Argument
"Mister Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" Socio-economic and Political Consequences 30 Years After

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Abstract: The fall of the Berlin Wall stood for a symbol of change and freedom across the socialist bloc and inspired the inhabitants in Eastern Europe to take action and revolt against dictatorial regimes. A long and often painful process of social, economic and political transformation began. Scholars grouped their research dealing with such transformations under the label of "Transitology" and the developing subfields of "transitional justice" and "memory studies" expanded and caught the academic interest. The present argument looks at the emergence and evolvement of these fields in parallel with a growing and changing society.

Keywords: transitology, social memory, transitional justice

Introduction: material remnants and symbolic afterlives of the Berlin Wall

On June 12, 1987, the United States President Ronald Reagan delivered his speech during the state visit to the Federal Republic of Germany. With the Brandenburg Gate serving as the dramatic background and monumental decorum for his political address, Reagan urged the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to "open this gate". "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!", resounded his words, welcomed by a cheering crowd. Two and a half years later, on November 9, 1989, it was the East Berliners who

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took Reagan at his word and started to dismantle the Wall that separated them from the Western half of the city since 1961.

In a surge of popular enthusiasm, the Berlin Wall was taken by storm during the following days. Loads of "wallpeckers" (*Mauerspechte*) used household tools to crack breaches that became informal crossing points between the two parts of Berlin. The East German Border Troops continued the demolition, by dismantling what had remained from the wall on June 13, 1990. By the time the process of German reunification was concluded on October 3, 1990, the wall was almost entirely removed from the capital city.

The Berlin Wall was indeed torn down, but it also survived in multiple lieus: parts of the Wall are still in place, either as concrete memorials or touristic replicas. Remnants of it can be found scattered across Berlin, covered in graffiti, and commodified as tourist attractions. Pieces of it were exported abroad and are now curated in museums from countless countries around the world. Bricks of the wall are kept as private souvenirs in people's homes. And, perhaps most importantly, the wall continues to exist in people's imagination, collective remembrance, and social nostalgia (on the "Ostalgie" experienced by the East Germans disappointed by how things turned out after reunification, see Berdahl, 1999; Boyer, 2006).

These material remnants and symbolic outliving of the Berlin Wall in the collective consciousness – either as a locus of repression or a locus of nostalgic memory – provide us with a powerful metaphor for conceptualising the socio-economic and political transformations that have reconfigured postsocialist societies in Central and Eastern Europe. With its ambiguous fate (teared apart and dismantled, but also memorialised and curated) and multiple destinations (kept in place as relics of a dark past, collected as memorabilia, and exhibited in museum collections) constitutes a telling parable for the intricate ambivalences and contradictions that underpinned the coming out of communist dictatorship.

In this editorial to the thematic issue of *History of Communism in Europe* we set out to reflect on the three decades passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of state socialisms in Central and Eastern European countries. To this purpose, in the remainder of this material, we take stock of some of the major debates that divided and still divide scholars engaged in the study of postsocialism. In the following sections, we first chart the emergence of a transitological perspective and we take a look at its development across the fields: both political scientists and sociologists have shown a keen interest in theorising and/or criticising the body of knowledge articulated in the field known as "transitology". Second, we analyse the ever-developing domain of memory studies and its contribution to transitology. We do this by exploring the politics and practices of memory – as well as their different understandings and academic practices – developed to coming to terms with the socialist past.

Against this background, we then move on to present the individual contributions to this thematic issue. The editorial concludes with some thoughts on the future directions of scholarship in postsocialism studies.

From what was to whatever came after: debating the 30 years of political transformations

The last three decades since the (partial) fall of the Berlin Wall have witnessed systemic transformations in terms of institutional change, political culture, and everyday lifestyle. These changes, documented by rafts of sociologists, political scientists, and other types of social researchers, are so overwhelming that they hardly need highlighting. Besides the introduction of pluralist liberal democracy and market capitalism instead of totalitarian one-party rule and planned, centralised economy (arguably the main axes of change in the political economy of postsocialist societies), major transformations occurred in the belief- and value-systems as well. In this last regard, the World and European Value Surveys, among other similar research programs and opinion barometers (e.g., European Social Survey, Life in Transition, New Russia Barometer) reveal the extent to which individual cultural worldviews, political mindsets, and religious attitudes have changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall (Miller, Whyte, and Heywood 1998; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2011).

Perhaps it is understandable that scholars who have studied these post-1989 developments in the Central and Eastern European region were swayed by the transformations they were witnessing. For a long time, they have focused overwhelmingly on documenting change and charting the spectacular shifts taking place in postsocialist societies. As such, they were often at pains to trace it in various realms of postsocialist social life. Simultaneously, they were also, at times, baffled and dismayed by the sluggishness of political change.

In covering the political and societal transformations, and the continuities between the systems, researchers analysed the transition from an apparent classless society to a class-based social structure as well as the role of former communist elites. Other powerful topics of research included the role played by intellectuals and dissidents in shaping the postsocialist transformation together with the postsocialist anticommunist stances of formerly rather discreet intellectuals. Scholars have been especially interested in unravelling the political alliances made between the former communists with former dissidents, often forged for pragmatic, economic purposes (Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley 2000). Another important strand of research was focused on charting the emerging profitable businesses developed by former members of the communist parties or the secret police (Oprea 2004). Humanitarian aid during and after state-socialism, with a special attention dedicated to Romanian institutionalised children, has become another topic of interest for scholars.

In the case of Central and Eastern Europe, and Romania in particular, several scholars showed how former members of the communist nomenclatura became rich representatives of the new capitalist order. Based on documenting these structural continuities, Romanian sociologist Cătălin Augustin Stoica (2018) calls for a reevaluation of the postsocialist transformations in this country from a story of upheaval and rupture to a more nuanced narrative of change and adaptation. Following Iván Szelenyi (2000), Stoica suggests the concept of "political capitalism" (Stoica 2018, 162) as a proper conceptual tool to analyse such ambivalent postsocialist realities.

An intriguing paradox can be stressed in this regard: at the same time as scholars' analytical attention was focused on change, communism was nevertheless felt as always lurking behind and haunting the present. Moreover, the so-called "communist mindset" was singled-out as the scapegoat to be blamed for the political setbacks and the failure to accelerate (and eventually complete) the transition to democracy, which many imagined as pursuing a straightforward, predefined socio-political path.

In parallel with these intricate dialectics of change and persistence, reform and inertia, historians and social scientists have articulated a growing body of knowledge to make sense of what communism is, what comes after it, and where postcommunist societies are heading to. At the same time with these academic pursuits, "an active array of governmental, quasi-governmental, and nongovernmental organisations devoted to promoting democracy abroad sprang into being" (Carothers 2002, p. 6). This apparatus of power-knowledge, to use Michel Foucault's (1980) famous term, had developed under the aegis of the United States' and the European Union's efforts to foster democracy in the aftermath of political changes in former authoritarian regimes.

"Transitology" was at the very core of this pursuit of democratisation. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the intense debate focused on the nature of the postwar regimes established in Central and Easter European countries shifted towards conceptualising the post-1989 situation. The "communism—state-socialism" controversy (with Western scholars preferring the latter term, while East Europeans arguing for the former) gave way to another debate centred on how to conceive of the situation generated in the aftermath of the regime changes (the "postcommunist transition to democracy—postsocialist transformations" controversy).

Scholars firmly rooted in the field of "transitology" were keen to provide expertise to civil society or state institutions as recipes on how to deal with the recent dictatorial past in order to foster democratic values and institutions in Eastern Europe after 1989. Many of those involved in this field perceived the post-1989 transition as a part of what Samuel P. Huntington called the "third democratisation wave" (Huntington 1991, 3-5, 13-20). According to the American political scientist, this wave included the transitions to democracy

that took place in Southern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s and those from Eastern Europe following the fall of the Iron Curtain. As the post-dictatorial societies in Southern Europe and Latin America, Eastern Europe faced similar dilemmas concerning their recent dictatorial past after 1989: how to deal with this traumatic past? Should post-dictatorial societies encourage remembering or forgetting it? And if the first option was to be chosen, what policies should be implemented? How to deal with the perpetrators and their collaborators? What were the adequate reparations for victims? How to define these categories? Should the new regimes punish or forgive the wrongdoings?

Taking into account these dilemmas, there is no surprise that the field of "transitology" entailed a subfield related to politics of memory. As Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt rightly emphasised, in post-dictatorial societies those practices related to uncovering the truth about the wrongdoings of the recent past were perceived "to have great ethical and transformative power" (Assmann and Shortt 2012, 1). Already in the 1990s scholars dealing with the issue of memory during the post-socialist transition emphasised the importance of this aspect. For example, Claus Offe brought to the fore that any change of a political regime entails two kind of tasks: "the forward-looking task of building a new political and economic order out of the ruins of the old" and "the backward-looking task of removing these ruins, where they are not as construction materials of the new, but rather stand in the way of what is conceived as a smooth transition" (Offe 1997, 82).

Consequently, a broad variety of policies were gathered under what in post-war West Germany was labelled as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (see Stan and Nedelsky 2014). This "coming to terms with the past," which was the result of the German post-war experience of dealing with the Nazi past and the practices related to how to deal with the East German dictatorship after the fall of the Berlin wall, represented a source of inspiration in many Eastern European countries. For example, the state agencies in the Eastern European countries dealing with archives of the former secret services were most of them established following the model of the so-called Gauck agency (officially, The Agency of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records – or in short, BStU). Groups of experts advised governments on how to implement various recipes recommended for dealing with the problematic past, enhance democratic values and institutions, and speed up the integration of these countries into the European Union (EU) and The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Transitology is not without its critics. Drawing heavily on an Orientalist-inspired, postcolonial perspective, Boris Buden argues that transitology and its "cynical ideologists" stand for a repressive infantilising of the societies liberating from dictatorships (Buden 2009, 41, 48-49). According to him, the Western "armies" of experts and bureaucrats were sent to teach "democracy" the very

same societies that managed to turn authoritarian regimes into democratic ones. These political emissaries were endowed with the mission to assist the latter into developing "civil societies", overlooking the fact that it was exactly the structures of "civil society" that had overturned dictatorships across Eastern Europe. "The Western spectators" were not involved in the changes of the regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, but they pretended to help Easterners to properly enjoy "democracy" in an attempt to dominate. According to the cultural critique, the West transformed the Eastern Europeans into childlike inhabitants that need to mature under their close guidance, in a process that has no predictable end but the one decided in the West (Buden 2009, 51).

Political scientists, historians, legal experts, sociologists, scholars special-ised in memory studies, and museologists used concepts such as "retroactive justice," "transitional justice," "politics of memory," or "de-communization" for producing knowledge on this issue (Stan 2009, 1). The new field of expertise and the policies recommended to governments by scholars involved in producing this corpus of knowledge made the German historian Thomas Lindenberger to argue that "memory has become an object of coherent policymaking," and that "memory governance" became "a regulatory practice assumed by the liberal state" (Lindenberger 2011, 73-74).

Drawing on this perspective, we could divide the contributions on the issue of the memory of the recent dictatorial past in Eastern Europe into two main camps. A first group draws more on the field of memory studies. These contri-butions focused on approaching memory as a socio-political phenomenon underpinned by stakes of power. As such, scholars working from this perspec-tive paid less attention to the institutional or juridical factors involved in the politics of memory and consequently refrained themselves from advancing recommendations for policy makers. Some of these contributions emphasised the need for a broader approach in which different versions of memory of the recent past interact/co-exist after 1989. In general, these contributions were prone to favouring the concepts of "socialism" and "post-socialism" perceived as less affected by the anticommunist narratives dominating the East European public spheres.

The second category comprises those approaches that are interested in how the memory of the dictatorial past is connected with the issue of de-communi-zation and the process of democratisation. These two developments – de-com-munization and democratisation – were conceived of as being strongly inter-twined. The works drawing on this law-centric and normative approach were authored rather by political scientists and legal experts. These contributions tend to emphasise the intrinsic connection between the necessity of adopting measures of transitional justice such as lustration and the reparations of former wrongdoings perpetrated during the former regime and the successful process of democratisation.

Since the 1990s, political scientists have tried to identify the characteristic patterns of the different approaches to the dictatorial past in Eastern European countries. In John P. Moran's view, those East European dictatorial regimes displaying a more brutal repression of dissent were inclined to implement more radical measures of transitional justice and were prone to punish the wrongdoers of the former communist regimes (Moran 1994, 95-109). In this regard, Lavinia Stan identified three factors determining a society's attitude towards post-communist transitional justice: "1) the composition, orientation, and strength of the opposition, both before and after 1989, 2) the communist regime's dominant methods of ensuring societal compliance with its rule (repression and/or cooptation), and 3) the country's pre-communist level of experience with political pluralism" (Stan 2009, 268). Other scholars brought to the fore the way post-89 political arena shaped the policies of transitional justice and perceived them as part of the "politics of the present" (Welsh 1996, 419-428). According to Helga A. Welsh, the post-communist competition for power played a key role in configuring the policies of dealing with the communist past in Eastern Europe (Welsh 1996, 419-28).

Contributions such as those authored or edited by Lavinia Stan (2004, 2009, 2013), Lavinia Stan & Nadya Nedelsky (2015), Dragoş Petrescu (2007), Cynthia Horne (2017), Cynthia Horne & Lavinia Stan (2018) have all emphasised the connection between the policies of transitional justice implemented in Eastern European countries and the process of democratisation. For instance, Cynthia Horne argues that measures such as lustration have influenced the level of trust in institutions during the post-socialist transition, while the lack of implementing such measures hampered the process of democratisation (Horne 2017). This category of contributions paid special attention to those aspects of the politics of memory related to institutions and state policies. Among the central questions raised and addressed in this body of work were how to deal with wrongdoings of the former dictatorial regimes, and especially what institutions should be in charge with these policies; the issue of lustration and the access to the files created by former secret policies institutions; what legislation should be adopted for proposing reparations for the victims; as well as the question of restitution of those properties abusively confiscated by the former regimes.

Special attention has been given to Holocaust negation and a developing competition of Gulag-Holocaust memories at societal level. In this context, a point of concern for many scholars has been the rise of antisemitism and the resurgence of the extreme right. A variety of manifestations of hate speech fed by ultranationalism, rasism, xenophobia – some of it even claiming ethnic cleansing – have been scrutinised from multiple perspectives: analyses of feelings and emotions that foment hate speech, legislation that bans various forms of hate speech and hate speech promoters (extreme right, antisemitic,

pro-totalitarian, rasist speech and symbols), cultural manifestations (such as music channeling hate speech) as well as civic and political education for a more inclusive society.

Against this complex background of political transformations, a new approach emerged in relation to the politics of memory: that is, "competitive martyrology," namely attempts at trivializing the history of the Holocaust by comparing the number of victims and the extent of suffering with that of victims of the socialist regimes (Shafir 2012). As a consequence of such comparisons, the discussion around memorialisation and musealisation has become highly contentious. At one end of the spectrum, we find those taking as a model the German way of treating separately the two authoritarian pasts while refraining from engaging in straightforward comparisons between the Nazi and the communist political regimes and historical experiences. At the other extreme are those embracing the thesis of the "double genocide," coined in the Prague Declaration adopted by the European Parliament. This idea, which puts the communist regime on par with the Nazi one, is supported and strongly promoted among the Central and Eastern European countries. Needless to say, the thesis of the "double genocide" stirred serious protests on the side of scholars researching the history and memory of the Holocaust, on grounds of Holocaust obfuscation (e.g., Dovid Katz 2016, Michael Shafir 2012).

The structure of the current issue of *History of Communism in Europe* reflects the main axes of research connected to postsocialism: transitional justice, Western involvement, and cultural shifts. The eight contributions are distributed in two large sections: I. Quicksands – Postsocialist Institutional Changes, which comprises articles that document the systemic transformations and intellectual repositionings in postsocialist societies; and II. Postsocialist Cultural Shifts, consisting of materials that address memorialization, representation and cultural manifestations of right-wing extremism.

The first of these, Svetlana Dimitrova's article, *« Universitaires "de l'Est" face au politique après 1989 »*, opens the series with a research on the political implication of intellectuals in Bulgaria after 1989. By following two generations of academics, the paper explores the role of "affiliations and influences" that impacted Bulgaria's postsocialist socio-political evolution.

The reconfiguration of urban symbolic space is also part of the processes of change that impacted the countries in the former Soviet bloc. Mihai Stelian Rusu's quantitative analysis focused on Romania explores the shifts in symbolic geographies by looking at street names. Besides documenting the extent of street renaming after 1989 in this country, in his article *Winds of Toponymic Change: Mapping the Patterns of Street Renaming in Post-communist Romania*, Rusu highlights how the politics of place-naming and renaming is sensitive to postsocialist policies of symbolic transitional justice and ethnopolitics.

Another important episode of the Romanian transition is the humanitarian aid that was massively sent to the country in the first postsocialist years. Welcomed as indispensable and deeply needed, the aid shifted from medical provisions in the first weeks after the Revolution, towards assisting suffering children in the following years. In her article, *Gendered Dynamics of the Humanitarian Commitment for Children in the post-socialist context. A case study: France (initiator)-Romania (beneficiary) (1989-2007)*, Luciana Jinga examines – from a gender perspective – the nature and character of this humanitarian aid in Romania, as well as the institutions involved in this process.

Free elections are a fundamental aspect of the democratisation process, while electoral debates give the pulse of societal preoccupations and highlight the priorities of the political agenda. Andreea Carstea's contribution, *Fighting "The Ghosts of the Past." Communism and Lustration as Key Topics of the First Romanian Electoral Debate (May 17, 1990) – A Review of Context and Discourse* examines the political discourses that were delivered during the year of the first free elections. In her analysis, Carstea pays close attention to identifying the main political themes that have remained unsolved and are, consequently, still lingering on 30 years after those elections.

Lotte Thaa's *"The Revolution Will Not Be Musealised" – Remnants of the GDR's "Peaceful Revolution" in the Museum* is opening the second section of this issue. By looking at the memorialisation of the largest protest in the GDR, the so-called "peaceful revolution," the author tracks down the processes of memory politics and memory policies in Germany. Based on the results of her analyses, Thaa concludes by pleading for a more inclusive and nuanced memory discourse in this country.

The entanglement of memory and identity is a topic approached by Gabija Purlyte as well. In her paper *Representations of the Soviet Period and its Traces in the Works of Contemporary Artists from the Baltic States*, Purlyte looks at the artistic milieu in the Baltic States and analyses the representations of the Soviet period in Baltic Contemporary Art. She outlines four paths in building post-Soviet identities in the works of arts. These range from (1) personal narratives and (2) tackling ethnic or linguistic minorities to (3) a focus on women's experiences and (4) debates on the fate of commemorative monuments.

A darker side of the last 30 years of cultural shifts is revealed by Davjola Ndoja's contribution, *German National Socialist Black Metal: Contemporary Neo-Nazism and the Ongoing Struggle with Antisemitism*. She tackles National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) as a musical genre in reunited Germany within the context of postsocialist transformations. Ndoja's article accomplishes this by studying the case of terrorist group and band *Absurd*, which has been an icon of Nazi ideology in Germany and worldwide since the 1990s.

Last but not least, Dalia Bathory's contribution, *Pop Memory. Clickbait on the Lives of the former Romanian Dictators Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, 30 Years*

After, proposes a new concept to analyse popular culture. In her work, Bathory explores the habits of remembering by consuming and circulating popular content with subjects of historical inspiration, which are produced to validate the postsocialist social order. The case study is conducted on clickbait media about Elena and Nicolae Ceausescu, released 30 years after the Romanian Revolution of 1989 and the former leaders' summary trial and execution.

All in all, the editors hope to offer a multi-dimensional and fresh perspective over some of the social, political, and cultural processes that have shaped the Central and Eastern European countries during these three decades of structural continuity and systemic change. While the Wall was not as high or as impenetrable as imagined and depicted in early postsocialist research, it did have its victims and heroes and it did stand for a limit to the long yearned freedoms of circulation and speech. In celebrating 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and in contemplating on its ambivalent legacies, the current issue of *History of Communism in Europe* provides a brief overview of the choices made within the newly acquired freedom.

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