended for it during the communist era and the one it has in postsocialism. Sebastian, for instance, sees it in a positive light from an aesthetic, symbolic and functional perspective:

It expresses power, [...] security [...] I think that if a worker passed by and looked at it, when he turned his head he knew what he had to do [...] To me at least it... first of all it's beautiful, like, it's fascinating... and hearing its story and what was there before, I don't know, it seems

that it brings, it represents an embellishment factor in Bucharest.

Before [...] there was a slum there (Sebastian)

Iosa (2006) identifies on a larger scale this discourse that focuses on the modernization role of the Civic Centre and especially of the House of the People. She argues that this area has been accepted due to its monumentality which makes it possible for Bucharest to claim its place among other European capitals (*ibid.*). Its mnemonic significance becomes less important than the potential it offers for Romanian people to be proud of a 'modern' city centre. Thus, Iosa (2008b) argues, instead of keeping the built environment attached to the past, it has been included in a narrative of continuity.

Iustin, on the other hand, perceives the House of the People as a symbol of oppressive power: '[...] it's large, it's concrete, it's... it's solid. It scares you a little [...]'. Similarly, Stela draws a parallel between the medieval times and the communist era, where the same spatial distance was placed between lay people and those in power by 'building castles'. Scholars emphasise the point made by Stela, noting that 'the House of the People clearly conveys the despotic character of the regime that ordered it, but most of all the gap which existed between the high ranks of communist power and the rest of the population' (Panaitescu, 2012: 197)⁸⁷. Hence, the very design of the House of the People and its location on top of an artificial hill might have been intended to symbolize power and authority.

⁸⁷ For a similar argument regarding the 'anti-public' character of the House of the People, due to the massive wall that surrounds it, see: Hatherley, 2015

All in all, The House of the People stands out as the symbol of the communist era, as it has always been intended, even if some participants are not reminded of the communist era by its presence. It acts as an efficient form of intentional urban memory transmission, but the narratives in which it is inscribed by young people vary, as we have seen. One should not forget, though, that inscribing politics of memory in stone or concrete has been done, during and after the communist era, through acts of erasure. In the following section, the focus will rest on acts of demolition and removal of parts of the cityscape, manifestations of intentional or unintentional urban memory, and on the change of the communist specific toponymy that occurred after 1989.

6.5. Erasing cultural memory

An important narrative, that goes hand in hand with that about the visible traces of the past, refers to the part of the cityscape that was lost due to the policy of systematization which involved destructions meant to make space for the construction of an urban environment that would reflect the ideology of the communist regime (Velescu, 1997). What once were *lieux* and *milieux de mémoire*, might have been transformed in *lieux d'oubli*, to rely on Nora's conceptions of the mnemonic character of space (1989). Young people talk about the reasons for the dismantling of parts of cities, and about its effects on people. In addition to offering their views on the whole process. They also discuss postsocialist politics of memory enacted through changing toponymies and removing monuments, politics that were intended to erase ideological references to the communist era.

6.5.1. Demolitions, removals and the traces of a lost city

Towards the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, large-scale demolitions took place, especially in Bucharest. The intention was to modernise the capital city, but '[t]he idea of a 'new city' for 'new people' led to unprecedented demolitions' (Ghenciulescu *et al.*, 2009: 22) in Romania or in any other city of the Eastern Bloc (*ibid.*). The ends of creating a Civic Centre, whose intended role has already been discussed, were justified by the means: 'the total destruction of the existing urban texture and of the quasitotality of the buildings from the area, including some historical monuments and numerous places of worship' (Panaitescu, 2012: 56). According to Iosa (2006, 2008), one fifth of the historical buildings of Bucharest disappeared. In terms of the heritage that was affected, Iosa maintains that overall in Bucharest 20 Orthodox churches have been demolished and another eight saved through a process of relocation (*ibid.*). The cityscape has thus been fundamentally reshaped and the memoryscape irremediably altered. And young people who were born in Bucharest have lived all their lives in this transformed city.

When it comes to the reasons for the demolition of entire neighbourhoods, amongst which the most prominent one is the Uranus neighbourhood that was completely removed in order for the House of the People to be built in the area, participants offer two types of explanations: one focuses on the need to develop and the other, discussed later, sees the whole process as ideological, as a way of expressing power. The former view is straightforward, summed up by Leonard: 'you do whatever is necessary'. Monuments stood in the way of progress:

some had to be demolished anyway and anyone [...] would have demolished them, because they were in areas... in which construction works were being carried out and there was nothing you could do...

(Andrei)

The space was cleared up for the construction of functional buildings, which thus makes the whole process justifiable. Ultimately, they were made for the greater good:

Even though, in the case of Bucharest, even if a neighbourhood was destroyed, it was rebuilt for... for civic purposes in the end. [...] All blocks were made for people to live in, so it's not something bad (Călin)

The end thus justifies the means. Destruction seems to be unavoidable when it comes to the development of a city.

In the case of Bucharest, the Great Earthquake of 1977⁸⁸ which affected, to a large extent, the cityscape was the first step towards the systematisation of the city:

some of these [historical] buildings were torn down because of the fact that in the aftermath of the '77 earthquake their [earthquake] resistant structure was seriously affected. Or... the regime realised the fact that [...] consolidation [works] would have cost three times more than if it were rebuilt from scratch (Silviu)

⁸⁸ The earthquake produced more than 1500 victims and significant material damages to Bucharest

The earthquake of 1977 did damage old buildings. Yet, Giurescu (1989) and Panaitescu (2012) argue, their demolition, rather than their consolidation or reconstruction, was chosen not for economic reasons, but because it facilitated the reshaping of the city. Hence, Silviu seems to have appropriated an explanation offered by the propaganda of the communist regime.

The effects of this natural calamity were taken as an opportunity to reshape Bucharest; the earthquake was actually ‘the pretext for a political project’ (Zahariade, 2011: 83). At first, the declared aim of the operations was to clear out the areas that had been affected. There was also a need to build a new centre of power in the safest area of the city, according to Panaitescu (2012). Demolition works then started to be carried out at the discretion of Nicolae Ceauşescu, with the only aim of modernizing the capital of Romania, to create ‘a city built from scratch, a city that would represent a new world...’ (Laurențiu). Actually, the whole process was probably also put into practice to satisfy the desire to exercise control more effectively, and to erase remnants of previous eras, as argued by Catalan (2010) and by Trişcu (2003). Participants have their own theories: ‘I think they wanted to tear them down because... they basically wanted to concentrate [...] the population in cities and thus it was easier for us to be controlled’ (Rareş).

Regarding the area that was torn down for elements of this new city to be built, views vary as well: Gențiana puts forward the figure she was told in class by her Romanian teacher: ‘approximately 70%’. Laurențiu offers another figure – one fifth of the surface of Bucharest, by 1985. Estimations differ: whilst Panaitescu

(2012) proposes the theory that works covered an area of over 7 km² and that approximately 30 per cent of the buildings from the central area have been torn down, Ioana Iosa claims that ‘just from 1984 to 1987, 400 hectares have been razed, 9 000 buildings dating from the nineteenth century or prior to it have been demolished’ (2006: 59), two hills have been flattened out and 40 000 people displaced. More generally, Giurescu argues that at national level, ‘[u]p to 1989 at least 29 towns have been razed and 85 to 90 percent reconstructed’ (1989: 47). Such a significant change over the span of a few years must have been perceived as a violent process, unlike processes of modernization that occur over longer periods of time, as Izabela argues: ‘in the Romanian context, and [...] in some other countries from our vicinity, this has happened, you know?, [...] at a much, much faster pace and it’s because of that somehow the violence is more evident’. Celac offers a similar argument, noting that:

the Bucharest operation distinguishes itself through the important size of the land, through its exhaustive character and the extreme brutality with which the emplacement was cleared up, through the size of the resources that were mobilized and the extremely short span of time [...] (1998: 288)

The participants’ perspectives of this process are expressed through remarks such as: ‘it’s sinister’ (Filip), ‘the horrid destructions’, ‘a cultural genocide’, ‘the centre was massacred’ (Laurențiu), or ‘the crime’ (Liviu). They perceive it as a loss of heritage buildings which ‘were real setbacks for the fulfilment of the vain

ambitions of emphasizing through constructed volume the socialist victories' (Velescu, 1997: 72).

Nostalgia for what once was and will never be again is a recurrent theme that emerges from the discussions with young people who mention the tearing down of old buildings. Liliana, for instance, expresses the inability for such a nostalgic viewpoint: '[...] I don't have a really poor opinion about the fact that they tore down an area in which I have never been anyway, I cannot have an impression... to a certain degree melancholic, yes, I could say'. The loss of something one never knew seems more bearable. When loss is part of the narratives of those close to participants, experiences have the potential to become traumatic. Discussions with participants reveal dramatic narratives about how people lost their homes and everything that they could not move to the flat where they were offered space to live. Besides material possessions, animals had to be left behind as well, which is actually the cause of the increase in numbers of stray dogs in postsocialist Romania.

Remains of the buildings that were demolished are still visible in the cityscape. Brândușa recounts how her grandfather keeps alive the memory of the house he built and which was nationalised and dismantled during the communist regime by showing his granddaughter the traces he can still identify in the current cityscape.

[...] there was [a trace] in the wall of the church and we were told 'look, it's visible'... in the stone fence of the church, 'look, it's visible here'. There were the traces of the house. Nothing seemed to me to

necessarily be visible, but... they were saying, ‘look, it was stuck to it... this wall and [...] look here this block [LAUGHS] was built’... (Brândușa)

Traumas are thus transmitted by people who have lived during the communist era using the built environment. Furthermore, memories seem to be more visible for those who know what to look for, who know what was there before (Czepczyński, 2008; Todorova, 2010). Liviu uses his own knowledge about the communist era to make sense of ruins that are forgotten across the city:

Go and have a stroll in the area of the House of the People, around the George Coșbuc Place, in that area, and you’ll discover some railway tracks which [...] don’t have any point there, but those were the former tracks which led to the factory that was called ‘The Army’s Arsenal’ where munition and weapons were produced, which is somewhere under the House of People as well (Liviu)

Absences are still present through what remains – either the traces of prior constructions or new constructions, such as The House of the People.

Another instance of such a (partial) absence is that of the statue from the Place of the Free Press of which only an empty pedestal remains⁸⁹ that acts as a

⁸⁹ The empty pedestal has hosted a contemporary art project, ‘Proiect 1990’, between 2010 and 2014, with 19 works being gradually put on display, several of them based on the theme of the former presence and current absence of Lenin’s statue, which has occupied the pedestal during the

lieu de mémoire only for those who *can* remember. It does so through the very absence of the statue that was formerly placed there. It is only for the participants that remember Lenin's statue from their childhood that this absence is significant. Others, however, have never questioned the intended role of the imposing empty pedestal or have been unsure about whose statue it was:

What about the one from the Place of the Press, whose was that?

It was Stalin's, if not... or Lenin's, I don't know anymore. Actually, Stalin, I think (Cecilia)

The empty pedestal that was left behind shows, to Sorina, the incapacity of devising a postsocialist politics of memory with a focus as important as the one that *lieux de mémoire* used to have during the communist era – or with any focus, for that matter: '[...] it tells me that we haven't managed to find another symbol... for anything. We lack... a direction altogether' (Sorina). Ioan concurs, arguing that 'the programme of post-communist monuments and memorials has entered into an acute crisis of expression' (2013: 48). Nevertheless, in 2015 the state institutions are about to solve this problem, seeing that construction works on a new memorial are under way⁹⁰.

communist era. With the construction works on an underground road tunnel that crosses the Place of the Free Press, the pedestal was demolished

⁹⁰ Work has started on a new concrete pedestal that would host 'Wings - The Monument of the Anticommunist Resistance Movement', a project consisting of three wings of steel, weighing over 100 tonnes and having a height of approx. 25 metres, on which sculptor Mihai Buculei has been working since the early 2000s. As of 2015, there is nothing to remind passers-by of the absence of

The empty pedestal of Lenin's statue has represented, for almost 25 years, a *lieu d'oubli*, and has now become a *lieu de mémoire détruite*, like the Georgi Dimitrov Mausoleum in Sofia, as argued by Todorova: 'with its disappearance, it is but a phantom without even a trace of its existence that would serve as a sign of memory' (2010: 427). Politics of memory is not that straightforward: physical removal or erasure does not go hand in hand with forgetting. At least those who can still remember the statue or its partial absence – marked by the empty pedestal – they might not forget (*ibid.*). As it has been demonstrated by the role played by the absence of Lenin's statue, Todorova's concluding remark might be right: '[r]emembering communism, however, is not easily blown up with powder: the processes are too complex and the stakes too high' (2010: 429). Czepczyński's arguments that '[t]he message of these landscapes of silence is only understood by those who still remember' (2008: 125), by 'those who dare or care to remember' (*ibid.*: 114) seems to hold. Built environment finds itself in a process of perpetual change, even if it is set in stone, concrete or bronze; *lieux de mémoire* can easily become *lieux d'oubli*, absences, yet if any traces are left, then these have the potential to act as media of memory transmission even for non-eyewitnesses.

6.5.2. Names one should forget: Toponymy in the postsocialist memoryscape

Politics of memory are also performed through symbolic acts that do not involve the removal of monuments. In the early 1990s, one of the major symbolic moves

Lenin's statue, but as the wheel of the politics of memory turns, the same spot will soon host one more anticommunist memorial that would be two-dimensionally superimposed on the House of the Free Press which acts as its backdrop

was ‘to rename towns, villages, natural sights, educational and cultural institutions, enterprises, and so on’ (Baeva and Kalinova, 2010: 76), an operation Czepczyński (2008), Kameda (2010), Marcheva (2010), Panaitescu (2012) and Paulesc (2014) also discuss. The change of toponymy, or, to use Palonen’s terminology (2008), of ‘(commemorative) city-text’ has been a manifestation of an anticommunist politics of memory. Czepczyński points out that ‘[n]ew names and new celebrated heroes [...] are also in opposition to the old, politically, economically and morally bankrupt system’ (2008: 115). Young people were thus raised in a society that was almost or completely ‘cleansed’ in terms of positive or neutral references to the past in the toponyms of cities.

Discussing the significance of this political project of changing toponymies, participants note that it symbolizes a manipulation of the means to remember the communist era: ‘It’s more a form of covering or... yes, but in the end it also has positive effects, because it’s a sort of *damnatio memoriae*... a control over memory, in the end...’ (Filip). Politics of forgetting, or rather the exclusive acceptance of forms of remembering that are filtered through an anticommunist lens, seem less successful in some cases, where old names are still in use, especially by those people who lived during the communist era and who got accustomed to using them, as argued by Filip.



Figure 6.17 The entrance to a block of flats in Curtea de Argeş. During our walking tour on 22nd August 2013, Miron showed me the inscription of the old name of the boulevard that can be read on the original entrance door to the block: ‘Bulevardul R.S.R.’⁹¹

All in all, participants note how this particular politics of memory was effective in defining new spatial references for young people, different from the references of those who lived during the communist era. The only exception seems to be the continuing habit of using old designations of several metro stations, which only changed in 2009, and thus they had already established themselves as benchmarks for newer generations:

No, not many have remained... Semănătoarea⁹² still Semănătoarea is, no matter what you’d say [...] all those super patriotic [names of metro

⁹¹ i.e. ‘The Boulevard of the Socialist Republic of Romania’

stations]: The Defenders of the Nation, The People's Army, these remain there no matter what you do to them... [...] We have already used them for too long (Sorina)

Having different reference systems, confusions might arise between generations. Tatiana, for instance, accessed an online map on the website of a university from Bucharest, and on the map, the current boulevard Lascăr Catargiu was labelled using its old name, Ana Ipătescu⁹³:

And I go to [Piața] Romană and I start looking at all the streets that were starting [from there]. [...] And I ask like crazy in the area [...] And eventually I asked in a bus station and someone told me [...] And 'no', I said, 'something like this can't be [true]', I mean, how can one use the old name after so many years...? (Tatiana)

Czepczyński (2008) seems to be right in remarking that cultural amnesia gradually emerges with respect to toponymy – with some exceptions. Yet, he is not right in referring to the decreasing mnemonic potential of built environment to act as media of memory, as we have seen earlier in the chapter.

A final note, though: participants do not find old names telling of any aspect of the communist era. For instance, they know that some names of metro stations are specific to the communist era, but they are taken for granted. In this

⁹² Trans. 'The Drill'

⁹³ A central boulevard connecting Piața Victoriei with Piața Romană

way, the very potential of exercising politics of memory through toponyms is questioned in itself. The postsocialist process of changing city-text seems to have been successful at least in what concerns young people, yet the very danger of keeping the old names is challenged by participants. Toponymy is just one element through which politics of memory are exercised, and if it is the only one that remains after the demise of a regime, then it might not be as dangerous as the new political figures fear.

6.6. Conclusion

If in previous chapters the focus has been on the narrative transmission of anticommunist and alternative discourses, in this chapter the predominant role of narratives in creating second-hand memories has been challenged. Memory is also sensorially experienced on a day-to-day basis, through virtually any aspect of the cityscape. Young people challenge the intended meaning of both intentional and unintentional urban media of memory by actively engaging with the space they inhabit and with the memories they have created, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Young people live their daily lives within *milieux de mémoire*, which are mainly created through the presence of blocks of flats, but also through other various elements such as (industrial) ruins, old shops, means of public transport etc. Most participants associate with ‘communist’ urban environment negative characteristics, either referring to appearances or structural issues. All in all, what remains from the communist era is characterised by degradation, and even if this deterioration has occurred since 1989, it seems to tell young people something

about the inherent flawed nature of the communist material culture – and political system. Whilst some participants acknowledge their embeddedness in the midst of memoryscapes of the communist era, others only identify as ‘communist’ parts of the built environment that they have no attachment to. Thus, material traces need to be ‘othered’ before being characterised as belonging to the communist era and consequently being ascribed negative characteristics.

Cityscapes also include *lieux de mémoire*, intentional forms of urban memory, such as emblematic buildings and monuments. The House of the People stands out as the most representative and effective exponent of socialist realist architecture. Like blocks of flats, it is mostly associated with negative aspects of the past, such as megalomania and demolitions, but its significance is also shaped by counter-narratives. Being framed as ‘a national product’ that impresses through its technical specifications, the House of the People can end up losing its role of *lieux de mémoire*, becoming taken for granted. A similar case is that of anticommunist monuments, which participants do not consider as effective *lieux de mémoire*. However, the postsocialist erasure of cultural memory fulfilled its purpose through the removal of ideological monuments and the change of toponymies.

The central argument of this chapter is that memories have relevance today even in the lives of young people who have not experienced the communist era. Second-hand memories shape their understanding of present-day society, and, at the same time, the present influences the way young people engage with the past. This thread will continue through the argument of the following two empirical chapters.

CHAPTER 7

Sensorial engagement with the past through material culture

7.1. Introduction

Traces of the communist era are not solely to be found in the urban environment; they can also be felt in the domestic environment. Products that originate in the communist era are still present in the homes of participants and some remind them of the past. In this chapter, attention will be turned to this particular way in which the past and the present are intertwined in young people's daily lives. Participants reveal the settings where they identify remnants from the past, what these are, what attitudes they have towards them and, ultimately, what it is that products of the past convey to young people, two decades after the fall of the communist regime.

One of the main foci of the literature on the means of dealing with the material culture of the socialist era is on nostalgia, which is expressed through the commodification and museumification of the past. Appadurai argues that 'commoditization lies at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors' (1986: 15) and thus the significance of commodities is shifting. As such, Berdahl argues that the 'commodification phase' of socialist objects, to use further Appadurai's (1986) perspective, relates 'to the re-invention, re-production, and mass merchandising' (Berdahl, 1999: 201) of products. Besides commodification, and linked to it, engaging with the past also occurs through practices that involve 'the collecting, cataloging and 'museumification' of 'GDR everyday life' (Berdahl, 1999: 201) and of postsocialist daily life in general. Regardless of the alleged

depoliticization of the material culture of the past through such acts of museumification, Velikonja (2008) maintains, nostalgia retains its ‘political prefix and [...] ideological burdens or “skeletons in the cupboards”’ (*ibid.*). This may be one reason why nostalgia, even in its commodified form, might still be perceived as a danger, even if scholars warn against (over)reading politics into nostalgia (Gille, 2010; Nadkarni and Shevchenko, 2004).

Since the fall of the communist/socialist regimes, nostalgic paraphernalia seems to have blossomed in parts of the Eastern Bloc. It manifested itself both through objects originating in the past and through the kitsch nostalgic paraphernalia which uses symbols originating in the recent past; a phenomenon found especially in the former GDR (Berdahl, 1999), or in former Yugoslavia (Velikonja, 2008). However, commodified nostalgia has not entered the public sphere at all in the postsocialist Romanian society. It is only in flea markets and on websites dedicated to buying and selling second-hand goods that young people can indulge themselves in ‘consuming’ the past through ‘historical junk’ (Velikonja, 2008). Otherwise, ‘materialized’ nostalgia is as condemned and thus rendered invisible as the ideological nostalgia, or ‘nostalgia as a feeling or an idea’, to draw on a distinction made by Velikonja (2008: 29).

To remain true to the experiences and views of the young people that took part in this study, practices of engaging with the past through material culture should not be confined to those of nostalgia. Dealing with traces of the past is much more complex; socialist products are not exclusively cherished as relics of the past. Young people either act as agents of forgetting, of amnesia, or they take

on the role of (would-be) collectors, demonstrating enough passion to become an active part of the process of commodification and museumification of the past.

If young people do engage with objects as technologies of memory, they engage with period artifacts, rather than with (kitsch) reproductions. Young people might actively seek to encounter the past through period nostalgic paraphernalia – objects that contained ideological messages specific to those times – and thus create *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989). However, it is through every day occurrences that young people normally interact with products that originate in the communist era, but that do not necessarily fall under ‘the nostalgic paraphernalia’ label, since they are not ideologically imbued. Usually, this happens from an early time in their childhood, a past that *they have experienced* which included elements – built environment, objects etc. – that had not gone yet through a process of replacement or transformation and that created *milieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989). At that time, forgetting had not yet started to become an effective politics of memory in terms of dealing with material traces of the communist era.

7.2. The mnemonic character of the material culture of everyday life

Cultural memory lives through the objects that create *milieux de mémoire*. However, the existence of such *milieux de mémoire* is threatened by the perishability of goods; this is one noteworthy theme that arose from the interviews. Participants discussed the ways in which the passage of time makes it increasingly difficult to identify any traces at all, a strikingly different situation than the one discussed in relation to the built environment, despite the fact that alterations to

constructions have also been made since 1989. Even if cityscapes are in a continuous process of change, buildings are there to stay (and participants note, as already shown, how they represent reminders of the past that are difficult or even impossible to erase). Objects, however, are replaceable; their functional and aesthetic values are constantly surpassed by improved objects, which drives people to want to update their domestic spaces and their living conditions. This very need for improvement makes it difficult for participants to identify any traces of the past in the material culture:

Why did you change it [the aspect of your home]?

Well, it keeps changing. It can't stay the same. They are... It wasn't, it wasn't because of some hard feelings, that 'look, that it's from the communist times'... [...] Especially given that nowadays there are new models released every day... and it's logical that we... [...] We couldn't possibly... leave it the same... (Andra)

Irina notes that her grandparents had a similar approach based on a pragmatic way of thinking: 'What is history remains history... The world goes on'. Life goes on indeed, yet whether 'history' is just a matter of the past is challenged by participants who do identify traces of the communist era in their homes, as will be discussed. Products originating in the communist era, historical artifacts, as one might argue, are characterised by fluidity; both their existence and significance are subject to change over time and depending on the person

engaging in acts of recollection (Appadurai, 1986; Hamilakis and Labanyi, 2008; Huyssen, 2003; Ladd, 1997; Zelizer, 1995). For instance, Stela notes how this process of change that eventually led to the disappearance of any traces of the past from her home took place gradually, over time: ‘It wasn’t just one change, we threw everything away, right? So it all was gradual, but gradual in such a way that we got rid of almost any object’. The phrasal verb used by Stela is ‘to get rid of’, whilst Horia remarks how his family ‘has thrown away’ the remnants of the past when they moved houses. Pavel talks about change in similar terms:

Maybe others aren’t keeping them [objects from the communist era] anymore, because they’re changing...the design and the whole look of the house and they have no purpose anymore and they throw them away. Others, there’s a room in which they don’t go in, a best room, [...] and they keep them there in the china cabinet ‘cause they don’t bother them at all (Pavel)

Objects seem to have a short fate as repositories of memories, unless they are personal memories, for instance, of those who lived during those times or even from the childhood of participants. Otherwise, they are not kept, and especially not for their potential of reminding family members of the communist era⁹⁴. Their

⁹⁴ Andi Mihalache argues that ornaments, which will be discussed later in the chapter, actually ‘reromanticized the 1980s and sustained the fiction of material stability of the 1990s’ (2014: 226). This could be the case, but such a conclusion could only be drawn after empirical research with people who have lived during the communist era is conducted. The conclusion presented in the

functionality is more important; if they do not correspond to current standards, they are perceived as waste and thus their disposal becomes a liberation. If they are kept, they might be isolated in one room and forgotten there, as Pavel mentions, or in the attic (Andra). Relics of the past are thus confined to a space of forgetting; they are put out of sight, but not entirely discarded. What determines their survival is their continual relevance in present day contexts, even if minimal. Memory is thus maintained through the quasi-existence of objects, through the knowledge that they continue to exist somewhere and can be brought again to light if need be.

A space where participants still identify relics of the communist era, a ‘living’ space of forgetting, is represented by the homes of grandparents or of (elderly) acquaintances, which are perceived as a museum of the communist era, of sorts. Amongst the objects found there are: ornaments (‘bibelouri’), photos, period furniture etc. They all add up to creating a setting that is reminiscent of past times. Sergiu offers a telling description of such places – imagined, remembered from the 90s or still encountered:

in the houses of elderly people it’s for sure [to identify objects from the communist era]... the sort of small flats, with paintings, with those paintings... with the The Abduction from the Seraglio⁹⁵ and macrame laces and vases and... the big, big bookcases with glass... (Sergiu)

thesis above is based on young people’s perceptions of the potential significance of socialist objects for their (grand)parents.

⁹⁵ A famous kitsch tapestry that depicted a colourful Oriental setting, introduced on the black market by seafarers who travelled to or via Turkey

The settings of everyday life during the communist era are thus easier to be imagined by some participants; private spaces that act as museums of the past are accessible, but they are perishable as well, becoming less and less easy to identify. Lucian notes how traces of the past, carefully preserved and displayed, can be gone in an instant:

my grandma had a china cabinet like that... with a mirror... you know, in which she had ornaments, until my grandpa leaned on it and it collapsed. [LAUGHS] And their house was rid of communism [LAUGHS] (Lucian)

He still remembers the china cabinet from his childhood. Moreover, participants do make reference to memories of their own childhood from the 1990s in order to evoke objects that they associate with the past. This is an important theme that emerges from the interviews. The inevitable drawback of second-hand memories – the lack of first-hand experience during the times that are remembered – is compensated through the first-hand memories young people have from their childhood. Young people note how back then society, in all its aspects, had more in common with that from the communist era than it has nowadays. The past they have experienced thus helps young people make sense of a remote time which influences the present and the future. In other words, the current manifestations of the interplay between the past and the present are put into perspective by those identified in the early 1990s.

It is in those early years of postsocialism that participants formed perceptions of socialist and non-socialist goods based on contrasts. Even when she was a child, Margareta felt a tension between the good, capitalist, post-1989 objects and those that originated from the communist era:

Yes, some dolls from my parents' wedding [...] the big dolls were communist and the small dolls, Barbie, were non-communist. And when I got the Barbie doll it was ok, I mean it was a good doll [LAUGHS]. Especially because it came with spare clothes... [...] we didn't have to sew them ourselves... (Margareta)

What is old, rough and unappealing is associated with the communist era, whilst the slender, carefully made Barbie doll is non-communist. At the same time, though, objects from the communist era are praised for their durability, even by Margareta, as will later be discussed regarding clothing.

Similarly to Margareta, Marcela associated old black-and-white TV sets with the communist era; having no other option but to watch TV on such an obsolete device at her grandparents' house was perceived as a return to the past by Marcela: 'it seemed dramatic'. Old TV sets are amongst the objects participants associate with the past, some of them having used them in their childhood. Even if the outdated technology was just a medium through which contemporary media products reached audiences during postsocialism, it seems that the lens actually influenced the practice of watching TV. Like a sepia photograph, the black-and-

white TV acted as a filter that inconvenienced participants and, because of this, reminded them of its origin: the communist era.

Other technical objects that were mentioned by young people in interviews were radios, which are praised for their capacity to capture stations from far-away countries, old tape recorders, vinyl records and, in one instance, a refrigerator. As with the black-and-white TVs, some were in use during the childhood of participants, or still are, as in the case of the refrigerator (Horia). Their functionality is, once again, the determining factor in whether they are still kept or used - although one participant notes that he keeps an old TV set for its sentimental value, because it reminds him of his childhood:

I'm like that, someone who collects old things. I have respect for them.

[...] for me it's something important because... [...] I wasn't watching cartoons... on the colour TV, I was watching them on the black-and-white TV. For me, this is a personal thing (Florin)

Nostalgia for socialist products does not necessarily refer to the communist era. It can refer to the experiences that young people have attached to these objects in postsocialism. Hence, the object of nostalgia is the same as in the case of 'eyewitnesses' (e.g. TV sets), yet the subject differs, since they refer to memories from early postsocialism rather than from the communist era. Thus, the nostalgia of young people for objects they have first-hand sensorial experiences of from the early 1990s does not seem to represent an expression of 'neostalgia', a form of

fondly remembering that which had not been directly experienced (Velikonja, 2008). Rather, it relies on their own direct memories.

Another remnant of the communist era is represented by furniture; traces of the past thus dominate the private space of participants, acting as silent witnesses of the passage of time. Miron mentions the wardrobe from his room, whilst Filip notes that all furniture from his room seems ‘very communist’. For Leonard’s mother, and in a way, for Leonard as well since he remembered what her perception was, the entrance door to their flat is linked with the past:

The entrance door I still have, the entrance door to the house.

Does it remind you of the communist era when you open the door?

[...] Not me personally. [...] mum is more, like, very... stressed about this, that we aren’t changing it, that she is seeing it there and... she’s still feeling like back then (Leonard)

In this particular case, the relic in question, the door, is dispensable because of its poor current state. Even so, the descriptions participants offer of typical communist era furniture, which everyone had, emphasize the fact that they are more resistant and robust than that available nowadays (Marilena). The furniture from those times is generally described as bulky, glossy and laminated (Margareta). Sorina describes in detail the types of bookcases that were available, even drawing rough sketches of one model (see: Figure 7.1):

I have the Bonanza bookcases which are... a bit older, I think... [...]
And there are also those... mine, Bonanza... which I am drawing
firstly from the side... [...] Basically, there's a buffet here and here's a
china cabinet (Sorina)

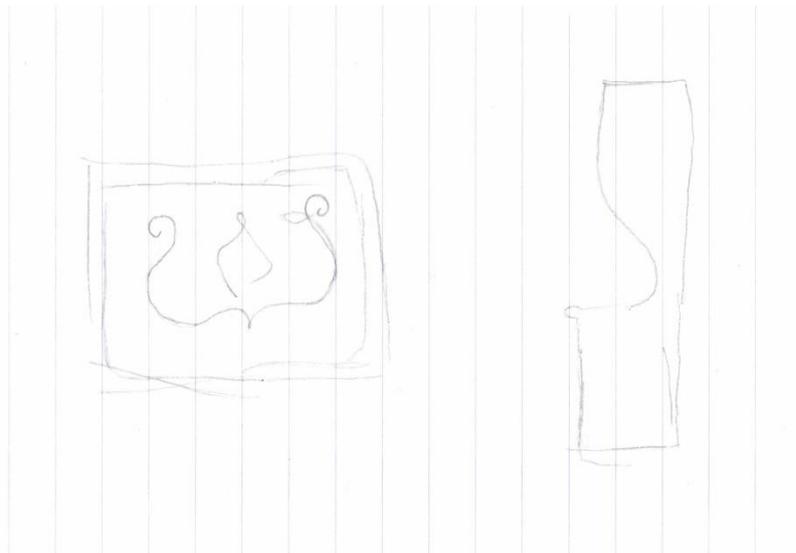


Figure 7.1 Drawing of the Bonanza bookcase made by Sorina during the interview I had with her in January 2013

Participants also mention the glasses, cups and old cutlery that are exclusively kept on display, saved for 'special occasions' which never come, as Camelia notes. Thus, not only objects are associated with the communist era, but also practices, such as saving the best objects one has for special events, which eventually means that they are rarely or even never used. The next chapter will focus on current practices that young people attribute to the communist era, and how they live on, thus demonstrating once more how the past is still relevant to the present.

7.3. Unwanted traces of the communist era: Laces, ornaments and rugs

The most characteristic objects participants associate with the past are *macrame laces*⁹⁶, *ornaments*⁹⁷ and *embroidered decorative rugs*⁹⁸. If macrame laces could be made by the grandmothers of the participants, and thus have an emotional value, embroidered decorative rugs and ornaments are generally perceived as worthless objects in themselves; they only seem to act as reminders of the past.

Ornaments are, by far, the objects labelled as most ‘communist’, seemingly omnipresent in the houses of Romanian people during those times. Amongst them, particular attention is given to a fish made of coloured glass, which Călin identifies particularly in homes from the urban environment⁹⁹:

it’s an image I, seriously, I’ve seen in everyone’s homes, that’s why I’m telling you, so for me... all nostalgics have a fishy like that...
(Miruna)

there’s that fish-ornament which used to be in all homes (Călin)

⁹⁶ Trans. ‘broderii’

⁹⁷ Trans. ‘bibelouri’

⁹⁸ Trans. ‘carpete’

⁹⁹ The reasons why Călin refers specifically to urban dwellings is unclear. He probably considers that ornaments were one of the few means of decorating urban dwellings, whereas in rural areas people could have gathered other types of decorative objects over time. He might also be referring to the financial possibilities of people living in urban environments as compared to the resources of those living in rural areas and who might have relied on subsistence agriculture

those old, classic ornaments [SMILES], those who one could see absolutely in any house from communism, all over, the same thing over the TV, the same doggie (Paula)

Young people attempt to make sense of the presence of ornaments, if not macrame laces as well, in people's homes. Several participants note that they were bought and displayed for aesthetic reasons, a view also expressed by Andi Mihalache (2014). They also mention that the choice was limited, which meant that people generally had no other options to decorate their homes (see: Mihalache A., 2014). They were accessible objects which did not pose a threat, as Florentina argues, in terms of being ideologically loaded. Ultimately, people only had a few (potentially significant) possessions, and ornaments were objects they could have and use for decorative purpose, according to Felix:

I don't think that if offered nicer objects and these ugly objects, the majority of people would have chosen to decorate their homes with ugly objects (Felix)

Well... but people had very few things of their own and that was one of the things you had of your own in the home, I don't know, there wasn't anyone who could come and take it away. Even if... all people had the same ornament [LAUGHS] but at least it was theirs, you had a thing... I think it was [...] a sort of escape (Paula)

The display of social status represents another theme that arises from the interviews. Even if standardisation was the end result due to the limited range of ornaments available, participants note how these mass-produced accessible objects were used to display a middle class status. The showcase of ornaments indicated belonging to a social group; it became a norm - to have what others were having. Andi Mihalache (2014) concurs, arguing that the private display of ornaments was meant to mark the appropriation of bourgeois aesthetic values, which was manifested also through porcelain objects. In the end, Mihalache notes, 'Romanian society was ostensibly proletizing itself in public, and reembourgeoisizing itself underhand, in private' (2014: 225), where mass-produced ornaments were given specific meanings.

Objects have been imbued in this way with meanings at the time when they were bought. Over time, they may lose it – and end up in the discard pile – or retain some kind of significance for the families of participants, which means that they are preserved. Some participants mention the utility of objects (including cars), which makes them or their families keep them. Others talk about getting used to the objects, having emotional value, having personal memories attached to them and thus their preservation might, in some cases, involve the maintenance of respect for forerunners (as in the case of the family of Rareș, who keep the house unaltered in the memory of their elders). This constitutes another instance of the process of everyday life museumification (Berdahl, 1999) noted earlier.

Remnants of the past, and especially ornaments, seem to still have a place in the homes of participants solely according to the wish of the parents and/or grandparents of participants. As already indicated, participants generally have a

negative attitude towards them and would like to see them removed. Camelia recounts several episodes in which she had terrible arguments with her mother, the two of them living in the same flat. At some point, she remembers, she took the matter into her own hands, but her mother returned all objects to their original place:

We had a china cabinet in the corridor, but I fancied taking it to make a sort of bookcase from it. And I gave her the ornaments, I don't know, I put them somewhere on the balcony. [...] 'How could you do something like that? Sacrilege! How?' [...] Outside of my room, [the flat] it's super communist: china cabinets, things, macrame laces
(Camelia)

Her progressive thoughts regarding the look of the flat were met with the same reticence when it came to changing the furniture, curtains or the use of the balcony:

'So, yes, what could I say? She has this mentality. To keep what used to be... You know, she has that kind of respect for grandparents, to keep for the future what they've left us...' (Camelia)

For Camelia's mother, memories live through the spatial setting of her home and she only protects her past. For the daughter, the objects and the interior design of the flat only reveal bad taste and obsolescence. She has no significant memories to associate with the material culture of their flat, so the result is estrangement from it.

Camelia's attempts to demuseumify her flat, as a move towards active forgetting (Assmann A., 2010), were ultimately unsuccessful, yet other participants managed to take steps, sometimes decisive ones, towards this goal. Several participants note that they have either persuaded their parents to remove all ornaments or they have placed them themselves in a storage space - usually a box. It is interesting to note that they did not get rid of them, but preferred to keep them in a state of semi-existence; they are still in their possession, yet out of sight. Young people thus become active agents of forgetting. They are the catalyst that sets in motion the process of memory erasure or of cultural amnesia.

The end points of ornaments, macrame laces, embroidered decorative rugs and other objects associated with the communist era seems to be either china cabinets, or a box, a drawer, an attic, an unused room, or even the house of their grandparents. If they end up hidden from view by eyewitnesses, Felix argues, it signals an attempt to foster active amnesia in order to suppress traumatic memories:

They want to get rid of them... Yes... Yes, and it seems to me that this is, again, an instinct of suppression, of erasure, of... like- like a rape victim who takes showers in an obsessive manner... something like this. [...] This is what this act of throwing everything away, of erasing everything, inspires me... (Felix)

Felix's explanation might shed light on the reasons why people who have first-hand memories of the past might like to discard objects that remind them of negative experiences. Yet, the question is whether it is applicable for second-hand

memories as well. Rather, I would suggest, the wish some young people have to remove relics of the past from their homes is actually a reaction against what they currently perceive as useless objects with no aesthetic value. The past might be considered a part of their personal or familial identity, yet the data indicates that there is no basis to argue that material culture activates traumatic memories which young people would prefer not to recall, and hence discard the products of socialism. Second-hand memories can be traumatic, as argued in Chapter 5, yet these traumas do not seem to pass into the material possessions of participants.

7.4. Preserving the past

There are, however, a number of young people who treasure relics of the past; some even collect such objects. Thus, they actively engage in the creation of *lieux de mémoire*. One reason for this is for their future potential value, as Filip suggests: ‘I look at them as some future [historical] sources, at least I will have them if others don’t’ (Filip). Ornaments, so despised by others, feature among the objects cherished by some participants. Margareta keeps the fish-ornament in a box in order to protect it and, in this way, to protect the memories she has of her childhood (as in the case of the old TV set mentioned earlier):

[...] I keep it in a box because nowadays I have a little niece at home who destroys everything and... I keep it because I don’t want it to break anyway and [...] because [...] when I was little, I was fascinated by looking through the mouth of the fish into the sun and I really liked

what... what I could see... through the fish... in the sun... because they were colourful... yes... (Margareta)

If Margareta is actually preserving her own first-hand memories, the reasons behind Pavel's attachment to products of the socialist era have to do with the fact that his parents invested in them at some point: 'they are their goods and my parents are keeping them'. Discarding them would involve a manifestation of disrespect towards his parents who have worked hard in order to afford ornaments.

Other objects preserved by participants are milk bottles, stamps, toys, knives, medals, watches and clothes. Both Iustin and Florin note that they collect old watches, which they praise for their high quality. In the case of Iustin, he either gets them from relatives, who know about his interest, or buys them. For Florin, his passion for objects from the communist era is related to watches:

And that part of, of collecting I started when I came to university and gradually I got to a friend who has antique shops... and I started to work with him on restoring objects... Oh well, amongst those objects he had some objects from the communist era. Mugs, caps... [...] I like to collect knives, for instance, or watches. I have at home about eight watches: Pobeda, Chaika [...], Leica... communist watches which really... sparked my interest through the fact that although they are objects that were produced 60 years ago, they still work like clockwork... And it's much easier to repair them; it's, I don't know,

that communist tactic of making an object so resistant, as crude, as resistant (Florin)

One could question, however, how effective watches are as vehicles of memory, and especially of memories regarding the communist era in Romania, since the watches both participants mention were produced in the USSR. There is a general message watches could transmit about the past, as Florin observes: socialist products were more durable than those currently on offer.

Other participants regret that they do not have any objects that could remind them of the communist era. In order to compensate for the absence of a *milieu de mémoire* of the communist era that they could engage with, Felix and Bianca wish to create an artificial one, by reconstituting a lost world of material possessions. However, their attempt to museumify (Berdahl, 1999) daily life during the communist era could at most succeed in creating *lieux de mémoire*, constructed mnemonic places, as opposed to a *milieu de mémoire*, as encountered by participants who engage with material traces found throughout the places they inhabit. The two modes of recollection are ultimately characterised by a difference of degree in terms of intentionality and awareness.

Felix and Bianca would have liked to create their own private museum of the communist era, in the same vein as the three German students that created a sort of museum of GDR everyday life in a flat in Dresden (Ten Dyke, 2000). Objects would aid Felix, for instance, in understanding how life was during those times. But his fascination with relics of the past has other roots:

I don't have the famous ornaments, something which I regret and I'm trying to buy them. [...] I'm trying to find them and... the ornaments as ornaments, the greatest regret I have is that I don't have those... embroidered decorative rugs... with...

Why is this a regret?

They seem to me to be fabulous documents through their sheer ugliness, [...] through the replacement of a decorative art, even if it was cripple, lame, how it might have been before... [...] with a delirious... thing... [...]

And why would you wish to have them? The ornaments and...

[...] I think that... the best... the best way possible to document, in fact, the everyday life of the period is through recreating the ways in which it was taking place. And... these things, ornaments, the Chinese fisherman with the ballerina, the fish... that multi-colored fish on the TV, all these things... [...] the macrame laces... are... the frame... in which domestic interactions were taking place, which ultimately represent 90 per cent of what we call everyday life. [...]

And would you display them?

I would make a room. If I had... if I could, at present, I would make a room... in the exact same style (Felix)

The same theme, of dedicating a special room to relics of the past, appears again although this time not to hide them, but to display them and thus make the most of them. He would need to own these objects because descriptions or even pictures do not do them justice:

[...] well, it's really hard to imagine that fish that was on the TV set...
[...] Would you be able to describe it... in all its ugliness and in all...
the actual awkwardness of the ornament ... to someone who doesn't
have a clue about it? I don't think you could (Felix)

Thus, one needs the actual period objects in order to attempt to recreate an atmosphere they are nostalgic about or that they desire to comprehend more fully. The wish of young people to create their own quasi-museums of the recent past might actually indicate the lack of private or state-investment in creating a museum of everyday life during socialism that would help young people make sense of the daily aspects of a period that has influenced the present society¹⁰⁰. Yet, all plans regarding the creation of a state-sponsored museum focus solely on the criminal character of the communist era, as Radu Preda (2015), the current president of the

¹⁰⁰ The private *Museum of the Communist Consumer* that was mentioned in Chapter 4 only opened in May 2015, after fieldwork was carried out

IICCMRE, recently emphasized¹⁰¹. Displaying objects that would illustrate the daily lives of people, the argument goes (*ibid.*), would only feed into nostalgia, which is inherently ‘pathological’, instead of promoting an appreciation of the values of democracy (another way of justifying an anticommunist approach). Winkler concurs that textless exhibitions of everyday life would provoke visitors’ interpretations rather than provide ‘distanced, professional, and objectifying statements about the past’ (2014: 20). And such freedom of interpretation would only create conditions for counter-memories to be (re)produced.

Bianca displays another kind of curiosity about relics of the past. She is less fascinated by the aesthetic side of products and is more concerned about what the objects can tell her about the past that could help her in her intellectual pursuits:

I would like, most of all, to analyse, to put them in a corner and whenever I need [...] to write about something [...] to look at them to see exactly what they show, to turn them on all sides, to see [...] what it is formed of, what colour shows... [...] I would like to really have all of them, because...you know that period better, you get more into that... into that atmosphere...

And what types of objects? I don't know, if you have any examples of objects that you would buy?

¹⁰¹ At a conference he held at the National Theatre in Bucharest on 7th June 2015, entitled ‘How was a world killed? Arguments for the creation of a museum of communism in Bucharest’.

I think that the first thing I'd buy would be the pioneer uniform [...] I'd like to see how they look... I'd wear one to see how it looks on me
[WE LAUGH] (Bianca)

The desire to touch, to feel, to have access to an unmediated experience of objects from those times and thus to project herself during the communist era (or the communist era on her person) are the main reasons behind Bianca's interest in relics of the past. The visualisation of specific clothes from the communist era is not enough; embodiment gives people access to a higher level of knowledge and understanding, one that is sensorial rather than a purely intellectual one.

7.5. Living the past

If Bianca would like to own a pioneer's uniform, other participants note how they are still using clothes that were produced during the communist era, and which belonged to their parents or older siblings. Thus, socialist products are not only put on display or hidden away; they also facilitate an embodied engagement with the recent past. Period products become so embedded in postsocialist everyday life that through their use, they immerse young people in a veritable *milieu de mémoire*.

For Margareta, for instance, the fact that she wore her older brothers' clothes when she was little and now wears her mother's clothes makes her feel as though she has lived during the communist era as well or, as she puts it, 'as if I was continuing what they lived in a way, like them...'. Once again, the embodiment of memories emerges as a powerful theme. The layer of clothing might take young

people, in a way, to the past, and allow them to feel what (they imagine) others have felt wearing the same clothes during those times. Clothes, like other objects, accumulate the memories of those who have used them; they can be reactivated by the persons whose first-hand memories are linked to the object, but it seems that young people can also access second-hand memories through them.

Another approach to clothing is illustrated by Sorina, who is proud of wearing her mother's clothes, which she likes because of the way they look, but also because of their high quality, a characteristic mentioned by several participants:

I didn't notice any difference... almost none, *in any respects* [...] *It's not something I hide*¹⁰², it's something I'm really proud of, that I've kept all these things and that they are more valuable, in the end, than the clothes that you buy now with a million¹⁰³ from an I-don't-know-what store from the mall (Sorina)

Clothes produced in the communist era are proof that products were made to last (Stitzel (2005) puts forward an opposite argument with reference to the poor quality of GDR garments and similarly Guentcheva notes how 'socialist commodities are presumed to have been inferior to Western ones, mediocre, and flawed' (2012: 141)). Another theme that emerged from the interviews and which will be discussed in the following chapter is the disenchantment with current Romanian society and capitalism, more generally: clothes produced after 1989 are

¹⁰² Quote in italics originally in English

¹⁰³ 100 new lei (RON), 1 million old lei (ROL), a little over £16

considered to be of poorer quality. This stance does not necessarily lead to adopting a nostalgic approach towards the past, but it is part of the valorification of both past and present and the material culture associated with the two periods.

Besides clothes, cars are also possessions that remind participants of the communist era and that might help them experience similar situations to those common before 1989. Dacia¹⁰⁴, Lada¹⁰⁵ and ARO¹⁰⁶ are the brands associated with the past. Dacia cars represent ‘the Romanian symbol’ (Luca) and are considered to be ‘a product of communism...’ (Iustin). Sandqvist concurs that the Dacia 1300, ‘that angular, noisy and somewhat unstable car’ became ‘the emblem of the state of the nation’ (in Sandqvist and Zahariade, 2003: 19).

Participants remember from their childhood what it was like to ride in a Dacia car:

I travelled once while on a hitchhike [in a Dacia] and I said ‘God, leave me on the road’, you know? [LAUGHS] It was all shaking [...] You had to use a hammer, kick it [LAUGHS] and then it would start. These ones [cars more recently produced], if they break down, the commands are electronic, you leave them there [where they break down].

[LAUGHS] (Pavel)

¹⁰⁴ A Romanian car brand. The Dacia factory was opened in 1966 and the design of the automobiles produced there has been linked to the Renault models. In 1999, the factory was bought by the Renault Group. Nowadays, Dacia models are sold on foreign markets either under the Dacia or the Renault logos.

¹⁰⁵ A Russian car brand, based on the Fiat models. Established in 1966.

¹⁰⁶ ARO was a Romanian 4x4 car manufacturer that functioned between 1957 and 2003

[...] things of this sort which I've experienced, I mean I *lived* in [sic!] a Dacia from the communist times [...] And ARO makes me remember, that one which [...] allegedly was a 4x4, but you had to give it a push [LAUGHS] to get it out of the mud (Miron)



Figure 7.2 An old Dacia 1310 photographed on 22nd August 2013 in Curtea de Arges during a walking tour with Miron. In the background, another relic of the socialist/communist era: a Trabant

Cars produced during the communist era seem to have a long-life, but they also appear to break down often during their life span. Paula's aunt is still experiencing difficulties in maintaining her old Dacia and even using it:

My aunt, poor her, still has a Dacia, I mean that is the household car. And everyone makes fun of her 'cause, ah, this isn't a car anymore' [...] When Dad had a Dacia as well, [...] I didn't think like that, but

now, when I see that you get into the car, turn on the heating and you start the car. Whilst my aunt... she's struggling to turn it on, to heat it, to defrost the windows, it's cold in the car, it has no heating (Paula)

Another category of relics of the past that might help participants sensorially experience how life was during the communist era is that of food. The vast majority of participants could not think of any type of food - prepared or raw - that could remind them of the communist era. Lacking any first-hand experience of those times, one cannot associate any types of food with the past:

If I had lived at all, you know?, I mean more, I would have known what I've eaten then and now 'man, when I eat French fries, yes, I think about...' (Pavel)

With communism? Mmm... Almost nothing makes me think about it because... I haven't lived... (Lucreția)

As discussed in Chapter 5, lack of first-hand experience leads to the incapacity of some young people to associate any material traces with the past.

In the case of other participants, personal narratives or ad campaigns are the ones that make them associate products with the communist era. Some foodstuff is associated based on personal narratives, such as salami and sausages, Bologna sausages - what one participant calls 'the universal cold cuts in those times' (Rareș) -, products sold in bulk, such as waffles, halva etc., home-made preserves, (raw)

bananas and oranges etc. Another type of product is represented by those that participants remember from their childhood, which they have eaten at one point: certain types of milk and yoghurt that had a high level of fat, ice cream cupcakes, Baba cakes, a particular type of bread, Christmas sweets, and the ROM chocolate¹⁰⁷ and Eugenia biscuits¹⁰⁸, both of them being marketed as favourite products from the communist era, juices with bad tastes and Boeuf salad. Associating these products with the communist era does not necessarily mean that participants think of those times when they eat any of them (maybe with the exception of those products marketed as originating from those times). Associating products with the socialist era does not automatically involve them acting as technologies of memory; rather, it demonstrates the level of engagement young people have with the past, and their ability to create links between memories that originate from different sources.

Except for the juices, products that were made during the communist era and are produced nowadays as well - such as dairy products or the Sibiu salami – are considered to have been of a better quality during the communist era and in the early 90s:

Nowadays, nothing seems to me... to compare with what was back then, in terms of food [...] All were so tasty, even if they were scarce

¹⁰⁷ A Romanian chocolate, whose recipe originates from 1964. The name refers to its rum flavour, but it can also be a reference to its Romanian origin. Nowadays, it is commercialised as ‘Authentic Rom’, even if its producers have diversified the flavours.

¹⁰⁸ Two biscuits sandwiched together with cream, which ended up being called ‘eugenii’, thus adapting the brand to a noun that designates a type of product. The trademark has been recently revived.

and... you couldn't find them very often and... the ice cream was so good, it was soft ice cream (Margareta)

Memory might well tint memories in a nostalgic shade, yet, even anticommunist people who lived during those times make the same remark, probably more as a critique of contemporary recipes and the quality of ingredients rather than in praise of how things were done during the communist era¹⁰⁹. Regarding the positive qualities products might have had, appliances, clothing and, in some cases, food are praised in interviews. Otherwise, as discussed with regard to the built environment, the socialist material culture is associated with negative qualities, amongst which the most important would be their poor aesthetics.

7.6. Nostalgic paraphernalia

A special note should be made about nostalgic paraphernalia, that is the category of objects that are specifically linked to the communist regime, rather than simply originating in a time in which Romanian society happened to be under a communist regime. These period artifacts, or 'historical junk' (Velikonja, 2008), are ideologically imbued in that their intended role was to promote the socialist/communist ideology. Through collecting them, participants engage in processes of creating *lieux de mémoire*. At this point it should be noted that these *lieux de mémoire* created by young people through the collection of various socialist objects, if well integrated in their domestic spaces, could well become

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of the inferior quality of affordable postsocialist products, see: Jung, 2007

milieux de mémoire for future generations. Thus, I would argue that instead of losing their capacity to become again *milieux de mémoire*, as Nora (1989) argues, ‘the social life of things’ (Appadurai, 1986) or rather ‘the cultural biography of things’ (Kopytoff, 1986)¹¹⁰ can determine a return to their initial function. That is, because ‘their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories’ (Appadurai, 1986: 5) and so any shifts can lead to objects becoming once again part of *milieux de mémoire*.

Going back to cherishing nostalgic paraphernalia and the (temporary) creation of *lieux de mémoire*, an example would be that of Sebastian, who sees himself as being a communist. He got the flag of the Socialist Republic of Romania as a birthday present, and has kept it safe ever since. Miruna recounts how she reacted upon stumbling upon a ribbon of her mother’s:

I’ve seen a... ribbon from the high school... graduation of my mother’s, on which it was written ‘Our youth is to the party indebted’. I’ve been keeping it in a special place, it’s... like, super.

Why have you kept it?

[...] I found it amusing... [...] at a level of... I don’t even know, almost of slavishness. It’s our youth, the youth, I mean the most

¹¹⁰ Appadurai (1986) notes that whilst the two perspectives have common points, they differ in that ‘the social life of things’ refers to cultural categories whereas Kopytoff’s (1986) ‘cultural biography of things’ refers to individual trajectories that objects go through. Both acknowledge the fact that meanings are assigned to objects depending on the social contexts in which they are used.

valuable thing one has, almost, that is indebted to the party. So it's a duty towards the party to commit it? The most valuable thing...

(Miruna)

Other objects that young people preserve, and even collect, are metal badges from those times, a sort of mass-produced small-size medals. Whilst Iustin makes sense of badges by comparing them with current diplomas, Florin sees them as similar to the rewards scouts get nowadays. Costin, on the other hand, does not understand why people were given identical badges:

my grandfather from my father's side having been... [...] team leader, every year he was getting a badge like those that, well, 'what a great service you have done for your nation' from I don't know what. I know I've kept those because... in a way it's redundant, you get the same thing every year by doing work in an identical manner (Costin)

Costin thus questions the whole Stakhanovite work ethics¹¹¹, characteristic of the communist era, according to which production levels that surpass the norm were rewarded with such quasi-medals. Nowadays, one could argue that the Stakhanovite work ethic has remained in place, yet the reward has changed; in capitalism, medals were replaced by pay rises, which makes it difficult for young people to comprehend what the practical function of such medals was, since they did not offer a better means of living.

¹¹¹ Being over-productive, surpassing expectations set through work plans

7.7. Material culture as technology of memory

One significant part of the narrative regarding objects as remnants of the past has focused on those possessions that young people stumble upon, that they had or still have the intention to put away or which they cherished. The narrative should return to those participants that do not identify any objects that would remind them of the communist era, who form about a third of participants. For them, the material culture surrounding them seems to have stopped acting as a *milieu de mémoire*. Eliza, for instance, expressed repulsion at the prospect of having any such objects: ‘No, God forbid! [LAUGHS] No’ as if inhabiting such a *milieu de mémoire* would bring the past back to life. Some participants do acknowledge the fact that there are old objects in their homes, yet they do not associate them with ‘communism’, since objects are specific to a period, not to a particular regime, as Olivia notes:

No, I don’t think I have any objects, I mean there are only old objects, but the old objects I don’t necessarily associate with communism. [...]
I mean old objects you find in absolutely any regime, to put it like that... (Olivia)

In other cases, objects either blend into the scenery and in this way go unnoticed, as in Filip’s case, or they are taken for granted, with their origin and its circumstances being left unquestioned:

No [SERENE]. [PAUSE] I don't know, I don't think I relate to objects in that way. Obviously there are objects that have [...] existed in the house in the communist era as well, but... [...] I regarded them simply as... objects and not relics of communism (Antoanela)

This is to emphasise the fluid character of objects as repositories of memories. The objects do not speak for themselves; they act as vehicles of memory transmission especially if young people initiate a dialogue between their (second-hand) memories and those that could reside in or that are produced by relics. Otherwise, they are considered junk that could be disposed of. Thus, *milieux de mémoire* are destroyed through acts of active forgetting (Assmann A., 2010). Regardless of the meanings participants attach to objects from the communist era, they still take a part in the interaction between past and present; besides having a place in the present, they have the potential of influencing the lives of young people and the narratives they keep creating and reworking regarding the pre-1989 period.

7.8. Conclusion

Leading on from the discussion on the emplacement of memories, this chapter has further explored the role of *milieux* and *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989) in young people's trajectories of engaging with the past. After more than two decades after the fall of the communist regime, socialist material culture has proven its perishability. Objects are either kept, due to their functionality or to emotional attachments to them, or, more commonly, they are hidden away in spaces of

forgetting or even discarded. Thus, *milieux de mémoire* are broken up and domestic spaces demuseumified (Berdahl, 1999) through acts of active forgetting. However, due to their shifting ‘cultural biographies’ (Kopytoff, 1986), period objects, such as nostalgic paraphernalia or the emblematic macrame laces, ornaments and embroidered decorative rugs, can also be sought out in order to recreate the atmosphere of the communist era by setting up postsocialist *lieux de mémoire*. They can also return to their initial role of forming *milieux de mémoire*, if integrated in domestic spaces – rather than confined to specially designated spaces, as discussed with reference to the plans of Felix and Bianca. More than that, through the current use of socialist commodities, such as garments, young people can also engage with the past on an embodied level.

Like in the case of built environment, and especially of means of public transport, participants refer to their direct memories of their own childhood from the 1990s in order to evoke a time when they were inhabiting more complex *milieux de mémoire* of the communist era. Furthermore, it is back then when they invested memories and emotions into socialist objects which they now cherish or remember nostalgically. Direct experience thus renders memories more vivid, a reason for which some young people might wish to engage sensorially with objects, in order to access unmediated knowledge - other than through their senses - about aspects of the communist era.

If objects and the built environment create either *lieux* or *milieux de mémoire*, the next chapter will deal with embodied memories through practices and behaviours of people that add another layer to the *milieux de mémoire*, the legacy of the communist era in the postsocialist Romanian society.

CHAPTER 8

Embodied memories:

The endurance of social practices and behaviours

8.1. Introduction

We have already seen how valued memories of eyewitnesses are for young people who have not directly experienced life during the communist era (see: Chapter 5). Embodied memories, together with the narratives that are told by family members or ‘significant others’, represent technologies of memory that are much more efficient than those relying solely on written texts, specifically because of their sensorial nature, which brings the past to life; as Narvaez puts it, ‘the past thus becomes vivified in shared presents’ (2006: 52).

In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which postsocialist practices and behaviours act as forms of ‘living memory’ (Mah, 2010), *milieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989), or as manifestations of embodied memory. Young people associate a set of postsocialist societal traits and social practices with the communist era, most of them, if not all, having a negative character. It seems that all the drawbacks of Romanian society and its people were assigned to what is depicted through public discourses as the source of all evil - the communist era. These range from lack of political engagement and passivity to corruption and evading rules and from conservative attitudes to the stagnation of society. Furthermore, the recent past has not only shaped Romanian society and those who have lived during the communist era, but also young people. The final part of this chapter (Section 8.7) focuses

specifically on how different levels of identity have been influenced, more or less, by the communist era¹¹². Thus, the final argument of the thesis concerns the intrinsic role of the past in shaping the identities of Romanians who have not lived during the communist era and who rely solely on second-hand memories in order to make sense of the past. By making sense of the past, it is argued moreover, they foster a greater understanding of the present and future of contemporary society, of their families and, most importantly, of themselves.

8.2. Remembering as an embodied practice

Before proceeding to the discussion about ‘communist’ practices and behaviours, it is useful to go back to the discussion about embodiment outlined in Chapter 2. According to the approach of Connerton (1989) and Roach (1996), memory is also expressed through bodily practices, and, more precisely, through performance. Hence, it refers to the process of remembering that occurs through bodily practices, rather than through the recollection of the past per se. This distinction helps one appreciate the capacity of bodies to engage in the same practices as in the past; the focus shifts from embodiment as a way of re-activating memories, which might be perceived as static resources, despite their ever-changing nature, to the ways in which remembering takes place. Practices of embodied remembrance can form part of daily routines without them being acknowledged as having any connection to the past, in any way. This chapter presents the analytical observations of young

¹¹² See also Paulesc, 2014

people regarding what could be considered acts of remembrance that place the traces of the communist era in the spotlight, in the form of embodied practices.

Nicoletta Diasio's (2013) conceptualisation of the body as a medium of memory in all its complexity represents another useful point of departure for this chapter. Remembering is not confined to recalling the past. The past is alive in the present, in the behavior and practices of communities of people, and it has shaped and is still shaping their multifarious identities. Bodies thus become in themselves *milieux de mémoire*, to go back to Pierre Nora's (1989) concept; environments in which traces of the past dwell without any disruptions. Through everyday embodied practices, or performances not part of consciously enacted politics of memory, these traces of the past are recalled and in this way other social actors can have access to one's own *milieu de mémoire*. In this chapter, it is young people who discuss the forms these *milieux de mémoire* might take.

8.3. Enduring socialist practices in postsocialism

Postsocialist societies remember through embodied practices, willingly or not. It has been argued, in the academic literature and in the previous two chapters of this thesis, that traces of the past are still very much present in postsocialist spaces. For instance, Hann *et al.* (2002) argue that the socialist legacy of the communist regime will continue to have an enduring effect on postsocialist societies. Lampland concurs, arguing that 'institutions are peopled by local actors, for whom the patterns of thought and action characteristic of the previous regime are normal and routine' (2002: 32). More specific to the Romanian context, Lavinia Betea

notes that mentalities, which encompass ‘ideas, values, behavioural schemes, social representations and ways of being’ (2005: 5) have been shaped during the communist era. Similarly, Ioan Mihăilescu identifies ten ‘mental and behavioural stereotypes’ (1993: 315) that originate from the communist era. These are so deeply embedded in the behaviour and practices of people, Betea (2005) and Mihăilescu (1993) argue, that they cannot be easily changed, and especially not by politics of memory. Hence, one can still identify in postsocialist societies the effects of the communist era, of ‘residual communism’ (Betea, 2005: 31). It could be argued, referring to the literature discussed above (and at length in Chapter 2), that these effects are in themselves manifestations of the process of remembering.

Enduring effects of the communist era are to be found in postsocialist Romanian society and in the people who were either born before or during those times, or after 1989. Participants talk at length about the practices which (they assume) originate in the communist era. They also discuss the ways in which the recent past has shaped contemporary Romanian society. In this chapter, the interplay between the past and the present is most evident; instead of dealing with standalone remnants of the past, traces of the past are interwoven in the behaviour and practices of the people living in postsocialist Romania, to such an extent that they even contribute to the creation of a sense of identity for young people.

While some young people do make sense of aspects of the society in which they live by turning to information about the past that they acquire from various sources and then rework, others find little effect of the past on the present; the current postsocialist society is taken for granted, as if it was formed together with the participants. However, entire generations that lived during the communist era

have been part of the narrative of the transition period as well, and they have left their mark both on Romanian society and on the young people born shortly before or after 1989. And all these people, together with young people who can only create second-hand memories of the communist era, constantly remember the recent past through bodily practices – at a physical and mental level. The past has thus shaped behaviours and practices and their simple iteration could be considered an act of (unconscious) remembrance.

Despite the caution manifested by some participants in terms of identifying a causal relationship between the communist era and any traits of contemporary society, the link between the past and the present seems to be indisputable. Traces of the past are, therefore, identifiable in the behaviour and practices of people, as ‘remnants of behaviour’ (Stela). They are to be found either on a general level, in society at large, or on a more specific level, in those people who have lived most of their lives during the communist era and for whom it has been more difficult to adapt to the values of postsocialism (Cecilia). These traces, however, might refer to specific traumatic events, and in this case young people mention ‘wounds’ and ‘family dramas’. As Andra notes, ‘even now... some splinters of this period are to be found in the souls of people. [...] Resentments, melancholy looks or family dramas [...]’. Be they negative or positive, traces of the past seem to be easily identifiable in postsocialist Romanian society even for those who have not lived during the communist era but have been raised by people that have been socialised during those times. Such traces are pervasive:

I think that like there were [traces] left on blocks of flats and [...] in the metro station and all over the city, they remained in... the souls of the people that went through communism. Even if they aren't important anymore, we pretend we don't see them anymore... [...] Even if they wished to erase them, something was still left, I don't think they passed just like that... that's it, now we have, we're going to the hypermarket, we're forgetting that at some point in our lives we stood in line... (Tatiana)

That's for certain, you can't... you can't ignore so many years in which things were happening differently and... to expect it to come back to a normality or to hope... [...] immediately after the fall of communism (Antoanela)

Antoanela's perception of the practices acquired during the communist era reflects that put forward as part of the public official discourse: the society of those times was 'abnormal', 'unnatural' (Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008; Dimitrova, 2010; Solomon, 2008).

Politics of remembrance are considered to be utterly ineffective in transitional societies because of the deep embeddedness of these traces (Hann *et al.*, 2002; Lampland, 2002); what is there, is there to stay until those who carry them – people or materials – eventually perish. Erasure is unlikely to succeed, and certainly not on a short term basis. Some participants confer that in 20-30 years' time, as the 'communist' generations die out, practices that originated from the

pre-1989 period will fade as well (Mirela and Pavel). Until then, young people identify - and condemn, as we shall see - practices and behaviours that they associate with the communist era.

When some participants comment on the extent to which such traces are to be found, they exaggerate by ascribing 'everything', good or bad, to the communist era: 'everything that's happening now has been caused during those times' (Pavel). Ultimately, Stela notes, 'every society is linked to its history' and everything from history still influences us (Luca). Such a totalising view could be challenged, but it also shows the degree to which young people consider that the communist era is still relevant to the state of the postsocialist Romanian society that they grew up in. Even unacknowledged as originating in the communist era, the effects of the communist era, or 'traumas', will long be the subject of discussion, since they represent the problems of contemporary society, as Luca argues.

One side of the narrative on the effects of the recent past on social practices and behaviours thus focuses on their extensive, enduring and negative character. However, a few participants suggest the opposite - that there are no traces of the recent past to be found anymore: 'Nowadays... I feel as though all those practices that were learnt during the communist era have been lost' (Călin). It is important to note here that, epistemologically, it is impossible to know whether all participants have the same practices and behaviours in mind when they refer to those that originate in the communist era. Notwithstanding this, most young people do identify traces of the past in contemporary society. The following section will consider the main practices and behaviours mentioned in turn.

8.4. What is ‘socialist’ in postsocialist Romania?

Most important among the ways in which the communist era is considered to have shaped Romanian society is by preventing its ‘normal’ development, as observed earlier with regards to Antoanela’s answer. Participants note how there are serious disparities between Romanian society and other societies, in terms of its social, economic, cultural and political development:

I would say that we haven’t been exposed to... to *more open ideas* [EMPHASIZES]. We haven’t thought about anything else and we were left with this restrictive mentality... [...] we didn’t get to evolve (Sorina)

Despite these setbacks, Romanian society has been slowly evolving during the past years, as Paula notes. This process might also involve the erasure of any traces of the past, which can be viewed both positively and negatively, as the following fragment from Violeta’s interview illustrates:

I think that even immediately after the revolution clear traces were perceived because we were a really backward country, but now it seems to me that we have managed to develop and to erase those traces and prints left by communism.

And have we managed to erase them?

Actually, not completely [LAUGHS]

What has remained?

[...] merely that image from the past that no matter what we do can't fade away because... [...] no matter how much time passes, Romania will remain [backwards] because [...] it went through this period and people should remember it and... it's an image which, even if it is unpleasant, should be memorised [sic!] (Violeta)

Progress is to be desired, but it is hindered by 'mental and behavioural stereotypes' (Mihăilescu, 1993) originating in the communist era. Furthermore, development implies the erasure of the prints of the past, but some of these traces cannot actually be effaced – and one should not even attempt to wipe them off. As discussed in relation to the built environment, traces of the past are set in stone, concrete or bronze. Another layer still is added; in postsocialist societies, memory is also set in flesh and bones, and in bodily practices.

Together with the sense that postsocialist Romanian society is inferior to others because of the impact of the communist era, also comes a sense of inferiority that some participants identify in their co-nationals. Eliza talks about the feeling of being 'some kind of poor relative of those from [LAUGHS] from the European Union'. This is coupled with the pride in being a hospitable nation which, Eliza notes, in the end creates a paradoxical 'complex of inferiority, of inferiority-

superiority'. Alternatively, other participants note that a particular type of nationalism is deeply rooted in society, a kind that stemmed from the cult of personality that was practiced during the last years of the communist era.

It is not only that the communist era represented an era of stagnation or regression for Romanian society, but it also had implications at a fundamental level: it altered or even destroyed, some participants argue, the very human nature of people¹¹³. It tampered with two basic elements of the ethos of the Romanian people: land and religion.

She [an elderly lady] told me something like... communism came and took the most precious thing Romanians had... it took their roots, which were the land, because the Romanians were used to – see the pre-war Romanian literature – were used to land being their only possession. It came, it took the land and it took their roots that they had in the skies, it took religion from them. And Romanians were left somewhere suspended, between the sky and the earth... (Miruna)

As a consequence, people became less religious, a trait that is identified by several participants in contemporary society. They also started, paradoxically, to value material possessions more, as is discussed later.

The impact of the communist era on Romanian society thus averted its natural course and affected its development in all respects. People, who were under constant pressure to act in a particular way, not necessarily reflecting their views,

¹¹³ See: Liiceanu, 2014, who argues that communism led to the degradation of life

have been affected on a psychological level, as Gabriel notes. Furthermore, Nadia suggests, like Verdery (1996), that people were treated as a mass to be manipulated, for the greater good: ‘this system has created [...] a way of sticking yourself to paper and not put first... the value of a life that is in front of you’. Nadia suggests that, for those in power back then, individual lives did not count. People were no more than names on pieces of paper, not persons with their own individual meaningful life. Katherine Verdery (1996) argues that ‘socialist paternalism’, lay at the core of the ideology and how it was put into practice. As she sees it, Party rule was justified:

with the claim that the Party would take care of everyone's needs by collecting the total social product and then making available whatever people needed - cheap food, jobs, medical care, affordable housing, education, and so on. (1996: 24-5)

And ‘everyone’s needs’ were conceptualised in a limited way; the system ‘rested not on devising infinite kinds of things to sell people but on claiming to satisfy people's *basic needs*’ (*ibid.*: 28, original emphasis).

Social mixture (and homogenisation) was an explicit policy of the regime, one that was successful, as participants observe. More specifically, people were encouraged or forced to move from rural to urban areas. Furthermore, the new type of state-sponsored dwellings involved a mixture of social classes, as noted in Chapter 6; people from different backgrounds lived alongside one another in blocks of flats, resulting in what Octavian calls ‘a social cocktail’. The accounts of

participants focus on the effects this process had on those who were unrooted, either negative, in that it changed their way of thinking, or positive, because they were offered better living conditions. Accounts also deal with the social structure of cities that was altered in a negative way and with the fate of the people whose houses were nationalised. On a social level, social mixture can still be identified in the practices that have been imported from the rural environment to the urban environment - such as gathering in front of blocks of flats and gossiping, as Octavian observes:

There are various rural elements [...] which they keep and they bring to the city, they change... [...] At some point there were a lot of [...] benches, little benches in front of blocks of flats [...] which were brought to life [LAUGHS] a lot of times and... little socials, [...] traditionally-rural rather than [...] [characteristic to the] urban environment (Octavian)

This process of urbanization is also responsible for the disregard people have for the city in which they live, since the city does not belong to them as such (Laurențiu), as communal areas do not belong to inhabitants of blocks of flats (see: Chapter 6). ‘The avalanche of people’, as Olivia calls the urbanization phenomenon, meant it was difficult for them to integrate and a sense of community could not be built in their new living spaces. This situation, it is suggested, has affected the social structure of postsocialist society in which young people grew up.

Young people also identify social divisions in contemporary society as stemming from the communist era. Besides the distinction between nostalgics or anticommunists, based on the stance people have on the past, there are other distinctions that are based on possessions and on labels, that all originate in the pre-1989 era, when similar distinctions were at the core of the ideology (the proletariat vs. the bourgeoisie; hooligans vs. workers¹¹⁴ etc.).

In terms of the way postsocialist Romanian society is organised, participants associate its flawed systems with the communist era. Antoanela, for instance, notes how unpredictability governs the way society functions (see: Giordano and Kostova, 2002, discussed later in this chapter), whilst several other participants mention a kind of bureaucracy in which public servants are dehumanised as originating in the communist era, a societal trait still identifiable in public institutions and especially in post offices and in public health clinics: ‘and we have still kept this legacy, that public servants still are really... sharp and really... and doctors and a lot of times teachers...’ (Nadia).

The educational system represents another legacy of the communist era, participants note. A system that focuses on learning by heart rather than providing students of all ages the instruments for critical thinking or for putting knowledge into practice. Ultimately, the educational sector has been neglected after 1989, and

¹¹⁴ In his televised address to the nation, in the aftermath of the violent events in Timișoara in December 1989 which triggered the Revolution, Nicolae Ceaușescu called protesters ‘hooligan elements’ (trans. ‘elemente huliganice’). Similarly, Ion Iliescu, the first postsocialist president of Romania, called protesters occupying the University Place in Bucharest in the first part of 1990s ‘ruffians’ (trans. ‘golani’). Protesters were demonstrating against neocommunism which they saw embodied by Ion Iliescu. One of the motivational songs of the movement was called ‘The Anthem of the Ruffians’, its chorus being ‘Better loafer,/ than traitor,/ Better hooligan,/ Than dictator,/ Better ruffian,/ Than activist,/ Better dead,/ Than communist’ (lyrics Cristina Pațurcă).

any positive parts originating in the communist era were side-lined due to their ideological charge. Călin, for instance mentions the youth organisations that were in place during the communist era that had positive effects on the education of young people¹¹⁵. For some participants, such as Raluca, the educational system was altogether better during the communist era than the postsocialist one. Hence, all participants who discuss postsocialist teaching and learning philosophies concur that it is not the most effective, yet they differ in terms of the origin of their negative traits. Some contrast them with the idealised educational system from the communist era, whilst others condemn the pre-1989 period as being the source of all problems.

Young people also seem to identify a strong link between the communist era and the much criticized postsocialist political system. First and foremost, the main postsocialist political actors, like successful businesspeople of the capitalist era, came from the elites of the communist regime, as also argued by Paulesc (2014):

the people who held offices and who still hold offices nowadays... [...] they tell themselves that they have changed [...] A person who has suffered, [...] that person [public servant] made them suffer, you can't lie [to victims] now in the face and tell them 'you know, actually I didn't mean it'. You can't (Paula)

¹¹⁵ For a similar argument, see: Omel'chenko and Pilkington, 2006

The political class has been ‘infested’, as Laurențiu puts it, by former party members and Securitate officers who managed to hold power by casting all the blame for the maintenance of a harsh regime on the Ceaușescu couple and only a few others, as Liviu argues¹¹⁶. Some participants find that the legacy of the communist era is so much alive in the political system that all present day politicians, regardless of their age, are ‘communists’ and thus form the ‘sewer’ that is the current political class:

The political class... The political class is purely communist. [...] After 1990, all parties from Romania come from PDSR¹¹⁷ and... and from the National Salvation Front¹¹⁸, so basically [...] you’ve got the same meat, different gravy, that it’s more liberal, that it’s redder, that’s a different story. But the essence is still there (Florin)

Young people that entered politics learned the ‘communist’ practices from those formed during the communist era and thus they became a hybrid type of politician,

¹¹⁶ For a similar argument, see: Liiceanu, 2014

¹¹⁷ Partidul Democrației Sociale din România (trans. The Party of the Social Democracy from Romania, abbrev. PSDR), the name under which the main socialist party from Romania was known between 1993 and 2001

¹¹⁸ After the 1989 Revolution, besides the re-establishment of historical parties that had been abolished in 1947, The National Liberal Party and The Peasants’ Party, another party was established, The National Salvation Front, whose president was the de facto leader of the Revolution, former activist Ion Iliescu. In 1992, a faction supporting president Iliescu (elected in 1990, in 1992 for a four-year term, and then again for another term in 2000), split from the main party and it created the The Democratic Front of the National Salvation, which was later renamed PSDR (see previous footnote) and The Social Democratic Party, SDP, in 2001. It is still the main socialist party in Romania.

as Laurențiu argues, who hinders any kind of progress. Furthermore, these new politicians were able to get into politics through the practice of nepotism that is associated with the communist era. Meritocracy is still a utopia in a society in which the lack of clear criteria of selection and promotion is precisely what keeps the flawed system in place.

Change is unlikely to happen soon, as long as there are not enough role models in postsocialist Romanian society. Some participants identify this issue as the most problematic legacy of the communist era, one that affects all generations, as Marcela argues: ‘The fact that... any intellectual benchmarks were eliminated, this has been the biggest problem’. The politics of epuration targeting the elites of the pre-1947 era or any intellectuals who did not share the values that were promoted by the communist regime represents the cause for the lack of role models in postsocialism. These politics entailed two components: one that was imposed on the Romanian people by the regime through the use of political prisons and the terror of the Securitate, and another one that was put into practice by individuals themselves by fleeing the country - what might be called self-exile. Hence, this process involved the concurrence of both potential role models and the exponents of the communist regime.

Even without role models, society has been changing over the past 25 years, generally for the better, participants note. Young people observe that society 'has calmed itself a bit' (Iustin) after the chaotic transitional period of the 1990s:

everything that happened it's a so and so normal state of transition, you know?, for people to see freedom. When you free an animal... that has

been held in captivity, it's normal that it... runs and does everything...
until it calms down (Horia)

Even if 'we've enormously progressed' (Cecilia), the values of the postsocialist Romanian society could not entirely be adapted to the European values, as it was intended: 'A lot of people try to... to orient themselves towards European values, but... with a foot stuck in their communist past, you know? Still with certain communist vices' (Dinu).

Even if young people concur that Romanian society has progressed, the legacy of the communist era is still identified in a whole range of practices and behaviours that young people observe in contemporary society.

8.5. Bodily practices as traces of the past

The discussion now shifts from macro-level considerations about postsocialist Romanian society to ways in which people embody memories of the communist era. As argued in Section 8.2, I take the manifestation of practices and behaviours that participants ascribe to the communist era as ways of performing embodied memories, both on a mental and physical level.

To begin with, one of the characteristics of postsocialist Romanian society is that some people still act according to the social order or hierarchy that was characteristic of the communist era. As Stela notes, 'this regime has somehow managed to impregnate really well... the behaviours of people and their way of thinking, of reacting'. There are people who seem to still hold a different set of

values than the ones that are cherished in a democratic regime, based on rights and freedoms. During the communist era, Cecilia notes, people had different sets of values: ‘what used to be moral to do, what used to be acceptable to do, what used to be decent to do, in comparison to what it is nowadays... decent, socially, morally acceptable to do’. Once again, one can identify a tension between the current Romanian society and the remote postsocialist society; social values and norms differ in the two periods, yet the practices and behaviours of some have remained similar.

Sometimes, these values associated with the communist era are viewed as illustrating a too conservative approach, at other times as being preferable to the ones that are currently shared. Among these values also lies the social expectation of getting married, having a secure job and owning a property, as Camelia and Laurențiu note. Flexibility is not a characteristic that people socialised during the communist era would manifest; having options is less important than being secure in the only option one has.

Flexibility and unpredictability are elements that came part and parcel with the democratic, capitalist regime, and it is these traits of postsocialist society that people felt uncomfortable with, young people suggest. Wishing to be in control thus represents a coping mechanism; and it manifests in a variety of ways, such as through the desire of parents to protect their children by imposing rules that young people find exaggerated, as is the case for Irina who reacts by reminding her parents that their approach of limiting her rights to free action is similar to the way the communist regime, that they disliked, acted upon the Romanian people.

A typical 'communist' behaviour is characterised by rigidity, by discouraging any type of critical thinking that would pave the way for putting forward alternative views and thus challenging the status quo. It is the result of communist policies, and especially of etatization, the control exercised over people's time, and consequently, over their lives (Verdery, 1996). People that are being strict are considered by some participants to manifest a behaviour stemming from the communist era. Teachers that adopt a particular teaching approach are by far the most common example of such rigid behaviour: they read out lecture notes rather than offer well-reasoned explanations, they do not offer students the opportunity to express their views, expecting them to learn lessons by heart and they have a clear view on the hierarchal relationship between student and teacher. Justin recounts situations in which his friends have labelled teachers 'communists':

harshness has been interpreted as communism: 'Look at that one how har- [CLEARS HIS VOICE IN A THEATRICAL MANNER] how communist he is!' I've had teachers like that. 'Man, my folks are seriously communists.' 'Why?' 'Cause they don't let me go out at 9pm.' 'Ha, ha, ha' I used to have these kind of classmates (Justin)

Families are indeed the other social group that participants identify as engaging in practices that were acquired during the communist era. Being authoritative and imposing limits on what young people can do, limits that participants find absurd, are manifestations of a strict behaviour formed during the communist era. A democratic regime fosters debates based on critical thinking and argumentation

that would eventually lead to the negotiation and acceptance of a solution. The communist regime, though, seems to have promoted a set of rules that cannot be challenged, regardless of their merits.

Leaving rules unquestioned stems from the passivity of people during the communist era. Another trait of postsocialist Romania that young people associate with the past is people's passivity – on social, economic, and political levels. For instance, people act as if they are still entitled to the benefits they had during the communist era believing the state should take action rather than the individual:

Look, people on the street consider that the city council should come and take the snow from the front of their door. I mean this is how they have been used to: to be given a job after finishing university, to get a flat if they work, to have their flats cleaned... (Luca)

This illustrates one of the ten 'mental stereotypes' identified by Mihăilescu in postsocialist Romania, namely '*[t]he paternalism of the state*' (1993: 321, original emphasis). Even young people, participants note, expect to be offered a stable job by the state after graduation. Participants show time and again how well they have appropriated the neoliberal principle of ensuring one's success by fighting for oneself.

And I said [to a workmate] 'Pardon?' [OUTRAGED] 'That is, you come and tell me that you want your parents to find you a job? This is why we're not progressing at all. Because you are waiting on others. This is the problem. You are waiting for others to come and give you

something. No, Sir, do it for yourself, try to struggle, it's going to be hard one year, two, five, ten, but ultimately you will come through' (Eliza)

Yet, people that were socialised during the communist era or were born after 1989 manifest a passive attitude towards social concerns (see: Paulesc, 2014). Soler-i-Martí and Ferrer-Fons (2015: 93) find 'low levels of participation regardless of the type of participation' across the new democracies of Eastern Europe. For some, this lack of civic engagement is the result of years in which the regime has constantly inhibited the agency of people, as Letiția argues¹¹⁹. Others argue that 'political engagement' encompasses diverse manifestations beyond involvement in conventional political acts (Spannring *et al.*, 2008) or that the different constitution of the public and private, the state and 'civil society' under socialist regimes, means that youth activism takes different forms in different spaces than in the 'old' democracies of Europe (Omel'chenko and Pilkington, 2006).

The postsocialist political culture could also be characterised by passivity, which originates in the communist era. The causes for the current voting patterns, including absenteeism, are to be found in the pre-1989 period, the argument goes (see: Mihăilescu, 1993); people do not vote, participants argue, because of their mistrust in the political class that originates in those times¹²⁰, and also because of people's disillusionment regarding the possibility of change: 'the lack of your participation consciousness in the act of running the state or of... of the normal

¹¹⁹ See: Mihăilescu, 1993

¹²⁰ See: Rose, 2012

functioning of a... democracy. After [...] surely the disappointment that has accumulated more and more...' (Laurențiu). People are passive mainly on a political level, be it activism or taking part in the political system¹²¹. Furthermore, participants note, some people do not think for themselves and thus are easily controlled. Part of society, Eliza argues, has been 'a bit idiotized, held on a leash' during the communist era and this has conditioned people to expect to be led after 1989 as well. Even if they do think for themselves, as Camelia notes, people might verbally express their dissatisfaction, yet they do not take any follow-up action either because of their disenchantment with the current regime, because of indolence or because of lack of interest in the actual development of the society which they live in¹²². In the end, people still comply with the status quo.

People's passivity is manifested in their work ethic as well. Participants, such as Antoanela, Margareta and Iustin, observe how attitudes towards work are dominated by laziness and weariness; people have a lack of interest in what they are doing, and this allegedly comes from the work ethic of the communist era, when people used to pretend that they were working. As the saying goes: 'You pretend that you are paying us, we pretend that we are working' (Boia, 2012: 70):

I think that the way in general in which they relate to life, to the way they work [...] a certain lack of interest in... doing their job, [...] seeing that there was no... property to a great extent and that... [...]

¹²¹ Thus, it seems that the view of participants regarding lack of civic engagement is empirically grounded rather than based on postsocialist discourses about the role young people (do not) play.

¹²² See: Mihăilescu, 1993

everything was like, in a certain kind of relativity, in a certain kind of nebula... (Antoanela)

The communist regime has left deeper traces in the soul of Romanian people, on a psychological level, as also argued by Mihăilescu (1993). Fear and mistrust seem to be the most pervasive ones – and the ones that originate most evidently during the communist era. Giordano and Kostova dwell on what they identify as ‘a lack of confidence in the state and limited trust towards its institutions’ (2002: 75), a situation they blame both the current postsocialist and the socialist regimes for. In their view,

The *social production of mistrust* [...] is a system of representations and rational strategies that actors follow when a state repeatedly fails to perform its fundamental duties, particularly the responsibility of creating the conditions to guarantee a ‘pacified space’, in which they can trust each other through the ‘rule of law’ (2002: 75, original emphasis)

The fear and mistrust that participants identify in people who have lived during the communist era probably stem from the work of the Romanian secret police, the Securitate. Verdery notes how ‘[t]he work of producing files (and thereby political subjects)’ by ‘networks of informers and collaborators’ ultimately ‘created an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion dividing people from one another’ (1996: 24).

Hence, ‘this shadowy system of production’ (*ibid.*) left an enduring mark on the Romanian people.

Participants mention the fear of talking about the communist era, a fear that manifests in people who lived during those times, as well as in those who only rely on second-hand memories, as illustrated by the attitude of Liviu towards being open during the interview:

This is why I’m saying, I mean for us it’s a taboo topic and for a lot of years you’re not going to find people willing to openly talk [...] I admit, at this point for me it’s a bit strange to talk and so because... like... I have a family, I have everything, but... [...] You know what the problem is? The more you know, the more you become dangerous for some circles. And... for them a lot of times, I know it sounds kind of paranoid, but it’s easier to eliminate you than to take you on their side. So many times, you know how the saying goes. *I like to be plain stupid*¹²³. You know? I pretend I’m stupid... (Liviu)

However, fear is not limited to topics that revolve around the communist era. Participants note that people can be fearful in general, as a consequence of what they went through during the communist regime. This manifests itself through avoidance of discussions about politics, even in their homes, an environment that is assumed to generally be risk free, and through seclusion, or a general reserve.

¹²³ Quote in italics originally in English

Coupled with fear comes mistrust. People might generally manifest a suspicious attitude towards others, whose intentions are always called into question. Recording people for research purposes becomes a challenge, no matter what the main topic of discussion is:

That reflex ‘man, it has me on... on the tape there, you know?’... I don’t think that this is... this is a normal reflex in a society in which you are free. And so what if he has a recording of you? You can say whatever you want, I mean it’s a view, isn’t it? No one can beat you up for a view (Luca)

a general mistrust in the people next to you, in those you meet... a bitterness that... that [LAUGHS] nothing is going to be right [...] It seems to me that a lot of people... don’t have anymore the hope that they could change something and could achieve something (Antoanela)

Negativity, pessimism, and disillusionment are other characteristics of postsocialist Romanian society that seem to originate in the communist era, according to participants. Romanian people do not generally smile, and rather manifest a sombre attitude – especially shop assistants and public servants, as Florentina suggests. Similarly, Luca observes that Romanian people ‘don’t smile... This is a thing... You go on the metro or on the bus, silence. [...] They are like sad, mummified, I don’t know... they don’t smile, so... It’s very, very... it strikes you’. Whilst Luca points out a characteristic of Romanian people, Laurențiu identifies a

common trait of Eastern European society: pessimism manifested in people's facial expressions. This might come together with a more profound understanding of the meaning of life that living under the communist regime, during harsh times, brought with it, as Nadia remarks:

It [not smiling] might be something good, because... I think we usually have a very broad view, the Romanians, on... life and on... [...] the world and, like, think about it, like when you see more things, it doesn't feel like smiling all the time [LAUGHS] (Nadia)

Here, Nadia stresses the emotional impact of having second-hand memories of the past. We have seen in Chapter 5 how relatives or 'significant others' aim to socialise new generations into mnemonic communities precisely with this aim; to make them appreciate their current state. Having the negative example of the communist society to contrast with the present could also lead young people, Nadia notes, to a more negative view of life - because it shows the potential for the existence of oppressive social and political systems.

Together with negativity, pessimism and disillusionment, the trajectory of Romanian society after 1989 also fosters feelings of frustration. Thus, traces are identifiable, Leonard suggests,

[...] only in the case of the poor people. In the case of the people who have frustrations, sorrows, these can be seen at every step [...] Because people can't afford anymore to get over it. [...] you see [...] even just

from the way they walk, from the look on their faces, that they are gloomy, they are frustrated and they are with their mind somewhere else. I look at my parents and they're the same as are many people that live with their mind in that period... (Leonard)

The lack of choices people had even after the fall of the communist regime has also given rise to a particular type of 'exacerbated individualism' (Simona) – what Mihăilescu identifies as 'an atomization of the people into families or other microgroups' (1993: 322), but which participants suggest that goes even further, at individual level. This ties in with the aforementioned passivity. From the interviews it emerges that Romanian people manifest indifference about anything else other than their close circle of relatives, friends and acquaintances; for this reason, they cannot work towards a common goal and, hence, society is not evolving. In their discussion about the socialist built environment, Ghenciulescu *et al.* identify people's '[e]xtreme individualism and the refusal of any collective responsibility' (2009: 34). People do not even consider engaging in voluntary work, maybe because it reminds them of a time when 'patriotic work' was compulsory, Filip argues (see: Omel'chenko and Pilkington, 2006). They prefer to live in their limited microcosm because nowadays they do not have any interest in receiving products or services from relatives or acquaintances (see Ledeneva's (1998) discussion of *blat*). Interestingly, contrary to Verdery's (1996) view that socialist regimes led to the decrease of sociability, participants argue that shortages determined an increase in social interaction¹²⁴ to a level at which after 1989 it was

¹²⁴ See: Drakulić, 1993

not necessary anymore (see: Grossman, 2010b). Postsocialist individualism is, thus, viewed in a negative light:

it's this individualism, [...] negative, bitter, like, every man for himself, it's a law of the jungle and everyone tries to surface on their own... [...] many times this thing is done with enthusiasm: 'if I go down, I'll take you with me', to... to put obstacles in the way of others
(Filip)

During the communist era, people had to fight for their own wellbeing – or, rather, for their survival. Some participants would argue that this is the reason 'they didn't care what [else] was happening' (Gençiana). In Gençiana's dystopian view, the fight for survival did not involve social relations based on corruption or bartering; it was purely individualistic and it brought out the worst in people. During the communist era, people 'in a way were bad', Olivia argues, a consequence of 'a kind of dehumanisation [that] has taken place in that period'.

The individualism that participants talk about is also present on the level of consumption. It differs, though, from the capitalist types of individualism in that even if it still is based on consumption, it seems to focus more on being greedy as a way of compensating for the period when they had experienced shortages rather than on consuming products for their functional, aesthetic, social capital etc.¹²⁵. Saving money, bargain shopping, and wishing to get anything for free are manifestations of a particular type of ethic of relating to products and services that

¹²⁵ See Drakulić for a similar argument regarding 'the ruthless accumulation of capital' (1996: 4)

comes from the communist era, participants suggests. The same ethic manifests itself in the practice of saving and recycling objects that people still engage in: ‘everything is kept, everything is re-used’ (Sorina), a practice Chelcea and Lățea (2004) Drakulić (1993) and Mihalache (2014) discuss with reference to the communist era. People engage in these practices, like in an ‘ecology of poverty’ (Drakulić, 1993: 182), even if they are not facing severe shortages anymore; one should keep anything one can because you never know when you might need it:

I think that they’ve got used [...] to always putting aside, always gathering... [...] Especially in the present... I find it absurd, because they [her parents] do not have any children to take care of [...] and despite all this [...] not only that they don’t accept anything, but from what they have, they keep saving all the time. I know that my mum is saving... I think [LAUGHS] she has gathered a treasure... I don’t know, maybe they think that it’s going to come back (Marcela)

The practice of saving objects indicates a life governed by fear, maybe an underlying fear that goes unacknowledged. In a way, the people participants talk about - exclusively people that lived during the communist era - cannot change their frame of mind in order to adapt to a period in which the rhythm of production does not create the risk of having to deal with serious shortages.

Some people have not managed to adapt to the postsocialist society, and thus they seem to be stuck in the past, manifesting a particular type of conservative behaviour that borders on the absurd. Generally, young people would link certain

types of behaviour to the communist era; for instance, they would refer to people who perceive their stance as the only viable one and ignore alternatives as being influenced by the past, or to people who oppose change, preferring the way things used to be or what they consider 'normal', or people who are critical, sometimes out of the blue, of the lifestyle choices of postsocialist youth – appearance, hobbies, manners etc. It seems that for some participants, whoever is not open minded and willing to accept the choices of the postsocialist generations, is labelled as 'communist': '[such a person] doesn't think ahead, it isn't... [...] integrated into our times. It's overcome by the situation, to put it like that. [...] It belongs to a, to another period, not the current period. Out of date' (Eliza). Gabriel concludes that this very (stubborn) conservative attitude towards present-day circumstances that some people display could well be narrow mindedness. Liiceanu goes even further, maintaining that 'communists are ill-mannered, insolent and violent' (2014: 88).

Interestingly, corruption is also generally seen as a remnant of the recent past that was first practiced through the exchange of products for other products or services¹²⁶. Ledeneva (1998), for instance, discusses how such forms of non-monetary exchange, *blat*, developed during the Soviet era and still influence contemporary Russian society. Corruption, as monetary exchanges and informal networks, opens the way for unorthodox solutions to problems, which is not something a conservative person, as described above, would wish for. Corruption affects all social areas, from politics to the educational or health systems. In all

¹²⁶ See: Paulesc, 2014; Rose, 2012

these social milieux, bribing has become an accepted practice, regardless of the financial situation of those who bribe:

It's that way of thinking that [when] I have to go to the hospital, to have some tests, the doctor comes and in order, I think, for her to do her job well, so that I won't die there, I give her, I give her, 'take 50 lei¹²⁷ from here or take I don't know what' or... [...] a pack of coffee [...]. You see the poor old people, [...], they say 'let's give them, 'cause if...'. This is how they remained, 'man, we gave them back then...'. (Pavel)

Bribing offers a way of obtaining the services or products you desire and might even deserve, which you would have otherwise not obtained at all or only after a long waiting period.

In the moment in which, like, a democratic system, liberal, like ours, doesn't, isn't helping you like... it was claiming, to, to reach some aims or to obtain some rights and liberties, then you try to get them yourself and... this is being done through the well learnt system from communism of networking and... bribes and, I don't know, gifts [...] (Filip)

¹²⁷ The equivalent of less than £10

Notwithstanding its form, corruption represents a way of eluding rules. Participants also mention the capacity of people to identify creative ways out, even by bending rules in their own interests, as originating in the communist era (a trait also identified by Patapievici (2014)). Having no other options, people were forced to use their imagination, which is a positive aspect of the pre-1989 period, as Margareta notes, even if at its origin lies the lack of products. Bren and Neuburger argue that ‘women and men displayed impressive creativity to make ends meet and even go beyond the basics, as many managed to do’ (2012: 13).

The freedom that was gained after the December Revolution of 1989 only created the conditions for this practice of evading rules to become more rooted in Romanian society:

they use freedom, this ace of freedom only for... personal, like, gains or for... [...] It's more the freedom to be on the edge of the law or... the freedom to exploit others... or to use the other in order for it to be alright for you (Filip)

Freedom was thus interpreted as the right to do whatever people want, as Patapievici also argues: with the fall of communist regimes, ‘ruined and deformed societies came to light, for which freedom did not have any political or social meaning, but only an individual-anarchic one’ (2014: 149).

The question that arises is whether participants refer to all three generations¹²⁸: grandparents, parents and children, i.e. those people born prior to 1947, the people who were born during the communist era, and those that were born shortly before or after the demise of the communist regime.

8.6. Is everyone ‘postsocialist’?

Generally speaking, participants refer to the generations of their grandparents and of their parents when they talk about the remnants of the past that are to be found in people’s behaviours and practices. There are, however, distinctions to be made between the three generations. To take the observation made by Letiția,

[...] ultimately, if we sit and think, it’s enough that the generation of our grandparents has suffered as a consequence of communism. [...] The generation of our parents has suffered or has been nostalgic or has been shocked by capitalism or who knows what. At least we should have new foundations (Letiția)

Young people thus represent the only hope for Romanian society, because they have no direct roots in a past that, according to Letiția, was marked by suffering.

For parents, Cecilia argues, it was easier to make the shift from the communist regime to the postsocialist one, as compared to the generation of

¹²⁸ See Section 2.5 for Mannheim’s (1952) and Shortt’s (2012) discussions of the concept of ‘generation’ and also for more about the implications of generational changes

grandparents, because they have lived less during the communist era. One may just as well argue that it was easier to adapt for those from the generation of grandparents, because they had had the chance to live during two regimes, not only in a communist society, and thus run less risk of taking things for granted.

The generation of young people seems to have been impacted in various ways by the communist era and its legacy. By contrast to the generations of their parents and grandparents, young people, who have had greater access to other societies and to information, express a desire to improve their condition; knowing what else is out there in the world makes them unsatisfied with the state of things in Romanian society. For instance, Tatiana argues that the desire to emigrate has its roots in the communist era, through its legacy, as it has been discussed so far in this chapter.

Living in a postsocialist society, Violeta argues, young people get to know more about the communist era than they would have if their society had not been under a communist regime. This knowledge, Iustin notes, would prevent young people from 'swallowing the bait of the past'. It also makes them aware of the advantages they have in the society they live in, Cecilia notes.

When it comes to the ways in which young people might have been influenced by the legacy of the communist era, participants mention the process of socialisation that was facilitated by people that have been directly influenced themselves, who, wittingly or not, transmitted to young people a set of values that were at least partly shaped during the communist era. Ultimately, Sorina argues, we are 'the product of our parents'. Discussing the potential effects of the communist era on young people, Filip notes:

there are traumas probably transmitted, differently, transmitted through, through memory as well, and through the behaviours that have survived. I mean, in the end we have... we have been witnesses to the behaviour of our parents after 1989 as well [...] (Filip)

Both Călin and Felix challenge the view that young people have been influenced by the communist era. Călin argues that they were affected by the transition, the reason for which no such effects can be identified in those who were born 10 years after the revolution. Yet, without a communist era there would have been no transition to capitalism and democracy. Hence, some might argue, the effects transition had on young people could be considered secondary effects of the communist era. In any case, participants generally identify social influences on contemporary personal, family, local, national or Eastern European identities. In the next section, discussion will centre on how the past influences all the aforementioned identities, but most of all the personal identities of young people who have not experienced life during the communist era.

8.7. Memories of the communist era and identity

The relationship between memory and identity is vital to understanding the role played by memory¹²⁹. As memory represents an important element of the process of socialisation into a particular community¹³⁰, then it would follow that memories

¹²⁹ As discussed in Chapter 2. See: Assmann J.; 2010, Boyarin, 1994; Fentress and Wickham, 1992; Halbwachs, 1992; Linde, 2000; Olick and Robbins, 1998

¹³⁰ See Connerton, 1989; Zerubavel, 1996, both referred to in Chapters 2 and 5

of the communist era do play a part in young people's sense of identity. Engaging in a reflexive exercise, young people distinguish multiple ways in which the past contributes to the way they define themselves and the social groups they are part of, be they families, local communities, nations or at multinational level.

8.7.1. Personal identity

For young people, second-hand memories are more than stories about a remote time, about experiences others had. Through the multiple ways in which the past is still felt in the present, young people's lives are shaped according to trajectories that partly originate from the communist era. The young people that took part in the research mention how they have been influenced involuntarily by the past through their social milieu; the past has influenced the people and the environment that they interacted with, and so it had effects on them as well. As Luca puts it,

I feel that it's part of my education, involuntarily. Because my parents, I mean, [...] the environment in which I grew up in, the school even my classmates because in the end they had parents who... [...] lived during those times and... they have some habits, I mean... (Luca)

Growing up in a society that was decisively formed during the communist era, it becomes difficult to separate yourself from any influences, from early childhood, and become immune to anything that is not purely capitalist or democratic, if there is such a thing.

Young people, thus, could not avoid the influences of the past that had an effect on themselves. Despite the fact that one of the general characteristics of second-hand memories, as identified in Chapter 5, is the inability of young people to fully empathize with those who have lived during the communist era due to their lack of first-hand experience they could rely on, some participants defied this logic. Memories were appropriated and the lives of their parents, grandparents and ‘significant others’ became part of their own life story. They empathise to such an extent with these people that in the end they take ownership of experiences they have never directly experienced. Linde calls this process ‘narrative induction [,] [...] by which people come to take on an existing set of stories as *their own* story’ (2000: 608, original emphasis), whilst Knowles pins it on ‘transference, in which the individual subject remembers events that s/he did not, in fact, experience, practices that s/he did not perform’ (2009: 17). Nadia, for instance, notes how she has ‘taken over their lives’ and how the story of her family ‘is almost a [...], a part of my life’. She even gets to the point where she questions whether these family stories could even be considered memories; they become more than that: experiences she once seems to have had. For her, ‘it’s as if I experienced them, in the sense that I was raised with those things, but I can’t remember them’. In this instance, it would be a challenge for anyone to argue that the second-hand memories Nadia had access to through her family do not form part of her identity. Similarly, Luca feels as if *his* life was lived by someone else:

And I was thinking: man, look at that, I am 22 now, but... I don’t know, I feel old, as if I have 20 years that were lived by others and they

keep telling me about them, it's as if I was drunk, I didn't remember anything about that period and everyone is saying 'yes, yes, do you know what you have done back then?' It's really odd because I feel it influences me, I mean I live in that world and... at every step, I mean... you see buildings, you see people who literally [...] are... super nostalgic about Ceaușescu (Luca)

Luca feels as though the communist era is part of his life story, even though he does not remember anything from it – and he does not actually play a role in the narratives he keeps hearing in his family. But because they have such a privileged place in the construction of his familial identity, he adopts the stories as well and thus acquires what he brilliantly labels as 'experiences from hearsay'. Margareta nearly has the same experience. Having been surrounded by the narratives of her elder brothers and of her parents about their lives during the communist era, she places herself in their story: 'Mmm... I don't know, in a way I feel as if I, too, lived during those times [LAUGHS]' (Margareta). Other young people, such as Sebastian and Florin, confess that they are experiencing those times through the stories of their parents. Filip even notes how he remembers events that took place before his birth: 'But anyway it stuck in my memory, I have... images... [...] from even before I was born, with... I imagine my mother in kindergarten, with the children [...]'. Mnemonic imagination plays a role in this process, as discussed in Chapter 5 with reference to the work of Keightley and Pickering (2012). Similarly, Simona suggests that she might not rely solely on memories that are acquired: 'It seems to me that I've planted myself memories, you know?'. As we have seen, the

origin of memories might become unclear to participants, since they do not simply take over memories, but they interpret, rework and adapt them so that they could form their own narrative of the past. Even so, some young people seem to appropriate the experiences and perspectives of their parents or grandparents. Sorina, for instance, keeps referring to what happened to ‘us’, what ‘we’ lived like during the communist era. A similar phenomenon occurs in several cases, when the young people I talked to use the first person singular form of the verb ‘to remember’ when they recount stories of the past:

I don’t remember much, especially since I was born after 1990...

(Pavel)

I remember, I mean, my parents were telling me (Rareş)

Sometimes, they correct themselves and say that they know about an aspect of the past, rather than remember it, as the quote from Rareş illustrates. However, the tendency was to refer to their knowledge about the past as being part of their own memories. Even if not based on first-hand experience, the recent past forms part of young people’s memories.

Second-hand memories are thus more than stories. They are appropriated, reworked, and become the personal memories of young people. Those who have access to these types of accounts that are emotionally imbued and that they eventually appropriate have the chance of getting to a higher level of understanding of a remote past. Because they are experiencing it through the

mediation of memories. Gențiana points out how people from other societies that did not go through postsocialism cannot have access to these ‘indirect experiences’ from those times. It implies, then, that access to this superior level of experience is reserved for those that are reached by emotionally imbued personal stories, probably featuring people they can relate to. Communism, thus, still forms part of the lives of some young people, ‘at least at an emotional level, if not at a practical level’, as Antoanela argues.

Second-hand memories help young people understand themselves better, in the context of postsocialism. One needs to know the context of his or her existence in order to understand their place in the world, as both Nadia and Luca argue:

you can’t even get to know yourself or what’s surrounding you if you don’t know where you come from and [...] how you got here (Nadia)

I started all this thing more to get to know myself... [...] in the end, it’s a feeling of insecurity because I don’t know who I am, you know? I think-... ‘What was, man, there, that...’ you know?, it’s like... you get out of a cave and you look, you start to look through the darkness at what can be seen inside and how... [...] it’s a pressing necessity... [...]

Where do I come from, man? What, what’s the deal? (Luca)

The past seems to hold the answer to the meaning of life, or at least to the meaning of postsocialist life.

At a more straightforward level, the communist era could be said to have direct effects on young people. For instance, Horia notes how he was born at the December Revolution; his very first moments in the world are associated with the social and political event that was shaping the society which he was going to grow up in. For Lucian, the story is similar, as he has always been told that he is ‘a child of the Revolution’. On an embodied level, Horia explains how the problems he is having with his teeth are due to the shock his mother went through during the Revolution, when she had been an inch away from death. Drawing on her expertise as a dentist, she tells her son that his problems are due to the fact that her shock coincided with the period when the foetus was developing teeth. Memory is thus embodied, in the sense in which Diasio (2013) argues it can be. At a different level, the built environment young people live in also makes them wonder whether they are partly experiencing life in the communist era: ‘Now I don’t know... Am I living myself in a part of communism? I have no idea’ (Justin).

Some participants not only wonder whether they are unwillingly part of ‘the communist story’. They consider themselves communists, and some are even actively involved in the reconstruction of the communist party. An interesting case is that of Florin who noticed that his ideas match those put forward within communism, which made him note that ‘there seems to be a communist inside me’ – as if he was talking about some kind of alien form of living nesting inside himself, without his wish or consent.

Not all young people that were part of the research felt that they were influenced by the communist era. Some doubted whether they were or not, whilst others were certain that the past has not affected them. For Florentina, for instance,

‘the past doesn’t mean much’. Even if they are knowledgeable about the past, some participants note that it seems distant and so it does not have any influence on them:

no, I haven’t lived myself during the communist era in order to, to [be able to] say something about what I have lived and that belongs to me. [...] No, it doesn’t belong to me in its entirety. Because I’ve lived in a different world. The fact that they have told me about it it’s... it’s as if my grandma told me fairytales (Andrei)

Memories of the communist era can, thus, only be stories. Or young people might like to think that the past has not affected them in any way, yet upon a more introspective inquiry, they might realise, like other young people, that the social milieu that is imbued with traces of the recent past has actually influenced them. But, again, the communist era might have no effect on some young people. Liliana brilliantly identifies a register in which the discourse on the communist era lies for her:

Even now I have the feeling that... [...] the communist period in Romania is a mythical thing. Never experiencing it myself, it’s... it’s like a story. No... [...] it doesn’t ask an emotional involvement from me... [...] It’s as if it never actually existed... This is why I haven’t... I’m not touched, maybe [because] I haven’t sensed the anticommunist discourse (Liliana)

The extent to which young people have engaged in the process of mnemonic socialisation, and more specifically the extent to which they have been exposed to discourses on the communist era, ranging from anticommunist to nostalgic, seems to determine whether young people do have the feeling that the communist era and memories of it are part of their identity.

8.7.2. Family identity

Memories of experiences from the communist era also shape family identities. The most prominent example is that of families who had members persecuted by the communist regime, such as the family of Violeta or of Rareș. Both Lidia and Miruna have their grandfathers buried in the Cemetery of the Poor¹³¹, which has recently been transformed into a memorial to the victims of the communist regime, to the political prisoners that died in the Sighet prison and were allegedly buried there. The fate of some families has been shaped by the opportunities they had or were denied during the communist era; for instance, the parents of Brândușa met at the workplace where they were allocated, whilst the parents of Călin could live on their own because they were given a flat by the communist regime. Participants recount various stories which inevitably form part of the identity of their family, since their parents lived a significant part of their lives during the communist era.

¹³¹ The cemetery is located 2.5 km away from Sighet

8.7.3. Local identity

Less frequently participants mention how their local identity was shaped by the legacy of the communist era. George, for instance, notes that Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was born in his hometown, whilst Dinu and Pavel note how their hometown, Onești, was named ‘Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej’ during the communist era – and this name figures on their birth certificates that were issued after 1989. Other participants mention that their hometowns are known for their political prisons, for the anticommunist fighters that were active in the area, or for the outbreak of the revolution. But none of these young people ascribes great importance to these elements that shape the identity of their city or area. Even if the link with the past is the only information worth mentioning when talking about their city, as in the case of George.

8.7.4. National identity

When it comes to national identity, the communist era seems to have left traces on the Romanian people. Nadia argues that Romanian people have a more complex view of the world: communism ultimately made Romanian people what they are, and especially those who were born and who lived during the communist regime, as Eliza claims. And what they are has been discussed earlier in this chapter: ‘I think that we as a people are so used to... bribes and with... with demagogy, and with taking... from those weaker than us, that I don’t think we can get away from this’ (Sorina). Ultimately, the communist era represents a part of their past, of their

history, whether they like it or not. Some also argue that what they are known for abroad originates in the communist era, as already noted, whilst others argue that the communist era has been ‘a great tragedy of ours’ (Lidia) and that those years were ‘stolen’ from them: ‘I’m thinking about the fact that we are what we are precisely because of 50 years of, of communism’ (Eliza). Hence, the communist era is ‘theirs’; it is part of the Romanian history and its various effects on contemporary society have been discussed earlier on.

8.7.5. Eastern European identity

Although mentioned the least, there is a sense that there are some traits that unite Eastern European societies, traits that come from the similar experiences those societies had during the communist era¹³². If Laurențiu mentioned the pessimism that he identifies in Eastern Europeans, Gabriel notes how Eastern Europeans are ‘sneaky’, always managing to find a way out, knowing that rules can be broken:

Whilst us... we have experienced life differently [LAUGHS] [...] it's as if
when we asked for a right that even if it was ours, we were told ‘no’ [...]
And... you've learnt to manage in another way, to find other solutions [...]
We know that we can find a way to... cheat the system [LAUGHS] Even if
he says ‘no’... you know it is possible [WE LAUGH] (Gabriel)

¹³² Interestingly, if there are brief mentions of a common Eastern European identity, there is absolutely no discussion at all about ‘postsocialist’ identities

The observation of Gabriel about Eastern Europeans links with the characteristic other young people identify in contemporary society as originating in the communist era, namely finding a (creative) way out, eluding rules.

Ultimately, the influences of the communist regime that are identified in Romanian society could be identified in others as well, since almost half the world's population (Outhwaite and Ray, 2005) has been under communist regimes: 'It's something that has indeed influenced some... atmospheres, some movements, some people... many, I mean a country... or... a continent' (Lucian). And the ways in which young people think it has done that has been shown in this chapter. Traces of the past are well visible in postsocialist Romanian society. Young people draw on their knowledge about the past and on their direct experience of life in postsocialism in order to associate particular types of behaviour and practices with the communist era. They engage in the to and fro process of creating a stance on the communist era and on the present day society and a sense of identity. Past and present are interlinked. One cannot understand the present without grasping the past and no one can fully understand current social (and even personal) circumstances without looking into the past.

8.8. Conclusion

This chapter has shed light on the ways in which young people consider that remnants of the recent past, or 'residual communism' (Betea, 2005), are still traceable in postsocialist Romanian society, in the behaviour and practices of people, as well as in aspects relating to social organisation. These effects of the communist

era are almost exclusively negative; almost 45 years under a communist regime have led to all the drawbacks of present day society. Thus, despite intended resistance to public discourses, young people join in the condemnation of the communist era by ascribing to it most flaws of postsocialism: lack of political engagement, passivity, eluding rules, not being able to evolve as a society etc.

The effects discussed in this chapter, manifestations of ‘living memory’ (Mah, 2010), surface through acts of embodied remembrance that reveal glimpses of the internal *milieux de mémoire* ‘hosted’ by each and every body and that create social *milieux de mémoire* that young people inhabit. This brings us to the final, and essential point, of this thesis. The past is not another country. The past still has a strong effect on contemporary society, most of all in the creation of identities. Probably the most enduring, and fundamental, legacy of the communist era is the mark it has left on society. As long as second-hand memories contribute to the creation of identities of people who have not lived during the communist era, it is still relevant to refer to ‘postsocialism’ as an accurate label for the societies that have been undertaking the move away from socialism/communism for the past quarter of a century.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

On a theoretical level, this thesis starts from the premise that the past is not a fixed resource one can have access to by remembering. Rather, acts of recollection involve the constant construction of memories and, hence, of the past. Memory is, then, a flexible, ever-changing phenomenon that is shaped by present-day circumstances and that is created with the use of ‘mnemonic imagination’, which accounts for the construction of the past. A case in point is represented by second-hand memories; memories that are based on second-hand experience. These are put together by non-eyewitnesses, using a whole array of sources that convey diverse discourses – of which nostalgia and anticommunism are just the (ideal type) ends of a continuum. They are appropriated, interpreted, challenged and reworked using discourses, as ‘collective memories’ (Halbwachs, 1992), personal narratives, as ‘social memories’ (Fentress and Wickham, 1992) and cultural products, which Jan Assmann defines as ‘cultural memory’ (1995, 2010). Second-hand memories are thus based on a host of resources that have been dealt with by the main theoretical traditions of memory studies. Means of engaging with the past are not confined to the above. Apart from its narrative dimension and its objectification, memory also manifests itself through emplacement and embodiment. In this way, memories permeate the present and have the potential to be experienced by anyone regardless of whether they have lived during the times when the respective traces were produced or not. This point further emphasises the symbiotic relationship between the past and the present (and, implicitly, the future, as ‘a continuous present’). Due to its very relevance to present day societies, and

also to the emotional charge of memories, the recent past shapes identities, as this study has demonstrated. The recent past is thus of relevance to young people who, instead of being passive consumers (Kansteiner, 2002), actively engage with it just by attempting to make sense of the memories they are exposed to.

Following this theoretical framework, and being underpinned by a constructivist approach, the research for this thesis was designed starting from an understanding of knowledge as being the result of the work of both participants and researcher. This conceptualisation of the (co)production of knowledge allowed for an ethnographic approach to be taken. By ethnographic approach, I mean that although the main body of data used for analysis emanated from in-depth interviews, the research was also participant-tailored in that encounters with participants beyond interviews were guided by their interests and the mnemonic processes they considered important. The data produced were analysed using a multi-grounded theory approach (Goldkuhl and Cronholm, 2010).

Given the particular circumstances of the current research, namely my own socio-historical background and age, I argue that I had all the prerequisites to act as a participant myself. My reflections on the processes of engaging with the past, of memory transmission and production as they happened throughout my experience of being brought up in postsocialist Romanian society, informed the refinement of the research design. Furthermore, as an attempt to minimise power imbalances, inherent to any research, and to elicit interpretations, I encouraged participants to adopt a reflexive approach themselves. Ultimately, all research encounters, as all social relations, had to be tailored to the specific context of each.

Romanian memory culture is characterised by a polarized - and radicalized - discursive field, where nostalgia acts as the stigmatised approach confined to the private sphere and anticommunism as the state-sponsored approach, propagated in the public sphere through the media, museum displays, school curricula and through written texts. All these vehicles of memory have the potential to influence young people and the second-hand memories they create. The argument goes further, stating that both constructions of the past are only two ends of a continuum and the diversity of accounts of the past, as experienced by individuals, illustrates this point. Faced with the confusing situation of anticommunism being raised to the status of 'the only legitimate approach that would uncover 'the truth' about the recent past' and parallel manifestations of nostalgia towards the communist era, young people try to understand what lies behind the construction of memories. The explanations they offer regarding taking a nostalgic or anticommunist stance reflect a similar mechanism; both discourses are ultimately acceptable since they reflect experiences, but both can be exaggerated and demonstrate a lack of consideration for other aspects of communist society. In the end, probably because of the way the sample was constituted, nostalgia seems to be undesirable, since it excludes the experiences of victims, whereas anticommunism, although determined by the violent character of the regime, might take all experiences into account. What young people prefer, the data indicate, is an open approach that would take into account all perspectives, even if the result is the creation of second-hand memories that would tip the balance in favour of either nostalgia or anticommunism.

In the current discursive context of postsocialist Romania, young people who have no experiences during the communist era go through the process of mnemonic socialisation that goes on mainly – or firstly – in the family social setting. Intergenerational transmission of memories is argued to be crucial in this process (Zerubavel, 1996). However, the argument put forward is that such transmission, of both personal and collective memories, does have an influence on most young people, but whether it is a crucial one depends. Accounts of ‘eyewitnesses’ might act as counter-memories to the public discourse, or they can as well reinforce it.

Family settings seem to be the place where at least the first stages of mnemonic socialisation occur. Only in a few cases it is an objective of (grand)parents to make their offspring appreciate their current circumstances, or of young people themselves who take the lead by asking family members specific questions. Mainly, the process occurs over time and unnoticed; young people mention having overheard discussions that ended up referring to the recent past, and to social, political, cultural and economic circumstances. However, participants also stress that there is a distinction between memories of life that happened to take place during the communist era and memories of the communist era (i.e. referring to the socio-political context). In order to take these narratives into account, regardless of whether they originate from family members, peers or acquaintances, young people need to trust the people in question. As for the specificities of intergenerational transmission of memories, they note how memories transmitted in this way are trustworthy, potentially because of family loyalty ties. Comparing personal narratives to memories transmitted through other

media, young people stress the emotional impact of the former which comes together with an ease in empathising with those who lived during the communist era. Furthermore, memories transmitted intergenerationally bring an additional perspective to the picture.

Actively contributing to their mnemonic socialisation, young people adopt various strategies in order to make sense of the variety of (inherently partial) memories they are exposed to. Thus, they have to find ways of selecting, putting together, recalling and reinterpreting memories, which, once they become their own memories, become emotionally imbued. Participants discuss the drawbacks of relying only on second-hand memories and having no access to first-hand memories; the impossibility to fully experience life during the communist era, and thus get to know aspects of it. This leads to making generalisations and assumptions and, ultimately, to expressing uncertainty about their second-hand memories. For this lack of valid knowledge, as they see it (i.e. originating through unmediated action of the senses), some participants find it difficult to adopt a political stance towards the past. However, there is another side to creating second-hand memories. Based on their synthesized character, young people employ these memories they (re)create in order to contradict or educate not only peers, where the transmission of memories occurs as an exchange, but also (grand)parents, close relatives, who have lived during those times. Not stemming directly from first-hand experiences and thus lacking the rich sensorial texture direct memories have does not render the memories constructed by young people less valuable than those of their elders.

Moving on, it is argued that the past finds itself in a two-way relationship with the present; if it had already been argued that the present context influences

the ways in which the past is remembered, now it becomes clear that the past affects the present as well. Secondly, it is by interacting with traces of the past that young people partly experience life during the communist era. Memories are thus emplaced and embodied and they form part of young people's life in the postsocialist society in which they live, in this way acting as *milieux de mémoire* rather than *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989).

Material traces of the past could be viewed as unintentional and intentional forms of urban memory. In the case of the former, blocks of flats are considered the most widespread material traces of the communist era. 'Communist' blocks are mainly criticized, either because of how they look, namely by their state of degradation and the grey colour most have, or for structural issues, offering people poor living conditions. Inhabiting such flats can give young people a sense of the living conditions available during the communist era, but most of all enable them to make connections to the memories they have from other sources. In this way, blocks of flats and the practices associated with living in them illustrate one way in which politics of urbanization, social mixture, uniformisation, control and surveillance were carried out. Besides blocks of flats, the transport system, the ruins of industrial sites and other various traces scattered throughout living environment, all form *milieux de mémoire* in which young people conduct their daily lives, and, thus, 'live the past'.

Politics of memory have also been carried out, before and after 1989 alike, through the creation of *lieux de mémoire*. In terms of monuments, politics of active forgetting that involved the removal of socialist monuments have been successful. However, the same cannot be argued about the establishing of anticommunist

landmarks in postsocialist Romanian memoryscapes; the monuments that are mentioned by young people as referring to the communist era virtually have no effect on them as vehicles of memory transmission. This could be one reason why young people challenge the effectiveness of monuments in general to enact politics of memory, as they do with acts of cultural erasure; toponyms from the communist era might be forgotten, but those that are still in use do not seem to say much about the past. The situation differs with regard to emblematic buildings, of which the House of the People in Bucharest is considered the most visible remnant of the recent past. Instead of offering a unilateral positive view of the communist era, as it was intended, it sits at the intersection of two discourses: one focusing on the qualities of the building and the pride one should take in it having been built in Romania; and the other focusing on it being the manifestation of Nicolae Ceaușescu's megalomania and, most importantly, on the tearing down of entire neighbourhoods in order for it to be built. Through its implantation in the cityscape of Bucharest, the House of the People has become an ambivalent - if not plurivalent - *lieu de mémoire*.

On a micro-level, objects also create *milieux de mémoire* in which young people carry out their daily lives. Objects from the communist era have either been discarded at the initiative of (grand)parents or of young people, due to their poor aesthetic value and what has become decreased functional value, or placed in *lieux d'oubli*: the homes of grandparents, attics, boxes, drawers etc. If they are kept, it is usually because of the emotions invested in them either by people who have lived during the communist era or by young people during their early years. Macrame laces, ornaments and embroidered decorative rugs figure as the typical objects

associated with the communist era. Even though they are mostly unwanted by young people, some express their wish to acquire such objects and in this way create their own museum of daily life during the communist era. The 'museumification' (Berdahl, 1999) of the recent past through the creation of *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989), and the first-hand sensorial experience of its material culture, thus figures as a prerequisite for an in-depth engagement with the past. Nostalgic paraphernalia, objects that have been ideologically imbued through the purposes they had to serve (such as medals), and functional objects alike (such as watches) are collected by some young people either for their mnemonic function, or because of their high quality, the latter being generally associated with products from the socialist era. Hence, whether creating *milieux* or *lieux de mémoire*, objects can act as vehicles of memory transmission and facilitate a sensorial engagement with the past in a similar way to built environment.

The past surfaces in the present not just through its material traces - buildings, monuments, means of transport and objects. The past is also embodied and the very act of engaging in practices (allegedly) originating in the communist era, the very act of recollection then represents another way of creating *milieux de mémoire*. Young people associate certain negative societal characteristics and social practices and behaviours with the communist era. Whether one mentions nepotism, corruption, exacerbated self-centredness, or being strict, anything that hinders the progress of the Romanian society is considered to originate in the communist era or to have flourished during those times. Living in a society in which the past still influences the present, either through the 'living memories' (Mah, 2010) manifested through practices and behaviours or through material

remnants of the past, also has an effect on young people. Personal, familial, local, national and regional identities are thus created around the heritage of the communist era. Young people feel that the communist era has been part of their lives, either directly through its traces, or through the narratives of those who lived during those times. The process of forming second-hand memories has the role both of shaping and uncovering what lies behind young people's identities. It becomes a process of self-exploration and of formation alike.

Viewed in its entirety, the thesis makes a significant contribution to memory studies. It takes the fundamental notions of 'second-hand memories' and 'mnemonic imagination', recently coined by Keightley and Pickering (2012), and it explores their relevance to the social world, expanding their understanding by shedding light on the details of their workings. This study also demonstrates that the aforementioned concepts, as well as Pierre Nora's (1989) '*milieux de mémoire*' alongside conceptualizations of embodied memories should be more inclusive. It does so by adopting an innovative methodology comprising a mix of both in-depth interviews, walking tours and inter-generational interviews, all necessary in order to grasp the complexities of the processes of memory transmission and (re)production. Furthermore, the choice of the site of the research also represents a necessary addition to the academic literature on postsocialist politics of memory, which has largely ignored the particular context of Romania, with its distinctive characteristics pinpointed throughout the thesis (and especially in Chapters 2 and 4).

In terms of its scope, the current research was based on in-depth interviews with a broad cross-section of Romanian young people, most of whom manifested an interest in the recent past - at least by accepting to take part in the study. Rather

than seeking a representative sample of Romanian youth, which would have been essential if one was to explore whether young people remember the communist era, fulfilling the aim of this research led to a different approach. In order to find out the ways in which memories are transmitted and (re)produced, the selection of participants was determined by their interest in the past. Ergo, instead of producing a generalizable picture of the presence or absence of memory work withing the first postsocialist generation in Romania, the significant number of discussions with young people who were reflective of their experience of mnemonic socialization shed light on these very processes.

As a final note, I will return to an argument put forward in the introduction, stressing once more that the past is not at all another country. It intermingles with the present and demonstrates on a daily basis its relevance not only in the lives of those who have experienced it, but also of those who came after the period in question. In the case of postsocialist Romania, we have seen how young people engage in processes of making sense of the communist era, by creating their own second-hand memories of those times, in order to understand the current state of Romanian society at large. Further exploration of this, and new studies of other postsocialist contexts, focusing on intergenerational interviews and narrative analysis (complementing the primarily thematic analysis presented here) would shed further light on how young people, experiencing their own particular configuration of mnemonic socialization, create specific set of second-hand memories confirming or refuting those transmitted to them through public or private discourses. It is only by attending to all the intricacies of the process of memory transmission and (re)production that we can understand the extent to

which current practices and behaviours that young people adopt are informed by mnemonic legacies.

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APPENDIX 1

Invitation to take part in the research project¹³³

Dear [firstname],

My name is Daniel Hanu and I am a Sociology PhD student at the University of Warwick, UK.

I am writing to invite you to take part in my doctoral research project on the process of transmission of memories about the communist era in Romania amongst young people who were born shortly before or after 1989. Since you took part in the Summer School organised by [name of organisation] in [year], I would like to talk to you about what the recent past means to you, under all its aspects - economic, political, social and cultural - manifest in the public and private spheres, and most importantly about the way in which you have formed a stance towards the period in question. This is not a test; any answers are welcome.

Your family, the environment where you come from ([place of residence], if I am not mistaken), etc. are factors which have contributed to the development of a personal perspective on the communist era. Hence, your involvement in the project would be very much appreciated, bringing, without a doubt, a unique and meaningful contribution towards the results of the research.

The open discussion which we would have would last about an hour and a half and it would be audio recorded. You would have the opportunity to take part in a research project that focuses on a topic that has barely been explored in Europe. The project is supported by ESRC (The Social and Economic Research Council), UK.

If you wish to get involved, this will not create any kind of obligation on your part, which means that you can withdraw at any time. In order to guarantee the safety of the participants, pseudonyms will be used in research reports.

I would be extremely grateful if you agreed to have this discussion about the recent past at any point in [month]. I would appreciate it if I could receive a response until [day].

Thank you in advance for your help. I am eagerly waiting for a reply.

Best wishes,
Daniel Hanu

Doctoral Researcher
Department of Sociology
University of Warwick
Coventry, CV4 7AL
United Kingdom

Tel: [mobile numbers]
Email: [email address]

¹³³ This is a translated version of the document handed out to participants, written in Romanian

APPENDIX 2
Data about participants

	Pseudonym	Gender	Year of birth	Place of origin	Place where the interview was taken	Access route
1.	Adina	f	1992	Bucharest	Bucharest	Summer School / University
2.	Andra	f	1992	Republic of Moldova	Iași	Summer School / University
3.	Andrei	m	1990	Village near Iași	Iași	Summer School / University
4.	Antoanela	f	1990	Galați	Cluj-Napoca	Summer School / University
5.	Bianca	f	1992	Orșova	Bucharest	Summer School / University
6.	Brândușa	f	1986	Moinești	Bucharest	Summer School / University
7.	Călin	m	1989	Focșani	Bucharest	Summer School / University
8.	Camelia	f	1989	Bucharest	Bucharest	Summer School / University
9.	Cecilia	f	1994	Bucharest	Bucharest	High school project
10.	Costin	m	1991	Bucharest	Bucharest	Summer School / University
11.	Darius	m	1991	Salva	Cluj-Napoca	Summer School / University
12.	Dinu	m	1989	Onești	Bucharest	Summer School / University
13.	Eliza	f	1987	Bucharest	Bucharest	Summer School / University
14.	Felix	m	1989	Bucharest	Bucharest	Summer School / University
15.	Filip	m	1986	Brașov	Bucharest	Summer School / University
16.	Flavia	f	1991	Village near Sighetu Marmăției	Cluj-Napoca	Summer School / University
17.	Florentina	f	1993	Bucharest	Bucharest	High school project
18.	Florin	m	1992	Vișeu de Sus	Cluj-Napoca	Snowballing
19.	Gabriel	m	1991	Adjud	Adjud	Facebook
20.	Gețiana	f	1994	Town near Bucharest	Bucharest	High school project

	Pseudonym	Gender	Year of birth	Place of origin	Place where the interview was taken	Access route
21.	George	m	1992	Bârlad	Iași	Summer School / University
22.	Horia	m	1989	Ploiești	Bucharest	Snowballing
23.	Irina	f	1994	Bucharest	Bucharest	Snowballing
24.	Iustin	m	1989	Bucharest	Bucharest	Facebook
25.	Izabela	f	1986	Timișoara	Bucharest	Summer School / University
26.	Laurențiu	m	1990	Bucharest	Bucharest	Snowballing
27.	Leonard	m	1989	Bucharest	Bucharest	Snowballing
28.	Letiția	f	1990	Iași	Iași	Summer School / University
29.	Lidia	f	1991	Sighetu Marmației	Sighetu Marmației	Summer School / University
30.	Liliana	f	1990	Bucharest	Bucharest	Snowballing
31.	Liviu	m	1990	Bucharest	Bucharest	Facebook
32.	Luca	m	1990	Topoloveni	Bucharest	Summer School / University
33.	Lucian	m	1989	Bucharest	Bucharest	Facebook
34.	Lucreția	f	1994	Village near Orșova	Village near Orșova	Snowballing
35.	Marcela	f	1988	Suceava	Bucharest	Volunteer
36.	Margareta	f	1988	Galați	Galați	Facebook
37.	Marilena	f	1993	Călan	Hunedoara	Snowballing
38.	Mirela	f	1991	Aiud	Cluj-Napoca	Summer School / University
39.	Miron	m	1991	Curtea de Argeș	Curtea de Argeș	Facebook
40.	Miruna	f	1992	Sighetu Marmației	Cluj-Napoca	Summer School / University
41.	Nadia	f	1986	Dorohoi	Iași	Summer School / University
42.	Narcisa	f	1995	Sighetu Marmației	Sighetu Marmației	Volunteer
43.	Octavian	m	1897	Bucharest	Bucharest	Summer School / University
44.	Olga	f	1993	Hunedoara	Leicester	Facebook

	Pseudonym	Gender	Year of birth	Place of origin	Place where the interview was taken	Access route
45.	Olivia	f	1995	Bucharest	Bucharest	High school project
46.	Paula	f	1991	Bucharest	Bucharest	Summer School / University
47.	Pavel	m	1993	Onești	Bucharest	Summer School / University
48.	Raluca	f	1990	Republic of Moldova	Iași	Summer School / University
49.	Rareș	m	1994	Town near Bucharest	Bucharest	High school project
50.	Rodica	f	1996	Bucharest	Bucharest	High school project
51.	Sebastian	m	1995	Bucharest	Bucharest	Facebook
52.	Sergiu	m	1995	Bucharest	Bucharest	Facebook
53.	Silviu	m	1986	Marghita	Oradea	Snowballing
54.	Smaranda	f	1994	Bucharest	Bucharest	High school project
55.	Sorina	f	1990	Bucharest	Bucharest	Volunteer
56.	Stela	f	1986	Galați	Bucharest	Summer School / University
57.	Tatiana	f	1992	Bucharest	Bucharest	Summer School / University
58.	Valeria	f	1995	Bucharest	Bucharest	High school project
59.	Violeta	f	1995	Cluj-Napoca	Cluj-Napoca	Summer School / University

APPENDIX 3

Informed consent form¹³⁴

Research about the process through which memories of the communist era are transmitted to the first postsocialist generation from Romania

Daniel Hanu

Department of Sociology

University of Warwick

I confirm that I took note and I have understood what my involvement in the doctoral research project about the process through which memories of the communist era are transmitted to the first postsocialist generation from Romania carried out by Daniel Hanu involves, as it has been presented to me in the information document about the study, dated , document which I can keep for further reference, and that I had the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the project.

I agree to take part in the aforementioned project by:

- Taking part in an audio recorded interview Yes / No

I understood that the information gathered through the research:

- Will be safely stored
- Will be confidential and they will not be associated with my person
- Will be used strictly for academic purposes

I understand the fact that my participation in the project is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage, without any kind of consequences on myself.

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of parent / legal tutor (where relevant)	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

¹³⁴ This is a translated version of the document handed out to participants, written in Romanian