The legacy of communism – difficult histories, emotions and contested narratives

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This paper considers contested and traumatic narratives, using a case study of the planned National Museum of Romanian Communism and the site of Jilava Penitentiary, a former communist prison, near Bucharest in Romania. It discusses what happened when representatives from different groups of former victims and perpetrators met together with facilitators and worked towards a shared understanding of the past to reach some consensus about how to deal with different and apparently conflicting narratives within a new museum of communism. It draws on notions of emotional communities in order to understand the role heritage plays in contested situations. It also considers the nature of transitional justice¹ in this context.

Key words Emotional communities, Romania, museum, communism, difficult history, transitional justice

Emotional communities, museums and heritage

Post-communist countries in Eastern Europe have used museums and heritage sites as ways of exploring and coming to terms with aspects of a difficult past. Some, such as the House of Terror in Budapest, have been much criticised for their attempts to craft emotional responses from visitors, ones that appear to discourage thoughtful analysis of events and a deep understanding of their complexities. Academics argue that here an immersive exhibition style encourages visitors to consume ‘simplistic emotional versions of history’ (Apor 2014, 329, Radno’ti 2003; Re’nyi 2008), a version in which communist officials were demonised without any attempt to contextualise communism within wider society and to understand the complex relationship of collusion and resistance along with active

¹ ‘Transitional justice is an approach to systematic or massive violations of human rights that both provides redress to victims and creates or enhances opportunities for the transformation of the political systems, conflicts, and other conditions that may have been at the root of the abuses’ (UN 2008, 1).

participation. Apor goes so far as to argue that this is ‘a spectacular example of directly abusing history for political aims in a postdictatorial country,’ in his opinion, by post-communist regimes for conservative nationalist reasons (Apor 2014, 330). Such examples help us to understand why many heritage professionals and museologists regard the deliberate emotional crafting of visitor responses with grave mistrust. Emotions, it is thought, are dangerous tools for museums to excite. Yet we cannot ignore them for visitors have personal emotional reactions to even the most dispassionate telling of historical events. Nevertheless to date there has, with notable exceptions, (e.g. Gregory and Witcomb 2007, Smith and Campbell 2015, Watson 2016), been little attempt to understand visitor emotional repertoires and how important these are for the development of visitor engagement. All too often emotions are seen as undesirable complications in the attempts by institutions to create an established official version of events (Crane 1997). In particular little attention has been paid to the notion of communities and their adoption of certain types of emotional responses to past events as a form of communal identity making. In addition little interest has been shown in the role the state adopts in regulating and encouraging these responses through institutions such as national museums and heritage sites of national importance. However, this case study demonstrates how some nations are beginning to work with community representatives to democratise this emotional form of heritage practice.

Emotions are significant in ‘the formation and experience of social and political events’ and contribute... ‘to the construction and negotiation of political and other discourses, andto the making and making of solidarities and divisions’ (6 et al 2007, 4), issues with which heritage and museums are intimately concerned. They are moreover the driver of a sense of belonging – a key element that binds communities together, for with belonging comes ‘attraction, identification, and cohesion’ (Marshall 2002, 360). Nussbaum’s work (2015) on political emotions deplores the ways in which some liberal democratic societies avoid emotions as dangerous, thus ceding their use to their opponents. Indeed she argues that governments have a key role in shaping public emotional responses towards encouraging inclusivity and tolerance. While museum exhibitions have moved towards encouraging more immersive experiences in their visitors this mistrust of emotions can be found

within many types of heritage and museum displays where dispassionate arguments, omissions and historical distancing encourage an intellectual rather than emotional response to complex events. However, it is increasingly being recognised that emotion is the ‘elephant’ in every room in the museum (Smith and Campbell 2015) – something that is always present in visitors and their responses to their experiences, often ignored and rarely understood. It is so important to community cohesion that we might begin to identify some groups as ‘emotional communities.’ Light (2015, 149) drawing on the work of Palmer (2003) and Park (2011) points to the ways in which visits to heritage sites (here Churchill’s home Chartwell and the Changdeok Palace in Korea) provided opportunities for emotional and intuitive experiences that encouraged feelings of national identity amongst the native visitors. Here national communities were re-enforced by the visits, not by historical facts but by feelings held in common with others from the same national group, a form of emotional community (Watson 2017). This paper seeks to open a discussion about national emotional communities, what this concept means and how it might affect our understanding of heritage and museums using post-communist Romania as an example.

Communities are encouraged and developed by the state towards an emotional consensus and the most successful regimes, past and present, manage public emotions. Reddy’s study of the French Revolution illustrates how its leaders were adept at emotional management of the public (Reddy 2001). Successful politicians will not only give voice to public emotional responses to events in the present and the past but will also craft this, as did Churchill in the UK in 1940 (Watson 2010). We can argue that the UK in 1940 was an example of one such emotional community, where Churchill’s voice was used to develop and articulate a resolute nation unified in its response to the Nazi threat, a response that encompassed the emotions of stoicism, stubbornness, anger and a strong sense of righteousness. Such emotionally effective people, their words and actions, continue to be significant markers of unity many decades, even centuries, later, contributing to a strong sense of cohesive historical identity. Research by László (2014) into the ways in which historical narratives become imbued with specific emotions by national communities (in this case Hungary), regardless of the context in which they are presented through public media, demonstrates that events can perform the

same function. Unity can, in this case, be encouraged by notions of victimhood in the past. Here the Peace Treaty of Trianon functioned as a ‘chosen trauma’ in which Hungary was dispossessed (László 2014,163). In this context Anderson’s (1991) seminal idea of the imagined community helps to explain how such emotions can be accepted and projected across time between generations, often facilitated by heritage monuments and rituals such as Remembrance Sunday in the UK, when people meet at war memorials to remember the dead of the two World Wars, thus demonstrating shared sorrow and pride. Thus, if we accept that ‘participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory’ (Connerton 2007, 3) we can deduce that, for such a memory to be unifying, there must be an accepted shared emotional response to it. If this is absent, or if it is contested, the nation state lacks a cohesive national narrative and political and social stability are weakened. While some heritage sites and museums in the West may see themselves as safe places in which to foreground contested or revisionist views of national histories evidence suggests that, without understanding of the emotional consequences of such interpretation, many visitors resist and resent these new meanings, as they did with some of the displays relating to the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the UK in 2007 Smith (2010).

In states where there is little or no public consensus about what happened to a segment of its citizenry during a particularly difficult period national historical narratives have a tendency to fragment rather than unite its citizens. If, as Connerton points out, ‘the past serves the purpose of legitimating the social order’ (Connerton 2007, 3) different emotional responses to a particular past might do the opposite. If, in addition, there is no official recognition of wrongs done to individuals by previous governments for some citizens the past becomes even more freighted with negative emotional associations. In turn the state runs the risk of losing credibility and support from such individuals for, without some form of transitional justice, it cannot effectively speak for, and represent, the emotional communities it governs. Nations, in theory, represent the common good against privilege (Hobsbawm 1992, 20), and when governing groups fail in this respect, they face opposition and demands for action. Moreover victims, as Sturken writing about Vietnam veterans and AIDs sufferers points out, can become ‘appealing objects of desire whose suffering is seen as giving them wisdom,

an understanding of life's purpose, and a heightened sense of values' (Sturken 1997, 256). They need to be incorporated into a national story so that the nation as a whole benefits from association with them. Sturken uses the examples of the Vietnam Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, DC and the Aids Memorial Quilt conserved for the nation as examples of this form of heritage work. Former East European nations have adopted formal methods of commemorating their communist past that embrace those who suffered under communism as victims on a par with those who suffered from Nazism (Mink 2013).

In Romania, however, the history of communism and its impact on society have yet to be resolved and the few attempts to right the wrongs of communism have left many individuals and groups deeply dissatisfied. The government faces increasing demands for a form of official recognition of communist crimes and victims and it is in this context that it wishes to establish a national museum of Romania under Communist rule. In so doing it no doubt hopes to craft common emotional responses to past Communist events, thus shaping formal emotional responses to memories that in turn will contribute to the establishment of emotional communities (Marshall 2002, Watson 2017).

The Romanian context

After 1989 the ruling elite, many of whom were associated with the former communist regime, drew a veil over 'the Communist past, as though it never happened.' (Bădică 2011, 720). This was made easier, at least as far as museum exhibitions were concerned, by the decision in 1989 before the fall of the Communist regime, to dismantle the official History Museum of the Communist Party and of the Revolutionary Democratic Movement of Romania, and move it to a new location, merged with History Museum of the Romanian Socialist Republic. Events overtook the decision – a new museum was never created (Bădică 2013). In Bucharest a small, easily overlooked exhibition in the basement of the Romanian Peasant National Museum, attempts to remind visitors of some individuals who died because of the regime (Bădică 2011, 285).

Political and public amnesia, in part a product of anxieties relating to fears of publicising collusion and guilt by many who retained power in the post-communist years, have left victims struggling to gain recognition for their stories of survival and suffering. In this Romania is unlike most other post-Communist countries in Eastern Europe where more victims have been recognised and many perpetrators have been disgraced (Mink and Neumayer 2013). Forgetting also comes with a price. Jeremy Black, in his *Contesting History* (2014, 21), drawing on Romanian fiction, points out that for young people in Romania, Ceaușescu, the Romanian communist dictator from 1965 to his deposition and execution in 1989, has become something like the monstrously cruel medieval monarch Vlad the Impaler. Both have become mythical in some way, their pasts symbolic of legendary horrors that have no relevance to today. In 2010 a poll reported that the majority of Romanians, 59% in total ‘thought that communism was a good idea and only 7% suffered directly as a result of the regime’ (Stan 2013, 13 -4). Such views are, perhaps, unsurprising, given the nation’s difficulties in determining the official memory of the events, so that many of the worst atrocities during this period have faded from public discourse, leaving a remnant of the communist version of the past, one that lacks much understanding of the direct consequences of the former regime and which, instead, can be seen by some through a lens of nostalgia (Pohrib 2015), a nostalgia that is both a reflection of loss but also a memory of times or places that can be unifying in some ways, a shared familiar experience (Orr 2017, 643).

One place to see this struggle to reframe the narrative of communist history is at the National History Museum of Romania (Muzeul National de Istorie a Romaniei) in Bucharest which closed most of its history galleries with visitors only allowed to see the prehistory of the nation, its Roman origins and its treasury. The official national story of the nation is as yet to be approved and exhibited here, although temporary exhibitions such as *Decembrie '89. 25 de ani de libertate*² have recently provided some outlines of the events that changed Romania for ever. The privately run Sighet Memorial

² <http://www.mnir.ro/index.php/expozitii/?paged=3> accessed 31 October 2016. Temporary exhibitions such as ‘our youth in communism’ also attempt to consider some aspects of the former regime. Meanwhile there is now a competition for a new museum (Information from Irina Hasnas Hubbard 24 October 2016 to whom I am indebted for this update).

Museum, (which receives little support from the government, but has some funding from the Council of Europe through the Foreign Affairs Committee) (Pohrib 2015: 726), focuses on the victims of communism. Since 2013 the Sighet Memorial has had a permanent exhibition space at no. 66, Jean Louis Calderon Street, Bucharest, in part as a result of the growing interest in a museum of communism in Bucharest (emorialsighet.ro/memorial-en/ 2017). However, this is not state controlled.

For many Romanians over a certain age the suffering they experienced under Ceaușescu is not over. Indeed it is a lived daily experience. Many of them lost family members, property and occupations and still have the mental scars from that time; most have not had their property restored. While it can be assumed that many Romanians see themselves as victims, a few others have come to understand themselves as perpetrators of cruelty, supporters and beneficiaries of an abhorrent regime, though this is rarely admitted publicly. Thus the heritage of this period is fraught with complex memories of both guilt and suffering. Discussions with members of the workshops described below suggests that Romanians, just as all citizens in post-communist nations, have to try to come to terms with the past while planning the future, and amnesia, attractive though it might be in some circumstances, is not an option they wish to take. Like others who display cruel and harsh histories (Ashworth 2008, 242) they would like their children and their children's children to know what political mistakes to avoid by learning about the past. Celebrations of the days they took back their freedom from the communist regime are not enough. They need to understand what happened and why.

The reluctance to commit to a permanent official public national museum narrative derives in part from the troubled legacy of the twentieth century. During the Second World War Romania allied with Germany in an attempt to prevent total occupation by the Soviet Union (Klepper 2002). In 1944 Romania changed sides but the allied victory left Romania under the control of communist Russia, along with the rest of Eastern Europe. The post war communist government suppressed all opposition and in 1947 the King was forced to abdicate. During the early years of communist rule traditional heritage monuments and practices were dismantled or discouraged. Opposition was considered to be a manifestation of Fascism and dealt with firmly. A new set of communist values, inspired by Stalinist

principles, was imposed on the people. This was a time of persecution and imprisonment of those who were thought to oppose the regime. The number of victims are so vast that it is difficult to determine their exact numbers, but Stan estimates there were at least 600,000 political prisoners between 1948 and 1964 before Ceaușescu's regime, a period in which homes of the accused were often confiscated.

When Ceaușescu came to power in 1965 he maintained policies independent of Soviet Russia, and later drove through the modernisation of industry and the countryside, while pursuing a cult of personality with extremely cruel and authoritarian methods. At first Ceaușescu appeared relatively moderate, but the toll of victims continued to rise during his period in office. Surveillance and intimidation destroyed all attempts at opposition. As Ciobanu (2009, 315) points out 'the repression exerted by totalitarian Soviet systems was all-encompassing and ...also effectively deprived citizens of their private existence' (Linz & Stepan 1996, pp. 44–45). It relied to a great extent on 'the widespread use by the repressive apparatus of collaborators, spies and informers among civilians as a means of control' (Cibanu 2009, 315). Although Ceaușescu eschewed the influence of the Soviet Union, the regime he controlled was as harsh as, if not harsher than, that imposed by neighbouring Russian communist rulers.

Priests, ethnic minorities, peasants, factory workers, and intellectuals, were all persecuted during Ceaușescu's period in office. His police force instigated a regime of terror. Individuals were imprisoned and encouraged to inform on their neighbours. In 1989 the dreaded secret police, the Securitate, employed 15,087 secret officers, 507,003 informers not belonging to the Communist party and an unknown number of collaborators in a population of approximately 21.5 million people (Stan 2013, 9). Public health and the economy suffered. Romanian living standards declined and there were intermittent famines and a rising death rate from cold and starvation (Kepler 2002, 232). Meanwhile the population was told how fortunate it was to live in such a benevolent state. This was a truly

Orwellian nightmare. Finally, in 1989 a revolution or coup³ overthrew Ceaușescu's regime and eventually established a democratically elected President and parliament.

Romanian attempts to deal with the difficult communist past

The transition to a free democratic nation and a member of the European Union (EU) was not easy for Romania. 'Neither politicians nor the public had any previous knowledge or experience of how a democratic country functions or how a market-driven economy operates. After forty five years of a brutal and ruthless type of communism, the electorate had no understanding of the significance of political parties, free elections, or business entrepreneurial skills' (Kepler 2002, 253). Indeed while communism had been overthrown most politicians who emerged as members of the new government were former party members. While there have been several attempts to deal with this issue (Stan 2013, 89), Romanian society has been divided about the best way forward, not least because many individuals in positions of power in the past were disreputable or their families had dark histories. At the same time there has been no really effective policy of compensation. There were some small payments to former political prisoners but these came unaccompanied 'by apologies, valued information and other nonmaterial benefits that, in the aggregate, convey the sense that society recognizes the worth and dignity of the human person behind each victim' (Mendez 1997, 15 cited in Stan 2013, 182). Thus there is a compounded sense of anger and injustice that accompanies any attempt to find public narratives when the victims feel strongly that their suffering has mainly gone unrecognised by the state and that they are still suffering loss.

In 2007 Romania joined the EU but corruption continues to be rife in central and local politics. Meanwhile many of the victims of the communist state seek 'transitional justice, a word that is used

³ Even now, there is no agreement as to whether Romania experienced a revolution or a coup. Many individuals question whether the country experienced a genuine revolution. Some Romanian and Western writers note that the Romanian post-revolutionary leadership consisted mostly of former communists and therefore that the country experienced a coup. Moreover, these writers argue that until 1996 there was no fundamental change in the country's political or social policy.

Roper, Stephen D. *Postcommunist States and Nations: Romania : The Unfinished Revolution* (1). Florence, US: Routledge, 2004.

to describe state and society efforts to come to terms with past human rights abuses' (Stan 2013, 1). This type of justice can take the form of both a recognition of perpetrators' guilt and their exclusion from new power regimes, and a memorialisation of the past, often through the use of museums that offer the testimony of victims' (Beare 2002, 423), for example in the House of Terror Museum, Budapest and the Robben Island Prison, South Africa. In Romania this idea of transitional justice was made more difficult by the sudden downfall, trial and execution of Ceaușescu and his wife, an event that enabled many former members of the regime to lay all the blame for the abuse on them individually (Stan 2013, 41). Subsequently there have been intermittent efforts by the government to deal with those who were active in the old regime but these initiatives have had very limited success. The result is that many former victims feel cheated of justice.

In an attempt to deal with some of these problems of accountability, public memory, and transitional justice, the government set up the *Institute de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului și Memoria Exilului Românesc* / The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER). This body's function is to analyze, investigate and support 'public awareness on the history of communism in Romania through research, educational, publishing and museum projects. The activity of IICCMER analyses the nature, purpose and effects of totalitarianism in Romania during 1945-1989 and also the memory of this regime in the Romanian exile and in the post-communist period' (IICCMER website 2016). Its work is part of an ongoing programme of events and activities to deal with the legacy of the communist past.

In May 2015 I was privileged to be invited to Bucharest to participate in and lead on workshops organised by IICCMER as part of a programme of activities to explore how communism can be officially remembered. The aim of the meetings that were held over two days was to explore what a Museum of Communism in Romania might look like. Individuals from other Eastern European states were there to share their experiences of the post-communist world and attempts to create museums that explored and explained the phenomenon of communism in their countries. I was

the only non-East European representative at the workshops, someone who, unlike all the others, had no experience of communism first hand. What could have been a disadvantage was, however, useful. I was able to point out that I had no views on who did what to whom nor why such things took place. As someone growing up in Western Europe during the Cold War, the Iron Curtain was just that – a barrier to all knowledge of the Eastern bloc. We received propaganda with some scepticism but we did not know the truth. Romania, more than other countries, remained a closed book to us. Thus it was hoped that I could be impartial and dispassionate, a mediator between the different interest groups, someone outside their experiences of suffering and oppression but a witness to their stories and facilitator of the consultation process taking place. The use of an outsider, and the gathering together of stakeholder groups to offer them a key part in the decision making process, represents a new turn for museums away from the curator/director as the powerful author of a narrative to something more inherently democratic (Simon 2010, Duclos-Orsello 2013, Watson 2007).

Methodology

It is unusual to develop an analysis of workshops and focus groups organised by a government run institution as a methodology for research but, in this case, it was opportune. I was asked to participate and, although my expenses were paid I received no fee. Rather I saw it as an opportunity to find out more about difficult histories, to witness the ways in which politics of the past are negotiated between individuals and community representatives and, once I had participated in the whole process, I was able to reflect on the findings and consider what they meant. Of course I am aware that such a methodology could be criticised as being sponsored by a government and thus not objective. However, no researcher can be entirely objective (Denscombe 2010, 81) and this paper has been written independently of Romanian government influence. As for the participants in the focus groups and workshops themselves –they were recruited by the Institute and were composed of representatives from existing organisations such as the Orthodox Church. Given that any representative of a group may not necessarily articulate the views of all those who identify with the group and that many of these individuals tend to be self-selecting the testimony of the participants can be understood to be just that – individual views on communism and its legacy.

The workshops had been set up by IICCMER to allow every representative from as many stakeholder groups as possible to stand up and tell of their experiences under communism and to identify the narratives they wanted the new museum to tell. These testimonies were harrowing. Individual after individual told their stories. They represented many different groups: former peasants driven from their lands and left to starve in new concrete blocks; former factory workers paranoid about what they could do and say without being accused of dissent; representatives of the Orthodox church, persecuted and imprisoned; those whose families had been evicted from their homes when an informer made up lies to gain their property. The latter had particular grievances. The informer was nearly always rewarded with the property of the accused who was always found guilty. A considerable number of these houses were still in the hands of those who benefitted from the confiscations but, as properties have changed hands over the years, many of the current occupants are innocent of any crime. These current owners may not even be aware of the fate of the previous occupants, and they did not want to give up their properties. They see themselves either as merely the descendants of someone who had supported the regime in some way, often informing on a neighbour, or those who currently occupy houses whose histories have nothing to do with them. Those whose families had been dispossessed still want compensation or their old homes back. Under the present government neither option is likely. Very few houses have been restored to their original owners and to date very little research has been done on this issue.

Some of the most moving stories were told by former prisoners, one of whom had been incarcerated for more than 20 years under the old regime. While most prisoners were men, women too were imprisoned there. As part of that day's workshop, before the personal testimonies, we were taken to Jilava Penitentiary, the former communist prison. There some former prisoners described how they would be packed like sardines in small cells, freezing in winter and boiling hot in summer, allowed out once a day for a brief walk in the yard but spent the rest of the time in spaces so crowded they could not sit down or rest. Older prisoners were allowed by the others to stand by the walls behind the doors where the guards could not see them leaning against the wall. If they were seen to be resting

they were beaten. We saw the cells of the condemned. Here executions were common place. The only redeeming feature of the experience, according to one former prisoner, was the education you received from your fellow cell mates. Many prisoners were intellectuals, former university lecturers or teachers. Occupants of many cells (containing about 40 prisoners) would devise a timetable and each expert would spend his time lecturing and talking about his specialist subject. People, I was told, went in to prison as ignorant illiterate peasants and came out as deep thinking and knowledgeable academics. They had not read books but had been taught about them and the ideas they contained. This activity helped to keep the prisoners sane and was tolerated by the guards as long as the sessions were non-political. Ancient history and the classics were apparently very popular – and safe.

At the time of the visit to the Prison there was talk of this place being the site of a new museum of communism for Romania. As such it would perform the role of a ‘contaminated’ site, with ‘traces of the dead’ and indications ‘the patterns of violence’ (Purbick 2007, 1). Its oppressiveness was in part a result of the present and former ‘power relationships’ bounded within that place (ibid, 4). A visit to such a site, indeed to any similar site the world over, is often associated with some form of enlightenment, social benefit and even therapy (ibid, 5). However, it became apparent that, while it was a place resonant with suffering, there were other stories to tell that did not fit easily within its walls, such as narratives of children being encouraged to betray parents, of censorship, of the general terror of living in a totalitarian state, and of endurance and survival in the everyday world.

The challenge of remembrance, commemoration and forgiveness

Back at the conference centre the dilemma was apparent – how were we to reconcile all these differing views? Where were the notions of reconciliation and forgiveness within this discourse of pain, suffering, resentment and the apparent need for revenge? The danger of remembering the traumatic past is that we remember only perpetrators’ oppression and victims’ grievances. Thus many heritage sites attempt to turn remembrance into a form of commemoration that eschews blame and avoids addressing the political contexts that created the oppression. This is particularly true of war memorials in Europe where there is a conscious effort to ignore the opponent but to remember the

sacrifice of one's own side. Occasionally there will be efforts made to memorialise all parties, but these are rare. Within such memorials there is no attempt to explain the perspectives of the enemy – merely to remember the pain and sorrow of the victim and the fallen. Indeed for many such heritage is contested – what may be seen by some as a heroic deed can be understood to be an oppressive act by others. Heritage thus becomes 'difficult' and is often forgotten or ignored. As Macdonald points out this so called '[D]ifficult heritage' may ...be troublesome because it threatens to break through into the present in disruptive ways, opening up social divisions...' (Macdonald 2010,1). For a nation struggling to re-establish its credentials as an independent country and attempting to put its dark past behind it this poses a particular challenge. There are some well-known examples of heritage memory work such as the District Six Museum, South Africa, where 'joy and the pain coexist' and where the complexities of both are recognised and accommodated through the 'giving up of narrative control' to the victims (Bennett 2012, 322). Yet this process, sometimes understood within a 'truth and reconciliation'⁴ process while laudable in intent, may not produce the desired impact upon society (Clark 2011). Indeed as Clark points out any attempt to bring about transitional justice by foregrounding human victims does not take into account denial and the complexities of different versions of 'truth'. Moreover, any attempt to evaluate the work of transitional justice institutions and methodologies has been hampered by the fact that those who do the evaluation are often advocates for the process (Ben-Josef Hirsch et al. 2012, 391).

Fischer and Manstead (2008) suggest that shared emotions help bind together communities of all sizes whether they are national, local or based on ethnicity or class, and we can assume that a lack of shared emotional responses to significant events in the past has the potential to destabilise the general consensus about values upon which rulers of nation states depend for support. Here Romanians struggle with a past where there is little consensus about the ways in which it should respond to the communist era. Without a strong official historical narrative that most can accept and engage with

⁴ 'TRCs entail the investigation of past human rights abuses whose findings are recorded in a report produced by a temporary official body (Bronkhorst, 2003). Hayner (2001) identifies five common characteristics constituting a TRC: they focus on the past, they investigate abuse, they are temporary, they have official sanction or mandate, and they are usually created during a period of political transition' (Androff 2010, 1965)

positively young people will continue to romanticise this period and many older people will remain dissatisfied with a lack of official acknowledgement of their suffering. In the case of Romania the heritage of communism is bedevilled not only by the difficulties of dealing with the beneficiaries and victims of the regime but also by the fact that for some the events of 1989 remain somehow ‘unfinished’ (Roper 2004). Most communists moved seamlessly to the new world order, while most victims continued to suffer in the aftermath of the old regime. As such Romania is similar to other nations with difficult pasts. Germany, for example, often exhibits and negotiates conflicting, confused and contradictory messages of German citizens simultaneously as perpetrators and victims of the Nazi regime (Watson 2016, Macdonald 2009, 10 – 12).

It is often easier to demonise perpetrators as simply irredeemably evil other rather than to attempt to understand their complex motives and their humanity. However, without a more nuanced understanding of the motives of the enemy one avoids the complexity of the human condition, and the horror and pain they inflicted becomes inexplicable, a form of madness visited upon adherents of certain ideological groups. It does not help us understand how to avoid such madness in the future.

In Romania there is a strong desire to avoid using the term commemoration for anyone categorised as a perpetrator. There is thus confusion about how the stories of those who worked for or were instrumental in supporting Ceaușescu’s regime can be remembered. Their stories are integral to an understanding of what happened during the communist period because making perpetrators in Romania inexplicably evil would not demonstrate to later generations what happened and warn them of the dangers of a one party, totalitarian regime. To be effective for the museum organizers’ goals of teaching the historical lessons of Romania’s authoritarian regimes, the museum needs to tell the story of everyday life and the horrors and suffering Romanians endured for decades, along with the complex motives of those who colluded or actively supported such regimes. Thus the perpetrators have to be brought out of the shadows where they lurk in many forms of commemoration museums in Europe and their roles have to be made explicit and explained.

A quick survey of the museums of Europe and North America shows that perpetrators are often forgotten in an attempt to create new ways of developing political memories of past events. The Holocaust Museum Washington, is a case in point. As critics pointed out when it first opened it displays the consequences of evil but fails to help us understand how apparently ordinary people could behave with such cruelty (Cohen 1993). Moreover, it offers visitors examples of extreme violence and suffering and assumes every visitor empathises with the victims which may not necessarily be the case (Ashworth 2008, 237). Exceptions such as the Dutch Resistance Museum - Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam, where attempts are made to understand why Dutch citizens joined the Nazi Party, are rare. Perhaps there is a fear that any humanising of these people could lead to misplaced sympathy for their actions. It could also pose difficult questions for victims about the role of forgiveness in memorialisation. According to Myszal 'the ethics of memory perspective focuses on to efforts to reconcile memory and forgetting with a help of the act of forgiveness' (Myszal 2016: 6). However, this poses a problem for community cohesion. What happens if some members of the community prefer remembering as we have seen they do in Romania and see public exposition of their suffering as one of the ways they can achieve justice for past wrongs? How do Romanians create a form of museum that will encourage both remembering and forgiving? For some the idea of forgiving is rooted in a concept of dispassionate opportunism (Digeser 2001). Digeser argues that one can still have resentment but one recognises that for progress to be made and the cycle of destructive actions caused by this resentment stopped, one must accept the fact that the past is the past and look forward to a better future, unclouded by this resentment. In other words there is no forgiving and forgetting but there is a desire to build a new future. However, this attitude requires acceptance of the past and a sense of closure, as well as an abandonment of all attempts to have revenge or punish wrong doing. This apparent lack of retribution can be a difficult challenge for any victim to face. For the Romanians with their complex histories of suppression, torture, repression, censorship, collusion, covert and overt resistance and above all fear, this is a particularly hard lesson to accept. Moreover is it just? Myszal points out that '[W]riters commenting on the workings of various truth and reconciliation commissions worry that forgiveness may restore social relationships between divided groups but at the expense of victims' dignity and that it is not always successful in the establishment

of post-conflict justice' (Misztal 2000,100). For these authors, political forgiveness is morally justified only if it is done in a way that secures justice for the past wrong and 'preserves the conditions for the possibility of universal respect for any person as a moral agent' (Babic 2000, 90; Misztal 2016, 3). However, in Romania the government is unable or unwilling to right the wrongs of the previous regime in material ways. Many Romanians were victims, many were perpetrators, and some were both.

Unlike some museum and heritage initiatives this plan to create a museum of communism was not about political forgiveness. It was about using historical memory to inform a political future for a country that would never again tolerate totalitarianism. Specifically, the process of agreeing the narratives of the new museum aimed to make it clear how dreadful the communist past had been, in part to educate future generations and in part to enable victims to feel their suffering had been publicly recognised. However, creating this national narrative was complicated by the very real and enduring vested interests in the legacies of that regime. These competing claims and tensions often thwarted the dialogue among "large and diverse collectivities" (Girswold 2007, Misztal 2016, 5) required for moving past trauma to true healing. For example, there was only one representative of the old regime at the meeting – a former prison guard as a delegate from an association of former prison officers who sought to atone for their former roles in the communist regime. Misztal argues that '[W]hile forgiveness at the interpersonal level is the process of the elimination of the victim's feelings of resentment, political forgiveness' success depends upon negotiations of some passions and feelings, which are not of the same nature and significance as strong emotions expressed by individuals involved in the private, one to one, process of forgiving' (Misztal 2016, 5). Herein lies the central dilemma for the proposed new museum: its narrative of the historical lessons of the horrors of totalitarianism was seemingly in conflict with the emotional requirements of a narrative of reconciliation and forgiveness. As part of Romanian national narrative, the museum's organizers wanted it to represent the public and political stance on the previous regime. In this it was to be a tool for 'conflict management' (Logan and Reeves 2009, 12), similar to the use to which places such as Robben Island in South Africa have been put. However, for the project to move forward there also

needed to be consensus about the emotional tone of the museum and whether it was to be an act of reconciliation looking forward into the future. Would it be an institution like the District Six Museum in Cape Town in which memory is mobilized for reconciliation or an institution that sought, like others such as the House of Terror in Budapest or the Holocaust exhibition in the Imperial War Museum London, to narrate victims' stories with little or no attempts to consider the motives and actions of the perpetrators? Furthermore, how could a consultative process, such as the IICCMER's efforts, help move toward an inclusive narrative that encompassed the diverse perspectives of historical actors and contemporary stakeholders?

Understanding the challenges of implementing a model of shared authority or community-curated history in Romania requires grappling with the country's complex fields of power and with the ambiguity of people's choices when living in authoritarian political systems. The situation in Romania, however, is complex as the case study below illustrates.

The stories of individuals navigating daily life in a totalitarian state complicates assigning evil or essentialising a common "enemy". This recognition of the complexity of Romania's history was apparent in the testimonies of the victims in the workshops I mediated, who often came representing whole groups of peoples whose lives had been made barely tolerable by the old regime, whose friends and relatives had died in custody or as a result of state sanctions. All were eager to tell their stories but all were also keen to ensure that everyone in the room had a chance to speak. When the time came for the former prison guard to give his testimony one man walked out, angrily refusing to listen but the others waited stony faced for his story. He was old now, well built, with glasses. He looked like any other old man – not the epitome of evil. He acknowledged his crimes but asked for a hearing. He had been barely more than a child when the Germans brought fascism to Romania and he became a partisan and resistance fighter, determined to rid the country of this dreadful regime. During this time he joined the communist party as he believed that it was the only political alternative to the fascist state and would save Romania from German domination. After the war ended he continued to support the party, firmly believing it would make for a fairer society, but was no longer active in its service.

Instead he married, had children and needed a steady job. This he secured in a civilian prison where individuals served time for theft and similar crimes, none of them political. Later as the regime's oppression grew and political sections in prisons were established, he was transferred to one of these. He did not and could not protest lest he be seen as an enemy of the state. He became hardened to the task he was required to do. He did not dwell on his actions but acknowledged his crimes against former political prisoners. Following the fall of Ceaușescu he realised just how dreadful his work had been, and he was now sincerely sorry for the pain, grief and suffering he had caused. He and some former fellow guards now belonged to a group trying to make reparation for what they had done. One way they could do this was to testify that the horrors told of and by former prisoners were true. He apologised and sat down. In those minutes he had turned from a faceless monster into a suffering human being who did not ask for forgiveness but who demonstrated a desire to try and make some small gesture of reparation for his crimes. No-one talked to him. No one acknowledged his testimony. He was as isolated after his speech as he had been before but his words were none the less powerful in that they illustrated the difficulties of identifying all perpetrators as evil and beyond redemption.

In the discussions that followed the testimony all participants recognised that there could be no one master narrative, no one explanation of the way communism took hold in Romania, and no consensus on its impact. Individuals began to reflect on how families who had suffered from the regime sometimes benefitted from collusion. One individual commented that the house in which he lived had been confiscated from someone who had been informed upon but his grandparents, now deceased, had in turn lost their house because of similar informant actions. He pondered upon the difficulty of restoring all the homes to the families of their rightful owners as it was not always clear who they were. All the stories we had heard only made sense when they were associated with the speaker and were personal. Each story told was contingent on the time and place of speaking (McLaughlin 2007, 244) ; not absolute truth but a version of an experience that will change over time. Thus finally we all agreed that rather than have a museum that showed the traditional linear narrative of the rise and fall of communism with heroes, villains and everything in between, there would be one main theme 'What would you do in order for your family to survive?' Within this framework all stories could be told

with compassion and without overt judgement. Such tales would illustrate more powerfully than anything else that communism in Romania was not a political system that can be analysed and framed within a discourse that enables Romanians to consign it to a form of official memory of things past. Instead, its aftermath echoes down the generations, through families still bereft of members and without property, via individuals wracked with guilt and sorrow, with those who would like to forget but cannot. Such stories illustrate that far from a mythical person with no relevance to the young of Romania, Ceaușescu's shadow still casts its gloom over their nation.

National stories are often those that emphasise the difference of the nation from the Other- whether these entities are other nation states or groups of people who do not belong in the nation. In Romania there is still considerable confusion about the relationships between the communist past and the capitalist/European present. The transition from one to another has been painful for many and confusing for others. As people were both victims and perpetrators of the communist regime and some people still retain their pre 1989 ill-gotten gains from the regime, it is difficult to construct notions of inclusive national identities to which all groups of peoples can find affiliation. This museum, if it allowed to come into existence, will be part of a means by which Romanians develop a shared emotional response to the events of the past and work toward creating an emotional community of memory. Of course such a museum could be categorised as yet another tourist attraction, a form of dark tourism (Lennon and Foley 2000) that encourages a form of remembrance that enhances emotional responses in the viewer in order to make pain and suffering more memorable (Ashworth 2008, 234). By drawing on personal testimonies it will utilise the focus on individual stories with which visitors can identify, such as the emphasis on people such as Anne Frank, whose story sometimes stands for that of all Jewish victims of the Holocaust. It may provide stories of violence that are both attractive and repellent (Ashworth 2008, 236) and thus used by visitors to entertain and educate in equal measure. These forms of memorials are not new and have been much discussed in academic literature (Seaton 2002, Marcuse 2001, Sharpley 2009, Stone 2016). Less attention has been paid, however, to the work of creating such museums and heritage sites which is

what this paper has attempted to do here. It suggests that this is often a complex process of trial and error, messy and full distrust and requiring negotiation and ultimately compromise.

The work of remembering the past goes on in Romania. IICCMER is developing an online network of memory. Details are still being developed but this offers an opportunity for the sharing of authority, the empowering of communities to tell their own stories and the inclusion of critical voices that might not normally be heard in official physical memorial sites. The President recently named the planned new museum the Museum of Communist Repression. While there is no guarantee that the Romanian government will develop this museum using the theme developed in the workshop, the exercise opens up debates about justice, memory, victimhood, oppression, reparations and the role of history in attempting to make sense of all this. It also offers a way of encouraging those who might deny their role in past a chance to tell their stories, thus developing ways heritage sites can be used in reconciliation processes.

Unlike some other nations where there is a general consensus about the nature and meaning of events in the past and an acceptance of the types of emotional response that can be officially recognised and promoted, Romanians still have to find agreement about the ways they officially remember the era of the communist dictators. In part, this is because there is no consensus about the emotional consequences of the regime. Some were winners, some were losers, most struggled to survive. Thus, we have noted that any attempt to rewrite national narratives taking into account the experiences of victims is fraught with difficulty. One of the key tasks of any government is to steer the emotional community that is the nation, if necessary accommodating the varying emotional responses to past events, to enable citizens to imagine the majority of their fellow nationals as those who understand their views of the past and share in some of their feelings towards it. Museums and heritage sites, as some of the ways by which authorities regulate stories about the past, have tended to focus only on victims. The qualitative research undertaken here suggests that Romania may only come to terms with some aspects of its communist past if it is able to create a formal method of remembering that enables both perpetrators as well as victims to tell their stories, using a democratic method which empowers

citizens to work with the authorities to create something more nuanced than most traditional museum narratives.

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