

Book Reviews

Monica CIOBANU & Mihaela ȘERBAN (eds.),
***Between the Memory and Post-Memory of Communism in Romania. Fluid Memories*, London: Routledge, 2025**

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The topic of “memory of communism” in Central and Eastern Europe has been thoroughly explored by several authors (e.g., Bernhard & Kubik, 2016), with empirical foci on specific national cases or in a comparative fashion, adopting both top-down approaches (institutional memories) and bottom-up perspectives (grassroots mnemonic practices and individual nostalgias). However, few studies have shed light on the relationship between the political-institutional and socio-cultural dimensions of the memory politics of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, or, to use the classical categories of Jan Assmann, between cultural memory and communicative memory (Assmann, 1992). Even fewer studies, by examining this overlap, have systematically explained the impact of generational change and the progressive passing of the “generation of witnesses” on the construction and transformation of memory of communism (Bonnard & Jouhanneau, 2017).

“Postmemory”, in this perspective, is a particularly productive conceptual lens. It has had a major influence on memory studies research since the publication of *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Hirsch, 2012), which has significantly shaped its reception and application. Focusing on the intergenerational dynamics of

transmitting and receiving memories of experiences not lived firsthand, yet felt with emotional intensity and socially resonant (Ranger & Ranger, 2023), the concept aims to describe the specific condition in which new generations remember moments of political transition or collective traumas understood as foundational breaking points, from which temporal distance is such that direct witnesses are now gone, or progressively so. The most emblematic case is probably the memory of the Holocaust, its victims, and perpetrators, with the current global population of survivors rapidly declining. But the memory of communism in the former socialist republics is also inevitably following the same path. As the editors of the book reviewed here, Monica Ciobanu and Mihaela Șerban, note in the introduction, “*more than three decades after the fall of communism, over half of its population has neither directly experienced nor has been exposed to first-hand accounts of childhood memories of communism*” (Introduction, p. 1). The implicit question running through the volume is therefore: what happens when those who remember a difficult and foundational past have no direct image, nor many opportunities to confront those for whom that past was once a present, and today’s present was imagined as a promising future? The collected essays in the volume thus explore the memory of communism in Romania in the midst of the transition from memory to postmemory.

The book is composed of eleven chapters illustrating how such memories are constructed and transformed in various sites and by various actors. Combining diverse disciplinary perspectives (spanning sociology, anthropology, history, and more), fields of inquiry (memory studies, heritage studies, museum studies), and methodological approaches (ethnography, archival research, document and social media analysis, and more), the scholars adopt several empirical foci: the Romanian State Secret Police Archive (chapters 1 and 2), property taking and restitutions practices and policies (chapter 3), legal proceedings and trials (chapter 4), royal monuments (chapter 5) and communist statues (chapter 8), TV series as commented on YouTube (chapter 6), cinematic productions (chapter 7), private museum initiatives

depicting daily life under communism (chapter 9), vernacular and community-driven memorialization initiatives (chapter 10), and grassroots advocacy for underrepresented victims of communism (chapter 11). The selection of Romania as a unique and all-encompassing case (with some limited comparative breadth in chapters 9 and 10) represents both a strength and a limitation: on one hand, it leaves open questions of comparative and transnational scope, but on the other, it constitutes the starting point for the analytical density of the work. The first notable merit of this book is undoubtedly the application of the “postmemory” lens to a case not yet studied in these terms (with few limited exceptions, see Crețan & Doiciar, 2023), namely, post-communist Romania. Another merit is the attention to non-conventional actors and arenas where communist memory making has occurred and continues to occur, such as museums of everyday life, digital media, and cinema, sometimes employing highly original methodological approaches, such as ethnographically driven archive research (see chapter 1). Undoubtedly, the volume represents an original and valuable contribution to memory studies and, more specifically, to the study of memory of communism in the context of the coming of the generation of postmemory.

To conclude, while postmemory – the memory of events not directly experienced – provides an interesting analytical perspective to assess the effects of intergenerational change on the construction of memory of communism, another underexplored space of inquiry remains in studying the so-called “memories of the future” (Jedlowski, 2017), that is, the memory of representations of the future imagined in the past. What does the “generation of witnesses” tell us today about the images of the future projected then, before and after the “fateful 1989”, onto the contemporary present? Which promises remain unfulfilled? How are these aspirations currently transmitted to and confronted by the generation of postmemory?

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Author biography

Andrea APOLLONIO (PhD) researches memory politics, political narratives, and symbolic legitimacy in the European Union and Japan. He has conducted research at several institutions, including the University of Turin, the University of Florence, the Université libre de Bruxelles, and Maastricht University. His recent article, *Intra-institutional memory activism: a sociological investigation of the European Parliament's politics of remembrance*, was published in the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* (2025). His PhD monograph, *Politiche della memoria e narrazioni sulla storia nel Parlamento europeo: un'indagine sociologica*, was awarded the Città di Firenze Prize 2025 and is forthcoming with Firenze University Press (2026).