HOLOCAUST MEMORYSCAPES

CONTEMPORARY MEMORIALISATION
OF THE HOLOCAUST IN CENTRAL
AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Edited by **SONIA CATRINA**

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Colecția ISTORIE ȘI ȘTIINȚE POLITICE

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Preface & Acknowledgements

Sonia CATRINA

The present volume originates from the International Colloquium on the "Contemporary Memorialisation of the Holocaust in Central and Eastern European Countries" which took place at the "Elie Wiesel" National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust (Bucharest, Romania) on the 11th-12th of October 2019. A selection of the colloquium papers is now presented in this thematic volume on "Holocaust Memoryscapes" in Central and Eastern Europe, an overarching trope that captures authors' perspectives on the memory-work in these countries, with a special focus on the Romanian post-communist context. This scientific event was focused on the major themes of ongoing research on the Holocaust memorialisation in post-communist contexts. It was organised in connection with the research project entitled "Coming to Terms with National History and Participation in Contemporary Memorialisation of the Holocaust in Central and Eastern European Post-communist Countries". This research project was hosted by the INSHR EW – The "Elie Wiesel" National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, and it was financed by the UEFISCDI – The Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0811, Contract 31/2018, 02/05/2018 – 30/04/2020). Therefore, I would like to acknowledge the support of UEFISCDI which made possible the publication of this volume. I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation for our hosts, notably, to Professor Alexandru Florian, General Director of the INSHR EW, for his strong institutional support, and firm belief in the value of our undertaking. Due to his valuable advice at various stages of this project and ongoing mentoring, the research has properly developed in relevant directions. I particularly thank the contributors[1] to this volume for their inspiring research papers which made our editorial work a most rewarding enterprise. Their case studies and theoretical frameworks added valuable

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[1] The content of each chapter is the sole responsibility of the author.

insights to the topic of the "Holocaust Memoryscapes" in post-communist European contexts. I am most grateful to Raul-Michael Cârstocea for his diligent proofreading of our papers and constructive feed-back on the preparation of this volume. Last but not least, I want to express my appreciation for all the colleagues at INSHR EW for their contributions to our overall project.

HOLOCAUST MEMORYSCAPES:
In Lieu of an Introduction[1]

Sonia CATRINA

European Jews were among the most affected categories by the genocide systematically planned by the Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators during the Second World War (1939-1945). They were targets of hostility, stigmatisation, persecution, and state discrimination long before the Holocaust. Yet, the escalation of these attitudes from 1933 toward the final stage of mass destruction in the period 1941-1945 was the result of the Nazi policy built on the idea of racial superiority. According to this conception, of biologically pure, Aryan blood, the Nazis deliberately targeted people who did not correspond to their racist ideological framing, without distinction of gender or age. In addition to the six million Jewish people (of which over 1,5 million were children) who perished across Europe during the Second World War in ghettos and extermination camps, other targets of Nazi racism were the Roma (Gypsies)[2], people with disabilities, Slavic people (Poles, Russians, and others), Soviet prisoners of war, and blacks (USHMM no date). Because of their alleged 'inferiority', these categories were considered as a threat to German racial purity – for example, Roma were considered as "asocials" and for this reason outside "normal" society (Open Society Foundations 2019). For this reason they were deliberately targeted for destruction across German-occupied Europe. Communists, socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals were also

[2] Despite the "unreliability of pre-genocide population figures for Roma", which makes it difficult to estimate the number of Roma and Sinti killed during the Second World War, "[s]cholarly estimates range from 300,000 to 500,000" (Open Society Foundations 2019).

persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioural grounds (USHMM no date).

Thinking that previously "racial stereotyping and demonization" has been the "prelude to mass violence around the globe" (Wall 2019) that led to the Holocaust, considered "a turning point in history" and "the archetype of evil" (Stone 2004), this volume is dedicated to the analysis of the remembrance policies, projects, practices, activities, and structures in contemporary Central and Eastern European countries. The aim of the chapters gathered in this volume is to showcase the extent to which societies from these countries connect with the past, dialogically engage with history, actively participate in tackling present issues of anti-Semitism, and contribute to building a culture of respect for human rights and peace. In other words, the chapters in this volume all deal, in different ways, with the problem of ideological debate in coming to terms with difficult pasts and the stakes of integrating the dark pasts into mainstream society in the Central and Eastern European post-communist region. In trying to answer the question: *How is the memorialisation of the Holocaust dealt with in different national and disciplinary contexts?*, the studies collected in this thematic volume examine the social, cultural, intellectual, political, technological, ethical, and practical changes impacting on the ways individuals, groups, and societies relate to the events of the Second World War and the Holocaust in various post-communist European contexts, with a special focus on Romania. By critically engaging with the field of Holocaust and memory studies, and using various theoretical, empirical, and methodological tools, the contributions to the volume inquire into various agencies dealing with the issue of the Holocaust in the contemporary Europe, examine the layering of remembrance, and analyse memorial events, performances, and cultural ventures of reconciliation, social repair and reconstruction. The chapters examine the history of memorialisation, the culture of memory, and Holocaust memorial art, both in terms of design and of content, in our contemporary era, deployed in local and transnational settings by political actors, non-governmental institutions, and individual agents.

The primary objectives of these research studies are threefold. (1) First, the chapters in this volume seek to trace, from a comparative perspective, the historical genealogy of the Holocaust remembrance in Central and Eastern European post-communist countries by discussing various engagements with the (re)enactment of the Jewish and Roma dreadful past into public memory. To answer this objective, we consider both top-down and bottom-up actions of memorialisation dedicated to the Holocaust, aimed at raising awareness about the destruction of European

Jews and Roma. (2) Second, through a critical analysis of a wide selection of Holocaust 'memoryscapes', our research interrogates how memories of the Second World War have been spatially and discursively appropriated by state and non-state agencies over various scales, as means of achieving multiple objectives, including nation-building, mourning, and education. (3) Third, our studies scrutinise ethical, emotional, and memorial attitudes within post-communist societies, in other words the moral and societal implications of the cultural valuing of memorial landscapes relating to the Second World War, including monuments, museums, and commemorative ceremonies, and the social impact of transmitting the memory of such tragic events.

The proposed overarching topic of our volume, which provides a research vista less explored in post-communist European academic contexts, has grown from my personal research interests and previous fieldwork, focused on identity, heritage, and the cultural phenomenon in connection with political authority and social engagement. This blend of research interests, supported by interdisciplinary academic foundations, with a social science and cultural studies emphasis, has opened up new vistas for questioning competing glances and representations of the Jewish and Romani past on a larger scale and in various national contexts. Moreover, considering that the analysis of the extent to which states across post-communist Central and Eastern Europe have valued their past and dealt with 'the Jewish issue' and 'the Roma issue' is of paramount importance for research, I decided to embark on this topic in an attempt to examine on comparative grounds the ways in which public authorities (state and municipal representatives, heritage professionals), but also other social agents (from private organisations and local communities to individual actors) have re-enacted the terrible Jewish and Romani past on home ground through memorial development and enhancement, heritage work, cultural practices, and educational resources. The need for an in-depth comparative analysis was supported by my motivation to scrutinise how, what, and why the memory of the war is currently commemorated in the nation-states' public lives and appropriated in everyday practices. The analysis of official attitudes toward Europe's painful past developed in post-communist contexts offers a window through which it is possible to understand what is at stake when national identity, political culture and ideology, public memory, and professional history intertwine. In turn, private stakeholders' engagements with these aims show how 'historical consciousness' and 'moral responsibility' relate in contemporary societies.

The importance of addressing this topic arises from the idea that there is a burden which hangs on the recent history of the European region

because of the planned killing of Jews and Roma during the first half of the 20th century. Unlike previous research, which focused on the why and how the genocide was possible, the aim of this volume is to examine the processes of remembering trauma in contemporary post-communist European societies, with a special focus on the Holocaust memory-making in the Romanian context. More precisely, it examines the manner in which post-communist states across Europe have dealt with their Jewish and Romani (hi)stories in the aftermath of the Second World War, and how the official memories have intertwined with "vernacular memories and histories" (Sather-Wagstaff 2016), by exploring engagements aimed at the (re)enactment of the traumatic past into national culture. Even more specifically, the object of study of this research volume concerns the analysis of cultural forms of memorialising and commemorating the Jewish and Romani histories during the Second World War in contemporary post-communist European countries. The analysis of the memorial and educational projects that make reference to the Holocaust carried out by various agents raises the question of the importance of the Holocaust for the collective memory in contemporary European historiography, as well as of its role in education and in fostering respect for human rights. This refreshing approach to the social functions performed by Jewish and Romani memory in the framework of national identity intends to historicise and rework our understanding of the role of memorial practices in present-day Europe. Thus, by investigating the actors' discourses, interpretations, and representations about Jewish and Romani history, we elaborate a critical and contextual analysis of the role of this legacy in contemporary post-communist European societies.

Whereas the literature that has developed around the phenomenon of war memorial landscapes has mainly drawn on Western case-studies, exposing the ways in which large-scale conflicts are commemorated and contested, we contend that there is still much more that can be learned from considering 'memoryscapes' of war in non-Western societies. This volume presents such an endeavour in its analysis of how the Second World War is remembered within post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, unique for its potential to shed light on the manifold politics associated with the commemoration of wars within multiracial and multi-religious post-communist contexts. From this point of view and considering that research on this issue remains rather underdeveloped in non-Western societies, through this research we want to bring the Eastern research in line with Western standards and open it to new research questions. For example, we ask ourselves if changing representations of trauma and memory of the Holocaust, and by extension of mass atrocities in general, could emerge as a

constitutive feature of the post-communist European identity project. On the other hand, Western research in this field mainly focused on official engagements aimed at the (re)enactment of the Jewish history in the present and its internalisation into individuals' consciousness. Holocaust memories were shaped by national imperatives, an aspect which was reflected in the proliferation of national sites of commemoration. While this focus remains confined to a territorial conception of memory inscribed into national discourse, it does not take into account how it is acknowledged locally. Compared to such an approach, the originality of our research involves touching upon bottom-up actions of memorialisation and heritagisation dedicated to the Holocaust, in addition to top-down actions of dealing with the past. In other words, the richness of this research lies with the analysis of official efforts in conjunction with those of private stakeholders to raise awareness about the Jewish and Romani past in these territories and to bring a dark chapter of the history of these countries into the present. The examination of the current memorial practices in post-communist Europe will reveal completely new modes of expression and meanings related to the social functions of such practices. In addition, it will unravel appropriations or even identity claims, socio-economic changes, and the negotiation of new socio-cultural relations, even political ones, at a territorial level. Broadly speaking, our comparative in-depth analysis will help us understand how the local history of Jews and Roma during the Holocaust is transmitted nowadays through commemorative practices, heritage, and education. More generally, the research studies collected in this volume indicate the extent to which the recognition of the historical and educational importance of Jewish and Romani memory is determined by the attitude of the authorities toward a previously unacknowledged history. In addition, the analysis of the mechanisms that have brought about the political commitment of the European states to the rediscovery of an overshadowed past and of the forms that this commitment has taken shows what factors allow the rise of private actions of memory-making, projected to stir emotions and empathy and to encourage people to engage with history, and the extent to which the 'internalisation' of the life-shattering experiences of Jews and Roma frames mentalities and contributes to reducing 'social distance' in multi-ethnic societies. In sum, we postulate that our research exposes the power games resulting from the social valorisation of the memory of the Second World War in post-communist Central and Eastern European countries, ideology issues, as well as the ethical and societal implications of the cultural valuing of the Holocaust, or the social impact of transmitting the memory of tragic events, such as the ghettoization followed by the extermination of the

European Jewry and Roma people, leading to the identification of elements that shape the social relationships in these societies.

Using cross-territorial comparisons, our research scrutinises symbolic forms of 'memoryscapes' of the Second World War, such as performative and commemorative practices aimed at directly engaging the audience with Jewish and Romani history through an immersive experience, as well as material ones, such as heritage projects and art installations. The difficulty in addressing this issue consists in approaching the multiple layers of the problem as unfolded below. To understand Holocaust memory-making entails investigating the strategies of various agents embarking on such processes, their proactive cultural and symbolic activities of memorialising the Second World War in more and more changing and entangled post-communist European societies, as well as their ethical and societal implications. Yet, by weaving together complex understandings and experiences from a wide range of disciplines, including political science, history, sociology, social anthropology, cultural studies, and Holocaust studies, this interdisciplinary blend of approaches will allow overcoming this problem. In turn, this will help us shed light on various agencies and their role in acknowledging the atrocities of the Second World War, on the symbolic value (to be) attached to Jewish and Romani history, and on the socio-cultural implications of these processes.

To refer to the ways in which memory develops in the public sphere and difficult pasts are remembered, and thus to reveal modes of "relationship to the past" (Tornatore 2010, p. 5) at work in memory processes, we have to acknowledge the existence in the literature of several competitive keywords associated with 'memory', such as 'collective', 'cultural', 'communicational', 'official', 'public', 'social', or 'popular'. Yet, these differences in terminology point less to diverging definitions of 'shared memory' than to different approaches to studying it. Thus, it was Maurice Halbwachs (1925) who first developed the term 'collective memory'. According to the French sociologist, individual memory develops in interaction with 'social frames' (*cadres sociaux*), with the nation-state being one of the less influential frames as compared to religion, class, and family. In contrast to Halbwachs, Pierre Nora's (1989) 'sites of memory' (*lieux de mémoire*) placed the emphasis on the nation as a primary framework for the building of collective memory and stressed the importance of collective memory for the identity of the nation. Halbwachs' insight has been further refined by historians and social scientists who studied twentieth-century memory practices. They have focused more on the social environment of memory and asked how individual stories about the past interact with existing narratives and other forms of commemoration. In

addition to the term 'collective memory', many scholars of literature and some philosophers prefer the term 'cultural memory' (Assmann 2010), while historians and social scientists mostly use the term 'social memory'. Being a familiar key term in the humanities and social sciences, the concept of 'public memory' seems to better help us analyse the framing of 'the pasts into present' (*passés présents*) (Tornatore 2010, p. 91). However, as a way of recalling the past, memory-work has to be considered as being subject to negotiation, even to contestation, among various agents concerned with expressing identity, and "in terms of multiple, diverse, mutable, and competing accounts of past events" (Phillips 2004, p. 2), as presented in more detail below.

It is already acknowledged that 'public memory' is officially shaped with the aim of defining the identity of a group or community. Following Laurajane Smith's (2006) conceptualisation of 'authorised heritage discourse', we posit that an 'authorised' memory discourse "generates institutional positions and legitimizes certain experiences and identities" (Smith 2006, p. 299). Because it is devised by political, cultural, and professional institutions, it follows that it entails "choices of inclusion" and exclusion (Kuutma 2013, p. 26). Therefore, "official memory" is defined by intersecting cultural policies, actions, and representations of various state-sponsored agents contributing to identity building. Being "officially sanctioned" (Kansteiner 2002, p. 182), it functions as "a political asset in negotiating governance". Since power interests are at stake when it comes to constructing identity, it follows that the processes of building public memory are not consensual, nor passive or neutral. On the other hand, "the processes of codifying collective memory (…) may engender varying levels of engagement", this because agents "engage differently with a particular aspect of history" (Smith and Campbell 2015, p. 445). Moreover, in addition to officially designated forms of public memory, one cannot deny the possibility of "'from below' engagements" (Ashley 2016, p. 556) with public memory, entailing memory-making "ideas or practices of those 'outside' the typical realm" (Ashley and Frank 2014) of these processes. Consequently, to explore the multi-layered frames of memory processes, we have to admit the multiplicity of perspectives of those who engage with or use memory as "a spatial-temporal reference in which collective narratives are structured" (Brescó 2010, p. 61). We therefore consider memory-work as "a process of engagement" (Smith 2006, p. 1) undertaken by various agents who "memoryscape" (Muzaini and Yeoh 2016, p. 10) the past with the purpose of "making meaning in and for the present" (Smith 2006, p. 1) and create a shared 'culture of memory'.

Considering that memories are actively constructed in specific contexts and places, while meanings are inscribed and maintained through communication and performative acts such as embodied "acts of remembrance and commemoration" (Smith 2006, p. 3), our approach refers to material and representational memorial forms of the Holocaust such as heritage war sites, sites of pilgrimage, museums, memorials, monuments, and plaques, but also to non-representational ones, such as discursive productions during jubilees, commemorations, and festivities. Moreover, given that these processes entail both production and reception, we analyse them not only as a result of "human agency" (Kansteiner 2002, p. 186), but also from the perspective of their social appropriation. By scrutinising social consumption and appropriations in "popular practice" (Cupers 2014, pp. 6-8), our research examines the 'performativity' (Smith 2006) of 'memoryscapes' in social processes. Therefore, our studies explore both the role played by various agencies in generating and shaping collective 'emotions and affects' (Hutchison and Bleiker 2008) encompassing "formal and informal depictions of the past" (Muzaini and Yeoh 2016, p. 10) and the social response to the cultural acts of codification of public memory.

By examining various social agents' engagement with the development of proactive activities, as well as local communities' attitudes toward the acknowledgment of the difficult history of the Jews and Roma, our studies try to fill the existing research gap on this issue. Therefore, the volume provides an original view on the agencies underlying the endorsement of Jewish and Romani history in the cultural, economic, and political spheres, as well as the cross-cutting implications and stakes of appropriating a traumatic past in the public sphere. It showcases a range of empowerment strategies of NGOs or individuals who decide to contribute to these processes of memory-making, of local authorities and representatives of local communities, social groups, and elites or Jewish communities still living in Europe. This in turn reveals the challenges of such approaches in contemporary post-communist Central and Eastern European societies, the structural and cultural barriers to building proactive activities around these processes in changing societies. In addition, it indicates the remaking and the new reinterpretations of Jewish history in the abovementioned post-communist European societies, an issue located at the interface between power, negotiation, exchanges, challenges, tensions, and conflicts. In sum, our focus on the social impact of a wide variety of interrelationships within and among government entities, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and individuals may provide new approaches to contemporary identity settings, seen from a comparative perspective, by

acknowledging the dynamic dimension of memory functions in a more and more interconnected world.

By setting the framework of this research on the position of the recent Jewish and Romani past in historical knowledge and its role in popular culture, our research calls for particularly sensitive critical reflection on the engagement with the accuracy of these events, whether we talk about political actors, non-governmental institutions, or individual agents. It is already known that standpoints[3] on the topic of the Second World War are not necessarily 'consensual' (Geissbühler 2012). Few far-right politicians and scholars have denied or downplayed the role of perpetrators in destroying European Jewry[4]. Beyond considering contemporary multifaceted dimensions to Holocaust denial, our research aims to disclose the extent to which the mental structures which had made the Holocaust possible have changed or disappeared.

In line with these arguments, widely described in my research project financed by the UEFISCDI (PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0811) and briefly summarised in this introduction, I sought contributions which examine how various post-communist contexts determine different strategies of negotiating memory-production and how memorial practices produce or reinforce specific values related to the Jewish and Romani legacy or the establishment of intercultural relations. In addition to analysing the social impact of transmitting the memory of such tragic events, I was interested in grounded papers that scrutinised frames, the media and political economy of remembrance, or explored affects engaged and catalysed by processes of shaping public memory. In this attempt, I welcomed ethnographically grounded, theoretically driven analyses, case studies, and comparisons from various disciplines, including social and cultural anthropology, history, sociology, political science, Holocaust studies, cultural studies, heritage, and museum studies.

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[3] Michael Shafir (2004) identified three Holocaust-denying postures: 'outright' (rejects the existence of the Holocaust), 'deflective' (admits the existence of the Holocaust, but transfers the responsibility to historical enemies or national minorities), and 'selective' (does not deny the Holocaust as having taken place elsewhere, but excludes any participation of members of one's own nation).

[4] In the case of Romania, although not being fully accepted, the Antonescu government's involvement in killing the Jewish populations within the Romanian territories is already widely acknowledged nowadays. Without having been as systematic as the German practices of killing Jews, the disorganised local practices and the frenzy of killing the Jews on a wide scale encompassed all social layers of the Romanian society of the time, which indicates the extent to which anti-Semitism and xenophobia were traits of a sick society, regardless of whether we are talking about underprivileged social classes, intellectuals, or authorities.

The volume dedicated to the politics of memory and the memorialisation of the Holocaust in post-communist Central and Eastern European countries has been divided into four parts.

The first part of this volume, "The memory of the Holocaust: accountability, legislative mechanisms and public speeches", investigates the role of authorities in speaking the 'historical truth' and taking on the responsibility for genocide, and critically presents official discourses and practices of engagement with the Holocaust or sanctioned means of establishing shared representations of the past through memory laws, such as laws prohibiting Holocaust denial. This is compared to popular culture, which sometimes clashes with the 'official narrative', being a productive space for alternative accounts and perspectives on history. By considering the Romanian case, **Sonia CATRINA** inquired into the process of institutionalising the Holocaust during the post-communist period, specifically by focusing on perceptions regarding the foundation in Bucharest of a National Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust. In light of the resurgence of anti-Semitism at the dawn of the 21st century, **Cristian JURA** paid particular attention to the issue of anti-Semitism as reflected in the jurisprudence of the National Council for Combating Discrimination. The relationship between Holocaust memory, national identity, and political legitimation is the main topic of the chapter written by **Valeriu ANTONOVICI**, who focused his research on the analysis of the official approaches to the Holocaust, as reflected in speeches delivered by Romanian officials in the last 30 years, before and after the formal acceptance of the "Final Report" in Parliament. **Alina POPESCU** analysed some of the most famous slip-ups the Romanian politicians have had in their public discourses from 2012 until the present, referring both to the myth of the 'outside enemy' embodied in the person of George Soros and the growing politicisation of the memory of the Holocaust.

The second part of our volume, "Learning from the past: trends, patterns, and practices in Holocaust education and remembrance", addresses the role of power structures in establishing a curriculum with regard to historical events such as the Holocaust, or other 'on the ground' educational practices of teaching about the Holocaust, with the aim of instilling certain values and ethics, such as respect for human rights, and creating, through this powerful vehicle, an anti-genocidal culture. The performative dimensions of memory transmission, through specific gestures, behaviours, or language adopted by survivors during Holocaust commemorative events was the main topic of **Sonia CATRINA**'s second chapter in this book.