

STUDII DE ATELIER. CERCETAREA MINORITĂȚILOR NAȚIONALE DIN ROMÂNIA
WORKING PAPERS IN ROMANIAN MINORITY STUDIES
MŰHELYTANULMÁNYOK A ROMÁNIAI KISEBBSÉGEKRŐL

Nr. 67

Plainer Zsuzsa

**SCIENTIFIC ACCOUNTS
ON THE MEMORY OF COMMUNISM
FOR MINORITY HUNGARIANS
IN ROMANIA**



INSTITUTUL PENTRU
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Abstract

■ The aim of this paper is to present and categorize the scholarly publications on the Hungarian remembering of the communist past in Romania. By stock-taking and categorizing the existing publication I intend to find out possible similarities and differences of such works in comparison with their Romanian „counterparts”. In doing so, the following paradigms are presented. The first category contains approaches coined by ethnographers, and anthropologists (including the memory of places, oral history accounts and anthropology of communism). The second paradigm covers those historical approaches which reached a greater public and had a visibility outside the minority Hungarian scientific community.

Similar to the Romanian studies and books, minority approaches stress on discourses of the victims. Both accounts have in their core a common denomination, namely that that communism was an unpleasant detour in the Romanian history, something to get rid of, something to be condemned. Thus, communism in this perspective relates drama and sufferings of victims: those „true” or „clean” people, who were not involved and corrupted by the system. Sometimes (unlike Romanians’) the Hungarians’ memories overethnicize communism, which makes possible to create the perception of staying apart from it. But a new generation of historians and social scientists seriously questions this statement, and pleads for a more nuanced framework, claiming to show, the ethnic Hungarians were “part of this system”, too.

Rezumat

■ Scopul acestui studiu este prezentarea și categorizarea literaturii academice despre modul în care minoritatea maghiară din România își construiește memoriile despre comunism. Prin trecerea în revistă și categorizarea acestor publicații autoarea își propune să identifice eventualele similarități și diferențe dintre memoria minoritară și corespondentul acesteia în română. În urma acestui proces de analiză au fost identificate două mari paradigme. Prima conține abordările etnografilor și ale antropologilor (printre care și perspectivele de memorie locală, istorie orală sau antropologia comunismului). A doua categorie tratează acele abordări ale istoricilor care au avut o oarecare influență asupra publicului mai larg, în afara cercurilor profesionale.

Asemănător construcțiilor românești despre trecutul comunist, memoria minoritară maghiară se concentrează asupra discursurilor victimelor. Ambele memorii (cea română, respectiv cea maghiară) consideră că perioada comunistă a fost un eveniment neplăcut în istorie, care trebuie condamnat, care trebuie lăsat în urmă. Astfel, comunismul, în aceste abordări, relatează suferințele victimelor, ale protagoniștilor „adevărați”, „nepătați”, care nu au fost implicați și corupți de către sistem. Însă există și diferențe între cele două perspective (cea majoritară și cea minoritară): reprezentările maghiare au tendința de a accentua latura etnică a sistemului, ceea ce permite crearea unei perspective conform căreia minoritarii ar fi putut sta deoparte de acest sistem, fără a fi implicați. Însă noua generație de istorici contestă acest discurs și pledează pentru o descriere mai nuanțată a trecutului, afirmând că și maghiarii pot fi considerați a fi „parte a sistemului”.



Contents

Hungarians in Romania: a separate entity with a separate way
of remembering the past? ■ 5

Researching communism and researching the memory of communism ■ 6

Ethnographical and anthropological approaches ■ 6

1. Remembering places ■ 6

2. Biographical memories and oral histories ■ 8

3. Anthropology - anthropology of communism ■ 9

Historical approaches with public relevance ■ 9

1. The Tismăneanu Report ■ 9

2. „Spies and provocators” ■ 10

Instead of conclusions ■ 11

References ■ 12

Primary sources ■ 12

Secondary sources ■ 13

SCIENTIFIC ACCOUNTS ON THE MEMORY OF COMMUNISM FOR MINORITY HUNGARIANS IN ROMANIA

■ Recently the memory of communism has become a relevant subject for many scholarly publications in Romania. In opposition to the earlier representations (which dealt with the political victims's memories - see for instance exhibitions of the Memorial Museum of the Communist victims in Sighet and Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bădică, manuscript, 2014) recent approaches collect the memories of ethnic and social groups like Romanian and Hungarian workers (Lönhárt – Țărău in Todorova et al ed. 2014) or women (M. Jinga, 2015). Moreover, everyday life has become a new topic for investigations. A few scholars have approached the issues of music, films and spare time in communism (Lungu – Gheorghită ed., 2014), others have dwelt with memories of urban places such as the toponymy of the communist city (Chelcea –Lățea, 2008) etc.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to grasp how the Hungarians in Romania remember the communist past. More exactly, I intend to collect and categorize scholarly production on the minority representations and – if possible – compare them with their Romanian „counterparts“.

Hungarians in Romania: a separate entity with a separate way of remembering the past?

■ Before stock-taking the research on the (minority Hungarian) remembrance of the communist past, I prefer to explain why a non-dominant ethnic group should be regarded as a self-standing entity in producing representations of the pre - 1989 period. Hungarians in Romania are one of the biggest ethnic minority in the EU with 1 237 000 members according to the 2011 census. Historically it is accounted as a community of necessity (Bárdi, 2004), which came into being by the modification of state borders after the First World War in accordance with the Trianon Treaty through which the Southern region of Transylvania was annexed from Greater Hungary to Romania in 1919. Despite their underrepresentation in certain “sub-systems” like the administration or the economic activity, sociologically and anthropologically the Hungarians from Transylvania can be grasped as a “whole” society due to the strong vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (regional) differences (Biró ed. 1998). This means that there are clearly defined social classes among the group of Hungarians, each with their saliently distinguishable socio-cultural markers, meanwhile the regional differences among the group are, too, chiselled. Seklers could be easily discerned by the Hungarians living on the North, and so do the social categories of workers, intellectuals or agricultures.

As concerns language use, a great majority of the Hungarians in Romania (over 60%) have Hungarian as their first language (Horváth, 2014b), they attend Hungarian schools and churches, and have distinct patterns of media consumption (Horváth, 2014). Hungarian-Romanian intermarriages have been untypical, yet they do exist within the two groups, and their number has been staying around 17-20%. However one third of the children born in such wedlocks are registered as Hungarians in census (Horváth,



2014b). In terms of identities and identifications the Hungarians in Romania perceive themselves as part of the Hungarian nation due to their mother tongue and ethnic affiliation. (Veres in Veres et al. 2012).

Ethno-politically this society is organized on the basis of the ethnic principle, and intends to create and maintain ethnically homogeneous social places within the borders of the nationalizing Romanian state (Brubaker, 1996; Kántor ed., 2002). From an organizational point of view pillarization is the most important principle of the Hungarian society in Romania (Enyedi on Lijphardt, 1993): the Hungarians and Romanians in the country build up vertically hierarchical institutional structures to maintain their linguistically and culturally homogeneous borders. Living in (mostly) parallel societies is not only for religion, education, political and social organizations, but this structure is also typical for high culture and academic production as well. Though there is no separate state-based Hungarian university in Romania, or a separate research institute, the existing academic framework enables establishing some separate Hungarian departments or sub-departments, suitable for recruiting mainly Hungarian speaking cultural elite, which has the Hungarian minority as its research focus.

In the following sections these publications are stock-taken, in order to identify the dominant trends and traits on the minority Hungarians' remembering communism in Romania.

In doing so, four major paradigms are presented. First we have the works of the ethnographers and anthropologists (covering a wide range of topics: local memory, oral histories, anthropology of communism), which is followed by historical accounts. A separate category was made up for those works which were carried out with academic demand but reached a greater non-professional public. The making of these above-mentioned categories can be arbitral. It might be so, as this is the first endeavor to put together the issues on memories of communism by the Hungarians in Romania. But this collection is exhaustive and does not claim to present "everything", but only the most important research trends, accounts and publications in this field.

Researching communism and researching the memory of communism

■ How do we define researches on communism and accounts on the memory of communism? In my view the act of remembering implies a more or less concious attitude in preserving and reconstructing the past from a present viewpoint. To follow Maria Todorova „This attention to the processual aspects of memory stresses the constant and consecutive reassessment and rearticulations of the communist experience which is to be compared to later memories. Nor does it posit an authentic primary memory; in a world, it is not about nailing down the past but an ongoing process of double take. This, by definition, makes the project long lasting because it entails the periodic revisiting of subjects and objects of memory, which is why the notion of *remembering* is favored over the concept of *memory*” (Todorova ed. 2010: 5). This is why the present analysis focuses merely on those publications, which deal especially with constructions of the communist past as these are grasped in the present; following Maria Todorova, a series of researches (especially narratives on the past) which – at a first glance – could be labelled as social history were included in this paradigm (Todorva et al. eds. 2014: 14-15). In line with such concept a series of historical approaches were willfully ignored from the following database.

Ethnographical and anthropological approaches

1. Remembering places

The first important paradigm on the memory of communism is the memories of places, and the collections of local histories. These researches go back to the theories of Pierre Nora, with his concept on *lieux de memoire* (stating that memory is inseperable of locality) and that of Daniel Fabre on local

histories, which reflect national events and protagonists in a local framework (Keszeg ed.2015, 372). This account purposefully echoes those representations of the local knowledge and memory which are missing from dominant representation of history. By definition “Local history stores the past of a local community, influences the local identity, regulates intergenerational relations within a local community, as well as shapes the relations between the local community and the regional, national and global world.” (Keszeg, ed. 2015:374).

Local memory encompasses a series of genres: inscriptions (buildings, churches, steeples, plaques), private notes (diaries, letters), official documents (church registers, documents of associations), official correspondence (laws, warrants, charters etc.). Together with a huge body of works on rural locality, we – want only or not – included here books and studies on street names, commemorations and important sites of the Transylvanian urban sites¹.

Despite of their varieties, these researches share some common features. Majority of them does not account the communist past as a separate period, they speak about “the past” in general. One reason for this may be the lack of records: as it is commonly acknowledged (either by professional historians or by the larger public) a series of sources regarding the communist times have not been properly preserved in the State Archives, and the few ones are difficult to access even for researches.

Still, Hungarian memory of communism shows certain special traits. Similarly with their Romanian counterparts, they see postcommunism as a new start, a possibility to return to the “real” version of history. But in minority representation this has an additional meaning, too. For ethnic Hungarians in Romania this return brings into light the non-dominant version of local history, which was reduced to silence during the communist times, where (Romanian) ethno-nationalism became a major source for legitimation, putting ethnic minorities aside (Boia 2015). Lajos Asztalos, a collector of the Hungarian street names from Cluj-Napoca (whose most important publications were issued almost exclusively after 1989) puts it as follows:

„My starting point [to document changes of street names] was January 1964. As an inhabitant of Cluj-Napoca, I suddenly woke up that the bi-lingual plaques of street names were suddenly changed into monolingual (Romanian) ones. After the war in 1945 the blossoming “Romanian popular democracy” changed [into Romanian] the names of the Hungarian historical figures unacceptable to them, still the street remained bi-lingual. This was put down in 1964 and by the end of the 1980ies all Hungarian names were vanished. As a native in Cluj I was familiar with the original street names from my father, and – beginning with the 1960ies I industriously collected every item on local history” (Makkay, 2015)

To my knowledge there is only one book (Jakab, 2012) which addresses the issue of urban local history by using a solid theoretical framework on social and cultural memory to frame the rigorously collected empirical data. The book investigates the commemorial practices in the city of Cluj-Napoca and dedicates a separate subchapter to the communist past. As the author states, one trait of post-communist practices is that of getting rid of the communist past by removing the plaques and monuments erected between 1945-1989 (on working-class heroes, interwar etc.) communist resistance (Jakab, *ibidem*, 212), and create a new version of history, where 1989 marked a new start. Thus plaques were unwaited with the victims of the 1989 revolution in 1996, the Lenin Street was renamed into 1989 22th of December (*ibidem*). And within this discourse there is no interest to remember communism, the socialist past is a reference only, indicating what was wrong and what should be adjusted in the post-1989 period.

According to Jakab, the Romanian commemorations of this period focus on the (Romanian) national heroes, who fought for national unity; other Romanian practices commemorate the figures of pre-communist times, who were marginalized by the communist power (Jakab, *ibidem*, 216-218). Hungarian

1 A selected bibliography on local urban history. On the city of Cluj-Napoca: Bálint István János (szerk.): Kincses Kolozsvár [Treasures of Cluj] I-II., Asztalos Lajos: Kolozsvár – közelről [Cluj from a Close], Asztalos Lajos: Kolozsvár. Helynév és településtörténeti adattár [Database on local names and local history]. On Târgu Mureş: Dr. Dezső István: Egy erdélyi sebész emlékei [Memories of a Transylvanian surgeon], Pál-Antal Sándor és Simon Zsolt: A Maros megyei magyarság történetéből [From the history of Hungarians in Mures county]III.On Oradea: Fleisz János: Nagyvárad várostörténete [Urban history of Oradea], Dukrét Géza–Péter I. Zoltán: Püspökfürdő.Nagy József Barna: Várad lelke [Soul of Oradea] etc.

commemorative practices intend to go against this trend, and claim a reinstallation of the Hungarian symbolic presence in the town and intend to adjus the Romanian nationalizing attempts. To follow Jakab, Romanian commemorative processes focus on the continuity of the nation and national unity by excluding non-dominant ethnic groups from it (Hungarians). In order to restore this symbolical inequality, the Hungarians commemorate the Hungarian presence in Transylvania: elites of the group tend to unveil a memorial stone to commemorate the 100th anniversary of establishing the first theatre in the region, unveil commemorative plaques of historian figures, like István Bocskai, governor of Transylvania during the 1950s (Jakab, *ibidem*, 228-230).

2. Biographical memories and oral histories

Biographical memories (life stories and life-histories) represent an outstanding, even self-standing category within the academic production on recalling and remembering the past. Story telling in this framework is a matter of narrative behavior (Keszeg, 2011:11) and has two major roles. On one hand – in line with the classical ethnography – story telling is a practice of remaking the tradition: “The boys always learn their fathers’ favorite stories in order to retell them to their sons ...” (*ibidem*,11); on the other hand, story telling is a form of reinterpreting the social as “the stories define, how should we see the world.”(*ibidem*, 11). In this paradigm life-stories and life-histories belong to a broader set of narrative genres together with fairy tales, folk ballads, chronicles, diaries, notes, poetical life story (life stories told in rythms), novels (*ibidem*, 169).

The concept of life-histories is coined through the French accounts of *autobiographie* (Jaques Voisine), and the genre was embodied initially in the Transylvanian aristocratic literature on *memoires* (XVIIth century), but later life-histories and life-stories reached the realm of rural folk culture beginning with the XIXth century (*ibidem*, 168). The scientific works belonging to this paradigm collect and interpret narrative forms of the peasantry, who – in collaboration with the ethnographer – construct and compille the life story, putting it down into a narrative form which fulfills both the narrators and the researcher’s demand. A very special subcategory is focused almost exclusively on the communist period, collecting and analyzing the condition of the better-off agriculture workers, the so-called kulaks, who became expropriated, socially marginalized and sometimes imprisoned as “enemies of the social classes” during the communist times². The ontological standpoint in these narratives is that of the victims, who were punished by an unjust political power.

A second category within this broader group of life stories is that of oral history researches on different social categories (other than the peasantry). The first in this line is a study signed by Judit Pál (Pál in Hunyadi ed. 2013) on the liquidation of the Transylvanian aristocracy, as it is reflected in the group’s memories. In these narratives re-appears the idea of “great pride”, which stays for resisting the communist times and the preservation of the traditional virtues (like honour, belonging, Christianity, family past, sentimental attachment to homeland) in order to challenge the socialist homogenization.

Somehow similarly, Illyés Sándor (Illyés, 2013) examines the everyday life of the Hungarian workers in the working class clubs from Cluj during the 1950-ies and 1960-ies in order to find out, how this concept of workers’ subculture is manifested in everyday life occasions of spending spare time. Workers of Cluj also appear in the article signed by Lönhárdt and Țărău, and compares Romanian and Hungarian memories on the city of Cluj during the communist times (Lönhárdt - Țărău in Todorova et.all. ed. 2014).

A third category is that of Hungarian priests, whose memories do not show significant changes when relating the post-Trianon times and those of communism. To these people the overarching narrative category is that of minority condition, regardless on the historical and political period. (Keszeg coord., 2001).

2 Oláh Sándor : „Hát ilyen virágokat szettünk, ilyen életököt éltünk...” [„These were the flowers we collected and the life we lived]. In: *Átmenetek - a mindennapi élet antropológiája*, No. 1 1990, 35-39. Oláh Sándor : „az-e a szebb élet?”. Az önéletrajzi visszaemlékezések lehetséges jelentései [‘is this the life we lived?’ Possible features of life stories]. In: *Átmenetek - a mindennapi élet antropológiája* No. 1 1991, 86-96. Gagy József (szerk.): *Ha akartam, füttyültem, ha akartam, dúdolászgattam* [When I felt like whistling, I whistled, when I felt like singing, I did]... Mentor Kiadó Marosvásárhely, 2012.

On kulaks: Miklós Zoltán: A kuláksors egyéni interpretációja a „kulák” perspektívájából [Individual interpretations of the ‘kulak-fate’ from the kulak’s viewpoint]. In: Szabó Á. Töhötöm (szerk.): *Lenyomatok 2. Fiatal kutatók a népi kultúráról* (Kriza Könyvek, 19.), Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság. Kolozsvár 2003, 49–62. Kristó Tibor: *Kuláksors. Székely kulákok története* [Kulak fate. Narratives of kulaks in Secklerland]. Státus Könyvek Csíkszereda, 1999.

Meanwhile the letter re-tell the past through the position of the victims, the workers recall it with nostalgia: the life in the clubs meant “togetherness”, connectivity and an intense social life.

3. Anthropology - anthropology of communism

Socialism accounted through the framework of anthropology of communism is coined basically by Western European and American anthropologists during the 1970ies and 1980ies (Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, Chris Hann and others). State communism in this perspective is seen as fragile system instead of a centralized and extremely powerful one, where duplicity (working out of one, system-conform behavior for official encounters and a “true” one for everyday situations) surrounds both the private and the public spheres.

One approach in this line is a collection of studies (Bodó ed. 1998) signed by the Workgroup of Cultural Anthropology from Miercurea Ciuc addresses the installation of communism in Romania and especially Secklerland (a Romanian region with its predominantly Hungarian population) as well as its outreaching until the 1980ies. Openly admitting the theoretical influence of the anthropology of socialism the volume takes on the concept of duplicity, and coins a new but undoubtedly similar one: that of techniques of duplicity and transgression. It tries to grasp how worlds of “up” and “down” (the power and its perception in everyday life) were mingled in different social scenes: mass-media, school-life, everyday life of the members in nomenklatura, etc.

Historical approaches with public relevance

1. The Tismăneanu Report

Known as the most representative act of remembering Romanian communism, the so-called Tismăneanu Report (officially: Report of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania – Raportul Comisiei Prezidențiale pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România) is a document of more than six hundred pages, containing the findings of historians working in/on Romania, gathered in a panel headed by the scholar Vladimir Tismăneanu. The uniqueness of this document was its link to politics, as the commission in charge was appointed by president Traian Băsescu, with the explicit task to investigate the communist regime in Romania. With his focus on the assigned political task, the aim of this report was to reveal the abuses of the dictatorship, the way it violated social groups and social sub-systems, in order to understand and officially condemn the totalitarian regime in Romania; the first version of the Report was presented in December 2006.

Sections on the Hungarian minority cover about 18-19 pages out of the total. These examine the most important events and phenomena that took place in different social fields (economic, cultural, administrative, educational etc.) of the minority society in order to reveal, how state communism influenced these spheres and the minority group. In doing so, phenomena like the establishing of the Autonomous Region in Secklerland, the closing down of the Hungarian university, the forms of minority intellectual resistance are investigated. However the Tismăneanu Report had a weak impact upon the Hungarian public sphere, there was one relevant interview with some of its authors, who present their intellectual vision on the document.

The chapter intended to follow the original aim of the Report, a stocktaking of the “damages” of communism, and the authors pleaded for a nuanced, self-reflexive vision on the minority condition, in order to avoid overexaggerating of minority self-victimization, so common in historical approaches of the Hungarian past in Romania.

“The saddest thing is – and this may signal the problems of the researching minorities in Romania – that we got only a few reactions to our work. Only two press articles were written the others being mere comments with political content, or, at least, we understood them as such. The Hungarian intelligentsia did not even react on what the



report was. [...] we did not want the Report to be a cadastre of offence that this and that disappeared or were taken. We were simply telling how certain economic institutions, cooperatives for instance; throw in maintaining the Hungarian culture. In 1945 these cooperatives were hiring more than 1000 people, they did a Hungarian bookkeeping, issued a Hungarian periodical on economy, which vanished together with the organizations. Through this we tried to explain, how this process affected negatively the whole Hungarian society” – as the authors affirmed (Transindex, 31 August, 2007)

The Report framed this issue as it follows:

„Economic condition of the Hungarian minority in Romania was seriously affected by the CASBI law (House of Administration and Surveillance of the Class Enemies’ Goods), by the agrarian reform from 1945, the process of nationalizing in 1948 and the subordination of cooperatives under state administration. However these restrictions were not directly targeting national minorities, still the setting up of such criteria, putting them in practice, minority groups had greater economic losses and more serious consequences falling on them, than the Romanians.” (Raport, 2006, 530-531).

2. „Spies and provocators³”

A second issue, which triggered public debates, was that of processing the Secret Service (Securitate) files. As it is known, this has been a common trait of the Eastern European memories of communism, so it occurred in the minority Hungarian society too. In my view two important issues were echoed in the minority Hungarian public sphere. The first was the Szilágyi Domokos – case, the story of a well-known and respected Hungarian poet, considered to be the most gifted one of his generation, who proved to be a collaborator, according to the investigations of the young historian Stefano Bottoni. The fact of collaboration was made public in 2006 by the family of the poet and Bottoni through a statement in the on-line daily, Transindex. After the declaration the journal started to ask minority Hungarian intellectuals on the issue, their answers being published in a series of articles. All responders were sharing a common viewpoint when forming their opinion. They affirmed that talent and quality of one’s artistic performance should not be denied in the light of these new findings and each case should be carefully investigated before any judgement is set in. This issue is extremely clearly articulated by writer Zsolt Láng (Gyorsankét 2006):

“This declaration gives the chance to speak for those, who knew him and are able to nuance the facts. To nuance the SZ.D. picture. And in doing so one can see what sort of people were on the other side. What sort of system were they run. SZ.D. was not benefiting from this collaboration: he was not a man of fortune (he was in fact shuffling), he was not appointed to be a director, an editor-in chief, he was not eligible for pension (he actually committed suicide). This makes more visible, what are we living in, unconsciously, indeed. [...] He was an outstanding poet, his works worth to be re-read. And now we have to set his art against these shocking facts.”

The second debate in this line is linked to the Cluj-based anthropologist, Könczei Csilla, and her blog on hers, and, especially, her fathers’ Secret Service files. In her intention to understand the ethnographer Ádám Könczei’s tragical and early death, her daughter tries to identify the name of those, who appeared in these records as agents of Securitate and wrote reports about the father. In doing so, names of well-known minority Hungarian intellectuals are identified and made public. Together with publication, Stefano Bottoni initiated a public debate in Transindex on the issues of collaboration (Bottoni 2013). In response to that, several intellectuals and social scientists from the minority Hungarian social scientist answer and publish their views. Although the replies show a great internal variety, a brief over-

3 The title is borrowed from a Hungarian song written in the 1980ies.

view of them seems to be relevant. In his start, Bottoni emphasizes the need for a nuanced approach in understanding the processes of collaboration, still – in his view – this was the product of the whole Romanian society: it happened with the complicity of the Romanians and Hungarians: “Securitatea was not confronting with the society, nevertheless with the civil society, it was weld of it, became part of it, it was breathing with it.” István Horváth (Horváth 2013) argues in the same manner, stating that cooperation was essential in approaching the system, as communism cannot be divided into the axemen and the innocent, into the questioners and the tortured. Others are challenging this narrative, and try to reveal – through personal narratives – (Magyari T 2013.) or a nuanced historical analysis (Gagyí 2013) the relativity of the act of collaboration and the many possible ways of avoiding it.

Instead of conclusions

■ In the first section we assumed to investigate whether there is a distinct way of commemorating the communist past for the minority Hungarians in Romania?⁴ As it comes out from the previous sections, some accounts, typical for the Romanian scholarly production, are missing from the minority approaches: studies on collective representations, especially on museums and research institutes (The Sighet Memorial, The Romanian Peasant Museum, the Institutions for Investigating Communist Crimes) do not have many homologues in the Hungarian social and cultural field⁵. It could be so, as Hungarians are not represented in these institutions, or they may think, these institutions do not represent them. Moreover, a systematic analysis on the different types of Hungarian memories on communism is missing from minority academic production.⁶ To go further, the minority representations give little interest to topics of everyday life during communism. This may be explained by the fact that social history or micro-history is not a dominant paradigm in the Hungarian scientific field. Likewise the Romanian representations, certain issues remain less explored in the minority Hungarian approaches: “the ordinary people, who did not did not opposed to the regime but did not support it publicly either” (Petrescu, 2009:313). But, unlike the majority approach of commercializing communism, the minority Hungarian scholars bring forward the analyses of certain social groups: workers, aristocrats, to nuance this picture.

Out of these, a considerable amount of similarities could be found in the Romanian and Hungarian approaches. Following the model set by Cristina and Dragoş Petrescu (Petrescu - Petrescu in Todorova et al. 2014) on discerning the types of representations according to the discourses behind them, we may say that – similarly to the Romanian works – the Hungarian narratives stress is on the a victims’ viewpoint, too. This dominant approach, similarly with the Romanian counterpart, has in its core that communism was an unpleasant detour in the Romanian history, something to get rid of, something to be condemned. Thus, communism in this perspective relates drama and sufferings of victims: those „true” or „clean” people, who were not involved and corrupted by the system (ibdem).

However, unlike the Romanian accounts, the Hungarian ones overethnicize the system: socialism here is considered a making of the Romanian power, towards which the Hungarian minority could be distant. It could be perceived as this, as communism, due to its assimilationist tendencies, has destroyed the memories of Hungarianness (street names, statues, memorials etc.). This may also explain why communism is not seen as a distinct category when recalling the past: in many books and studies the only category of framing is that of the minority condition, the starting point for many Hungarian narratives is the moment of Trianon, which marked the beginnings of the minority condition, and it remains as constant, overarching category until the 1990-ies.

4 It was Tamás Lönhárt, who suggested me this idea of comparison between Romanian and Hungarian types of remembering.

5 A quite recent example is the exhibition “Elmúlt jelen” [A Past that Passed Away], which displays various levels of life in communism experienced by the minority Hungarian’s community. For the details see the homepage: elmultjelen.ro.

6 To my knowledge, there is but one institutionalized form of dealing with memory of communism: a B.A.-level course on the Faculty of History in the Babeş - Bolyai University. As my attempts to get its bibliography was in vain, I cannot tell much about this approach.



In my view this bounding to minority identity could be the reason for the discourse which opposes the former: the strong criticism of the young scholars on the minority condition, which sees the Hungarians staying apart from the communist system. In these scholar's view this is biased approach, as there is no clear division between who „was in” and who „was out”, when speaking about perpetrators, victims and dissidence. A scrutiny on such issues is simultaneously an attempt for reframing the scientific and public discourse on “Hungarian-ness” in Romania.

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Utilizarea limbii maghiare în administrația publică locală și în instituțiile deconcentrate din județul Harghita
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Veress Ilka: *Strategiile de reproducere culturală ale minorității armenie din România*
- Nr. 34
Kiss Dénes: *Sistemul instituțional al minorităților etnice din România*
- Nr. 35
Gidó Attila – Sólyom Zsuzsa: *Kolozsvár, Nagykároly és Nagyvárad zsidó túlélői. A Zsidó Világkongresszus 1946-os észak-erdélyi felmérése*
The surviving Jewish inhabitants of Cluj, Carei and Oradea. The survey of the World Jewish Congress in 1946
- Nr. 36
Marin Timeea Elena: *„We are Gypsies, not Roma”. Ethnic Identity Constructions and Ethnic Stereotypes – an example from a Gypsy Community in Central Romania*
- Nr. 37
Kiss Dénes: *Romániai magyar nonprofit szervezetek – 2009–2010. A szervezetek adatbázisának bemutatása és a nonprofit szektor szociológiai elemzése*
- Nr. 38
Lazăr Andreea: *O cartografie a concepțiilor „populare” despre apartenența națională în statele membre ale Uniunii Europene*
- Nr. 39
Gidó Attila: *School Market and the Educational Institutions in Transylvania, Partium and Banat between 1919 and 1948*
- Nr. 40
Horváth István: *Romania and Moldova, Migration mid-19th Century to Present, with Special Focus on Minorities Migration/Migrația din România și Republica Moldova de la mijlocul secolului XIX până în prezent, cu accent pe migrația minorităților*
- Nr. 41
Plainer Zsuzsa: *WHAT TO GIVE IN RETURN? Suspicion in a Roma shantytown from Romania*
- Nr. 42
Sorbán Angella: *Kisebbség – társadalomszerkezet – kétnyelvűség*
- Nr. 43
Kiss Tamás – Barna Gergő: *Népszámlálás 2011. Erdélyi magyar népesedés a XXI. század első évtizedében. Demográfiai és statisztikai elemzés*
- Nr. 44
Plainer Zsuzsa: *Controlul presei locale orădene în primii ani ai sistemului ceaușist. Descriere generală și aspecte minoritare*
- Nr. 45
Remus Gabriel Anghel: *Migrația croaților din România. Între migrație etnică și migrație de muncă*

- Nr. 46
Gheorghe Sarău: *Istoricul studiului limbii romani și al școlarizării rromilor în România (1990–2012)*
- Nr. 47
Könczei Csongor – Sárkány Mihály – Vincze Enikő:
Etnicitate și economie
- Nr. 48
Csósz László – Gidó Attila: *Excluși și exploați. Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România și Ungaria în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial*
- Nr. 49
Adriana Cupcea: *Construcția identitară la comunitățile turcă și tătară din Dobrogea*
- Nr. 50
Kiss Tamás – Barna Gergő: *Erdélyi magyarok a magyarországi és a romániai politikai térben*
- Nr. 51
Benedek József – Török Ibolya – Máthé Csongor:
Dimensiunea regională a societății, diversitatea etnoculturală și organizarea administrativ-teritorială în România
- Nr. 52
Kiss Tamás: *Analysis on Existing Migratory Data Production Systems and Major Data Sources in Romania*
- Nr. 53
Kiss Tamás – Barna Gergő: *Maghiarii din Transilvania în spațiul politic maghiar și românesc*
- Nr. 54
Bakk Miklós: *Regionalism asimetric și administrație publică*
- Nr. 55
Plainer Zsuzsa: *Audit Culture and the Making of a "Gypsy School". Financing Policies, Curricula, Testing and Educational Inequalities in a Romanian Town*
- Nr. 56
Peti Lehel: *Schimbări în agricultura rurală într-o localitate din Transilvania/The changes of rural farming in a Transylvanian settlement*
- Nr. 57
Peti Lehel: *Strategii de subzistență într-o localitate de lângă Târnava Mică/Subsistence strategies in a settlement situated along the Kis-Küküllő (Târnava Mică) River*
- Nr. 58
Adriana Cupcea: *Turc, tătar sau turco-tătar. Probleme ale identității la turcii și tătarii din Dobrogea, în perioada postcomunistă/Turk, Tatar, Or Turko-Tatar. Challenges to the Identities of Dobruja Turks and Tatars in Post-communism*
- Nr. 59
Győri Tamás: *Románul (a)vagy magyarul gondolkodni? Gondolkodási struktúrák elemzése a székely zászló-vitáról közölt publicisztikák alapján*
- Nr. 60
Plainer Zsuzsa: *When Someone Came and Started to Sing, the Others Sang Too, Accompanying Him on the Violin' – Living and Working Conditions in the Onetime Roma Colony in Oradea and Its Liquidation in the 1970s*
- Nr. 61
Gheorghe Sarău: *Lucrări publicate și activități întreprinse de Gheorghe Sarău în perioada 1980–2015*
- Nr. 62
Kádár Edit: *A magyar nyelv tantárgy tartalma és oktatása a romániai oktatásszabályozási keretben*
- Nr. 63
Adriana Cupcea: *Asserting ethnicity: the Tatars from Dobruja (Romania)*
- Nr. 64
Gheorghe Sarău: *BIBLIOGRAFIE RROMĂ (Reviste și ziare)*
- Nr. 65
Kiss Tamás - Veress Ilka: *Minorități din România. Recensământ 2011 - procese demografice*
- Nr. 66
Iulia-Elena Hossu (ed.): *Rapoarte de cercetare*