

Anthropological Inquiries on the Politics of Memory in Contemporary Europe. A Case Study from Romania's Ways of Remembering the Past

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In January 2006, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly voted upon the *Resolution 1481*, or 'Need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes'. Although it did not receive the necessary two-thirds majority of the votes, due to the strong opposition of communist parties' group, the resolution was strongly supported by liberal groups and other members of former communist countries in Eastern Europe and determined a long debate. In short, a need for coming to terms with the communist past was and still is a problematic issue on the Europe's agenda, giving birth to different politics of memory at the level of each member state and strongly influencing the intra-European relations.

In trying to apply an anthropological gaze on the post-communist politics of memory in Europe, this essay intends to examine those memo-politics in contemporary Romania, taking as a case study the memory of pronatalism and Ceaușescu's demographic policies. Analyzing the different forms of memory of Romania's pronatalism, I will discuss the ways by which remembering, as a social phenomenon, often influences the development of a society. Thus, social remembering of collectivities can and is often used in the creation process of supra-identities, as is actually the case with the need for 'common politics of memory' in post-communist Europe. The analysis is based on an extensive oral history fieldwork started in 2003, as well as related documentation and archives, and has as theoretical background the interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies².

The Memory Boom in Europe: From Its Manifestation to Its Study.

It is widely acknowledged that contemporary interest in the past – which is sometimes almost obsessive – can be sparked by a multitude of causes. From the fundamental change

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² For an exhaustive description of the development of 'Collective/Social Memory Studies' or 'Memory Studies' in the field of social sciences, see especially Olick & Robbins: 'Social Memory Studies: From Collective Memory to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, 1998: 105-140; Astrid & Nünning: *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007; Roediger & Wertsch: 'Creating a New Discipline of Memory Studies', *Memory Studies*, vol. 1, 2008: 9-22; Olick: 'Collective Memory: a memoir and prospect', *Memory Studies*, vol. 1, 2008: 23-29.

towards the perception of time and space (Huysen: 2000; Klein: 2000) or the transformation and even dissolution of traditional memory (Nora: 1984), to the discussion of the obsession with memory in relation to the new types of media (Kansteiner: 2002), the memory boom, as we now perceive it, initially 'exploded' in the 1980s, and was seen as intrinsically related to the remembrance of the Holocaust.

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the memory sites related to the former communist world also registered on the 'memorial agenda'. The entire remembrance process, as well as the scientific research, was perceived to be centred on two major poles of remembrance: *trauma* and *nostalgia*, both related to an acute necessity to create and recreate a new national identity. The scholars were thus underlining, at large, the persistence of a real 'memory crisis'³ among the post-communist regimes (Eyal: 2004), stemming from two major causes: first, the manifestation of a generalised post-communist amnesia, i.e. the tendency to systematically forget all previous communist crimes and compromises. Second, the phenomenon of the super-saturation of memory, scholars arguing that, in reality, there is no such thing as too little memory, but rather too much (Huysen: 2003; Muller: 2006).

Memory can thus play a major role in the contemporary creation and resemantisation of the new transnational European-ness. Long a divided land after the Second World War, the old continent is now giving voice to its plural memories in order to shape and reshape its 'European common identity'. Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the public sphere as well as the social sciences in Central and Eastern Europe were confronted with a memory boom that forced them to remember and analyse their controversial pasts. Generally focused on the remembrance of communist traumas and injustices as well as on the everyday life of the "New Man", the recollections soon succumbed to the so-called 'politics of memory': the instrumentalisation of their memory started to shift from one post-communist reality to another, due to multi-interested actors and new power constellations. A generally social phenomenon, memory and the reshaping of the past into the present was, is and it will always remain closely related to the domain of power and politics. The remembrance of every past should thus be understood like a bilateral bond: the past is re-coming into the present, but it is governed by this one. The very concept of 'politics of memory' appeared in the social sciences (following older concepts like 'collective identity' and 'politics of identity') especially to analyse and research upon the way in which power and politics are influencing, and often dictating, the memory-boom of a certain past or another (Confino: 1997; Huysen: 2003; Garcia: 2006; Lebow, Kansteiner & Fogu: 2006; Olick: 2007).

³ Denominated as such, for the first time, by Richard Terdiman in 1993, in his study 'Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis' (*apud* Climo & Cattell 2002:6).

Grosso modo, the notion of 'politics of memory' could be associated, on a larger scale of interpretation, with the one of strategy, in the public sphere, towards the social remembrance of individuals, groups or an entire society. It implies, in fact, an actor who is developing a memory-project, either at a trans-national (as the European Union), national (the Romanian State) or organisational level⁴. Thus, memory and remembrance are transformed into a 'natural corollary' of political development and interest. Simply stated, it is who wants whom to remember what, and why (Confino, 1997:1393).

The trans-disciplinary domain of Memory Studies was thus extremely rich in analyzing the way the past was constructed and reconstructed from a social and political era to another. The amazingly body of literature has mainly appeared in the last decade in relation to history, psychology or sociological studies, but cultural memory and social recollection have recently become topics of interest for anthropology as well (Connerton: 1989; Kilani: 1992; Candau: 1996; Berliner: 2005; Climo & Cattell: 2002; Gessat-Anstett: 2007, etc). In the following paragraphs, I will try to provide a concise characterisation of the memory issue from an anthropological standpoint, following the works of scholars like J. Climo and M. Cattell (*Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives*: 2002), J. Candau (*Anthropologie de la mémoire*: 1996) or D. Berliner (*The Abuses of Memory: Reflection on the Memory Boom in Anthropology*: 2005).

The specificity of an anthropological approach to memory and recollection, as outlined by Climo and Cattell (2002), consists in the particular way in which an anthropologist researches on the field the traces of memory, in the documentation upon the ways memories are created and transmitted, as well as in the interpretation of the important role of memory in the construction and re-construction of the past, *in* and *through* the present. Thus, an anthropologist will be always more interested in memory as a process rather than as an information-provider. Moreover, starting from the primary observation that 'memory work' is generally done in *liminal spaces*⁵, i.e., in the space between different disciplines, one can underline that anthropologists - through their ethnographic work⁶ - can easily approach those spaces, given their experience in setting aside

⁴ See, with this regard, the case of the Communist Party in France, as it is described and analyzed by Marie-Claire Lavabre (1994) in *Le fil rouge. Sociologie de la mémoire communiste*, Broché, Les Presses de Sciences Po, Paris.

⁵ The theory of the 'liminal spaces' has been developed by Susan Radstone: Working with Memory: An Introduction, in: *Memory and Methodology*, Oxford / New York: Berg, 2000: 1-22. According to Radstone, the liminal spaces are those spaces in between disciplines, which are characterised by liminal practises or hybridised methods, with the notion of liminality underlining the very idea by which research in such a space promotes a higher degree of creativity.

⁶ For an interesting and up-to-date discussion and critique of the relation between ethnographic work and memory studies see the exhaustive study of Robert Prus, 'Human Memory, Social Process, and the Pragmatist Metamorphosis. Ethnological Foundations, Ethnographic Contributions, and Conceptual Challenges', in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36 (4), August 2007: 378-437.

their cultural context in order to do fieldwork in another culture. Furthermore, the basic method of every anthropological work, i.e. the participative observation, has lately come to include a large number of sub-methods, many of them 'borrowed' from other disciplines, like history or sociology. This methodological heterogeneity can be interpreted as a liminal approach, which characterises memory studies. At the same time, culture – as the main object of anthropological research – can be seen as a gigantic memory in movement.

For Candau (1996:6), the anthropological approach to memory focuses on memory work as a process, not as an information-provider: „...l'anthropologue, au titre de sa discipline, ne s'intéresse pas à la faculté de la mémoire proprement dite... mais aux modalités culturelles de cette faculté, c'est-à-dire aux formes diverses que peuvent prendre les représentations individuelles et collective du passé". Following the increasingly large amount of anthropological scholarship dedicated to cultural and social memory of collectivities, Berliner (2005), quoting Todorov, cautioned against the transformation of memory into an 'empty object' for anthropological research. An object with numerous shells, but lacking internal consistency, memory can thus become an 'expansive notion' with omnipresent manifestations. Many anthropologists, observed Berliner, risk defining memory as the entire transmission and utilisation of culture, the very reproduction of the past into the present. Such an approach is as false as it is non-profitable for a better understanding of any form of memory.

Personally, I see the anthropological approach to memory also as a complex form of 'an anthropology of the present', an approach that is relatively new in the European anthropological tradition and not entirely recognised in some major schools, such as the French one. As 'le beau sauvage' becomes our own past, and beyond that, the re-actualisation of this past into the present, the fieldwork is both too close to and too far from the object of study. Approaching this kind of research is never easy, but putting together and analysing all the micro-histories and the memory-forms through which the past comes into the present can be a wonderful modality of decoding one's culture. In the following paragraphs, I will try to contextualize such an anthropological approach to memory and social remembrance taking into account a case study from the recent past of Romania (an European member state since 2007). By decoding different forms of the memory of communist pronatalism in contemporary Romanian society, I will analyse the relations between a traumatic past and a transitory present, highly influenced by the European politics of memory and identity. As the Union is continuously creating its unity in diversity, the study of the complicated relations between its past and present history can be included on the open agenda of 'an anthropology of Europe'.

The Life of a Decree: 770/1966. From 1966 to 1989, the Romanian Communist Party prohibited by law the right to pregnancy interruptions, all in the name of the sanctity of the Romanian communist nation. In the second half of the 1980s, the so-called the *Golden Era* of Romanian Communism, Ceaușescu – the head of the Communist Party – even proclaimed publicly that ‘the foetus is the socialist property of the whole society. Giving birth is a patriotic duty. Those who refuse to have children are deserters, escaping the law of natural continuity’⁷. In the public sphere, reproduction was thus fundamentally associated with the nation and its needs. Every communist subject had to participate in Ceaușescu’s projects, and above all, every Romanian woman had to fulfil her role by becoming a prolific *socialist mother*.

Romanian pronatalism was one of the most repressive politics of reproduction in Europe. But how all this started? It is widely acknowledged that after the Second World War, all of the so-called satellite countries from Central and Eastern Europe followed the soviet trends in legalising in-hospital abortion upon request (for women in the first trimester of pregnancy). Romania had revised its Penal Code in 1948 (article no. 482), outlawing the termination of a pregnancy, but in 1955, the text of a related decree permitted abortion on request⁸ – if the pregnancy represented a danger to the woman’s health or if one of the parents suffered from a serious hereditary disease.

In 1957, as ‘the light came from the East’, the Romanian government legalised abortion on request, the new law being one of the most liberal in Europe at that time. In November 1966, one year after Ceaușescu came to power, abortion was strictly prohibited by law, without any previous media campaign, that is, without any warning.⁹ At first, the abrupt change in Romanian legislation had a dramatic effect. In October 1966 for example, the date of the anti-abortion decree, the monthly birth rate (per 1000 inhabitants) was 14.5; after only one year, it climbed to 36.1 (see appendix no. 1 for further statistical data). But within a few years, the expected

⁷ Ceaușescu in *Der Spiegel* – 20 octombrie 1986, *apud* David & Băban:1996.

⁸ Decree no. 456/1955, published in “The Official Gazette of the Grand National Assembly of the Romanian People’s Republic” - *Buletinul Oficial al Marii Adunări Naționale a Republicii Populare România* - no. 3/November 1st, 1955, which was the official legal publication of the Romanian State, under different titles starting with its first apparition in 1832 (nowadays “The Official Gazette of Romania” - *Monitorul Oficial al României*).

⁹ In short, the famous Decree no.770/1966 – “For the reglementation of the interruption of pregnancy’ course” (Pentru reglementarea întreruperii cursului sarcinii – in Romanian) limited abortion on request to: (1) women over 45 years of age; (2) women already supporting four or more children; or (3) women whose lives, in the judgment of a special commission, were endangered by the pregnancy, or who were at risk of giving birth to an infant with a congenital deformity, or whose pregnancy resulted from rape, incest, or who were physically, psychologically or emotionally incapacitated. This law was modified once in 1972 (before the International Conference on Demography, held in 1974 in Bucharest) – by the corresponding Decree no. 53/1972 (the main difference being that the required minimum age for the permission of an abortion on request was not 45, but 40, as all international studies on demographic trends recommended), and once in 1985, when the required age-threshold was restored to 45 (Decree no.441/1985) and the official quota of children per family to 5.

demographic results steadily decreased – women, forced to seek for themselves alternative methods of not having the requisite ‘socialist babies’, remembered old-fashioned methods of contraception or created new strategies for interrupting unwanted pregnancies.¹⁰

The inner motivation of such a strict political demography (Fischer: 1985; Kligman: 2000; Popa: 2006) was related to different reasons: first, to the ‘multi-developed’ nationalism developed by Ceaușescu’s regime. Assuring the strength of the nation, the regime was assuring its greatness in terms of number. Second, the massive and the rapid development of the communist economy had to be sustained by a massive correlated workforce. And third, last but not least, the communist morality, highly patriarchal, was reinforcing and resemantising the traditional mentalities of the Romanian culture. According to them, the family was supposed to be as big as possible, and sexuality should be assumed only in terms of reproduction. In short, being a communist moral subject was equal with being a prolific mother-comrade.

Ceaușescu’s pronatalism lasted for 23 years, being legitimated and reinforced day by day by the State’s propaganda. Following the overthrow of the regime in December 1989, the new government reversed the restrictive abortion legislation. A new law (the second one voted upon in the new regime) was passed, authorizing the importation, production and sale of modern contraceptives, and permitting abortion on demand to be performed by qualified personnel (through the first trimester of pregnancy). After the years, only the old mentalities have remained. The stories and the memories of that time, an unspoken reality in the communist era, are still a contemporary taboo....

Remembering Romanian Pronatalism: Forms and Problems of Memory. Even if the contemporary memory boom and the omnipresence of the politics of memory are normal phenomena of postcommunist societies of Europe, one should underline that, at a closer look, not all the pasts are remembered in the same way. While certain pasts have become the centre of numerous studies, public debates and legislative projects, some are under the spell of a generalized silence. Romania’s pronatalism could be listed under the last category. According to the memorial theory of Jan Assmann¹¹, the past could be remembered, at the level of an entire society, through different forms, among which the form of a communicative memory (the social

¹⁰ I am using the term ‘unwanted pregnancy’ in its broader meaning, including not only the ‘undesired’, but also – and, in that cases, especially – ‘unable to assume’ (from a socio-economic point of view) future state of motherhood.

¹¹ Cf. Jan Assmann : ”Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”, *New German Critique* 65, 1995: 125-133. For in details studies of his typology of memory and remembrance, see also his volumes *Moïse l’Égyptien : un essai d’histoire de la mémoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003) or *La memoria culturale: Scrittura, ricordo e identità politica nelle grandi civiltà antiche* (Torino: Einaudi, 1997)

memory divided, in the private sphere, between the people who lived that special past), and the one of a cultural memory (the past is brought into the present public sphere by and with the means of culture). In relation to those, a third form – a historical memory, the official record of the past – could be added. Following those general differentiations, I have analysed the memory and contemporary ‘low remembrance’¹² of communist Romania’s pronatalism, trying to examine as well the different relations that can be established between them. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss those forms of memory which are present in the contemporary Romanian society, being more or less manifested in the public sphere, as well as the interrelations between them. My hypothesis is that, as the commemorative social memory of Romania’s pronatalism is always influenced by the present of remembrance, its cultural memory could be highly influenced by the official record of the past remembered, as well as by the contemporary politics of memory towards the communist past (at national or transnational level).

At the level of contemporary public sphere, the Romania society seems to have forgotten the injustice and traumas of the former regime’s political demography. This past is low-remembered if one compares it with the public remembrance of other communist dramas like, for example, the collectivization - the socialist transformation of agriculture, or the socialist omnipresent police, the famous *Securitatea*. Unfortunately, this low-remembrance is highly influencing the reproductive health of the current Romanian society, massively tributary to its socialist past. During all the twenty-three period of abortion interdiction, at the level of discourse, Romania seemed the “Gilead-ian paradise”¹³ of giving birth and raising children. In reality, much of the pronatalist public policies, in terms of supportive measures, were true in full only on paper. In relation with all shortages presented in the everyday life, the families simply could not raise the demanded quota of minimum four children, so they had to develop numerous strategies and contra-strategies in order to oppose Ceaușescu’s pronatalist policies.

Although there were no laws against contraception, its importation, becoming a political a taboo, ceased from the late ‘60s. With no means of professional contraceptives, and thus forced to become mothers, the women of communist Romania started a silent war against the regime and its pronatalist policies. In time, a real industry of abortion and pregnancy interruptions

¹² I propose the concept of ‘low-remembrance (low-memory)’ in order to characterize the social discussion of certain past-facts into the present which are not the object of a real general remembrance at the level of the public sphere of that society (through debates, commemorations, patrimonialization, etc.). At the same time, they are not entirely forgotten, an argument in this sense being their acute presence in the social, commemorative memory in the private sphere. From time to time, they could as well ‘surface’ on the public agenda, being often influenced by different politics of memory.

¹³ For details, see the well known novel of the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, about an imagined society who used physically reproductive-fit women as wombs for its future subjects.

emerged into the shadows. Performed under the closed doors, by medical personnel¹⁴ or as well as by amateurs (abortion interruptions being a very good source of additional income), the illegal abortions became the only general method against conception. The ones who did not have the possibilities of having an interruption of this type, often tried to 'resolve the problem by their own', i.e to induce themselves a 'spontaneous abortion', in order to arrive bleeding at the hospital, and here to receive a professional end of pregnancy. Sad but true, self-induced abortion became, especially in the last years of communism, a *per se* method against conception.

Besides claiming lives, unsafe clandestine abortions – which involved many potentially very dangerous techniques, such as scraping the uterus with a rubber tube, uterine lavage with a caustic fluid, introduction of foreign bodies into the uterus or external trauma - permanently maimed many more women (David & Băban: 1996). At the same time, the maternal mortality rate, as well as the infant mortality one, was the highest ones in Europe, although the Party used numerous methods¹⁵ to keep quiet on all its internal affairs. The sad effects of pronatalist policies implemented by Ceausescu's regime were disastrous during and after the communist period. Even if the anti-abortion decree was the second law who passed after December 1989, the pronatalist legacy was not entirely eliminated by this mere act. Suffice it to say that the number of women who died because of illegal abortion is approximated to 25.000 between 1967 and 1989. If one also adds the rates of infant mortality, 26.9 per 1000 in 1989, one is given a clear picture of the price the Romanian population had to pay in the name of ensuring 'the nation's vigour'¹⁶.

However, figures cannot speak about another type of legacies, as the degradation of human condition, the falsification of couple's relationship, and, most of all, the creation of a certain type of mentalities in relation to reproductive health. In its two transitional decades after 1989, Romania lost almost one million people, as a direct result of a severe drop in birth rate. Even today, almost twenty years after communism, one cannot speak about a real, operational sexual education among the Romanian society, not even restricted to the young generation. Although modern contraceptives are greatly available nowadays, the number of abortions is still

¹⁴ A special case was the one of the village midwives. Very skilled in their field, their skills were forbidden during communist times, and often punished for performing gynaecological help to the ones in need.

¹⁵ One of those was not to declare the mortality numbers, related to illegal abortion and its complications as such, but as any other medical problem or disease. On the national, as well as the international level, the Party's – represented by its leader - opinion in relation with the State's demographic politics was more than clear: "Each state has the sovereign right to promote the demographic policy and measures which it considers best suited, according to its national interests, without any intervention from the outside." (Ceaușescu, in a speech delivered at the Population World Conference, held in 1974 in Bucharest, quoted in N. Branzei & V. Ghețan, „Population – a Decisive Factor for the Development of Our Socialist nation”, *The Socialist Era*, February 15th, 1986:3, *apud* Kligman: 2000).

¹⁶ For a clear demographic analysis on this matter, see Vladimir Trebici, *Genocid și demografîe (Genocide and Demography)*, Humanitas, București: 1991.

extremely high. More, phenomena like self-induced abortions and children's abandonment still measure far above the ground rates. This paradoxical phenomenon can be explained by an 'abortion culture'¹⁷ who still characterizes Romania's reproductive health, a legacy of its communist past. The lack of a proper education regarding contraceptive methods, combined with persistent taboo-mentalities, lead to the reluctance of women to control their fertility by other means than abortion. At the same time, despite the fact that modern contraceptives are much easier to obtain, their price is still high for most of women.

Another possible cause in not actively remembering pronatalism, as a major social trauma, is the fact that, at least at a superficial level, there is no one to blame - no one to blame, no one to trial, no one to punish as the major scapegoat. In fact, is no one and everyone, but the reality had so many hidden aspects, that it becomes more and more complicated to start a remembering process, along with a looking-back analysis. More, the official record of communist regime's political demography- the official memory of that time - is another possible strong motivation of the present low-memory of Romania's pronatalism. In Romanian Communism, the abortion debate was not perceived as a simple phenomenon of reproductive policies, as it appears, for example, in Occident. In Ceaușescu's Romania, pronatalism was one of the devices by which the *New Man* had to be constructed. During the anti-abortion and *pro-family* campaigns from 1966 to 1989¹⁸, in order to legitimize its demographic policies, the Party invented a new past and a new present by constructing a new identity, the one of *socialist mothers*. Thus, a new social tradition was set into place. As developed by Hobsbawm (1983), the concept of 'invented tradition' refers to "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual and symbolical nature, which seek to incalculable certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past". The general rule and alternative reality that the Party wanted to implement in pronatalist Romania was that the woman's most sacred, historically transmitted role was the one of giving birth and rearing children, thus fulfilling her contribution to the nation's vigour:

¹⁷ Along with this powerful 'abortion culture', who affects the reproductive health of the Romanian society to its very core, another destructive consequence of the communist-related mentalities is the reluctance to gynaecological controls and complementary measures. This phenomenon, who characterizes the generations of women aged more than 40, is related to the mistrust and even hate those women developed, in time, to the imposed gynaecological controls performed all over the '80s in communist Romania, as a direct control of the Party over the nation's body.

¹⁸ The sources I have analysed could be delimited in two main domains: on the one hand, the official documents - from Ceaușescu's reports, speeches and articles, reports of the Party's sessions, legislative acts concerning the state's demographic policies, to related articles published in the Party's newspapers and official journals (i.e. *Scînteia* & all). On the other hand, the common studies for the popularising of the Party's policy, as medical brochures, little family encyclopaedias, journals and almanacs for women (written in a semi specialised language, but nevertheless very persuasive).

“The greatest honour and most important social role for woman is to give birth, to give life, and to raise children. There cannot be anything more precious for a woman than to be a mother, except to ensure the realisation of nature’s laws in her own life, to procreate, to ensure the continuous development of the people, of our nation. There cannot exist for a family and for a woman a greater pride and joy than that of having and raising children”¹⁹.

Essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, the invented role of the *socialist mother* was developed through intense campaigns of daily propaganda: from the media to the school books, the image of the *socialist mother* and her role in the construction of the ‘great Romanian communist nation’ irrupted everywhere. Taking into account that it is actually “women, who reproduced nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically” (Yuval-Davis: 1997), the Party reproduced and reinforced stereotypical gender roles²⁰ through nationalist and pronatalist discourse: maternity and motherhood thus became the most recurrent leitmotifs of the public sphere. During the entire period of abortion interdiction, maternity and children especially were exalted in the media as ‘the fulfilment of women’s destiny’, ‘the wonder of nature’, ‘the wellspring of life’²¹.

Starting from the early ‘70s, the presses was filled with accounts of perfect mothers, who had devoted themselves to the bearing and raising of their children and, in their old age, were enjoying the outcomes of such an exemplary life. This model was a present leitmotif even in the primary-school’s manuals. Here, the youngest generations (among them future possible *socialist mothers*) were able to read and discuss prototype stories such as ‘The Tale of Vrâncioaia’. The tale

¹⁹ Ceaușescu, 1988, *apud* Kligman: 2000 (My translation from Romanian, as all the other texts of the same type that follows).

²⁰ It is important to underline that those stereotypes were, in a certain way, already latent in the Romanian culture. As developed by Hobsbawm, one of the most interesting parts in re-inventing the past/present is “the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes” (Hobsbawm: 1983). In constructing maternity as the core of a socialist woman’s life and attributions, Romanian communism was in fact constructing on the foundations of the traditional patriarchal Romanian society, which perceived woman primarily in terms of passiveness and submissiveness.

²¹ The press articles from those years, and especially from the last decade, when pronatalist policies and their propaganda were at their best, had titles and subtitles such as: „Children – the joy of Trifa family/Copiii – bucuria familie Trifa” (*Health / Sănătatea*, no. 3/1984); „The Children’s Health – the Richness of the Future / Sănătatea copiilor – bogăția viitorului” (*Health / Sănătatea*, no. 4/1984); „The Joy of Life (i.e., the children – author’s note)/Bucuria vieții” (*Health / Sănătatea*, no. 4/1984); „The Great Concern with which the Country lends an Eye to its Children / Imensa grijă cu care țara își veghează copiii” (*Woman / Femeia*, no. 3/1985); „The Children – the love and concern of the entire country / Copiii – dragostea și grija întregii țări” (*Woman / Femeia*, no. 6/1985); „The Romanian family – the reason for reaching through the centuries: everlasting teachings of the Romanian history / Familia românească – temeiul dăinuirii și statorniciei prin vreme: perene învățăminte ale istoriei românești” (*Scînteia*, September 18, 1986), etc.

presents exemplary old mother Vrâncioaia who, by giving birth and raising seven brave children, contributed to the victory of Steven the Great (one of the Romanian princes of the fifteenth century, a warrior model in the Romanian historiography) against the Turkish invaders. History itself was re-written in order to represent motherhood as a specific value of the Romanian nation. From the Dacian²² women to the present, the Romanian women were fighting for maintaining their people and their nation. The written media was invaded with 'true-stories' about model families and their babies. Television shows were dedicated to this, and the 'particular subject' started to flourish also in literature and arts. From media to national celebrations, from art to science²³, the motherhood-model irrupted everywhere.

Inculcating a gendered responsibility through the nationalist discourse, the Party's propaganda continuously reinforced the patriotic duty of women to ensure the development and future of the nation. Thus, as maternity became the first and ultimate duty of the socialist woman, anyone who wanted to induce her own abortion, or who submitted herself to one, was officially stigmatised and thus symbolically excluded from 'socialist mothers' society'. The interruption of pregnancies was seen as threatening the homeland's health, both individually (as abortions jeopardised every woman's physical and psychological health) and generally (as abortion determined a low birth rate, thus endangering the health and vigour the political body). Thus, another identity-construction appeared, in contrast to the responsible comrade and loving mother: the selfish, sinful woman who refused the benefits of motherhood. Starting with the beginning of the pronatalist campaign, the highly-stigmatized abortion *topos* appeared everywhere. The Party's official dailies were full with long studies incriminating abortion, signed by respected specialists:

"I wish to state outright that any termination of pregnancy... is a brutal act that endangers women's health. Unfortunately, at present, certain young women think that the termination of a pregnancy, when done under the best hygienic circumstances and by a specialist, does not present a future risk for their

²² The Dacs were the ancient Romanian tribes, before the Roman conquest (years 101-102, A.C.)

²³ Even linguistics contributed to the motherhood construction. For example, an article published in *Femeia Almanac* (Ioan N. Chitu, „The origin of the Romanian word *femeie* (woman)”, *Femeia*, 1968, p.54) in 1968 and dealing with the etymology of the Romanian word *femeie* (*woman*) revealed the close connection between woman and the family by analyzing it from a linguistic point of view. The author explains the evolution of the Romanian word from the Latin one *familia*, which is identical with the present Romanian word denoting family. Thus, *femeie* (woman) and *familie* (family) overlap in a significant way; this was also used as an argument in constructing the role of woman as the preserver and reproducer of the family unit. At the same time, the ancient origins of the word, and its preservation in time, were proof of the traditional relationship between women, motherhood and the family. At its imagistic level, *Femeia Almanac* was a continuous source of the propagandistic role of the ideal type of socialist woman: in the sixties, its front page was almost always an young woman; in the seventies, a woman with a child; in the eighties, a woman with children or, simply, just children. For exemplification, see appendix no.2.

*general health or for the possibility of having a child. This is erroneous. Interventions of this kind, performed even by the most skilled hands, can have negative effects on the organism...I also want to remind you that genital ailments have ill effects on women's psyches. The first trauma that leads to demoralisation is involuntary sterility. In any woman's life there comes a time when she wants to have a child, and if she is no longer able? The second is the heightened sensitivity of the entire organism. A similar result may derive from the repeated use of anaesthetics.'*²⁴

Especially in the last period of the 1980s, the State directed an intense propaganda campaign to incriminate abortion, officially classified as 'a social plague'. Complementary, contraception was also stigmatised, because of its dangerous secondary effects²⁵. Female sexuality was taken into consideration only in relation to its reproductive function. A person was judged according to her/his being a Party member, the degree of commitment to the socialist cause, and the spirit of sacrifice for the nation. In this omnipresent context, not to become a mother – a sign of supreme selfishness - was perceived as the capital sin against one's nation.

This official record of Romania's pronatalist times constitutes itself, over the years, as a powerful historical memory of that time. Further, as the constructed tradition of the *socialist mother* was intrinsically developed on the basis of Romanian traditional culture and its correlated Orthodoxy, looking critically back to the pronatalist past becomes in the present a problem *per se*. A law against abortion could never be successfully criticized in the Romanian contemporary society, fact which is influencing the past public remembrance. Nevertheless, a stronger remembrance of the communist pronatalist past should not be constructed around this, but around the ways the regime instrumentalized the people's bodies in order to fulfil its demographic plans. And the legacies that are still lived by the entire Romanian society.

²⁴ Dr. Gheorghe Theodoru, a specialist at the Polizu-clinic in Bucharest, in an article from *Femeia* magazine, October 1966.

²⁵ "Couples were to be instructed on the biological merits of procreation for reproduction of species, as well on the social ones for the reproduction of the work force. Educators and activists received all manner of booklets on the relationship between health and demography, marital harmony, care of infants and children, and the consequences of abortion... Discussion groups were organized at which individualized advice was also obtainable. Formal group instruction was offered at schools for mothers, for fathers, and for grandparents. Documentary films were shown for ideological-educational purposes." (Kligman, 2000: 143). In the field of cinematography, pronatalism was a central topic, but any reference related to abortion was officially censored. However, a film appeared in the '70s on this subject (following the official policies of "do-s and don't-s"), "Ilustrate cu flori de câmp" (Postcards with Wild-Flowers), based on a true story about a young girl who died after an illegal abortion. In the literary field, the subject was also prohibited – in the sense that it almost never survived the censorship's vigilance. Nevertheless, 'innocent hints' were made, as in Marin Preda's novel, "Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni" (where one of the heroines disappears after an unwanted pregnancy, and the main character, her lover, is put under investigation).

For the moment, those topics are only sporadically discussed in the public arena (a major change occurring for a short time in 2007, after Romania won the *Palm d'Or* of Cannes Festival with a film about abortion's interdiction in the '80s). They are nevertheless fully vivid in the private, social memory of the people – especially women – who experienced Ceaușescu's demographic plans. The discussion I will further develop is constructed around this third form of the memory of pronatalism, the most impressive, yet unexplored – its communicative one. My study is based on an oral history project started in 2003, and continued during my master and doctoral research.

Actors and Sites of Communicative Memory: Narrating the Individual Back into Collective. In analysing the communicative memory of those times, manifested in the oral histories collected in the past years, among the first research questions I put myself was focussed on which are, exactly, the memory nodes that are interrelating the stories in a bigger, 'collective picture'. What are the common points of the looking back to that traumatic past? In short, what are the most recurrent memory-sites of the social memory or Romanian pronatalism? Even if memory is primary an individual psychological process, individual remembering is always taking place in a larger, omnipresent social context. Thus, the social memory of collectivities can be structured in numerous practices and memorial-sites: in speech, in writing, in ceremonies and customs, in body-attitudes and body-practices, in landscapes and objects, in museums and national commemorations, etc. The civilizations which do not use writing can, as well, deposit their memory into traditions and oral texts, in daily practices of life, in culinary customs or *rites de passage*.

For the entire community, the sites of memory are thus “important to truth claims, identities and many other aspects of the human life. They are important for social and cultural continuity within ethnic, religious, national, and other groups, and across generations, occupational categories, and other identities. At the same times, the sites of memory can, and often do, become the focus of contestation...” (Climo & Cattell, 2002: 18). With all this in mind, one can thus speak, in the relation with the cultural memory of communist Romania's pronatalism, about different memory-sites: the language as memory-deposit, the sensorial memory or body-memory, the memory of places or, why not, the memory of the objects, etc. Memory can thus be seen and analyzed as an ongoing process, a continuous dialogue between the present and the past. In the following lines, I will restrict my analysis to two of such memory-

sites, (a) the urban folklore²⁶, constructed around the black jokes of that time, and (b) the memory-places.

(a) Urban folklore as a memorial depository. In the case of communist Romania's pronatalism and abortion interdiction, language and oral expressions are one of the main memorial depositories. Abortion was one of the former communist regime's favourite taboos, and speaking about it was strictly forbidden in the public as well as in the private sphere. Even now, the language describing illegal abortions generally reflects this taboo. In terms of vocabulary, none of the interviewed informants (except, maybe, members of the medical body) mentioned abortion by name, using instead numerous euphemistic expressions: „a da afara/to expell (= to abort)”, „a scăpa/to drop off (= to abort)”, „a lepăda / to drop out (= to abort) ” „a lua/prinde aer / to take air (=to abort, in the sense of making the air entering the placenta)”, „a rezolva / to resolve (= to finished the induced abortion, in the sense of a medical intervention)”, „a sonda/ to probe” (= to induce an abortion using a home-made probe), etc. Of course, a larger analysis of all of those euphemisms should be made with respect to their genetic and generic context. Many of those expressions were already part of passive popular vocabulary, but the pronatalist era imbued them with new meaning, and they re-entered the language bearing testimony to a difficult past.

From this point of view, one can analyze numerous the large numbers of communist-era black jokes about abortion as a particular form of pronatalist folklore. Taking into discussion the multiple facets of daily life touched by this social transformation of sexuality, and especially the lack of modern contraception, the pronatalist jokes were extremely popular in the underground public sphere. *In nuce*, they were generally seen as a primary form of protest against the overly restrictive politics of reproduction. Thus, a black joke like the following:

A woman calls Radio Erevan, asking:

'Is it true that one can use aspirin as a contraceptive method?'

'Yes, comrade!' comes the quick answer.

After five minutes, the same woman calls again:

'And how exactly can one use aspirin as contraception?'

'By keeping it between the knees – that's how!' can be understood only in its genetic and generic context. Along with the official banning of abortion on demand, the communist regime also

²⁶ The folklore as 'cultural memory in motion' is a common idea of the text-context analysis of ethno-folkloric studies. Nevertheless, my research on the urban folklore related to the memory of abortion during communist Romania is a part of a larger context, namely the language as memorial-depository, given the specificity of the histories collected.

restricted the people's access to modern contraception, making them impossible to find in the public sphere. Couples were thus forced to turn to more 'traditional methods', from the interruption of the sexual act to the use of a large number of surrogate substances and products, including the famous aspirins. In short, their objective was to modify the temperature or the internal chemistry of the woman's vagina in order to impede conception. In most cases, along with being totally ineffective, they were also extremely deleterious to reproductive health. Thus, the idea that the best contraception was abstinence, or 'the aspirin kept between one's knees', gained currency.

(b) Memory in places. People often become emotionally attached to certain places, and those places have the power to evoke forgotten memories or even entire pasts. Thus, a place can become a historical and memorial trace with special importance for a certain individual, a social, professional or religious group, a nation or an entire civilization. By extension, places can also be 'un-remembered', as when buildings or other landmarks are demolished and can no longer serve as repositories for the memories and meanings once stored in them (Climo & Catell 2002 : 21). Called *memory places*²⁷ or *memoryscapes*²⁸ in scholarly texts, those memorial storages can function as *spatial imago*²⁹ capable of launching the process of recollection.

Among the most prominent memory places concerning pronatalism during communist-era Romania, the two most revisited are 'the hospital' and the 'Prefectura', the official political police headquarters, where all the women who tried to have an illegal abortion were brought. The hospital building, situated at the end of the road, was a place that women sought and dreaded at the same time. The large majority of so-called 'spontaneous' abortions were illegally induced at home, so they had 'to be finished' at the hospital, as many women recall. The hospital thus becomes a place where all the recollections meet, from the terrible fear of being discovered to the terror of being forced by the regime to carry such a 'damaged' pregnancy to term, to the dread of the political police force, whose members were perpetually lurking in the hospital's rooms to detect 'crimes against the nation's vigour':

We arrived during the night. At night, as with everything like this, it was compulsory that a commission of doctors was gathered from the entire hospital. So, even though the doctor from the gynaecological department was there, at his post, he couldn't start to help me, to finish the job – no matter the

²⁷ Cf. Robert Archibald: 'A Personal History of Memory', in Climo & Cattell: 2002

²⁸ Cf. Nuttall & Coetzee, 1998, quoted in Climo & Cattell: 2002

²⁹ In short, the *imago*-s are those mini-memorial sites, such as flash-backs, containing a different degree of historical truth - for example, the indelible image of the Red Army tanks when one speaks about the events at Tiananmen Square. For an exhaustive theory of the *imago*, see the study by Norman M. Klein: *The History of Forgetting*. Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory, Verso: London, New York, 1997.

consequences – until this commission was gathered. So they said, Mr. X from that department, he should come, everybody should come...He put me there, on a table, and during that time, the blood started to run down me, once, twice, running down on that table; on every table there was a plastic device, to prevent damage to the table itself, and then a pail on the floor, for the blood to run down into. That's how it was, back then. And one could hear, gâl-gâl-gâl, poc. Gâl-gâl-gâl, poc. Two times, at least two times I remember, I was bleeding really hard. And I said, 'Abh, I feel better now', and the nurse replied, 'Listen, doctor, she has already started to see Heaven there!' and then I realized that it was not supposed to be a joke. And he said, 'Go and tell them to come, drop everything and come: this woman is dying here and me, I have to wait for them....'(I.A., primary school teacher, 43 years old, interviewed September 2003)

Related to this memory place, 'going to the Prefectura' – the place where all the Party's men gathered to develop its policies, including the pronatalist one – is another major topos in the communicative, social memory of pronatalism. The women's memory of the place *per se* is generally associated with the sensorial memory of the fear they endured there, or with the recollection of the public moral condemnations and harsh criticisms rained upon them. The 'Prefectura' thus becomes a special memory place, the centre of a maze formed by numerous different memories, all traumatic, all painful to remember.

Remembering to Forget, or Some Final Open Conclusions. More than another past through the current national politics of memory towards communism, to publicly remember Romania's pronatalism is trying to enter into the history of personal trauma of all the communist subjects involved. Implicitly, this stands for another reason for which communist pronatalism is not strongly rememorized in the current post-communist society. As one of the women I have interviewed stated, 'I don't know if you believe me or not, but there are some things that I forget, I *had to* forget'. Nevertheless, remembering is an important past in overcoming trauma, this being one of the major truth underlined in all post-communist studies dealing with politics of memory: 'Nations, like individuals, need to face up to and understand traumatic past events before they can put them aside and move on to a normal life... Preventing dictatorship's return requires a full understanding of the mechanisms of dictatorship... A nation's discussion about how to face its past is central to the challenge of building real democracy³⁰. In the construction of the future Europe, the past is thus playing its role...

³⁰ Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land*, apud Eyal, 2004 : 13.

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APPENDIX no. 1:
Pronatalism and Official Statistics

Table no. 1: Monthly birth rates, 1966 – 1971

Month	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970
January	12,7	15,4	29,5	25,3	20,1
February	14,8	15,7	29,5	24,9	21,5
March	15,1	16,5	29,8	25,1	22,6
April	15,4	17,8	28,1	24,7	23,5
Mai	15,2	20,7	26,8	24,1	22,3
June	14,8	29,9	26,2	22,7	22,3
July	14,3	38,7	26,0	23,6	22,1
August	14,4	38,5	26,1	23,3	20,6
September	14,1	39,9	27,8	24,9	20,8
October (Decree 770/1966)	14,5	36,1	26,4	23,0	20,5
November	13,9	31,1	24,2	20,8	18,8
December	12,8	27,7	21,5	17,9	18,4
Total per year	14,3	27,3	26,8	23,3	21,1

Source: Official Statistics of RSR, *apud* David & Wright 1971: 206.

Table no.2: Romania's fertility rate, 1956-1996

Year	Fertility rate
1956	2,87
1957	2,72
1958	2,58
1959	2,42
1960	2,33
1961	2,17
1962	2,03
1963	2,00
1964	1,96
1965	1,90
1966	1,90
1967	3,65
1968	3,63
1969	3,19
1970	2,88
1971	2,66
1972	2,54
1973	2,43
1974	2,72
1975	2,62
1976	2,58
1977	2,59
1978	2,53
1979	2,49
1980	2,45
1981	2,37
1982	2,16
1983	2,00
1984	2,19
1985	2,26
1986	2,39
1987	2,42
1988	2,31
1989	2,19
1990	1,83
1991	1,56
1992	1,50
1993	1,44
1994	1,41
1995	1,34
1996	1,29

Source: Ministry of Health's Official Monitor, *apud* Keil, Andrescu 1999: 484.

Table no. 3: Infantile mortality and maternal deaths related to abortion, 1965 – 1991

Year	Abortions	Maternal deaths related to abortions	Infantile mortality per 1000 living-births
1965	1 112 704	47	44,1
1966	973 447	64	46,6
1967	205 783	143	46,6
1968	220 193	192	59,5
1969	257 496	258	54,9
1970	292 410	314	49,4
1971	341 740	363	42,4
1972	380 625	370	40,0
1973	375 752	364	38,1
1974	334 621	381	35,0
1975	359 417	385	34,7
1976	383 220	432	31,4
1977	378 990	469	31,2
1978	394 636	447	30,3
1979	403 776	422	31,6
1980	413 093	441	29,3
1981	427 081	456	28,6
1982	468 041	511	28,0
1983	421 386	471	23,9
1984	303 123	449	23,4
1985	302 838	425	25,6
1986	183 959	488	23,2
1987	182 442	491	28,9
1988	185 416	524	25,3
1989	193 084	545	26,9
1990	992 265	181	-
1991	866 834	114	-

Source: Romania, Ministry of Health, *apud* Gail Kligman 2000: 237.

APPENDIX no. 2:
Front Pages of *Femeia* Almanac during Pronatalism

