On Memory Work in Post-communist Europe
A Case Study on Romania’s Ways of Remembering its Pronatalist Past

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ABSTRACT
Taking the memory of pronatalism in contemporary Romania as a case study, this article is an attempt to view the national politics of memory of contemporary Europe with regard to its communist past from an anthropological perspective. From 1966 to 1989, the communist regime imposed extreme policies of controlled demography in Romania, as it was imputed, for ‘the good of the socialist nation’. Pro-family measures were developed in parallel to the banning of abortion on request and the making of contraception almost inaccessible. The social remembering of such a difficult past is still a taboo in contemporary Romanian society. This general lack of public remembering, which is still playing a role in the current situation of Romania’s reproductive health, is influenced by the interrelations between the different forms of pronatalist memory. The analysis is based on oral history fieldwork conducted between 2003 and 2008, and is theoretically informed by the interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies.

KEYWORDS
abortion, Communist Romania, low-remembering, pronatalism, social memory

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

In applying an anthropological approach to post-communist memory work in Europe, I intend to examine this issue in contemporary Romania, taking as a case study the memory of its communist political demography (developed from 1966 to 1989). In analysing the different forms of memory of Romania’s pronatalism, I will discuss the ways by which social remembering, as a collectively shared phenomenon, is highly interrelational and often influences the development of each community. My analysis is based on extensive oral history fieldwork started in 2003, as well as related documentation and archives, and is theoretically informed by the interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies (e.g. Olick and Robbins 1998; Mitzal 2003; Erll et al. 2008). The article is developed around four distinctive parts, followed by some brief general conclusions. The first part provides a short theoretical insight into the study of memory and remembering, taking as its main framework the memory work in post-communist Europe. After a second part on the history of Romania’s political demography, the third part presents the current memory forms of Romanian pronatalism, analysing their direct or indirect relations. The fourth and final part describes two of the main sites of the social-communicative memory of Romania’s pronatalism, underlining the possible intersubjectivities between personal memory, societal trauma and characteristics of contemporary Romania’s reproductive health.

Ghosts of Communism: An Anthropological Approach to the Politics of Memory

Soon after 1989, the social remembering related to the former communist world was openly registered on the ‘memorial agenda’ of Europe. The entire remembering process, as well as the corresponding academic research, was perceived to be centred on two major poles of commemoration: trauma and nostalgia, both related to an acute necessity to create and recreate a new national identity. Scholars were thus underlining in general the persistence of what Richard Terdiman called ‘memory crisis’ (cited in Climo and Cattell 2002: 6) in post-communist societies (Eyal 2004; Müller 2006), stemming from two major causes: firstly, the manifestation of a generalised post-communist
amnesia, namely the tendency systematically to forget all previous communist crimes and compromises; secondly, the phenomenon of the supersaturation of memory, with researchers arguing that, in fact, there is no such thing as too little memory, but rather too much of it (Nora 1984; Huyssen 2003).

Memory can thus play a major role in the contemporary creation and resemantisation of the new Europe. Long a divided land after the Second World War, the old continent is now giving voice to its plural memories in order to shape and reshape its common European identity (Garcia 2006; Müller 2006; Onken 2007). Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the public and academic post-communist spheres in Central and Eastern Europe were openly confronted with a memory boom that forced them to remember and analyse their controversial pasts. Generally focused on the remembering of communist traumas and injustices as well as on the everyday life of the socialist New Man, these diverse phenomena of social remembering soon succumbed to the so-called ‘politics of memory’: the instrumentalisation of the memory of the recent past started to shift from one post-communist reality to another, due to multi-interested actors and new power constellations. The very concept of ‘politics of memory’ appeared in the social sciences (following older concepts of ‘collective identity’ and ‘politics of identity’) in order to analyse the ways in which power and politics are influencing, and often dictating, the memory boom of one past or another (Huyssen 2003; Mitzal 2003; Garcia 2006; Lebow et al. 2006; Olick 2007). In short, the notion of ‘politics of memory’ in the public sphere could be associated, on a larger scale of interpretation, with that of strategy with regard to the social remembering of individuals, groups or an entire society. It implies, in fact, an actor who is developing a memory-project, either at a transnational (the European Union), national (the Romanian State) or organisational level. ‘Simply stated, it is who wants whom to remember what, and why’ (Confino 1997: 1393).

Thus, depending on the general interest of a smaller or larger group, a remembered reality of recent history will surface in present debates far more often than others. In post-communist Romania, this memorial back-and-forth process can be easily followed at the level of official reports (e.g. Romanian Presidency 2006) and contemporary public discussions on the ‘communist crimes’. Related generally to the present interests of different political actors, the post-communist memorial agenda is always putting forward certain sites of memory to the detriment of others. Thus, the memory work immediately related to the restitution of direct economic or social rights is, and will always
be, favoured to the detriment of other social remembering, whose victims are
difficult to hear or even to identify. To analyse all those intersections, I will
propose in the following pages an anthropological approach to memory and
social recollection, taking as a case study the contemporary lack of public
remembering towards Romania’s communist demography.

Although in the last decades the largest body of memory-literature mainly
appeared in the fields of history, psychology or sociological studies, memory
and social recollection have been topics of interest for anthropology as well,
with research focussed either on social practices as memorial depositories
(Connerton 1989; Candau 2005), the peculiarities of the memory-work within
a certain community (Bloch 1998; Gessat-Anstett 2007) or theoretical and
general considerations on an ‘anthropology of memory’ (Climo and Cattell
2002; Berliner 2005; Candau 2005), to underline only some of them.

In short, the specificity of an anthropological approach to memory and rec-
collection, as outlined by Climo and Cattell (2002), consists in the particular
way in which an anthropologist researches on the field the forms and traces of
memory, being always more interested in social remembering as a relational
process rather than as a mere source of information. Applied on the memory
work of contemporary post-communist Europe, such an approach could be
developed as a complex form of an ‘anthropology of the present’, ‘at home’
(Abélès and Rogers 1992; Althabe et al. 1995; Peirano 1998). I will attempt
such an approach by taking as a case study the memory of communist politi-
cal demography in contemporary Romania, a European member state since
2007. By decoding different forms of the memory of communist pronatalism
in contemporary Romanian society, I will try to analyse the possible intersub-
jectivities between a traumatic past, its social remembering and the possible
influences that memory work related to this past can determine at the level
of present-day society.

The Historical Memory of a Pronatalist Decree: 770/1966

From 1966 to 1989, the Romanian Communist Party prohibited by law the
right to pregnancy terminations, all in the name of the sanctity of the Roma-
nian communist nation. In the public sphere, reproduction was thus funda-
mentally associated with the nation and its needs. Every communist subject
had to participate in Ceaușescu’s projects and, above all, every Romanian
woman had to fulfil her role by becoming a prolific ‘socialist mother’.
Romanian pronatalism was one of the most repressive politics of reproduction in Europe. After the Second World War, following the Soviet models, the communist Romanian government legalised abortion on request in 1957. This legislation, one of the most liberal in Europe at that time, was drastically reversed at the end of the 1960s, when the new regime of Ceaușescu banned abortion on request for women under 45 and with less than four dependent children (cf. Kligman 2000). At first, the abrupt change in Romanian legislation had a dramatic effect. In October 1966, for example, the date of the anti-abortion decree, the monthly birth rate (per 1,000 inhabitants) was 14.5; after only one year, it climbed to 36.1 (Kligman 2000). But within a few years, the expected demographic results steadily decreased. In order to refuse the instrumentalisation of their bodies in the service of the pronatalist state, women remembered traditional methods of contraception and created new strategies for terminating unwanted pregnancies, including not only ‘undesired’ pregnancies, but also those impossible for the mother to assume from a socio-economic point of view.

The inner motivation of such strict political demography was related to different reasons: firstly, to the socialist nationalism developed by Ceaușescu’s regime (Kligman 2000). To assure the strength of the nation, the regime was assuring its greatness in terms of number. Secondly, the massive and rapid development of the communist economy had to be sustained by a massive correlated workforce (Fischer 1985; Kligman 2000). And thirdly, last but not least, Romanian communist morality, highly patriarchal, had to be constructed in direct relation with the resemantisation of the traditional mentalities of Romanian culture (Popa 2006). In short, the family was supposed to be as large as possible, and sexuality was to be conceptualised only in terms of reproduction. Thus, being a moral communist subject was equal to being a prolific ‘mother-comrade’.

Ceaușescu’s pronatalism lasted twenty-three years, being legitimated and reinforced day by day by the state’s propaganda. Following the overthrow of the regime in December 1989, the new government reversed the restrictive abortion legislation. A new law (the second one voted on under the new regime) was passed, authorising the import, production and sale of modern contraceptives, and permitting abortion on demand to be performed by qualified personnel (during the first trimester of pregnancy). Even if demographic and public health policies changed substantially after 1989, the legacies of the communist ‘abortion culture’ (Kligman 2000) are still silently present.
in Romanian society. The social memory of the pronatalist times is still a contemporary taboo, hardly addressed in the contemporary public sphere but strongly influencing the characteristics of contemporary Romania’s reproductive health.

Remembering Romania’s Pronatalism: Forms of Memory and Their Inner Relations

Even if the contemporary memory boom and the omnipresence of the politics of memory are normal phenomena of post-communist societies in Europe, one should underline that, at a closer look, not all pasts are remembered in the same way. While certain pasts have become the centre of numerous studies, public debates and legislative projects, others are still silenced. Romania’s pronatalism could be listed under this ‘silence category’.

According to the memory theory of Jan Assmann (1995), the past can be remembered, at the level of an entire society, in different forms, which include that of social-communicative memory (the social memory shared in the private sphere, among the people who lived that particular past), and that of cultural memory (the remote past which is brought into the present public sphere by and with the means of culture/cultural artefacts). To the above, one could add a third form of memory – historical memory, the official record of the past. Following these theoretical differentiations, I have analysed the memory forms and contemporary ‘low remembering’ of communist Romania’s pronatalism, in trying to examine their inner relations and intersubjectivities. My hypothesis is that the low-remembering of pronatalism in the contemporary Romanian public arena is closely determined by both the characteristics of private social-communicative memory as well as by the hidden legacies of the historical memory of Romania’s political demography. I propose the concept of ‘low-remembering’ (low-memory) in order to characterise the social discussion in the present of certain past facts, which are not the object of an openly-manifested remembering in the public sphere (through debates, commemorations, patrimonialisation, etc.). At the same time, they are not entirely absent in present-day society – determining a so-called ‘social amnesia’ – since they clearly manifest their presence in the private sphere, through social-communicative memory. From time to time, they may also ‘come to the surface’ of the public agenda, being often influenced by different politics of memory.
In the contemporary Romanian public sphere, the former pronatalist times seem to be generally forgotten. This recent past is surprisingly low-remembered if one compares it with the public remembering of other communist dramas like, for example, collectivisation (the socialist transformation of agriculture), or collaboration with the omnipresent socialist police (the famous ‘Securitatea’). Unfortunately this low-remembering strongly influences the reproductive health of current Romanian society, very reliant on its socialist past. During the whole twenty-three year period during which abortion was banned, on the level of official public discourse, communist Romania ‘advertised’ itself as a perfect pronatalist state. In the reality of daily life, much of the pronatalist public policies advocated at a national or international level were far from the model. Although there were no direct laws against contraception, its importation, as it became politically taboo, ceased from the late sixties. With no access to medical contraception, and thus indirectly forced to become mothers, the women of communist Romania started a silent war against the regime and its pronatalist policies. In time, a real industry of pregnancy terminations emerged in the shadows. Performed behind closed doors, by medical personnel as well as by amateurs, illegal abortions became the only general method to avoid giving birth. Besides claiming lives, unsafe clandestine abortions permanently maimed the reproductive health of Romanian women during communism (David and Băban 1996). At the same time, the maternal mortality rate, as well as that of infant mortality, was the highest in Europe, although the Party used numerous methods to keep a low profile on all its internal affairs (Kligman 2000).

A possible cause for not actively remembering this pronatalist past as a major social trauma is the fact that, at least on a superficial level, there is no one to blame in contemporary Romania: no one to blame, no one to put to trial, no one to punish as the main scapegoat. Moreover, the official record of the communist regime’s political demography – the official memory of that era – is closely interrelated to the present low-memory of Romania’s pronatalism. In Romanian communism, the abortion debate was not perceived as a common phenomenon of reproductive policies, but as one of the devices by which the socialist New Man had to be constructed. During the anti-abortion and pro-family campaigns from 1966 to 1989, in order to sustain its demographic policies the Party invented a new past and a new present by constructing a new identity, that of ‘socialist mothers’. In short, the general rule and alternative reality that the Party wanted to implement in pronatalist Ro-
mania was that the (Romanian socialist) woman’s most sacred, historically transmitted role was that of giving birth and rearing children, thus fulfilling her contribution to the nation’s vigour. With the help of the State’s propaganda, in time, a new social tradition was established in order to legitimise the regime’s pronatalist policies. Especially in the last part of the 1980s, the State directed an intense propaganda campaign to incriminate illegal abortion, officially classified as ‘a social plague’. At the same time, contraception was also stigmatised, because of its dangerous secondary effects – according to official declarations. Female sexuality was taken into consideration only in relation to its reproductive function. A person was judged according to her/his being a Party member, the degree of commitment to the socialist cause, and the spirit of sacrifice for the nation. In this context, not to become a mother – a sign of supreme selfishness – was perceived as the capital sin against one’s nation (Anton 2008).

The official record of Romania’s pronatalist era constitutes, over the years, a powerful historical memory of those times. Furthermore, as the constructed tradition of the ‘socialist mother’ was intrinsically developed on the basis of Romanian traditional culture and its correlated Orthodox Christianity, looking back critically to the pronatalist past becomes in the present a problem per se. In fact, at a closer look, the mother role developed by the pronatalist propaganda was a resemantisation of the traditional gender roles and stereotypes long present in Romanian patriarchal society (largely an agricultural one when the communists came to power), and reinforced by the Christian Orthodox principles of family life. Even now, after half a century of presumed communist gender equality and two decades of post-communist democracy, a law against abortion on demand could never be successfully criticised in contemporary Romanian society, a fact which influences the public’s remembering of the past. Nevertheless, a stronger remembering of the communist pronatalist past should not be constructed around this, but around the ways the regime instrumentalised people’s bodies in order to fulfil its demographic plans and around the correlated legacies that are still alive in Romanian society.

For the moment these topics are only sporadically discussed in the public arena. A major change occurred, for a short time, in 2007 after a Romanian director, Cristian Mungiu, won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Festival with 4 months, 3 weeks, 2 days, a film about the ban on abortion during the 1980s. They are nevertheless very alive in the private social memory of the people
– especially women – who experienced Ceaușescu’s demographic plans. The discussion I will go on to develop is constructed around this third form of the memory of pronatalism, the most impressive yet rarely explored form, its social-communicative one.

**Forgetting the Pronatalist Past: Memories and Intersubjectivity**

With regard to difficult pasts, it is now a widely acknowledged truth that often the most common response to trauma is continuous forgetting. As one of the women I interviewed started her story, ‘I don’t know if you believe me, but there are many things I don’t remember […] I have forgotten them – I had to forget!’ (F.B., primary school teacher, born 1959). This part of my analysis of the memory of Romanian pronatalism is devoted therefore to the intersubjective links formed between social memory in its communicative form and social forgetting. My hypothesis is that, even if the low-remembering of the communist demographic policies is firstly determined by the taboo dimension of the past to be remembered in itself, the current social silence is also influenced by the specificity of individual memories – the memories of women who lived through traumatic experiences that are often better or easier to leave in the past. Although contraception, abortion and pregnancy are not only a ‘woman’s problem’, they were constructed as such during communist pronatalism. My analysis thus follows this line, although men’s involvement and personal trauma during Ceaușescu’s political demography could of course have their place in a larger discussion. Nevertheless, I chose to restrict my current discussion to the feminine communicative-memory, another reason being the fact that it could always contain an external and internal account at the same time (versus masculine, which involves only an external account, i.e. not bodily-lived experience of abortion).

In analysing the communicative memory of Romania’s political demography, the first research question was: what are the memory nodes that are forming the stories into a bigger, ‘collective picture’? What are the most recurrent memory sites of the social memory of Romanian pronatalism? Even if memory is primarily an individual psychological process, individual remembering always takes place in a larger social context. Thus, the social memory of collectivities can be structured in numerous practices and memory sites: in speech, in writing, in ceremonies and customs, in body attitudes and bodily
practices, in landscapes and objects, in museums and national commemorations and the like. The civilisations which do not use writing can also deposit their memory in traditions and oral texts, in daily practices of life, in culinary customs or rituals. For the entire community, the sites of memory are thus ‘important to truth claims’, assuring or contesting individual and group identities over time (Climo and Cattell 2002).

Keeping this in mind, one can thus speak about different memory sites in the case of the social memory of communist Romania’s pronatalism: language as a memorial depository, sensorial memory or body memory, the memory of places or the memory of the objects. Memory can hence be seen and analysed as an ongoing process, a continuous dialogue between the present and the past. In the following paragraphs, I will restrict my analysis to two such memory sites, namely the urban folklore constructed around the black humour of that era, and the memory places. Folklore as ‘cultural memory in motion’ is a common idea of the text-context analysis of ethno-folkloric studies. Nevertheless, my research on the urban folklore related to the memory of abortion in communist Romania is part of a larger context, namely language as a memorial depository, given the specificity of the oral life histories collected.

**Urban Folklore as a Memorial Depository**

In the case of communist Romania’s pronatalism and abortion ban, language and oral expressions are one of the main memorial depositories. Abortion was one of the former communist regime’s most repressed taboos, and speaking about it was strictly forbidden in the public as well as in the private sphere. Even now the language describing illegal abortions generally reflects this ban. In terms of vocabulary none of the people whom I interviewed (except, maybe, members of the medical profession) mentioned abortion by name, using instead numerous euphemistic expressions: ‘a da afară’ [to expel], ‘a scăpa’ [to drop off], ‘a lepăda’ [to drop out], ‘a lua/prinde aer’ [to take air (in the sense of making the air entering the placenta)], ‘a rezolva’ [to resolve (in the sense of finishing the induced abortion by medical intervention)], ‘a sonda’ [to probe (in the sense of inducing an abortion using a home-made probe) and so on. Surely a more large-scale analysis of these euphemisms should be made with respect to their specific etymology and their use during communist times. Many of these 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.
Nowadays, the inner referent of such taboo expressions is more and more forgotten. Along with the oblivion of the abortion language, the phenomenon in itself will be forever trapped in the past at the level of the public sphere. For example, the verb ‘a sonda’ [to probe] has definitively lost its pronatalist reference in common contemporary vocabulary, being used only in direct or metaphorical reference to earth probing. In the memory narratives of the women who lived through Romanian pronatalism, ‘a sonda’ will nevertheless remain an open gateway to a certain traumatic past.

Again from the language as memorial depository point of view, one can analyse the large numbers of communist-era black jokes about abortion as a particular form of pronatalist folklore. Taking into account the multiple facets of daily life affected by this social transformation of sexuality, and especially by the lack of modern contraception, pronatalist jokes were extremely popular in underground public discourse. In short, they functioned as a primary form of protest against the overly restrictive politics of reproduction. Consider the following joke:

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!’

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

Memory in (Remembered) 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 mark with special importance for a certain individual, a social, professional or religious group, a nation or a whole 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 (Climo and Cattell 2002: 21). Called ‘memory places’ (Archibald 2002) or ‘memory scapes’ (Nuttall and Coetzee 1998, quoted in Climo and Cattell 2002: 21) in scholarly texts related to Memory Studies, these memorial storage banks can function as spatial catalysts capable of triggering off the process of recollection.

Among the most prominent memory places concerning pronatalism during the communist era in Romania, the two most revisited memory-topos are ‘the hospital’ and the ‘Procuratura’, the official political police headquarters, where all the women who tried to have an illegal abortion were brought. The hospital building was always 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’ in hospital, as many women recall. The hospital thus becomes a memorial-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, or 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’.

The first one? I did it before Florin, my son. He’s 19, almost 20 now. So then [. . .] I had induced one myself, after one month, a month and a half [. . .] And then the first aid people came and they said: ‘Where’s the baby?’ ‘What baby?’ I said. And then they took me away in the ambulance [. . .] I had a new blouse, I remember, that my mother dressed me in – she thought I would die, she was sure I would die. Because I was covered in my own blood, when the ambulance came. I was asking for water, asking for water. When we arrived [at the hospital], they dropped me next to the entrance, and there they switched me to a stretcher. That lady doctor was there, what’s her name, the one who now has her clinic in Ploieşti. A great lady! She helped me a lot, a lot! She came – when I sat down on that hospital bed, I can tell you, you could not even see it because of my blood, waves, clots of blood – and she said: ‘Donators, immediately we need donators!’ [. . .] And I lay on that bed and my little mama stayed with me all through the night, on that hospital floor. (M.L., domestic worker, born 1954)
Related to this memory place, ‘going to the Procuratura’ – the place where all the women detected trying to disobey the Party’s pronatalist policies went – is another major recurrent theme in the social-communicative memory of pronatalism. The medical profession was obliged by law to report any possible sign of illegal termination of pregnancy. 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 official criticisms poured upon them. The Procuratura becomes thus a special memory topos, the end of a remembering-maze formed by numerous different memories, all traumatic, painful and dominated by the acute fear of death:

So I arrived at doctor B., and he immediately started yelling at me, ‘What have you done’ and all. ‘What was I supposed to do, doctor, all that I’d heard about, all that I’d heard about in this world I did, until it started again [the period – a.n.], and now it won’t stop, what can I do . . . Give me something to make it stop!’ And what could I do, blessed be my mother in Heaven, he sent me to the Procuratura. I said to him, ‘Doctor, you do something for me so that I don’t die, and after I will see with the Police and the Procuratura’. The Miliția [Romanian name for the Police forces during communist times – a.n.!!] Because that is what he was saying, ‘You’re not afraid, woman, of the Miliția man? Aren’t you afraid?’ ‘I’m not afraid, Doctor, me I am afraid of death, not of the Miliția man’. And they called me to the Procuratura. (A.I., retired worker, born 1952)

Generally most of the women summoned to the Procuratura were then registered in a special ‘abortion attempt’ file. Many of them were closely watched afterwards at work, as well as by their doctor, and many of them went to prison. Years later for many of them openly remembering such things is just trying not to forget a personal failure (or the additional social stigmatisation). Thus, more than for any other past affected by the current national politics of memory with regard to communism, to remember publicly Romania’s pronatalism is to attempt to enter into the personal trauma history of all the communist subjects involved. Implicitly this represents another reason for which communist pronatalism is not strongly remembered in current post-communist society. The entire generation of ‘socialist mothers’, unlistened to in the contemporary public sphere, raised a whole generation of young women and men during communism, most of them knowing nothing about sexuality and reproductive health. Stereotypes and mentalities are thus involuntarily trans-
mitted from an era in which everything was forbidden and silenced to an era in which everything is theoretically permitted.

The side effects of this involuntary cultural heritage can easily be seen on the level of the current situation of reproductive health in Romania, a country still classified among the last places in Europe regarding abortion, infant and maternal mortality, as well as cervical cancer. The traumatic effects of the pronatalist policies implemented by Ceaușescu’s regime were disastrous during and after the communist period. Even if the anti-abortion decree was the second law passed after December 1989, the pronatalist legacy was not entirely eliminated by this sole act. Suffice it to say that the number of women who died because of illegal abortion is approximated to be about 25,000, between 1967 and 1989. If one also adds that of infant mortality rate, 26.9 per 1,000 in 1989, one is given a clear picture of the price the Romanian population had to pay in the name of ‘the nation’s vigour’ (Trebici 1991). However, figures cannot express other types of legacy, such as the degradation of the human condition, the falsification of the couple relationship and, above all, the creation of certain types of mentality in relation to reproductive health. In its two transitionary decades after 1989, Romania lost almost one million people as a direct result of a severe drop in the birth rate (and, more recently, intensive migration). Even today, although modern contraceptives are widely available, the number of abortions on request is still extremely high. Moreover, phenomena like self-induced abortions and child abandonment are still far above average levels (David and Băban 1996; Leibowitz 2003; Ghețău 2004). This paradoxical phenomenon can be explained by an ‘abortion culture’ (Kligman 2000) which still characterises Romania’s reproductive health, a legacy of its communist past. Inside this powerful ‘abortion culture’, which affects the reproductive health of Romanian society to its very core, another destructive consequence of the communist-related mentalities is women’s reluctance to have gynaecological checks or take complementary measures. This phenomenon, which characterises the generations of women over forty, is related to the mistrust and even hate those women developed, over time, to the imposed gynaecological checks performed all through the eighties in communist Romania, as a form of the Party’s direct control over the nation’s body. The lack of proper education regarding contraceptive methods, combined with persistent taboo-mentalities, lead to the reluctance of women to control their fertility by other means than abortion (Johnson and al. 1996; Leibowitz 2003; Ministry of Health 2005).
Conclusions: Forgetting the Forgotten, or Remembering to Forget?

The current low-remembering of Romania’s pronatalism can be explained by a multitude of causes, among which figure the interrelations between its different forms of memory and the intersubjectivities developed by its actors and these memory forms. The prohibition of abortion during communist times was, and still is, a ‘women-problem’, the problem of the entire generation of closely watched ‘socialist mothers’. Their social memory affects different relations with the present generation, relations first and foremost characterised by a general silence. Sometimes it is better to forget, one ‘has to forget’, but is this low-remembering really positive for the reproductive health of post-communist Romanian society? Moreover, low-remembering often leads to generalised oblivion. In this sense, in time, even the very idea of a forgotten past is eventually ‘unremembered’. Thus, forgetting the forgotten is the final stage in putting a difficult past aside forever.

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Notes

1. The translation of this memorial narrative excerpt from Romanian to English is mine, as are all the others in the present article.

References

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