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The social organization of representations of history: the textual accomplishment of coming to terms with the past

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In his essay 'What does coming to terms with the past mean?', Theodor W. Adorno notes: the matter of coming to terms with the past is 'essentially ... a matter of the *way* in which the past is called up and made present: whether one stops at sheer reproach, or whether one endures the horror through a certain strength that comprehends even the incomprehensible' (1986, p. 126, emphasis in original). Adorno's insights are intimately related to how one might think about the 'political morality of a community' (Habermas, 1988, p. 50) when faced with the 'ghosts' of its (traumatic) own past. Struggles around history and its social representation (official and non-official) have been one of the central elements of the process of coming to terms with the past in Eastern Europe (Habermas & Michnik, 1994; Tismăneanu, 1998). One of the most important aspects of this process has been linked to how nation-states reckon with former regimes.

This paper suggests that when one considers the issue of how nation-states reckon with former regimes, one has to start taking seriously the issue of how collective memory and social representations of history are created, managed and disseminated. One way to study this is to focus on how nation-states turn themselves into some sort of 'socially organized biographical objects' (Plummer, 2001) when 'confronting' the past. By taking Romania as a case in point, this study is generally concerned with the social organization of collective memory in the public arena. This paper situates itself in the context of the study of collective memory in Eastern Europe, and illustrates some of the ways in which discourse analytic work might shed light on the workings of collective memory production and dissemination (see also Tileagă, 2008).

The social organization of representations of history in theory

The relationship between history and psychology has been a focus of a range of social psychological studies. There have been several attempts to offer a social psychological approach to interpreting this relationship. Some authors (see for instance, Bruner, 2005; Gergen, 2005; Straub, 2005) have been concerned with the 'active construction of historical realities' (Straub, 2005, p. 45). According to Bruner, the fact that "history making" has not been studied more as a psychological phenomenon is probably less an oversight than a blind spot created by the archaic conviction that history is just "there" and in no need of being constructed' (2005, p. 37). Gergen (2005) documents how 'historical narratives serve as a foreground for achieving moral identity within relevant communities' (p. 116). Using the example of the Holocaust and its 'hotly debated' history, Gergen emphasizes the essential issue of 'sustained dialogue ... not on the adequacy of the facts, but in terms of our vision of the moral society' (p. 117-118).

Social representations of past, nation and history have also been studied with regard to the construction of national entitativity (Condor, 2006), social identity politics and the perception of history and cultural/historical representations of nation-states (Liu et al., 1999; Liu & Hilton, 2005) or social inequality (Sibley et al., in press). Some researchers have chosen to detail the influence of representations of history on 'identity dynamics' (Liu & Hilton, 2005) and political attitudes (Hilton et al., 1996). Condor (2006) has focused, among other issues, on the temporal aspect of societal representations and discusses the social psychological aspects of national representation: temporality and entitativity. As she argues, 'national representation may vary as a function of the deployment of particular

temporal frames of reference' (p. 673), as historical narratives may take both 'progressive' and 'regressive' forms.

When social psychologists have approached history and collective memory, its construction and maintenance has been conceived as a dynamic socio-psychological process (Pennebaker & Banasik, 1997). The sociocultural approach in psychology (see Valsiner & Rosa, 2007 for an overview) has been closely engaging with issues of how history gets reconstructed as social memory. Memory as a topic for socio-cultural psychology involves 'approaching remembering and forgetting as public, social activities where individual experience is necessarily mediated by collective experience' (Middleton & Brown, 2007, p. 661; see also Wertsch, 2002; Murakami, 2007). The thrust of this position relates to understanding how history and historical representations can be said to acquire a social character as a result of a variety of activities, forms of interpretation and recounting over time (cf. Middleton & Brown, 2005). Sociocultural psychologists make a distinction between a 'strong version' of collective memory, one that is seen as 'slipping into questionable assumptions about memory of the group' (Wertsch, 2007, p. 646), and a 'distributed version' of collective memory, where memory is viewed as being distributed 'socially', in small group interaction and 'instrumentally', involving 'active agents ... and cultural tools such as calendars, written records, computers, and narratives' (p. 646). In addressing the collective historical continuity of the nation and the representation of its history, nation-states create different 'texts of history' that may persuade citizens of the reasonableness and importance of the nation's causes and trigger diverse forms of social and political action (see also Luczynski, 1997). Wertsch (1997) identifies and distinguishes between a) texts of history that

construct imagined communities; b) texts of history that construct mythic history (White, 1997); c) texts of history that construct 'official histories' (Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994; Ahonen, 1997) – providing a sense of group identity; and d) texts of history creating loyalty on the part of the citizens to the nation-states.

For social psychologists embracing a sociocultural perspective, the group is not the source of memories or, for that matter, an entity endowed with the ability to transpose the past into the present. Understanding the reconstruction of the past on the basis of the present and the creation of what has been called a 'usable past' that can serve some identity project or form the basis of a negotiation of group identity entails understanding that 'collective frameworks are ... the instruments used by collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord ... with the predominant thoughts of the society' (Halbwachs, 1952/1992, p. 40). The reconstruction of an image of the past which is in line with the predominant thoughts of the society may lead to the formation of what Serge Moscovici has called hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1988). The need to secure legitimization for specific reconstructions of the past entails not only representations of history shared to some extent by all members of a society, but also the configuration of polemical representations where rivalry and incongruity between positions/representations is an essential feature. It is the dynamic of the social interaction between hegemonic and polemical representations that creates, organizes/re-organizes the collective frameworks through which an image of the past is conveyed.

However, what matters for the study of collective memory and reckoning with past is not only how hegemonic and polemical representations

interact and influence one another, how the unfamiliar is familiarized, or how representations of history might underlie the process of creating group identity, but also how representations of history (and the social practices in which they figure) may be displayed and conceptualized as situated and public accomplishments, and not only as instantiations of a 'strong' or 'distributed' version of collective memory.

Although there is much to take from all the aforementioned studies, what seems to be missing is a dimension of taking the social organization of representations of history as a topic of investigation in its own right (cf. Lynch & Bogen, 1996). Arguably, one will not be able to satisfactorily consider representations of history in the public sphere as forms of moral narratives (Gergen, 2005), before one has charted the constitutive processes involved in bringing off representations of history as situated social action and social practice. In order for representations of history to become foundations for the public articulation for the past they have to be *constituted* in some way or another as stories of some kind. This work of constitution is the focus of this paper¹.

The social organization of representations of history in action

An ethnomethodologically inspired discursive psychology can start to offer an alternative to theorizing the social organization of representations of history and coming to terms with the past. As 'interpretive communities',

¹ This position does not necessarily entail assigning a special ontological status to 'representations of history'. Following Ibañez (1994) one could argue that 'we neither construct representations nor do we represent constructions' (p. 364-365). We neither construct representations of history nor do we represent historical constructions. This may seem a radical statement, but instead of focusing on the process of 'representation', a more useful avenue is that of focusing on the practical production and dissemination of history, its *projected* and *constituted* public dimension.

nation-states continually re-write various stories, interpretations and representations of themselves. National histories will not only be characterised by the special moments of heroism and patriotism, but also by the marks of traumatic pasts. It is suggested that understanding the social organization of representations of history should be seen as anchored in the social organization of talk and text (Billig, 1998; Augoustinos & Penny, 2001; Augoustinos et al., 2007), as *situated, occasioned, rhetorical and action oriented* accomplishment².

If one conceptualizes representations of history within a framework of situated social action and social practice, then one can begin to consider the 'nature' and the range of uses to which the production and dissemination of history as social memory might be put. A discursive approach tries to place collective memory, social representations of history and coming to terms with the past as something in need of *constitution* rather than simply relied on. What I am referring to here is a (method of) *constitution* through a 'documentary reality' (Smith, 1974; Chua, 1979a), which 'embodies a textually constructed reality, which in turn makes reference to the world external to the text' (Chua, 1979b, p. 47-48). This is a move that entails a focus on the situated and practical-textual accomplishment (Barthélémy, 2003) of the past. It is also a move that presupposes an ethnomethodological 'analytic mentality' that insists 'working on materials to see what can be discovered in and from them, rather than selecting problems and data on the basis of some theoretically-specified agenda' (Eglin & Hester, 2003, p. 90). In this particular case, it involves studying official public documents with an interest

² What also underlies an appreciation of the social organization of representations of history is taking into account the context of controversy, justification and criticism in which 'representations of the past' are construed, debated, challenged and transformed.

in whichever *perspectives* can be discovered to be relevant to members of society themselves (cf. Berard, 2005). Part of the undertaking of the researcher is to unravel ‘the image of “reality” which the text projects’ (Prior, 1997, p. 70) by identifying its constitutive features essential to its redemption as a medium for practical/political/ideological courses of action.

The relevant issue is not so much how nation-states may retroactively ‘interpret’ their past and present history, but how collective memory, the reckoning with former regimes and traumatic pasts, unfolds and is being displayed and entangled in a space of public visibility and accountability. If one takes seriously the idea that the essential thing about social practices and social/political action (such as ‘coming to terms with the past’) is its ‘designed visibility’, then one ought to study the discursive and social procedures that ensure its ‘publicly accomplished *recognition*’ (Edwards, 1997, p. 99, emphasis in original). This is a position based on considering how social and political life ‘is ordered *from within*’ (Eglin & Hester, 2003, p. 90, emphasis in original).

This can be achieved if one accepts not only the ordering from within of social life, but also a wider notion of ‘discourse’, where discourse is seen as ‘a conversation mediated by texts that is not a matter of statements alone but of actual ongoing practices and sites of practices, the material forms of texts ..., the methods of producing texts, the reputational and status structures, the organization of powers intersecting with other relations of ruling in state agencies, universities, professional organizations, and the like’ (Smith, 1987, p. 214).

Coming to terms with the past

‘Coming to terms with the past’, as a moral/ideological course of action endorsed by the state as a way of dealing with the (traumatic) legacy of the past, has mainly been interpreted within the context of drawing upon categories and theories such as transitional justice (Stan, 2006; Teitel, 2000), reconciliation in the context of intractable intergroup conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000) or re-assessed collective memory (Wertsch, 2002).

Coming to terms with the past in Eastern Europe has mainly been thought of as a process of ‘overcoming the past’ (Habermas & Michnik, 1994) and has involved, in some respect, redesigning the past or history (Merridale, 2003) as an integral part of political transition (Evans, 2003). According to Stan (2007), the condemnation of totalitarianism has taken diverse forms in the former communist states. One category has been represented by ‘apologies and the public, personal or official, condemnations coming from head of states’, while the second has been that ‘of laws of condemnation’ (p. 9). There are similarities between Truth and Reconciliation Committees (e.g. Africa, Latin America) and the Eastern European condemnation of totalitarianism. Overall, the main aim of the approaches has been to ‘re-write history by recovering the suffering of the victims, to identify victims and victimizers, to reveal the nature of the crimes’ (ibid., p. 9), but also, in some instances, to offer ‘legitimacy to politicians, the party, government or political regimes’ (ibid., p. 9). What seems to be missing from the diverse approaches to the condemnation of totalitarianism is making reference to the idea that the collections of social practices that can potentially be included under the heading ‘coming to terms with the past’ are a product of occasioned and action oriented social/practical/textual accomplishments. Moreover, by ignoring the

discursive resources used to constitute, maintain and reproduce representations of history, social psychologists, historians, political psychologists and political scientists have disregarded what is, arguably, *social* about representations of history. By not considering 'coming to terms with the past' as a situated, reflexive social practice, researchers are running the risk of founding their approaches on a phrase 'highly suspect as a slogan' that 'does not imply a serious working through of the past, the breaking of its spell through an act of consciousness' (Adorno, 1986, p. 115).

In the context of post-communist Romania, 'coming to terms' with the communist, totalitarian past has been a convoluted process where most of the political/public debate has been focused around constructing, negotiating, contesting different types of arguments for *avoiding* or straightforwardly *refusing* the 'confrontation' with the past (cf. Cornea, 2007). According to Cornea, the argument and debate has been characterized by two versions: a 'weak' one: 'the time has not come *yet!*' and a 'strong' one: 'the moment has passed!'. The Romanian 'coming to terms with the past' is an interesting case. The two versions of the argument for not confronting the past 'do not directly deny, explicitly the value or the necessity in itself of discussing the past, but are raising question marks as to the opportunity of a public discussion exactly when this is invoked' (Cornea, 2007, p. 134). In Dec 2006, the time finally came to confront the past.

Making sense of coming to terms with the past, interpreting the 'redesigning' of history in political transitions, cannot continue ignoring the publicly available, *accountable* means of constructing representations of history. This entails, among other issues, treating documents and texts as 'reflecting the meanings which people ... or groups attribute to their

experiences, and the perspectives through which they define their social realities' (Drew, 2006, p. 79)

Case background

As many scholars and political commentators agree, Romania's exit from communism has resulted in a quasi-democratic regime. Simply, but sketchily put, Romanian politics has been (and still is, in some respect) characterized by a continuous struggle for power between the democratic intelligentsia, nostalgic communists and xenophobic nationalists. When it comes to confronting the past, the 'democratic' Romanian politics has been usually the product of an uneasy mix of ambiguous political positions, where the line between genuine and politically motivated commitments and positions was very difficult to draw. The 'revolution' of 1989 seemed to have opened the way for a genuine attempt to come to terms with the legacy of the communist regime, but the fierce opposition of nostalgic communists (like former president Iliescu) and xenophobic nationalists (like Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the leader of the extreme right-wing Greater Romania Party) has hindered the process of reckoning with the communist past (cf. Tismăneanu, 2008 for more details on Romania confronting its communist past and the wider political/ideological context preceding that).

The focus of this paper is an official Report on the condemnation of Communism in Romania. This is the Final Report of the Presidential Committee for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (henceforth, the Report)³ lead by Prof. Vladimir Tismăneanu⁴. According to

³ The Report can be found at http://www.presidentcy.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CADCR.pdf (Romanian only).

Stan (2007), the Tismăneanu Committee is the first Presidential committee in Eastern Europe to investigate the crimes of Communism, being preceded only by a parliamentary committee of the Bundestag in 1992. The Report deals with the period 1945-1989. The Committee was the result of a petition signed by hundreds of intellectuals and handed to the Romanian president in March 2006. The petition explicitly requested the public condemnation of the Romanian communist regime as 'illegitimate' and criminal (cf. Drăguțin, 2007). The Committee was appointed in April 2006. In Dec 2006, the Romanian President Traian Băsescu, officially condemns the crimes of the Communist regime in front of the Romanian Parliament, declaring the Communist regime in Romania as 'illegitimate and criminal'⁵.

The Report runs over 600 pages and has the following structure: an Introduction on the 'nature, scope and effects of the Romanian communist totalitarian regime', followed by separate chapters on the Romanian Communist Party (chap. 1), the Communist Repression (chap. 2), Society, Economy and Culture (chap. 3). The Conclusions of the Report come under the title: 'the necessity of the analysis, condemnation and repudiation of the Communist regime'. The Report closes with the biographies of the Communist bureaucratic elite.

The extracts used in this paper have been translated from the original Romanian by the author. The analysis was carried out on the original text.

⁴ Vladimir Tismăneanu is a well-known Romanian born Professor of Political Sciences at University of Maryland, College Park.

⁵ The English version of the Presidential address can be found at http://www.presidency.ro/pdf/date/8288_en.pdf. The extracts from the Presidential address are taken from the English version on the official website, although the analysis has been carried out on the original Romanian.

Materials and analytic framework

Although the main focus is on the Report itself, President Bănescu's address to the Romanian Parliament will also be drawn upon. This stems from an analytic and methodological suggestion of investigation/analysis of texts 'as they ... "occur" in actuality, namely in some sequence of action in relation to each other' (Smith, 1999, p. 199). As it is usually the case for nation-states reckoning with former regimes and past injustices, the two texts are seen as authorizing the same version of (historical) reality. This has relevance to exploring discourses of collective memory as 'local practices organizing a sequential social act' (Smith, 1999, p. 195)⁶. The Report is 'brought into a position of discipleship' (Hodge & McHoul, 1992, p. 191), being 'an accomplice' to the discourse of the President.

The implicit question that the Report is seemingly trying to answer is: how is the Communist period to be processed in public consciousness? This is a matter concerning, among others, the 'public use of history' (Habermas, 1988). Taking account of the social and political context of coming to terms with the past in Eastern Europe (and Romania), one might argue that the main task of the Report was to 'fixing an enduring historical account of an evil past' (cf. Teitel, 2000, p. 105). As noted earlier, what underlies an appreciation of the social organization of representations of history is taking into account the context of controversy, justification and criticisms in which 'representations of the past' are construed. This observation is extremely relevant in the context of the Report and Presidential address. It is relevant as the Report is not the only representation of history in the Romanian public

⁶ As part of a political sequence of action, one could argue that both texts constitute the expression of a relation of ruling and of a ruling, institutional order (Smith, 1999)

sphere, and far from constituting a dominant and widely shared representation of history. It is a collective representation of history that tries to engage with (and at the same time, create) emerging collective representations, such as reconciliation and condemnation (Augoustinos & Penny, 2001)⁷.

While it is relevant to look at how a specific representation of the past might be accomplished, one should also take into account that that representation will already, in some form or another, be contested. A case in point is the way the President's parliamentary address and the 'conclusions' of the Report were 'received' in the Romanian Parliament. The President was booed throughout. The 'charge' was led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the notorious leader of the extreme right-wing Greater Romania Party, whose name, alongside that of former President Iliescu and others, has been mentioned in the Report as 'pillars of Communism'. The context in which representations of history occur will be relevant to an analysis of how a particular accomplishment can have an influence on the social organisation of collective memory, which in turn has implications for a range of social practices (reconciliation, commemoration, and so on)⁸.

The problem for the analyst is not so much how the Report goes about fixing an enduring historical account of an 'evil' past, but what are the means through which the character, the *essence* of the past is constituted? How is a sense of the *nature* of state of affairs accomplished and displayed in the commissioned Report in order for it to be consequential to a process of

⁷ Constructing a representation of history as the 'official version' does not give the initiators any guarantees as to how it will be received or how soon will it transform itself into a dominant social representation of the national past.

⁸ The analysis addresses the issue of how the Presidential address actively resists alternative categorizations of the condemnation of Communism as a politically motivated move rather than a genuine attempt at reconciliation.

coming to terms with the past? How the work done by such accomplishment produces a particular social representation of history? How is it that the text provides for its 'objective' character, by which it is encountered as an 'objective account of actual reality'? (cf. Jayyusi, 1991b)

As a particular type of public document, inquiry reports are 'doubly charged with sociological interest' (Green, 1983, p. 10), by virtue of the 'substantive topic ... they refer to' and 'their status as politically salient exercises in reality construction' (ibid., p. 10). The exploration of a particular social/ideological practice (like that of 'constructing' a social representation of history and coming to terms with the past) is not to be addressed solely with reference to a wider social/historical context treated as extrinsic to the text, linked to it in some descriptive, explanatory fashion, but rather as intrinsic to the text's intelligibility (cf. Jayyusi, 1991b). Analysis is informed by discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 2001) and membership categorisation analysis of textual material (Baker, 2000; Eglin & Hester, 2003; Watson, 1997). The analysis involved an investigation of how the Report (in conjunction with the President's address) 'actively makes sense' (Watson, 1997, p. 85) of the phenomenon of which they speak about.

Analysis

Constructing a practical framework for the inquiry as a matter of public concern and attention

The Report seems to be inviting the reader to treat it as a *resource* to gain information on a specific period in national history. In order to construct a practical framework and concern for the inquiry the Report is faced with having to provide both 'for the availability ... or observability-reportability'

(Eglin & Hester, 2003, p. 52) of the reporting and the *meaning* of the reporting. This is done in relation to making reference to a framework of political reconciliation and transitional justice. The Report contends that the ‘recuperation of memory, but also the identification of responsibilities are indispensable to the functioning of a democratic political community’ (p. 10). The Report sets out to document the ‘dimensions and methods of repression from Communist Romania’ (p. 16) in order ‘not to forget, to condemn, to not repeat’ (p. 635).

The practical framework that calls for the investigation is justified by making reference to a public concern around the lack of responsibility taking in relation to the past:

(1) ‘None of the parties from post-December Romania has assumed the responsibility for the four decades and a half of obsessive following in the construction of an impossible utopia’ (R⁹, p. 10)

(2) ‘There is not yet an official document of the Romanian state in which one apologizes to the victims of the communist terror for their immense and totally undeserved suffering’ (R, p. 10)

Note the use of extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) which point to the relevance of the particular inquiry. What it is seen as missing is, on one hand, the political responsibility taking in relation the past and on the other hand, a political and moral dimension of forgiveness and reconciliation. A moral order is constituted by making relevant the absence of moral courses of action. The moral significance of the inquiry in itself does not need to be directly justified. Arguably, the historical (and practical) significance of ‘studying’ Communism need not be justified. ‘Communism’ (as a category of

⁹ R denotes an extract from the Report; B an extract from the Presidential address

the ‘macro-social’) is, in a way, *already* constituted as a ‘reality’ beyond the text and associated with particular features. One could argue that the presence of the category, of events, people and social formations in folk imagination as well as mass-media ‘provide a generic warrant for the attribution of historical significance’ (Lynch & Bogen, 1996, p. 60). Nevertheless, although the choice of Communism as a topic of inquiry does not seem to require a justification, what needs to be justified, as will be later seen, is the *social representation* of Communism.

The current investigative concerns are constituted as plausibly tied to public criteria and moral worlds. The investigative concerns are *moral* because they are *public* concerns.

(3) ‘The burden of not condemning communism in the period 1990-2006 has, in many respects, hindered democratic consolidation and has created sentiments of profound frustration, exasperation and disappointment among large social groupings’ (R., p. 10)

(4) ‘The Presidential Commission was established ... in response to society’s demands that the totalitarian past should be assumed and condemned. We considered it necessary to constitute the Commission precisely in order to substantiate intellectually and morally the act of condemnation’ (B)

The ‘intellectual and moral act of condemnation’ is to be understood as a public act responding to a public concern. The practical framework of inquiry is established through the constitution of a practical-public concern as something publicly *observable*. Condemning Communism and achieving reconciliation is presented as an issue for the members of society rather than for the investigators themselves. This is nevertheless not considered enough to substantiate the analytic focus of the Report. The Report also needs to construct the *necessity* of condemning Communism. It achieves that by

drawing on an 'ethic' and 'rhetoric of responsibility' (Smart, 1999). This is in relation to a dimension of *doing*, but more importantly *knowing*:

(5) 'Condemning communism is today, more than ever, a moral, intellectual, politic and social duty/obligation. The democratic and pluralist Romanian state can and ought to do it. Also, knowing these dark and saddening pages of 20th century Romanian history is indispensable for the younger generations who have the right to know the world their parents lived in' (R., p. 19)

(6) 'The names of the victims, as well as those of the executioners, must be known in order to say, like those who have survived the Nazi Holocaust: "So it shall not be repeated"' (R., p. 18)

(7) 'The names of the institutions that have committed the crimes against humanity must be identified. In the same manner, the names of the main culprits, so those of the potentate communists and of the Securitate executioners must also be known' (R., p. 18)

(8) 'The names of Regional (later District) Committee Secretaries must be known. The evil spread initially from the top, and then from bottom-up, becoming a cancer of the whole society' (R., p. 630)

It is implied that political responsibility taking in relation the past cannot be achieved outside a framework of accountability that includes a political and moral dimension of knowledge and truth. This is a dimension of public accountability where political (and institutional) accountability is intertwined with personal accountability (one must know the names of specific individuals; victims, executioners and those having various roles in the Communist system). The public concern and necessity of condemning Communism is constituted through a mixture of a repertoire of entitlement ('the right to know'), duty and moral responsibility.

The nature of the condemnation of Communism is also something that needs constituting.

(9) “We must ... honour the memory of those who sacrificed their lives resisting the system, from those dying in jails to those dying because of illegal abortions, from those jailed and beaten up (miners, workers, peasants who protested against merging the lands and collectivisation) during the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej years to the victims of the 1980s under Nicolae Ceaușescu” (R., p. 9)

(10) “All these snapshots are accusations of this criminal regime that removed us for half a century from Europe and tried to make us forget who we were...not all the victims were martyrs, but all of them ask us, from their own heavens, to not forget them” (R., p. 216)

In (9) and (10), the condemnation of Communism is not directly constituted as a *political* act. A dimension of national reconciliation and remembrance is explicitly framed instead. In (9), there is an explicit, comprehensive call for remembrance of those who have resisted the Communist system. This call makes reference to all the categories of victims of the system in a temporal perspective encompassing the whole communist period. In (10), one witnesses the voice of the nation. The act of coming to terms with the past is one that would re-establish the dignity of a nation taken out of History by a criminal regime. It is implied that this can only be done through condemnation of communism and remembrance of victims.

The President’s address, on the other hand, is very explicit in tackling a potential alternative reading.

(11) “I do not want to become ‘the President who condemned communism’. I want only to be the head of a state which considers that this condemnation relates to normality, that, without this condemnation, we shall move forward with difficulty, we shall move forward while continuing to carry on our back the corpse of our own past. All that I want is for us to build the future of democracy in Romania and the national identity upon clean ground”

(12) “We did not wish for a merely formal repudiation of the communist past, at the level of declarations of complaisance. Such a condemnation would have been unconvincing”

(13) “My gesture today is the natural consequence of the fact that we have assumed, as a nation, democratic values. In the name of these values, we have the obligation to identify in our history those things which we do or do not want to define our identity as Romanians and future citizens of the European Union”

(14) “We must not display historical arrogance. My purpose is aimed at authentic national reconciliation, and all the more so since numerous legacies of the past continue to scar our lives”

One can notice how the President is trying to construct the sense and authenticity of the act of condemnation. He is ‘managing credibility’ (cf. Edwards, 1997) with regard to possible alternative descriptions of the act. In discursive terms, this can be seen as a move of inoculating against stake and interest. The sense of the act is construed with regard to the actor and the visibility of the act, such that the act will be taken for what it appears to be (cf. Edwards, 1997). One of the actors involved is the President himself, who does not want to be seen as supporting anything else than a *true* condemnation and reconciliation. He works against the potential ascription of a *political* vested interest with regard to the act of condemnation: ‘I don’t want to become the “President who condemned communism” (11). The President can see what everyone *should* see, that ‘condemnation relates to normality’, the future and identity of the nation. This is the voice of the ‘reasonable politician’ serving the interests of the country. In (12), (13) and (14), he further works to establish the reasonableness of taking such a position in appraising the national past. Condemning communism is seen as a ‘natural consequence’ of post-communist democratic values and self-definition. Establishing the authenticity of the act is paramount against a potential reading of political wilfulness. This is a way to publicly display the recognizability of

condemnation and reconciliation as ‘essentially’ *about* coming to terms with the past.

‘Communism’ as category device

In the Report, accounting for the legacy of Communism is coterminous with constituting the *nature* of Communism. Although the condemnation of Communism is secured as an object of inquiry, as an *accountable*, public phenomenon, the ‘identity’, the nature of Communism itself is still something in need of constitution. Throughout the Report, Communism is described in different ways. In general (historical, social formation) terms, it is described as a ‘regime’ and ‘ideology’. It is also described as an ‘utopian conception’ (p. 9), ‘an enemy of the human race’ (p. 19), as being reproduced through ‘terror, violence and crime’ (p. 197), having instituted ‘the physical and moral assassinate’ (p. 197), and having survived ‘through repression’ (p. 197). These are features that are seen to apply to Communism in general, not only to Romanian Communism. In ‘national’ terms, communism is described as ‘antinational’ (p. 17), a ‘(foreign) occupation regime’ (p. 267), ‘profoundly disregarding the notion of human rights’ (p. 373); ‘criminal towards its own people’ (p. 405).

Constituting the nature of Communism involves more than simply attaching a series of characteristics, but also pointing to people, institutions, social relations etc. As *social and ideological formation*, as a category of the ‘macro-social’ (Coulter, 2001), Communism can be said to have *already* entered ‘document time’. It is to be found in the state archives, the nationalization and collectivization orders, the files of the Securitate, the information notes of Securitate informers etc. Communism is already

constituted in 'documentary form' (Smith, 1974). As work in discursive psychology and ethnomethodology has shown, categories are deployable for various purposes: 'In practical contexts, there are routinely more than one set of characterisations (or categorisations/descriptions) that are relevantly available to members' (Jayyusi, 1991a, p. 248). The Report can be seen as sketching a 'map of the social and moral terrain' (Baker, 2000, p. 108) around the relevance of two categories, 'illegitimate' and 'criminal':

(15) "Against the facts presented in this report, it is certain that genocide acts have been committed during 1945 – 1989, thus the communist regime can be qualified as criminal against its own people" (p. 405)

(16) "The communist regime was an antimodern one (simulating modernity), which, once it took over - as foreign occupation regime - began destroying the Romanian elites and democratic institutions, the market economy and private property" (p. 624)

(17) "The communist regime has had a criminal nature, in that it generated (initiated, ordered, committed) crimes against humanity. It established itself through violence after 1945. Its nature has been a violent one: it produced hundreds of thousands deaths in jails and labour camps. It destroyed millions of people through various ways of repression, inhuman treatment, criminal attitudes or through decisions with devastating effects on the environment, the economy and the human life in general. It was a regime aiming to turn its people into slaves, mercilessly exploiting them under the pretence of constructing a utopian society, of equality and freedom. The regime was throughout its duration an illegitimate one, and in its essence, criminal, ending as it began: through violence" (p. 624)

Communism is being assigned 'descriptive categories and a conceptual structure' (Smith, 1974, p. 258). Constituting the relevance of the labels 'illegitimate' and 'criminal' is an integral part of a moral discourse in which 'description and appraisal are ... deeply intertwined' (Jayyusi, 1991a, p. 233): 'genocide deeds', 'the liquidation of Romanian elites and democratic institutions, market economy and private property', 'generated (initiated,

ordered, committed) crimes against humanity' etc.. The historical record does not simply stand 'as a morally untextured, neutral collection of facts' (Lynch & Bogen, 1996, p. 60), but rather 'a set of factual circumstances' are seen to be 'generative of specifically moral judgments' (Jayyusi, 1991a, p. 232).

In (17), descriptions in terms of 'criminality' and 'violence' are intertwined. Predicates such as 'violent', 'illegitimate' and 'criminal' can be seen to be reciprocally sustaining each other, each providing reflexively for the other (cf. Jayyusi, 1991b). They are also providing reflexively for the kinds of moral inferences with regard to the category Communism. The collectability of Communism and descriptions such as 'illegitimate', 'criminal', 'violent' orient to and reproduce a purportedly known in common social reality with *non-controversial* objective properties (cf. Jayyusi, 1991b). The notion of 'violence' mediates the constitution of 'illegitimacy' and 'criminality' of Communism as *uniquely* bound features of the category Romanian Communism.

The representativeness of this particular description of Communism is taken to be co-substantial with 'coming to terms with the past' as a relevant and consequential course of action:

(18) "Taking act of this Report, The president can say with his hand on the heart: the Communist regime in Romania has been illegitimate and criminal. Condemning this regime, the Romanian democratic state condemns its instruments, first and foremost, the Romanian Communist Party and the Securitate, as well as the people responsible for the illegitimacy and criminality of Communism" (p. 636)

The thrust of this is not what attributes *could* be attached to 'Communism', but about what attributes one *ought* to attach to 'Communism'. Categories and category-bound attributes 'lock the discourse into place, and ...

practices that flow from them' (Baker, 2000, p. 112). One could argue that historical representation is produced and 'secured' through categorisation work (cf. Baker, 2000, p. 112)¹⁰. In order for Communism (and 'coming to terms with the past') to acquire an 'identity', it needs to be cast into a *category* with associated characteristics or features. The *occasioned* ideological and political significance of Communism (and its *consequentiality* in and for the reporting) lies in it being displayed as an observable category with *uniquely* category-bound predicates¹¹.

Although 'coming to terms with the past' may be considered a 'categorically open' activity (cf. Coulter, 2001), the particular invocation of 'criminality' and 'illegitimacy' of Communism places the discourse of the Report as part of a more general moral worldview, one that is beyond argument:

(19) 'to deny the crimes of communism is as unacceptable as denying the crimes of fascism' (p. 640)

The co-location of the 'violent nature', 'criminality' and 'illegitimacy' of Communism can be said to be operative throughout the Report and is used as a sense-making device. The practical and historical significance of condemning Communism becomes thus 'visible as a practical accomplishment' (Lynch & Bogen, 1996, p. 60). Moreover, the constituted 'criminality' and 'illegitimacy' of Communism can be seen as acting as a

¹⁰ Although categorisation-work can be seen as constituting discourse, one should not nevertheless downplay the idea that the 'text itself is a large, complex sign, in which the interests of a particular producer are realized' (Kress, 1993, p. 181) – such as the 'interests' of the state, a ruling apparatus

¹¹ See Tileagă (2008) for a similar argument with regard to the concept of 'revolution'

‘regulator’ between ‘original events and public discourse’ (Smith, 1999, p. 185).

Time, political agenda and national identity

The Report and the President’s address clearly mark the boundaries of the ‘event’, ‘state of affairs’ under scrutiny. There is a clear temporal delineation of the period: 1945-1989. The period is described in different ways: in the Report, it is being referred as ‘four decades and a half of obsessive following in the construction of an impossible utopia’; in the President address, it is ‘a grim chapter in our country’s past’. Together with the co-selection of the *unique* attributes ascribed to Communism it expresses a particular ‘structure of relevance’ of a specific representation of history.

But the Report does not solely rely on the temporal delineation of its ‘object of inquiry’. As some authors have argued, the politics of coming to terms with the past ‘consists first and foremost in structuring time’ (Santiso, 1998, p. 26). The focus on the present, the past and the future is said to frame and establish the boundaries of moral and political courses of action. In political discourse (as in ordinary talk), ‘time is a resource ... to be drawn on ... in order present an identity, establish a truth or defend an interest’ (Taylor & Wetherell, 1999, p. 39). In this particular case, the structuring of time is achieved by joining a political agenda (of condemnation and reconciliation) and a repertoire of national identity. This is a feature of both the Report and President’s address:

(20) “The moment has finally come for this methodically maintained state of amnesia to end. The recuperation of memory, as well as the

identification of responsibilities is indispensable to the workings of a democratic political community” (R., p. 10).

(21) “Thus the moment has come to identify the nature and the legacies of the communist regime” (R., p. 626)

(22) “17 years after the December 1989 revolution, the moment has fully arrived for all the communist archives to be made public and accessible” (R., p. 640)

(23) ‘The imported communism we experienced in our own lives for five decades is an open wound in the history of Romania whose time to heal has come once and for all’ (B)

(24) ‘We believed that we could forget communism, but it did not want to forget us. Therefore, the condemnation of this past arises as a priority for the present, without which we shall behave in the future too in a way which resembles the burden of an unhealed illness’ (B)

The time of condemning communism, is a time *for* coming to terms with the past. As Billig (1998) has argued, ‘the construal of time is crucial to ideology’ (p. 209). The time for coming to terms with the past points reflexively to a political agenda that is rhetorically structured to work against the ‘ambivalence’ of previous political positions, such as *avoiding* or *refusing* coming to terms with the past.

‘The time has come’ to recuperate memory and identify responsibilities (20), to ‘identify the nature and legacies of the communist regime’ (21), to make public and accessible communist archives (22), to heal an ‘open wound in the history of Romania’ (23), to lift the burden of ‘an unhealed illness’ (24). These are all actions stemming from an authoritative collective time summon (cf. Leeuwen, 2005). These are also actions that take for granted ‘togetherness’ and the timely nature of reckoning with the past.

Notice the use of metaphors in (23) and (24): ‘open wound ... whose time to heal has come’, ‘the burden of an unhealed illness’. These metaphors frame condemnation and reconciliation discourse with regard to coming to

terms with the past. The move towards closing a chapter in the nation's history becomes a 'healing' process (see Cameron, 2007 on metaphor use in reconciliation talk).

The message of both the Report and President's address is clear: the future (of the nation) depends on coming to terms with the past. The time dimension invoked in these accounts can be seen as operating 'as a cultural and practical resource for the members of society whose task it is to establish the scope and meaning of something that is happening within and for the society to which they reflexively refer' (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 420). It is a members' resource to establish the intelligibility of condemnation and reconciliation as moral courses of action *as* an issue for the *present*. Together with the other features identified in the Report and President's address, it provides the ethical *grounds* for moral/political/legal courses of action.

Through temporal reference, condemnation and reconciliation are constituted as activities that embody the values and goals that the nation aspires to. They are an integral part of the political *project* of the nation. They are constitutive of both 'future action and future reality' (Dunmire, 2005: 484):

(25) "The future of Romania is dependant upon assuming its past, that is upon condemning the communist regime as enemy of the human race. Not doing it, here and now, will forever burden us with the guilt of complicity, be it only through silence, with the totalitarian Evil" (R., p. 19)

(26) "This symbolic moment represents the balance sheet of what we have lived through and the day in which we all ask ourselves how we want to live henceforward" (B)

There is an ideological dimension present in all these accounts. There is a clear *promise* of national change and transformation. It would seem that a

close adherence to this political agenda would give the ‘assurance’ that, from the moment of speaking and writing, it would be ‘no longer possible ... to fall back into the past’ (Habermas & Michnik, 1994, p. 11). In conjunction with the previously identified characteristics of Communism (‘illegitimate’ and ‘criminal’), the Report reflexively positions Communism as political ideology. Constituted in this way, Communism cannot be anything else than *ideology*, *political ideology*.

Discussion

In this paper, I have argued for a discursive approach to understanding the social organization of representations of history and coming to terms with the past. In contrast to other social psychological accounts, such an approach highlights the importance of studying representations of history as situated social action and social practice. A discursive approach suggests treating representations of history not as something ‘pre-given’, but as something in need of *constitution*.

The nature of the past and history has to be reflexively, inter-subjectively, publicly accomplished and displayed. The present paper has focused on the textual accomplishment of coming to terms with a past by taking the condemnation of Communism in Romania as a case in point. The analysis has identified some discursive/textual features of the ‘Tismăneanu Report’ on Communism (and a Presidential address) consequential to bringing off a particular ‘representation of history’ as the relevant thing in remembering and coming to terms with the past: constructing a practical framework for the inquiry as a matter of public concern; producing

‘Communism’ as a category with *uniquely* bound features; structuring time by bringing together a political agenda and national identity.

Constructing an inquiry framework *as* a public concern becomes a platform for generating appropriate knowledge, a preface and condition for appropriate action (cf. Jayyusi, 1991b) in the terms put forward by the Report. The promise is of knowledge ‘that is potentially transformative of the public sphere’ (Teitel, 2000, p. 100). The categorization of Communism as ‘illegitimate’ and ‘criminal’ reflexively provides a warrant, not only for the activity of reporting, but also for the activity of ‘coming to terms with the past’. Categorially tied predicates are constitutive of, and provide for a ‘moral inferential logic’ (Jayyusi, 1991a, p. 240) of a particular representation of history. Structuring time through bringing together a political agenda and national identity defines an ethic that gives the nation ‘something to do’ (de Certeau, 1986, p. 199; see also Frow, 2001). Time is an ideological resource used to establish not only the intelligibility, but also the *necessity* of moral courses of action *as* an issue for the *present* history of the nation. These three features are intertwined in the Report and they *organize* and at the same time, *project* a conceptual, moral and practical framework *for* coming to terms with the past.

The story of the Report is not merely a *possible* conceptualization of a chapter of national history. The Report is not ‘an invitation to engage in a post-modernist game of interpretation where any story is as good a reading as any other’ (Hester & Eglin, 1997, p. 42). The Report engenders a morally constitutive reading of Communism *as* political ideology. The ‘practice of objectivity’ of the Report is that of ‘arriving at an account capable of overriding what you think, what I think, what she thinks’ (Smith, 1999, p. 212-

213) about Communism. One can sense an implicit desire for ‘a final accounting – for a fully entrenched historical consensus – to be “beyond history” as it were’ (Teitel, 2000, p. 117). In doing so, it is drawing attention not to what *could* be observed (inferred) by any member of society, but what *ought* to be observed (inferred) by any member of society¹².

One way in which an ethnomethodologically inspired discursive psychology can contribute to modern debates about social memory is to show how particular public accomplishments of collective remembering are produced and disseminated and how these may have an influence on the social organisation of collective memory through a range of social, political and ideological practices (commemoration, reconciliation, confession, and so on). The true nature and meaning of national history should not be simply considered as given, the forgone conclusion of some invisible social process or simply the product of emerging historical discourses (Lynch & Bogen, 1996). Social psychologists can learn more about the political morality of a community and the morality of politics/history by looking at the various *ways* in which the past is remembered, displayed and accomplished in and for the present. One needs to be more explicit about the discursive, political and ideological underpinnings of representations of the past as contingent and situated accomplishments encompassing a rich texture of individual and group-based practices. Only then one can begin to say something meaningful with regard to the structure, function and salience of representations of history as essential elements of moral/political/legal courses of action.

¹² This could be seen by some as a problematic attempt to ‘create forms of consciousness that override the “naturally” occurring diversity of perspectives and experiences’ (Smith, 1999, p. 195-196). But this conceptualization of Communism is one that is grounded in a particular meaning attached to historical accountability and historical justice in transition as manifestly dependent ‘on the nature of prior legacies of injustice’ (Teitel, 2000, p. 102).

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