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Post-Communist Change via Politics and Legacy of Memory Past in Sense-Making, Coming to Terms with Uncertainty

Radu-Cristian Petcu[*]

Abstract

Post-communism is a matter of purposeful regime transition and aftermath in historical context, factuality review and overview. Studying post-communism recency implies ongoing (re)interpretation inasmuch as it references communist regime practices and their legacy as well as the definition of political change, institutional discontinuation and latent cultural and ideological effects. The present paper outlines the role collective memory plays alongside paths of dependency as well as in breaking away from them, in redesigned projects for collective identity; the stake of restored order while it is also being reshaped is considered through the comparative and coterminous institutionalisation of two vying forces: memory and oblivion or intentional forgetting. The case made herein is that collective memory can be institutionalized and „governed" outside of uncertainty into normative sensibility and logic of change. Responsible policies can be devised in such a way that truth and memory, although in an arena of narrative and discursive contestation and competition, lead in ethical principles, positions and stances and follow through into justice. The need for balanced approaches in ensuring a coherent and legitimate continuum between past, present and future, by means of collective memory, is emphasized: previous regime understanding, past reconstruction in present interpretations, defining future change and assigning meaning to it in relation to the past, in such a way that the memory of change takes precedence over the memory of uncertainty.

Keywords: *post-communist transition; politics of memory; memory institutionalization*

[*] Lecturer, PhD, University of Craiova, Faculty of Social Sciences, Phone: 0040251418515, Email: cr_petcu@yahoo.com

The Past in Memory and Identity – making sense of recent history

Considerations on recent history are an inevitable reference to the defining change therein, the change that marks the beginning of recent history, and its correspondences in individual and collective memories. The context addressed in this paper is an interplay between fact, representations and inquiry. The fall of the communist/totalitarian regime, political system and political culture changes, resurfacing (previously suppressed) dialogue concerning political community identity in the transition period. Controversy. What is the reason why uncertainty persists regarding the foundational moment of regime change? What are the certitudes regarding the process of change? How can memory promote conciliation and reflect truth? What is to become of the past? The ongoing (re-)interpretation of communist regime practices and their legacy, political change, institutional discontinuation, latent ideological effects, collective memory and identity in restored societal order, coterminous institutionalisation of memory and intentional forgetting are as much part of the answer as they are of the question.

One way to approach memory as the ordering principle of regime transition is to legitimize a continuum between past, present and future, in understanding the past, reconstructing it in defining change, assigning meaning to it so as to govern society out of transition period uncertainty and into normative sensibility and change logic. The gist of this enterprise would be to enable the memory of change to take precedence over a persistent memory of uncertainty and rule out the option of intentional forgetting in committing a new identity to memory. In the introduction of "Meaning and Representation in History", Jörn Rüsen (2006) weighs discourses on the end of history against the contemporary interest in collective identity building via memory, cultural, social political narrative representations of the past and the functions of remembrance and forgetting, descriptive of their nature as converging in history. Constructing reality needs sense-making and interplay, inter-subjectivity; critical approaches to history and memory should bridge the distance (uncertainty or multiple certitudes conflicting) between contexts, meanings and their mutually-informing co-evolution (Halbwachs, 2007; Assmann, 2008). Worldviews and experiences of the past meet their expression in memory institutionalization, practices of historical consciousness and temporal orientation (Rüsen, 1993); these are patterns in representing the continuum and boundary lines between past, present and future, while co-terminous for some culturally specific scope of identity (Rüsen, 2004).

The memory of political regime change, as it connects past, present and future of the political community, requires historical thinking in terms of how collective identity was perpetuated, what evolution paths were suspended or severed by previous regime change (the installation of the communist regime), remaining latent, what patterns of social purpose and identity orientation were discontinued on end and reconstructed after recent regime change and transition (post-communism/totalitarianism), what "other" identity is represented as result of competing orientations, how past experience and present institutions regarding the past coalesce into by dealing with contingency and transformation (Pennebaker, Paez, Rime, 1997; Stan, 2009; Tileagă, 2012). In fact, as Rüsen suggests, collective identity cannot be treated without relation to historical change, modern forms of political identity are defined by capacity to transform and, as such, identity is to be regarded "not as a function of difference, but as a concrete cultural and ongoing *practice* of difference" (Rüsen, 2006: xii). The simultaneous construction and representation of time, its divisions via change and considerations on identity, ends and

morality, call for historical consciousness orientated by narrative structures rendering past experiences and trans-generational forms of remembrance in intra-cultural sense-formation practices context (Rüsen, 1993, 2004). Koselleck refers to the past as a mapped "space of experience" and to the future as a "horizon of expectation", thus relating experience (and its memory) to expectations in knowing, understanding and working with historical consciousness (Koselleck, 2004). Or, in Kattago's words, latencies or "effects of history are legacies of the past that are meaningful in the present. One can never totally free oneself from the past and be a purely rational being, neither is one condemned to reproduce blindly the prejudices of one's tradition. The individual has the potential to criticize and evaluate his or her own traditions [...] Each person has a finite but changing horizon of understanding" (Kattago, 2009: 375).

Political community identity is defined by orientation which, in turn, relies on self-understanding as a reflection of past connected with present and future. Only as such, events of the past acquire historical quality of topic as pillars and premises for truth, while historical truth acts as a framework for such contents concerning the meaning of the past. Historical arguments tend to be, in this respect, "abductive" (in Charles Peirce's terminology, in *Collected Papers*, ed. Arthur W. Burks, Cambridge, Mass., 1985), rather than inductive or deductive, since in relation to factuality, they articulate views (about events of the past) that *may possibly be* true. Rüsen's approach to historical consciousness follows the same line, by maintaining cultural context-sensitive topic relevance. Making sense of past events is thus treated through its preconditions defined by direct cultural experience of change and its effects impacting the identity pattern, at the intersection with present interpretation (culturally mediated representation) of meaning and identity orientation, defined in continuity and change. Critical authority is paramount in setting the course for the process of memory guided transition, addressing the polarity between "space of experience", totality of past inheritance, and "horizon of expectation", potential (to use Koselleck's terms, in *Futures Past*), irreducible to one another, ensuring the dynamic nature of historical consciousness. Belonging and remembrance practice provide a referential structure for group identity or, in Olick's terms, "frameworks of memory" that individuals cannot escape (Olick, 2007: 28). It is rather the continuation of past, through long term structures, into present which gives group identity cohesive strength as well as trans-historical group behaviour coherence. This is indicative of Olick's interpretation of memory as a process, not as a thing, a temporal, context-sensitive relation between being-doing, rather than doing-having; its very nature makes this process open to contestation and negotiation in order to link past, present and future (Olick, 2007).

Individual or group identity is then also defined by a trans-context carry-forward of meaning regarding change and not just the "sense of sameness over time and space [that is] sustained by remembering" (Gillis, 1994: 3). It is also the case of remembering adjustment and re-orientation, indicative of the internalized, coherent and consistent relationship between change and continuity since they are mutually referential and enforcing in the ways individuals and communities interpret the past in relation to present justification and options and generate a memory bond with a founding event in the (revisited) past. If that which is remembered "is defined by the assumed identity" and "identity and memories are highly selective, inscriptive rather than descriptive, serving particular interests and ideological positions" (Gillis, 1994: 4), then the conceptualization and expression of forgetting is, just as relevant as remembrance and identity, in the choice of affiliation, retro-projection or imagination of the past (Ribeiro, 2013: 159-160).

Collective memory is, in this sense, a process of internal and external negotiations with regard to competing meanings in order to produce legitimate memory narratives.

Legacies of the past and meanings of change – an institutional setting

The past is not merely "usable", it is integral to both continuity and change. Returning to the past for meaning may or may not be about reinstatement or strengthening of national myths and symbols; it could also be about resistance to reproduce legacies, and/or expression of change relating to contexts of continuity and discontinuation, without resorting to intentional forgetting. The function performed therein, as counter-balance to memories developing in opposition to each other, is the gradual transformation of relations between collectivities who thus converge on non-mutually exclusive meanings in a shared, co-terminous memory of their identity formation. Addressing the past constructs memory roles to either consolidate a path of dependence on initial meanings or open it up to multifarious inter-subjectivity and between-memories bridging. In this perspective, remembrance practices are descriptive of emerging reconciliation approaches between previously conflicting memories and identities (Szurek, 2002). Coming to terms with a past that separates rather than unites makes transitional narratives and histories come together in spite of not also meeting respective mutual expectations of justice; what is gained instead is a referential regulatory framework for the course of memories institutionalization (Ribeiro, 2013).

Collective memory is of institutional interest in the aftermath of the Communist Bloc collapse, when Eastern European societies experience the need for truth, memory recovery, justice for the victims, resulting in a process which leads to the emergence of alternative models for interpreting the past, to the de-falsification of history and which opens up possibilities for reconciliation (Elster, 1998; Szurek, 2002). Understanding the past, its continuity and change into the present, is a set prerequisite for any exploration of recent history as well as for the way in which it is recounted during the transition period.

Memory is one of the building blocks of identity construction, and its production and reproduction by various memory agents is represented in either national ("official") or mass dimensions. The former refers to a traditionally state-centric perspective focusing on national character and historic identity of the political community of the state, whereas the latter refers to individual, pluralistic perceptions converging into a more internally competing and diverse collective consciousness. The latter aims for recognition and vies for the public character of the former; social, cultural memory, bearing the markings of individual and group experiences of historical events, reach for political significance in order to be part of the core-identity of the state, building the norms which guide or regulate state behaviour, domestically as well as internationally (Ribeiro, 2013). Whether officially integrated or not, there are processes of further seeking acknowledgement in the development of more complex networks of trans-nationally shared memories (such as memories constitutive of European identity), cosmopolitan or emerging universal memory (Malksoo, 2009). Memory regimes can be designed and enforced by governments, promoted by politically active individuals assuming the role of memory entrepreneurs. The power struggle in memory politics between distinct strategies to shape collective consciousness, and to make it historical, presents a risk of memory-instrumentation by way of exploitation, manipulation, abuse or occultation which describes memory misuse. However, this is arguably not what Maurice Halbwachs meant when he considered that "the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present" (Halbwachs, 1992: 40). Distortion of memory is a possibility with collective remembering as it is

defined by group belonging and practice, which can also imply intentional forgetting. Memory can also involve *ambiguity* and *uncertainty* as past is brought into the present for meaning (Zehfuss, 2007).

While it is rather difficult to resist the intellectual reflex to found a new social order model by denying the previous, to uncritically both reject former ideologies and support a new one in a single grand narrative, it does not suffice to provide interpretations which are instrumental to the goal of separation from the past (Onken, 2010). The past is still present in a variety of forms, perceptions, practices and meanings, and there is no relevance to simply criminalizing/condemning the past when understanding it is due in terms of providing contents of rationale for the course of transformation. Memories come into inter-subjective play upon the logic of institutional design, dismantling the old logic, safeguarding a legitimate course for continuity, introducing change, by redefined scope of political community identity. Public recognition of memories is thus the defining competition of transition in the process of understanding the past. Repressiveness and traumatic experiences as well as acceptable practices are to be integrated in remembrance of old regime political community identity (Tileagă, 2012).

The challenge in establishing historical evidence regarding political community identity and its prospects, by virtue of cultural meaning and collective practice, is then the formation of a complex relation between political community perceptions of regime change over time, internalized change and purposeful, intentional direction of change, as resulting from competing memories and narratives (Onken, 2010). Norms resulting from change reflect both conditional chains in the enactment of practices and prevailing meaning of symbols, and the reconstruction of the path including change in institutional design which takes account of the variation in memory-processed past as well as of intentional transfer of its context-experience to significant present expectations (Offe, 1996). The role of evaluation and ensuing norms in the process of generating historical consciousness is essential. Or, as Rüsen puts it, "interpretation of the past serves as a means for understanding the present and expecting the future" (Rüsen, 2006: 3). Norms, informed by the cultural practice of narrative discourses supported by direct experience and memory, express willingness to mark (and adapt to) change and embody memory as well as forgetfulness, in varying proportion and with different functions, for distinct purposes: governing the change (and re-ordering the political community), mediating memory conflicts, introducing reconciliation, applying sanctions or imparting transitional justice.

A multiplicity of memory narratives, including contradictory ones, may coexist in the institutional remembrance space; part may be active while others express latency, and nevertheless there is considerable potential for mutual balancing through dialogue between distinct layers of meaning (Djelic, Quack, 2007). Existing institutional structures and arrangements are bestowed new purposes (Kattago, 2009). Different narratives of the past react differently to change, from pressure to resistance or to support, from a perspective of stability to a perception of uncertainty; memory relations are sensitive to context and to increasing competition for institutionalization, yet they can also evolve into complementarities and interdependence for historical consciousness. The choice to forget is rather telling of power relations between memory entrepreneurs; if forgetting is institutionalized, historical consciousness is deprived of its pillars of experience-memory-meaning processes. Emergence of a memory about forgetting may ease tensions, despite its force of de-legitimation when in conflict with official narratives, inviting the question

of unintended effects of remembrance-forgetting ratios and rapports in memory entrepreneurs behaviour and memory politics (Assmann, 2008).

The political community is imagined both toward past and future, in a dual function of receptacle and beacon for past, present and future identity fitting within the frameworks of collective memory. Legacies of the past inform the social practices of remembrance and also feed counter-memories. Contemporary historical thought is laden with ambivalence toward legacies of the past as either symbolic foundation-setting, trans-context stability, continuity, cohesion, or as questions of trauma, of past meaning dis-integration, memory(-ies) separation, and need of democratic justice. Regime transition studies tend to pit these perspectives against one another, by emphasizing the latter and problematizing the former: what remains usable and what becomes obstructive-disruptive in the legacy of the past, in terms of "meaningful inheritance" versus "traumatic burden" (Kattago, 2009: 380). Nevertheless, approaching legacies of the past is a matter of perspective complementarity. Jeffrey Olick theorized rapports with the past in a manner which may also apply to perceptions of past legacies: a "presentist" understanding of the past regards "what *we* do *with* the past", with interpretations of the past being instrumental to present options; a "functional" understanding of the past concerns the fact-to-utility meaning for the continuity of identity, "what the *past* does *for* us"; and, the "psychoanalytical" understanding of the past as a moral and political source of complexity challenge and predicament for individual and collective identities, "what the past does *to* us" (Olick, 2007).

While it is hardly surprising that historical memory has become a political resource, the institutionalization of memory, its political dimension in containing and safeguarding identity is also virtual control of the meaning, of the reach and grasp of the past and its events over the present and its decisions. Historical course is constitutive of present-day conditions, but it is present-day institutions which give meaning to conditions, and collective/community memories and their representations which shape institutional ends. The politics of memory should reflect rather a process of managing the memory-identity relationship and governing transitions in its scope against forgetting than a process of memory appropriation, its collapse into a purely political instrumentation of former meaning-detached logic. Responsible policies can be devised in such a way that truth and memory, although in an arena of narrative and discursive contestation and competition, lead in ethical principles, positions and stances and follow through into justice. Politics of memory address the convenient as well as the uncomfortable evidences of experiences shared in the past and should open up viable paths into reconciliation and memory re-integration and re-connection of memory "lieux" (Nora, 1997), combining recognition, dignity and historical truth into consistent expressions of the "right to memory" and re-accommodating the narratives of the past (Lebow, 2008: 25-27). Legacies are memory-articulated, therefore future mythification is also possible, as Lebow notes: "we have no memories of the future, but we do have imagined memories of the future [...] Future 'memories' of this kind are just as important for building and sustaining identities as memories of the past – and many of the latter are, of course, also imaginary" (Lebow, 2008: 39).

When addressing recent history matters, the temptation to design norms to incorporate larger allowance toward forgetting than for memory is quite irresistible for transitional elites if the process is neither oriented by memories' dialogue, nor purpose guided by the meaning of change. When dealing with foundational events marking change, it is nevertheless provocative to arbitrarily use such an algorithm if also raising

questions of legitimization. Therefore we may understand memory-governed regime transition as either *thick* or *thin,* based on the complexity or scarcity of meaning assigned to change as disputed between narratives emerging from collective memories. *Thickness* lies with sense-making and understanding-driven processes, whereas *thinness* lies with moving away from the past, less internal contradiction and competition, but also less meaning-charged direction of change. The latter is what Ricoeur would describe as "shortage of memory and excess of forgetting" (2001, introduction). Criticism toward either exhibits prevailing correspondences to remembering-forgetting and degree of resistance to change or depth of institutionalization/norm-internalization in the community of reference. Memory and forgetting are two vying institutions in any political regime striving to reach the end of transition, and they are as basic as power and opposition. And also resilience. But for transitional justice purposes, intentional forgetting cannot be an institutionalized *memory of change – past is no longer represented*.

Paths for identity-memory – identity via *memory of change*

Critically addressing the past (its constitution and reconstitution) is the ongoing practice of memory communities, interacting on possible integration of memory patterns at times of new or changing political orders. The past offers models or anti-models to inform action and to open up questions of updated or outdated identity. The present is a purposeful reversed lens for the past through which historical events are represented to have meaning. Past and present are mutually constructed in memory, and memory practices do not reflect past or present exclusively, but rather the exchanges in between them (Olick, 2007). The ways of their construction describe a path of temporal linkages in the institutionalization of memory and identity, a relationship which we may call *memory-identity continuum*, or rather, given the nature and functions of memory in the articulation of identity and internalized change, *continua*. The logic of identity is memory-binding in terms of change acceptance, while memories are identity-binding in terms of contexts of experience and their evidence. In regime transition contexts, the *continua*, work against uncertainty regarding environmental contingency, institutional conditions and change, and into publicly dignified multiple certainties. A *memory of change* is then a reworking of past-dependence into a path of emergence, maintaining links with the past and co-integrating it with the present, transforming course by way of *continua* meanings. Memory of change marks path transformation by critically addressing recency between dependence, contingency and emergence.

Path dependence is indicative of legacies of the past, or effects of events occurring at an earlier point in time on later occurring events (Djelic, Quack, 2007). In this sense, path dependence refers to mechanisms of memory which secure stable links with the past and are not necessarily concerned with change. Processes of change refer to dynamic contexts of distinct, but intersecting memory institutionalization paths (official history and social-cultural construction of past and recency); the evolution of memory practices (continued or discontinued) bears the mark of structural constraint of past actions aggregated in a course logic and meaning (Djelic, Quack, 2007: 166). *Contingent* variance occurring across the sequence of time-frames, is experienced, negotiated and translated differently by memory entrepreneurs, carrying into meaning which may challenge dominant norms on memory practice and remembrance interaction behaviours and prompt change rather than lock-in. Instead of course logic reinforcement, contingent beginnings are marked by critical moments of juncture; post-socialist and post-communist transformations regard "exceptional politics" (Johnson, 2001), especially if these imply

dealing with existing institutionalization legacies and breaking away from their structural constraints which describe past dependency (Stark and Bruszt, 1998). The structured accumulation of past representations generates durable path-dependence and past meanings dependency for memory institutionalization which could inhibit reorientation in historical consciousness in the context of transition: "conditions of uncertainty typically reinforce old networks and patterns as people turn towards the familiar and the safe" (Johnson, 2001: 254). However, policies of collective memory practice conformity with official historical narrative, commonly met in totalitarian regimes, may also prompt counter-memory feedback, in an attempt to recover against institutionalized forgetting, and in a shift from reproduction of existing institutionalization frameworks to different ones which grant access to other foundationally resourceful memory space and experience time references for remembrance practice. The possibility for change can open up from within the existing system (Djelic, Quack, 2007). In post-communist societies, *transformation* is a less controversial term when compared to *revolution* and *evolution*; institutions can either be replaced or re-arranged, reformed, reconfigured, in such a way that "choice and chance" are reconciled to accommodate consideration of both path dependence and path contingency (Johnson, 2001). Transformation processes are guided by ideas and their normative framework interpretations, by entrepreneurial initiatives, by institutions which support diffusion and adaptation to make room for a memory regime informed by an identity perspective (Djelic, Quack, 2007).

To describe the complexity of critical juncture for further institutional course, we could turn to Olick's observations regarding political socialization, norms and culture operating as "historical system of meaning – that is, as ordered but changing system of claim-making – in which collective memory obliges the present (as prescription) and restricts it (as proscription) both mythically and rationally. [...] social pasts interact with social presents to shape political action (Olick, 2007: 54-55). *Emergent paths* would require a "logic of appropriateness" (March and Olsen, 1998), based on normative legitimacy of memory institutionalization.

Path transformation is aided by a memory of change in the process of transition, of cumulative, competing or concurring meanings of past, recency, present and future. Path transformation is a logic-course switch, while *path creation* is an all-comprising mosaic: the institutionalization of memory of official narratives, counter narratives, trauma, institutionalization of forgetting - it is a memory of how change itself is institutionalized in transition regimes. It is also a memory of future, in which the past is recovered to internalize the progression of change and the meanings about it. *Identity-memory path creation* cannot be set up from a *tabula rasa*; instead, this may be a process of dynamic correlation and review of legacies, logics, diffusion, with cumulative effects over time, gradually institutionalizing memory as change is defined, experienced, and redefined. Path generation must be seen as a social, cultural and political process involving different actors with different interests, normative orientations and identities aiming to shape institutional rules to govern regime transition by means of existing and emerging narratives of past memory institutionalization on the acceptability and scope of courses of action; factoring in "reflexive agency and cumulative processes of gradual change" with regard to the complex shaping of path dependencies, yields "difficult to predict aggregate or cumulative results", in "crooked" rather than linear paths of change, since they reflect a summation of "struggles, negotiations, and recombinations" over critical junctures (Djelic, Quack, 2007: 167).

Memory of change as well as memory of the future allow for path transformation, in the institutionalization, de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization of past narratives in a socially open system of correspondences and co-evolutionary interaction between memory (in path-dependent course) and historical consciousness (in path-contingent course). *Memory-identity continua* institutionalization engage and commit even those meanings about past and change we choose to forget in order to forge a legacy of memory (past in co-existing interpretations), relating to recency orientation, instead of uncritically bearing a legacy of the past.

Concluding remarks

Studying post-communism recency implies ongoing (re-)interpretation inasmuch as it references communist regime practices and their legacy as well as the definition of political change, institutional discontinuation and latent cultural and ideological effects. Making sense of the past regime implies to understand its value practice persistence and decline in a dialectical approach to stability and change, in the legacies of path-dependence, conditions of path contingency and options of path transformation or perspectives of path creation, distinguishing between change by design and the determinism of constraints on change (Johnson, 2001). Institutions emerging in the transition period need to reflect change so that they may enable, at the same time, de-institutionalization from past value practice, identity reconstruction and the re-institutionalization of collective memory as pluralistic narratives of the experience of recent past and change. Latencies are dealt with in the antagonisms of memories and counter-memories while mitigating the effects of past regime experience and its memory marginalization, isolation, concealment, denial and even abolition under the former ideology. Change should be present as focal point in memory formation, its articulation in competition, its consolidation or its reconstruction. A two-fold institutionalisation is to take place during transition: that of the *memory of past regime experience* as well as that of the *memory of change* itself, defining the project of identity for the political community.

Memory actors, norms, institutions and policies, by means of negotiation, develop political socialization about the change in community identity. Understanding the past also implies *memory entrepreneurship*, and thus a path to alleviate the tensions between memory and history, history and truth, justice and value continuity and change. Public memory and historical consciousness become inclusive by supporting societal transformation and institutionalization of a change pluralistic narrative based on principles governing the meanings of change, the logic governing its practice and direction, and its significance for identity prospects: known past, understood and managed present, purposeful future. Transformative, integrative and projective functions become joint by building change, certainties and ideals into collective memory.

The need for balanced approaches in ensuring a coherent and legitimate linkages between past, present and future, by means of collective memory, is emphasized: previous regime understanding, recovering the intentionally forgotten past and its reconstruction in present interpretations, defining future change and assigning meaning to it in relation to the past, in such a way that the memory of change takes precedence over the memory of uncertainty.

Openness toward the past along with a consciousness of present process and commitment toward future are key as interdependent coordinates in constructing, organizing and learning about social memory. The interest in the past is not necessarily guided by the aim of temporal "re-anchoring"; it is rather that past continuation resides in

resourceful mnemonic media for meaning to be attached, the sense of "having been" from the past onward that we bring into the present so as to define and manage change and to mitigate uncertainty.

Knowing and understanding the past, interpreting its significance sheds light on the contingency of the present time-frame in terms of both conditions and opportunities; it is consistence in the path and security for its traveller, at the same time of memory. A memory away from uncertainty does not mean forgetting the past. A *memory of change* is indicative of *sustainable identity*.

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