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Lorena Anton: Crises of Memory: Pronatalism in Communist Romania and its Remembering

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Abstract

A short time after the fall of the communist regimes in Europe and the former Soviet block, 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 their controversial pasts. Perceived as a normal post-traumatic process, this *travail de mémoire* was also seen as an important part in the democratisation process. Nevertheless, some pasts were “more remembered” than others, and some were never remembered at all.

In the effort to provide some possible answers to the complicated question of post-communist remembrance, this paper presents a case study from Eastern Europe contemporary realities, namely Communist Romania’s pronatalist policies and their remembering after the fall of Ceaușescu’s regime. From 1966 to 1989, the Romanian Communist Party prohibited by law the right to interrupt a pregnancy, all in the name of the sanctity of the Romanian communist nation. 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.

Nevertheless, in spite of the Party’s rules, and especially because along with abortion, the regime generally prohibited contraception on Romanian territory, abortion had developed into a common practice during those years. The memory of those times, recollected in the form of oral histories, has over the years constituted an alternative discourse, excluded during Communism, but possible after its fall, as a form of counter-story to the public historical narration of *the socialist mother*. However, in the public sphere of contemporary Romania, those memories are as excluded as they were in communist times.

In the theoretical context of the “politics of memory” and memory studies, I would thus like to analyse the complicated relationship between remembering and abortion in communist Romania. A powerful taboo during Communism, abortion politics as well as the corresponding pronatalist policies are still not remembered, and not “re-memorised” – at least not for the moment. This is unfortunate, as the phenomenon is having a great impact on reproduction health and related public policies in contemporary Romania. In applying an anthropological approach to this memory-taboo, I intend to research it in relation to some possible explanations for its inclusion in the larger taboo of sexuality in Romanian culture or its relation to orthodoxy. In the end, my aim is to offer an open answer to the question of memory politics and their instrumentalisation in post-communist Eastern Europe, which is currently pursuing the path to constructing a democratic society and everyday life.

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. More important, some pasts were “more remembered” than others and some were never remembered at all. Both phenomena directly influenced the process of democratisation in all of the states involved.

The aim of the following pages is to provide some open insights into the complicated issue of “the politics of memory” and the memory-crisis in post-communism. To this end, a case study from Eastern Europe’s contemporary realities, namely the pronatalism in Communist Romania and its remembering after the fall of Ceaușescu’s regime, is presented.¹ Starting with the contextualisation of my subject of research in the general area of memory studies, I will then try to locate and analyse some major memory sites vis-à-vis Romania’s pronatalism in order to examine memory politics and their instrumentalisation in post-communist Eastern European countries as they move along the path to constructing a democratic society.

1. Introduction: pronatalism and Communist Romania

1.1. General overview

From 1966 to 1989, the Romanian Communist Party prohibited by law the right to interrupt a pregnancy, 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”.² 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*. Even though all of the other communist states in Eastern Europe prohibited abortion in one way or another during their socialist regimes, Romania’s “politics of duplicity” (to use Gail Kingman’s term³) concerning reproduction remains a singular example by virtue of its force and negativism.

1.2. Legislative trends concerning abortion

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 demand⁴ – if the pregnancy represented a danger to the woman’s health or if one of the parents suffered from a serious hereditary disease.

1 Starting with an oral history project, Bucharest of the ‘80s, initiated by The Romanian Peasant Museum in 2003, I have since conducted individual research (in the context of my PhD research) in order to create a data base with narratives concerning the memory of abortion during communist Romania and the effect of Ceaușescu’s draconic reproductive policies in everyday life. My general fieldwork favours non-structured interviews, according to a basic interview framework applied to all types of actors involved in the former pronatalist policies, i.e. women, men, police officers, nurses, doctors, priests, etc. The following analysis is based on this research, still in progress, as well as on the related archives, materials and studies on this particular issue.

2 Apud Henry P. David: Abortion in Europe, 1920–1991: A Public Health Perspective, in: Studies in Family Planning, Jan.–Feb. 1992, Vol.23, No.1, p. 13.

3 Kligman, Gail: Politica duplicității, Controlul reproducerii în România lui Ceaușescu (“The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu’s Romania”), Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2000.

4 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 Româna – no. 3/November 1st, 1955, which

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.⁵ At first, the abrupt change in Romanian legislation had a dramatic effect. In October 1966, 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. But within a few years, the expected 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.⁶

The anti-abortion law was modified once in 1972 (before the International Conference on Demography, held in 1974 in Bucharest) – by the related *Decree no. 53/1972* (the main difference being that the required minimum age for the permission of an abortion on request was lowered to 40 from 45, in accordance with the recommendations of all international studies on demographic trends), and once in 1985, when the required age-threshold was again put at 45; moreover, the woman asking for an abortion needed to have all four of her previous children under her direct care⁷ (*Decree no.441/1985*).

Following the overthrow of Ceaușescu in December 1989, the new government (“The Front of National Salvation”/ *Frontul Salvării Naționale*) reversed the restrictive abortion legislation. A new law (the second one voted upon in the new regime) was passed, authorising the importation, production and sale of modern contraceptives, and permitting abortion on demand through the first trimester, to be performed by qualified personnel.

2. Remembering the past – the approaches of memory

In the following paragraphs, I will try to contextualise the remembrance of Romania’s pronatalism into the broader theoretical area of memory studies. To this end, I will start with a general presentation of the contemporary “memory boom” in order to arrive at the specificity of an anthropological approach to such a subject of research.

2.1. “On the Emergence of Memory”⁸

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 towards the perception of time and space⁹ or the transformation and even dissolution of traditional memory¹⁰, to the discussion of the

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*).

5 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).

6 I am using the term “unwanted pregnancy” in its general meaning, including not only the “undesired”, but also – and, in such cases, especially – “unable to assume” (from a socio-economic point of view) future state of motherhood.

7 If, for example, one of the children was over 18, he/she was no longer considered as being reared by the mother.

8 Title borrowed from Kerwin Lee Klein: *On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse*, in: *Representations*, Winter 2000, pp. 127–150.

9 Cf. Andreas Huyssen: *Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia*, in: *Public Culture*, 12(1)/2000, pp. 21–38, or Kerwin Lee Klein: *On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse*, in *Representations*, Winter 2000, pp. 127–150.

10 Cf. Pierre Nora: *Entre Mémoire et Histoire. La problématique des lieux*, in: *Les lieux de la mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1984.

obsession with memory in relation to the new types of media¹¹, 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/recreate a new national identity. The scholars were thus underlining the persistence of a real “memory crisis” in most post-communist regimes¹², 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, with scholars arguing that in reality, there is no such thing as too little memory, but rather too much...

2.2. Towards an anthropological approach to memory

Long a preferred subject of history studies, especially with respect to recent history, memory and recollection have recently become topics of interest for anthropology as well. Even though an impressive number of studies has been dedicated to memory studies in recent years, the discipline is nevertheless fraught with problems, most of which stem from the methodology and the object of research. “...A nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise”, as described by Olick and Robbins¹³, memory studies has extremely permeable borders, and therefore does not lend itself to easy characterisation. In the following paragraphs, I will nevertheless try to provide a concise characterisation from an anthropological standpoint, following the works of scholars like Climo and 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 Cattell¹⁴, consists in the particular way in which an anthropologist researches traces of memory in the field and documents how memories are created and transmitted. It also consists of 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*¹⁵, i.e., in the space between different disciplines, one can underline that anthropologists – through their ethnographic work – can easily approach those spaces, given their experience in setting aside their cultural context in order to do fieldwork in another culture. Furthermore, the basic method of every anthropological work, 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, the author of *Anthropologie de la mémoire* (*Que sais-je ?*, Paris, PUF, 1996) and *Mémoire et identité* (PUF, Paris, 1998), the anthropological approach to memory focuses on memory work as a process, not as an information-provider:

11 Cf. Wulf Kansteiner: Finding Meaning in Memory: a Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies, in: *History and Memory*, 41, May 2002, pp. 179–197.

12 Cf. Gil Eyal: Identity and Trauma. Two Forms of the Will to Memory, *History and Memory*, 16.1, 2004, pp. 5–36.

13 J.K. Olick / J. Robbins: Social Memory Studies: From Collective Memory to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices”, in: *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1998, vol. 24, p. 106.

14 Jacob J. Climo/ Maria G. Cattell: *Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives*, New York, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2002.

15 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, pp. 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.

*“...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”.*¹⁶

At the same time, Berliner¹⁷, 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 cultural memory.

Personally, I see the anthropological approach to memory 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 fieldwork is never easy, but putting together and analysing all the micro-histories through which the past comes into the present can be a wonderful modality for decoding one’s culture.

3. Remembering Romania’s pronatalism – sites of memory

3.1. Memorial sites of collectivities

From a psychological point of view, memory exists only inside the human brain, in its imagistic-behavioural and linguistic-narrative systems. But human beings are, by definition, cultural beings, and as such cannot be reduced to mere biological processes. Accordingly, human memory can be located in numerous practises and memorial sites: in speech, in writing, in ceremonies and customs, in body-attitudes and body-practises, in landscapes and objects, in museums and national commemorations, etc. Memory can thus be seen and analysed as an ongoing process, a continuous dialogue between the present and the past.

For an 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 time, the sites of memory can, and often do, become the focus of contestation...”*¹⁸

With all this in mind, one can thus speak about different memory sites related to the cultural memory of communist Romania’s pronatalism: language as a memory-deposit, the sensorial memory or body-memory, the memory of places or – why not? – the memory of objects, etc. In the following lines, I will restrict my analysis to two such memory sites, namely *language as a memorial depository* and *memory places*.

3.2. Language as a memorial depository

Language can be seen and examined as a memory in motion, being both the depository and the medium of transmission of the past. Moreover, some forgotten expressions and words enter the society’s amnesia

16 Candau, Joël: *Anthropologie de la mémoire, Que sais-je ?*, Paris, PUF, 1996, p.6./ ‘The anthropologist, given his discipline, is not interested in memory in itself....but rather in the cultural processes of memory, i.e. the possible different forms of individual and collective representations of the past. (translation of the author)

17 Berliner, David: *The Abuses of Memory: Reflection on the Memory Boom in Anthropology*, in: *Anthropological Quarterly*, 2005, 78.1.

18 Jacob J. Climo/ Maria G. Cattell: *Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives*, New York, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2002, p. 18.

at the same time with the realities they designated – sometimes, the death of the words can determine the death of memories.

In the case of communist Romania's pronatalism and abortion interdiction, language is 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. The language describing illegal abortions generally reflects the taboo. In terms of vocabulary, none of the interviewed informants (except, of course, members of the medical profession) 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 analyse the large number of communist-era 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 restricted the people's access to modern contraception, making it 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 aspirin. In short, their objective was to modify the temperature or the internal chemistry of the woman's body 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.

3.3. 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 civilisation. 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.¹⁹

19 Cf. Jacob J. Climo/ Maria G. Cattell: *Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives*, New York, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2002, p. 21

Called *memory places*²⁰ or *memoryscapes*²¹ in scholarly texts, those memorial storages can function as *spatial imagos*²² 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 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, ‘Ahh, I feel better now’, and the nurse replied, ‘Listen, doctor, she has already started to see Heaven there!’ and then I realised 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 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.

4. Why remember: pronatalism’s politics of memory and its consequences

As observed before, after the fall of communism, Eastern European countries were confronted with a large spectrum of crises of memory, which, as many social scholars have emphasised, was not necessarily caused by generalised forgetfulness or amnesia, but was instead a result of the investment of memory with the function of healing and protecting the society. Nevertheless, as I have already stated, some pasts were more remembered than others, and some were never remembered at all. In post-communist Romania, Ceaușescu’s pronatalism fell into the latter category. The socialist transformation of agriculture, the so-

20 Cf. Robert Archibald: A Personal History of Memory, in Climo & Cattell: Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives, New York, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2002

21 Cf. Nuttall & Coetzee, 1998, quoted in Climo & Cattell: Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives, New York, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2002

22 In short, the imagos 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.

called “collectivisation” and the political police (*Securitatea*) were intensely remembered and debated, but the interdiction on abortion was not discussed. One can thus infer that communist pronatalism follows the laws of a certain “politics of memory” relative to post-communist remembrance. In short, this particular inference defines memory and remembrance as a subjective experience of a social group / society that essentially sustains a relation of power. Simply stated, it is who wants whom to remember what, and why.²³

4.1. Memory, pronatalism and taboo

Under communism, abortion was one of the most powerful public taboos, and even in the private sphere, the “quietness” on the subject was motivated by the continuous fear of punishment. Nevertheless, abortion and all of the surrounding secrecy are taboos *per se*, as integrated into the larger context of sexuality and intimacy. In Romanian culture, sexuality was and still is taboo, with the body seen as a silenced actor. Taking into account that the communist regime created and re-created a social memory of natality as a historically constructed value, which pushed abortions out of the society’s sphere of normality, recalling pronatalism becomes more and more difficult. At the same time, Christian Orthodox values are strongly cherished in contemporary Romanian society, a fact that imbued the abortion-taboo with even more power. Moreover, the Party’s pronatalist propaganda used so much religious discourse during communism that remembering and criticising all those constructions is not one of the easiest tasks in a public debate.

4.2. Memory, pronatalism and trauma

Of course, remembering abortion’s interdiction in the communist era is like trying to probe the personal trauma of all those involved. And this could be another reason, an implicit one this time, as to why communist pronatalism is not publicly remembered in post-communist Romanian society. As one of my narrators stated, “I don’t know if you believe me or not, but there are some things that I forgot, I *had to* forget”. Nevertheless, remembering is an important part of overcoming trauma, which is a major tenet of 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 discussions about how to face its past are central to the challenge of building real democracy”.²⁴

Another possible reason that pronatalism is not commemorated as a major social trauma is the fact that, at least on a superficial level, there is no one to blame: no one to blame, no one to put on trial, no one to punish, no obvious scapegoat. In fact, it is no one and everyone, but the reality had so many hidden aspects, that it becomes increasingly complicated to start a remembering process and, correspondingly, a “looking-back” analysis.

4.3. Why remember: memory and the construction of democracy

The case of communist Romania and its pronatalist policies is a classic example of how a state and its public policies can influence and ultimately harm its subjects, especially when individual rights are not primarily taken into consideration. Unfortunately, as Gal & Kligman argued²⁵, “women’s experiences of the economic and political changes are different from those of men; the implications for women’s lives are often more damaging”. What this study wanted to underline was, in fact, that the concrete example of communist Romania has become an important lesson in the controversial discussion about reproduction and reproductive politics. Its remembrance should be put on the nation’s current agenda, because the memory of Ceausescu’s pronatalism once again underlines the idea that the responsibility of human fertil-

23 According to Alan Confino: *Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method*, in *American Historical Review*, December 1997, pp. 1386–1403.

24 Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land*, apud Gil Eyal: *Identity and Trauma. Two Forms of the Will to Memory, History and Memory*, 16.1, 2004, p. 13.

25 Gal, Susan & Kligman, Gail: *Politicele de gen în perioada postsocialistă* (“The Politics of Gender after Socialism”), Polirom Publishing House, 2003

ity and sexuality should rest primarily with the family and its members. The banning of abortion, whether in communist Romania or other regimes/ eras, was never a successful policy for completely eradicating the termination of unwanted pregnancies. The ban ultimately only managed to eradicate the phenomenon from the public sphere. In this case, the public policies and their laws were not instruments for defending and improving life, but tools of oppression. This must never be forgotten...