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Hegemonic or Marginal Perspective!?

The Many Shades of Nostalgia in Post-communist Romania

*Ceaușescu n-a murit!
Ne veghează îndârjit
Ceaușescu e o școală
Ceaușescu e o boală.*

*E în mine e în tine
E în fabrici și uzine
Azi îl poartă fiecare
Ceaușescu-n veci nu moare.*

(Ceaușescu is not dead!/He watches over us fiercely/Ceaușescu is a school/
Ceaușescu is a disease./ He is in me, he is in you/
He is in factories and plants/Today everyone wears him/Ceaușescu never dies.)
(Ada Milea, 2003, *Ceaușescu has not died*)

Abstract: *In Romania, communism was declared, on December 18, 2006, an ‘illegitimate and criminal regime’. From this moment on, the main paradigm of remembering communism in the public space was anticommunism. However, ordinary people seem to remember communism in a more positive tune as shown by the various polls which measure a constantly increasing appreciation for the fallen regime. The explanations for this nostalgia are various: from ‘longing for a lost past’ to a form of counter-memory, as a critique of the present, and a fear for the future. Another explanation is the commodification of communism which became another merchandise to be consumed. A more subtle form of nostalgia was fuelled by the Romanian intelligentsia in the 2000s, which can be explained by a change of generation, which did not feel represented either by the anticommunist discourse or the regret for a fallen regime measured by the polls. My article deals with the various forms of nostalgia recorded in Romania in the last 36 years since the fall of communism aiming at describing them, offering some explanations while trying to understand the trends and mechanisms of both ‘reflective’ and ‘restorative’ forms of nostalgia.*

Keywords: *Anticommunism; Dominant Narratives; Intergenerational Memory; Pink Nostalgia.*

Introduction

In July 2025, a survey by INSCOP Research and the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of Romanian Exile (ICCMER) revealed surprising perceptions of communism in present-day Romania. The results indicated that 55.8% of participants view the communist era as a time marked by more positive than negative things, values, and events. Additionally, 48.4% believe that living standards were better during that period, while 66.4% feel the state provided better care for its citizens (*sic!*). A significant 77.2% assert that Romania was wealthier at that time. Despite these positive views, 59.2% recognize that the government committed crimes and abuses against its people, with 82% aware of instances of killings and torture, and 80.9% acknowledging a lack of freedom compared to today (IULIE 2025: Sondaj, 2025).

The mentioned results indicate an increasing appreciation for the communist regime, necessitating thoughtful explanations that extend beyond the typical critiques of ungratefulness and lack of education of the majority of Romanians often voiced by public intellectuals and the media. This situation calls for a meticulous analysis and a nuanced interpretation. My article seeks to offer several explanations and proposes hypotheses that can be further explored through in-depth researches on the memory of communism in Romania.

The State of Art: Nostalgia as a Social and Cultural Phenomenon

The nostalgia as a individual emotion and a social and cultural phenomenon was analyzed broadly since XVII century (Arnold-Foster, 2025). Its political implications and impact on people everyday life were also investigated by scholars (Tanner, 2021; Boym, 2001; de Certeau, 1984). Some of them concluded that the nostalgic discourse became a characteristic of the contemporary societies (Gaston, Hilhorst, 2018, p. 11; Lowenthal, 2015, p. 31), a “clever instrument of the merchandiser’s toolbox”, acquiring a “recycling dimension” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 78), the ‘new opium for the people’ (Gabriel, 1993), a sign of the present-day decay (Cohen, 2021), but also a stylized presentation of the present (Jameson, 1989).

If in the Western World, the nostalgia concerns the 1970s, the 1990s or even the Middle Ages, in Central and Eastern Europe it is the communist epoch that stirs regret and longing for its lost. The nostalgia for communism is frequently assessed through surveys (The Pew,

2009), as well as by the popularity of museums that showcase daily life, which openly assume a nostalgic stance, created mainly by private individuals and/or institutions such as: Museum of Life under Communism from Warsaw, The Museum of Communism in Bucharest, Museum of Communism in Prague, The Communist Consumers Museum in Timișoara, DDR Museum, Tales of Communism Museum from Brașov, The Red Flat in Sofia, Budapest Retro Museum, Zagreb '80s Museum, etc. This sentiment is also reflected in products marketed with a nostalgic appeal (Goulding, 2001; Puhl, Kraske, 2005) and in the rhetoric of populist politicians (Kenny; van der Velden, Lopez Ortega, Roth, Guldemon, 2023). It seems that the further we get from the moment of the collapse of the communist regimes in the region, the stronger nostalgia manifests itself (Arnold-Forster, 2025, p. 204). What are the explanations for this memorial trend and which are the consequences are two important questions to which my article aims to find an answer, focusing on a case study, namely on Romania.

David Berliner provides some explanations about the Western nostalgia in his seminal book, *Losing Culture. Nostalgia, Heritage, and Our Accelerated Times*. The French anthropologist argues that there are two types of nostalgia: 'endonostalgia', which refers to the "nostalgia for a past that has been experienced personally", and 'exonostalgia' that is the longing for "a past that one has not personally lived, entailing feelings of loss that are detached from the direct experience of loss" (Berliner, 2020, p. 62). For David Berliner 'endonostalgia' is a discourse which transforms the longing for a past into an impetus for present-day political purposes. Furthermore, he argues that 'exonostalgia' was perpetuated by the anthropologists who constantly invoke the "paradigm of the last", and the specificity of the local which eventually contributed to the transformation of the preservation of the heritage into a dominant perspective about the past (Berliner, 2020, p. 62-63).

Svetlana Boym, who analyzes nostalgia in the former Soviet countries, also distinguishes between two types of nostalgia. She argues that people who lived during communism manifest either a 'restorative nostalgia', that aims at "rebuilding the lost home" or/and a 'reflective nostalgia' which dwells in longing and loss. Boym believes that 'restorative nostalgia' is due to the fact that, faced with sudden and difficult to understand changes, individuals feel the need to take refuge in an era they have experienced and know well (Boym, 2001, p. 58-64).

Research into nostalgia in the West began to gain traction among social science scholars in the latter half of the 20th century (Davis,

1979). In contrast, the exploration of nostalgia for communism in Central and Eastern Europe emerged as a significant area of study in the early 2000s (Brunnbauer and Troebst, 2007; Volcic, 2007; Spaskovska, 2008; Barney, 2009; Sierp, 2009; Koleva, 2011). In 2006, a conference held at the Free University of Berlin, organized by Stefan Troebst and Ulf Brunnbauer, focused on the theme of nostalgia as it pertains to the former Yugoslavia and GDR as well as to Hungary and Bulgaria. One of the scholars dealing with this issue, Predrag Marković, aiming to find an explanation to the growing Yugonostalgia, argued that nostalgia is based on the ‘Seven S’, namely social security, solidarity, stability, social inclusions, self-respect, sociability and solidity, all in contrast with the post-communist bleak realities. In the Serbian researcher’s opinion, these assumptions were certainly myths, which, nevertheless, had a real foundation, but bear negative consequences for the development of the society (Markovic, 2007, p. 153-164).

Another book edited by Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille, *Post-communist Nostalgia*, also deals with various forms of nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe. Focused on Bosnia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Kosovo, former Yugoslavia and Russia, it aims at analyzing the particularities of this social phenomenon in the former communist countries not only as a scholarly endeavor but also as a political issue (Todorova, 2010, p. 10-11).

In Romania, the communist nostalgia was analyzed from several perspectives: of reversed nostalgia (Popescu-Sandu, 2010), of marketing the past (Bardan, 2018, 2020; Marin, 2013, 2016; Morariu, 2012), of counter-memory as a response to the official anti-communist paradigm (Georgescu, 2010; Rusu, 2015; Morariu, 2012), as a complementary form of memory and new practices of memorialization of the communist past (Asavei, 2016), as a critique of the present (Dobre, 2017; Anton, 2020), but also as a form of collective irony and a reassessing the communist past (Dobre, 2024; Petrescu, 2017) as well as a fear for the future (Dobre, 2025). It was also analyzed through the lens of arts (Preda, 2015), and of its instrumentalization by museums dedicated to communism (Preda, 2025; Dobre, 2024). The societal causes of nostalgia were examined by Cioflâncă (2010) as well as by Marin (2019) and Anton (2020).

Following Boym and Berliner assumptions that there are two types of nostalgia, I argue that in Romania, one can speak about a ‘restorative’ nostalgia but also a ‘reflexive’ one, which I call ‘the pink

memory of communism'. Studying both aspects of nostalgia of communism in conjunction can highlight the interaction between public and private, the social effects of public policies as well as the evolution of political/cultural representations of the past. It can emphasize that the past (at least in democratic societies) is neither a burden nor a biased construction but a re-construction through negotiation in a specific context (Bonnard, Jouhanneau, 2017). I argue that the nostalgia felt by individuals is linked to the myth of golden age while the social nostalgia is created and disseminated by certain groups belonging to a specific generation especially when the dominant narrative do not include them or dissatisfy them. The nostalgia used by politicians is a tool, a stake in the struggle for power, and it is instrumentalized in order to legitimize but also to attract unsatisfied voters.

Measuring Nostalgia in Romania

Despite the official condemnation of communism as an 'illegitimate and criminal' regime, on December 18, 2006, the perception of communism of the majority of the Romanian population is not that of a traumatic experience, but rather of a 'golden age' which people regret and long for it. Opinion polls from the last 27 years measure an increasing appreciation of communism, seen in most cases as a good idea, poorly applied. The interest in products from the communist era is another argument in favor of positive representations of the fallen regime among Romanians. The explanations for this state of affairs are multiple and depend on numerous factors that I will analyze below, not before presenting the results of various polls conducted over time.

One of the first opinion polls, from 1998, commissioned by the Open Society Foundation, measures a positive perception of communism. According to it, 51% of Romanians said that life was better under communism (Radio Free Europe, 1998). An explanation for this positive evaluation, at this specific moment, can be found in the destabilizing socio-economic situation of that period. After the Democratic Convention came to power in Romania (in 1996), reforms of all kinds led to a decrease in living standards, but especially to social insecurity and destabilization. Researchers who have studied the nostalgia for communism in post-communist countries believe that sudden changes at the political, social, cultural and economic levels represent a cause and an explanation of this phenomenon. Gerald W. Creed stated that nostalgia is a symptom of the social trauma experienced by those who experienced the transition from totalitarianism to democracy and from

socialism to capitalism, but also a sign that this period was coming to an end (Creed, 2010, p. 35). The sociologist argued that nostalgia makes its presence felt at times when communities and individuals realize the impossibility of returning to the past, when the future presents itself as a real break with the past. Nostalgia manifests itself when the future knocks on the door and returning to an era that has already passed is practically impossible (Creed, 2010, p. 37).

The repeated waves of change and social insecurity maintain and even increase the nostalgic feeling among the Romanian population, as evidenced by the survey conducted in September 2003 by Gallup and the Open Society Foundation, which counted two-thirds of Romanians as nostalgic for communism (Radio Free Europe, 2003).

In 2006, the year communism was condemned in Romania, the nostalgic feeling persists, and the positive assessment of communism stands in stark contrast to the anticommunist public discourse. Duncan Light and Craig Young explained this nostalgia as a form of 'counter-memory' (Light, Young, 2015, p. 221-243), defined as a refusal to conform to the official memory (Legg, 2007, p. 456-466). Thus, in 2006, according to a survey conducted at the request of the Open Society Foundation, 12% of Romanians considered communism a good idea, well applied, 41% believed communism a good idea, poorly applied, and only 34% considered communism a bad idea, poorly applied. Only 8% of people over 34 years old declared that they had suffered during the communist period (Fundăția pentru o Societate Deschisă, 2007).

In 2010, a poll concerning the perception of communism show that 63% believed that people lived better during communism. Furthermore, 41% of them would have voted for Ceausescu if he was a candidate for the presidential election. Only 9% of those interviewed believe that life was worse during communism (Sondaj, 2010).

Another 2011 survey conducted by CSOP on behalf of IICCMER indicated that 61% of Romanians perceived communism as a good idea, and 37% of them considered the establishment of communism as a positive event. At the same time, 29% of those interviewed were unaware that there had been repression in Romania (Manolache, 2011).

The November 2013 poll showed that 45.5% of respondents considered communism to be a good thing for Romania and 44.4% of them believed that life was better under communism. In September 2014, another poll measured Romanians' appreciation of the regime that collapsed in December 1989: 69.5% of respondents believed that life was

better under communism, and 68% believed that there was more justice under communism than in post-communism (Boghiceanu, 2017).

A 2021 INSCOP poll continued to record a positive assessment of the communist period. According to it, 63% of those surveyed believed that life was better under communism. In September-October 2022, the same public opinion polling institute measured an appreciation of the Ceaușescu era by Romanians at a rate of 57.4% (Ecurile, 2023).

A survey from November 2023 showed that 48.1% of Romanians considered communism a good thing, while 46.4% estimated that life was better under communism (Sondaj, 2023). A poll conducted by The Romanian Institute for Strategic Evaluation (IRES) in November-December 2024 shows that almost half of Romanians view communism in an idealized light, attributing numerous positive aspects to it. An overwhelming 80-90% of the respondents agree with the existence of positive aspects of the communism (such as safeness, healthy eating, free time dedicated to reading, or human solidarity), the appreciation transcending generational boundaries (Hurezean, 2025).

The already mentioned survey, conducted in June-July 2025, reveals a growing sense of nostalgia for communism among Romanians, particularly among those over 30 years old. The highest levels of nostalgia are found in the 60+ age group, with 67% expressing positive sentiments towards the past regime. Additionally, individuals with lower educational attainment (72%), those residing in rural areas (60%) and small towns (61%), and people whose incomes are insufficient to meet basic expenses (70%) exhibit stronger nostalgic feelings. In contrast, younger individuals under 30 tend to view the communist era negatively, with 48% holding this perspective, alongside 53% of Bucharest residents and 59% of university graduates. Furthermore, a significant 55% of high-income individuals also assess communism unfavorably (IULIE 2025: Sondaj, 2025).

Few Explanations about Present-day Nostalgia in Romania

Despite people's positive representations of communism, statistical data shows that life was not better under communism, compared with the countries in the West or to European integrated Romania. The historian, Bogdan Murgescu, who analyzed the available data, stated that in 1989, Romania ranked last in terms of the value of industrial manufacturing production and classic indicators of living standards. Romania ranked last among European countries in social indicators

such as infant mortality (after Albania) or in the Human Development Indicator, after Albania and Bulgaria (Murgescu, 2010, p. 329, f. 48). The gross national product per capita in the year of the fall of communism was 1567 dollars in Romania, while the European average was 8298 dollars (Murgescu, 2010, p. 330).

People's representations of communism are not based on statistical data, which are otherwise little known, as Bogdan Murgescu argued, but on affects, feelings and perceptions. The analyses carried out by economists and sociologists have not really been adopted neither by the educated public nor the larger audience but only by a narrow circle of specialists (Murgescu, 2010, p. 328). Therefore, nostalgia for communism must be understood and explained and not considered a symptom of backwardness, ignorance or ill will on the part of citizens.

I argue that in Romania, the nostalgia for the communist era also comes from a partisan view of the past. Most Romanians benefited from communism, climbing the social ladder. At the time of the communists' installation in power, approximately 80% of Romanians were peasants: 18.6% of them lived in poverty, owning less than one hectare of land, while 33.6% lived on the edge with the income obtained from their properties that ranged between 3 and 5 hectares (Murgescu, 2010, p. 229). The communists gave them land through the 1945 agrarian reform, which divided up the land confiscated from those convicted of war crimes, those who fled abroad, and those who owned more than 50 hectares (Dobre, 2023, p. 49). However, most peasants remained poor, with 91.1% of them owning properties under 5 hectares, and 36.4% owning even less than 1 ha (in 1948) (Murgescu, 2010, p. 362). Forced industrialization and urban development offered the latter the opportunity to change their social status. The historian Cosmin Popa stated that the regime favored the industrialization out of a need of political leaders to ensure an economic base of power. To a large extent, the idea of communist industrialization was subordinated to the idea of national consolidation of the regime (Popa, 2024, p. 104).

Due to the communist state policies, a majority of Romanians accepted the regime and adapted to it, especially since the repression targeted a small percentage of the population. If we take into account, the findings of the Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, the figures would be "about 600,000" political prisoners, 200,000 administrative internees, approximately 44,000 deportees and several tens of thousands of displaced persons. The report gives a total number of 2 million politically

persecuted persons, which would represent a little more than 10% of the population (Raportul Final, 2006, p. 463).

After the fall of communism, the political instrumentalization of repression by historical parties (Dobre, 2023, p. 32-49), the neo-communist amnesia (Dobre, 2018, p. 155-173), the loss of experience, as Giorgio Agamben (1989, p. 19-23) called it, its failure to be transmitted across generations, as well as the blockage of 'communicative memory' due to structural changes in society, have left their mark on the way communism is remembered, memorialized and displayed. The memory of repression has often not been transmitted from one generation to another, even within families that were persecuted. And even if they had wanted to, the links that would have facilitated such transmission no longer existed (Dobre, 2024, p. 92).

Communism destroyed not only traditions, collective memory, but also the spirit of togetherness. The interference in private life through state policies and constant surveillance led Romanians to no longer be interested in the helping each others. And not only did individuals no longer show interest in helping others, but also in finding out about their past, which could affect them if it had not been in accordance with ideological standards (which also changed from one period to another). Therefore, Romanians lived under communism in a kind of continuous present (Petre, 2005; Hartog, 2003), without showing any interest to the past and without thinking about the future. The 1989 revolution caught them off guard, as did the social and economic transformations that followed. Keen to adapt to the new realities, most Romanians left the past behind, ignoring communism with its crimes and abuses. Considering themselves all victims of the regime, as they were officially told by some anticommunists and neo-communists, Romanians viewed the persecuted as profiteers, considering the granting of rights to the oppressed individuals as an unjustly obtained privilege (Dobre, 2019, p. 139).

The appreciation of communism also quantifies a criticism of the present, as well as a revitalization of the myth of the 'golden age' (especially among those who were young in the 1960s and 1970s), but also a fear of the future that is increasingly bleak. Taking refuge in the past can represent a compensatory mechanism on a psychological level, the human psyche having the tendency to keep in memory the positive aspects that are easily accessible, the negative ones being repressed and harder to bring to the surface.

Manuela Marin believed that Romanians' nostalgia for communism was due to their appreciation for the well-being "that the paternalistic communist state ensured for them: from the stability of a job and living conditions that they considered decent to what they perceived to be a certain equality within Romanian society" (Marin, 2013, p. 12).

Nostalgia of communism is also a sign of consumerism, of a commodification of communism. Manuela Marin, analyzing the perceptions about communism promoted in the newspaper *Libertatea*, stated that there is a media and mercantile interest in disseminating a nostalgic image of communism, whose memory is transmitted selectively, focused on positive aspects such as education, economic and social equality, public decency, morality, work ethics, all in contrast to the values of the present (Marin, 2013, p. 14). In the opinion of Gerald W. Creed, this type of consumerist nostalgia contributes to the consolidation of neo-liberalism by promoting products and services that are based precisely on these feelings of loss and refuge (Creed, 2010, p. 39).

In analyzing this nostalgia, however, age, social status, and the questions asked in the surveys must be taken into account. Specific analyses show that these general statements of those interviewed in the opinion polls are much more nuanced when referring to the shortages of the 1980s, the ban on abortions, and even the preservation or removal of communist symbols in post-communism (Rusu, Croitoru, 2022, p. 165).

Research shows that young people do not seem to be interested in a real knowledge of this period, as Mihai S. Rusu and Alin Croitoru found, who consider that for young Romanians the communist past "is a foreign country". Instead, the two researchers measured a false nostalgia of the older generations who demonstrate an unexpected anticommunism, speaking out in large numbers in the survey they conducted, in favor of removing communist symbols from public space: "our research found that Romanians who lived during communism convincingly approve of the revision of the spatialized memory associated with the former regime. This result underlines a critique of the communist nostalgia thesis centered on emphasizing the fact that people may not be nostalgic for the political regime, but rather long for their irretrievable youth" (Rusu, Croitoru, 2022, p. 165).

Other Explanations of Nostalgia: Women's Remembering Communism

Between 2015 and 2017, I carried out 20 structured and semi-structured narrative interviews, along with one focus group, involving women who experienced life during the communist era in Romania. The participants were categorized into three generational cohorts: those born between 1938 and 1950, those born from 1951 to 1964, and those born between 1965 and 1975. This research was part of the international project titled "Regaining the future by rebuilding the past: Women's narratives of life in communism", supervised by Izabela Skorzynska (Project number: NCN nr/no. 2013/10/M/HS3/00482) (Dobre et al., 2019). The interviews took place in Timișoara, Brașov, Bucharest, Călărași, and Târgu Mureș. The selection of informants was based on the specified age groups, their willingness to engage in the project, and the opportunity to connect with women who could share their experiences in (un)familiar cities for me. As regards their social status, these women could be classified as middle class, encompassing a range of professions such as engineers, teachers, researchers, civil servants, and white-collar workers.

The analysis of their interviews regarding daily life under communism revealed a complex and often contradictory image of the regime among the participants. The women I interviewed hold a ambiguous view of the communist times, reflecting both positive and negative aspects. Their perceptions are influenced by the specific communist era they lived through, their family status, and personal achievements (Dobre, 2020).

Women born in the late 1930s and early 1940s, who experienced childhood during World War II and its aftermath, tend to hold a negative perception of communism. In contrast, those born in the 1950s and early 1960s recall communism more favorably, viewing the 1960s as a time of relative prosperity and freedom during their formative years.

According to Magdalena Man (born in 1952 in Brașov), times were better during her childhood which correspond to a period of stability and growth of the country (1955–1965):

"Our childhood and adolescence were relatively good from a socio-economic point of view... I can't say that I feel any physical or moral effects on my childhood. I think we are a generation that hasn't gone through many deprivations".

Her opinion is confirmed by Niculina Bordeianu (born in 1951, locality Barza, county of Călărași):

"I had a happy childhood, my parents had no problems, they got along well, I was protected. My parents were middle-class peasants, they had 7 hectares of land, they had horses, a cart, they worked their land. ... Later I experienced some scenes that marked me as a child, during the collectivization".

The good old times were also recalled by Mirela Rădulescu (born in 1957 in Bucharest) who stated that:

"Between 1972-1977, I was a teenager. We didn't have many opportunities, but we made the most of them. Young people who came from educated backgrounds had the opportunity to discuss things. It was a beautiful period. We didn't have the freedoms we have now, but we enjoyed meeting for tea, that's what we called parties, we met every week, to go to the movies, to shows. ... We went to the theater, the opera or the Athenaeum more often than we do now. I had a beautiful adolescence because I had a lot of friends.

We went to the mountains, to the sea thanks to this group of friends".

Magda Andreescu, born in 1967 in Bucharest, challenges the favorable views on communism held by the women born in the 1950s. Having lived through her childhood and adolescence during the late 1970s and the 1980s, a time characterized by increased restrictions and a prolonged period of shortages, she offers a contrasting perspective shaped by her personal experiences:

"I experienced during my youth both the good and the bad parts of the system. ... When I was little I caught the period when there was some kind of abundance. I remember there was a store where I used to buy cheese but after that it was no longer available. ... In the '80s, ... I remember the lines at the gas cylinders, my father would go in the evening. We didn't have gas in the neighborhood back then. No one will convince me that those were rosy times. Not even for the party activists who had their own canteen and the order house where they bought Cuban candies and Chinese chocolate. And they smoked Kent under the covers so that no one would see them because they also lived with the sword of Damocles over their heads. Those were the times. ... I experienced communism to the fullest, the system was wrong, it wasn't just Dej's or Ceaușescu's fault.

I don't know where we will end up, but I hope we never go back there!"

Women who experienced communism during the 1980s tend to hold a predominantly negative view of the regime. Born in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they often portray communism in bleak terms and express criticism of its governance. This perspective can be attributed to their coming of age during a time marked by significant shortages in the 1980s, followed by a tumultuous youth in the 1990s characterized by frustration and deprivation.

All women I interviewed, regardless of age and status, described the 1980s as dark years, marked by deprivation, cold and fear. Florentina Șuteu (born in 1942 in Brașov) remembered the difficult times when people had to stay in line for hours but could not find enough food, because it was rationalized:

„Mom and dad would get up in the morning and stand in line, or leave the milk bottle, a bag to stay in line for us. ... We only ate meat 3 times a year. We kept the piece of meat frozen since January and ate it in May. Once, I was on the street, I even remember the place where I heard this conversation because it stuck in my mind because it impressed me, and there was a child with his mother, and he said, "Mom, I would eat an egg today". And she answered him: "My dear, we don't have any more, don't you know that I gave it to you last week, we don't have any more eggs". You were entitled to 7 eggs for I don't know how long, half a pack of butter... How can you live like that!? What's that child supposed to understand that he ate the egg two weeks ago and now he had no right to?!"

In the same vein, Magdalena Man (b. 1951) remembered that:

„...things started to get worse economically, with a reflection on social life, in the '80s. Every year, life became more and more gray. ... And in a concrete way it got grayer in the sense that people started wearing duller colors. The color was disappearing from clothing because the clothes in the stores were getting grayer and grayer. ... Grocery stores were starting to empty, products were disappearing from the shelves. ... The meat had disappeared from the butcher's shelves, the cold cuts had disappeared, everything was starting to be harder and harder to find.

The stores with those gray metal or glass shelves, almost empty. In this context, people's faces had lost their smile, plus the eternal state of worry, of looking over their shoulder, you never knew who was listening to you, how they were listening to you and what could happen. A state of fear had begun to dominate among people”.

An extensive examination of the perceptions and views on communism reveals that the women I interviewed hold a nuanced perspective shaped by their personal and familial experiences across different eras. Those who spent their formative years from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s generally view this time positively. In contrast, individuals who experienced the late 1970s and 1980s often recall this period with discomfort and tend to assess the communist era unfavorably. Women born in the late 1970s, who experienced childhood in the late 1980s, tend to recall a different perspective on time and space, one that diverges from the hardships and abuses associated with communism. Their memories reflect a sense of abnormality that, while distinct, can be easily understood and can be transformed into a realm of personal freedom and togetherness. For all women I interviewed there was a personal golden age within the communist regime which might fuel nostalgia, be it restorative, be it reflective.

The 'Reflective' Nostalgia or the Pink Memory of Communism

*Noi în anul 2000
Când nu vom mai fi copii
Vom face ce-am văzut cândva
Toate visele îndrăznețe
În fapte le vom preschimba.*

(We in the year 2000/When we are no longer children/We will do what we once saw/All the bold dreams/We will turn them into deeds.)

(„Anul 2000”, a communist song composed in 1970 by Horia Moculescu, lyrics by Mihai Maximilian)

The feeling of yearning for a personal ‘golden age’ may help explain the phenomenon of ‘restorative nostalgia’ measured by polls and interests in items and in museums of daily life during communism. This longing not only reflects a wish to return to earlier times, but also might create a ‘reflective nostalgia’ (Boym, 2001, p. 41). The latter represents a type of reference to the past that encourages self-reflection, as well as a different perception of space and time (Boym, 2001, p. 49-50).

Such an approach to the communist past asserted itself in the Romanian public space in the 2000s, being the result of a generational change (Dobre, 2024, p. 95). Individuals born in the late 1960s and 1970s (the so-called people of the decree-*decreșei*, born after 1966 ban of abortion) came of age during the late 1980s while asserting themselves in the public space in the early 2000s, a period when they began to reflect on their childhood and experiences under communism. Their recollections do not align neither with the dominant anticommunist narrative of the 1990s, nor with the nostalgic longing for the lost past. Instead, they approach the communist era with a sense of (auto)irony and humor, often targeting figures like Ceaușescu as well as the broader spectrum of communist propaganda, literature, and art. Maria-Alina Asavei points out that “there are various invocations and enactments of Ceaușescu’s name and image in Romania’s public sphere: from theatrical performances, rock music and film production to advertising campaigns, country branding and the souvenir industry” (Asavei, 2016, p. 34). Bogdan Murgescu underlines that this form of memory focuses on the everyday experiences of the 1980s, emphasizing a rejection of the Ceaușescu regime and its absurdities. It also underscores the notion that, irrespective of the prevailing regime, individuals can carve out personal spaces of freedom, navigating various obstacles and potential risks (Murgescu, 2010, p. 327). I argue that what characterized the most

this memorial trend is its subjectiveness and the ironic self-centered memories and narrations.



Ceaușescu selling chocolate Rom, a very appreciate chocolate from the communist time. Poster on the Dâmbovița river, in front of the Parliament, June 2007. Photo: CFDobre, 2007.

In my publications since 2011, I have called this memorial trend ‘the pink memory of communism’, inspired by the title of the volume coordinated by Gabriel Horațiu Decuble (b. 1968, professor at the University of Bucharest), *The Pink Book of Communism* (Decuble, 2004). To this can be added collective volumes such as, *O lume dispărută*, coordinated by Ioan Manolescu (b. 1968, professor at the University of Bucharest), Paul Cernat (born 1972, professor at the University of Bucharest), Angelo Mitchievici (b. 1972, professor at the University of Constanța), and Ioan Stanomir (b. 1973, professor at the University of Bucharest) (Manolescu et alii, 2004); *În căutarea comunismului pierdut* (Cernat et alii., 2001), *Cum era? Cam așa... Amintiri din anii comunismului românesc*, coordinated by Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu (b. 1956 in Bucharest, writer and professor at the University of Ontario) (Mihăilescu, 2006), which resume, as Paul Cernat observed, “common obsessions” and which tell the story of communism “from the grass-roots”, being centered on the universe of the 1980s and the ego-stories of its last witnesses (Cernat, 2004).

This reflexive-nostalgic, playful and ironic perspective is also to be found in the film of Cristian Mungiu (well acclaimed director, born in 1968) and his colleagues who directed, “Amintiri din Epoca de Aur” (Tales of the Golden Age), released in 2009. The 6 episodes directed by Hanno Hofer (b. 1967), Răzvan Mărculescu (b. 1976), Cristian Mungiu,



The Hydra Installation by Costin Ioniță. Photo: *CFDobre, 2012.*

at the Transylvania International Film Festival (TIFF) in Cluj.

The Pink Memory trend can also encompass the twenty artistic installations that were showcased on the former pedestal of the Lenin statue, which was inaugurated in 1960 and dismantled in March 1990. These installations were displayed in front of the Press House, previously known as the House of Sparks, between 2010 and 2014. "Project1990", conceived by Ioana Ciocan (b. 1980, curator and university lecturer), started on January 26, 2010 (Nicolae Ceaușescu's birthday) and ended on April 14, 2014. For 4 years, 20 projects drew attention in a playful and deliberately exaggerated way to several aspects of communism and its legacy.

The project was defined as "a space of collective memory, of awareness of the present" (Sânc, 2014, p. 4), which "is part of this corpus of contemporary artworks that question the past and, at the same time, propose critical reading keys for it, provoking a reflection on it" (Preda, 2014, p. 65). Magda Cârnci argues that these artistic installations played a cathartic role, of remembering in a different, friendlier

Constantin Popescu (b. 1973), and Ioana Uricaru (b. 1972) tell cinematically several urban legends of the 1980s. Grouped into two parts, "Comrades, Life is Beautiful!" and "Love in Your Free Time", the films enjoyed both public and critical attention. According to the data of the Romanian National Office of Cinema, 18,256 viewers went to see it in theaters (Centrul Național al Cinematografiei, 2019). The mini-series was also available on Netflix and on DVDs. The film was broadcasted at the Cannes Film Festival, the Toronto Film Festival, and

and more relaxed setting, the communist past, but also the post-communist transition (Cârneçi, 2014, p. 18-19).

The ‘Pink Memory’ trend, which successfully fostered debate and encouraged reflection, has largely faded from public space. This decline was marked by the removal of Lenin’s pedestal and the subsequent installation of the monument “Wings”, designed by Mihai Buculei and commissioned by Association of the Former Persecuted People of Romania (AFDPR), with funding from the neo-communist government (2000-2004) lead by Adrian Nastase, a former member of the nomenklatura. This monument honors the victims of communism in Romania and the Republic of Moldova and was inaugurated on May 30, 2016, by Romanian President Klaus Werner Johannis, in the presence of politicians from various parties, former political prisoners, and numerous European officials.

As I argued elsewhere, the ‘Pink memory’, often a source of debate and discontent, presents a unique viewpoint on communism that encourages both personal and collective introspection regarding the past. This phenomenon acts as a societal mirror, reflecting lived experiences and fostering awareness of the complexities associated with communism, including its cultural trauma. Pink memory served as a cathartic experience, eliciting discussions that could lead to both humor and discomfort, while consistently prompting challenging questions about the implications of this historical period (Dobre, 2021, p. 261). An elitist trend, it promoted a critical memorialization of communism that encourage self-reflection, irony, and new narratives about the past. However, it has not deeply resonated within Romanian society, which engages with the communist era through personal, familial, and collective lenses. These perspectives have been shaped by decades of national-communist propaganda that emphasized the uniqueness of the Romanian nation, its distinctiveness among neighboring countries and great powers, and the perceived equality of all citizens. Furthermore, the historical myths propagated during and after the regime’s collapse in December 1989, coupled with the frustrations stemming from a challenging transition to democracy and the subsequent migration of over five million Romanians, have compounded these views. Additionally, the education system has struggled to instill democratic values, further entrenching the legacy of the past in the collective consciousness. The political consequences of these societal challenges, along with cultural and memorial viewpoints and individual beliefs, became apparent in November 2024.

The Georgescu Effect and the Nostalgia for Communism

On 24 November 2024, Romania conducted the first round of its presidential elections, featuring 13 candidates from various political parties and independents. Among them was Călin Georgescu (born in 1962 in Bucharest), an outsider who gained significant popularity through TikTok and other social media platforms, which were reportedly influenced by the Russian Federation and various national and international entities. The vote count on the evening of November 24, 2024, ultimately declared him the winner of the first round which stirred astonishment, misunderstanding and even despair. The combination of these mixed emotions, along with the irregularities and illegalities surrounding his electoral campaign, ultimately resulted in the annulment of the first round of the presidential elections. This led to a new election scheduled for May 2025, in which Călin Georgescu was barred from participating.

Although he has voluntarily retired from politics in May 2025, his speeches have significantly influenced the Romanian public sphere and left a lasting impression on his supporters. His discourse was a complex amalgamation of various ideologies, intertwining new wave beliefs with traditional Orthodox Christian practices. It showcased an appreciation for communism alongside references to interwar Romanian far-right (legionnaires), while also blending nationalist economic policies with neo-liberal strategies for interstate economic interactions.

Georgescu's opinion about the communist regime was constantly positive, expressing regret over its condemnation in December 2006 and characterizing the 1989 Revolution as a Coup d'État (Toşa, 2025). He advocates for a return to economic nationalization, a more autonomous foreign policy, and a lifestyle governed by state oversight. He has praised Ceaușescu for his foreign policy, highlighting its purported independence from other nations. Additionally, he embraced Ceaușescu's commitment to global peace while expressing a deep appreciation for the Russian Federation and its culture (Despa, 2022).

The recourse to Ceaușescu served Georgescu well because, as David Kideckel has argued, Romanians have historically shown a tendency to seek refuge in the arms of paternalistic figures. Ceaușescu strategically used his representations as a paternal figure in order to create devotion among his people although this approach also gave birth to hatred and frustration (Kideckel, 2004, p. 123-147). The revival of the Ceaușescu paternalistic image by Călin Georgescu had a reverse effect making not only Georgescu popular but increasing the popularity of

Ceaușescu himself as shown by the July 2025 survey. It is true that Ceaușescu's persona haunted the Romanians since his execution on December 25, 1989. In a 2006 poll by the public television channel TVR1, Nicolae Ceaușescu was ranked 11th among the "100 greatest Romanians", significantly outpacing notable figures such as King Ferdinand, who placed 24th, liberal prime minister Ion C. Brătianu at 29th, and Peasant Party leader and former prime minister Iuliu Maniu, who was 32nd (Maniu died in Sighet political prison in 1954) (Mari Români, 2006). A subsequent survey in 2014 revealed that if Ceaușescu had run for the presidency, 66% of Romanians would have voted for him (Sondaj IRES, 2014). Furthermore, a 2018 study by the Institute of Social Studies (ISOGEPI) indicated that 64.3% of respondents held a positive view of Ceaușescu (Sondaj, 2018).

In the July 2025 survey, 66.2% of participants expressed the belief that Ceaușescu was a good leader. This sentiment is particularly prevalent among individuals aged 30 and older, with 67% of those aged 30-44, 65% of those aged 45-59, and 71% of respondents aged 60 and above sharing this view. Additionally, 80% of individuals with only a primary education and 65% of secondary education hold similar opinions. The belief is also strong among rural residents, with 74% supporting the notion, and among those facing financial difficulties, where 89% agree with the assessment of Ceaușescu's leadership (IULIE 2025: Sondaj, 2025).

The revival of a favorable perception of communism, coupled with a reassessment of its modernization aspects and the public policies advocated by Ceaușescu, contributed to a resurgence of nostalgia for the communist era. This sentiment was embraced by Călin Georgescu's supporters as a means of distinguishing themselves from Georgescu's adversaries, serving as a unique marker of identity, although being an expression of a retrograde nationalism and undemocratic values.

Final Remarks

In post-communist Romania, nostalgia manifests in various forms, reflecting both individual and societal viewpoints. This multifaceted sentiment reveals how individuals and communities grapple with their past, often oscillating between idealization of the communist era and critical reassessments of its legacy. Nostalgia serves not only as a personal reflection but also as a lens through which the broader socio-

political landscape can be understood, highlighting the tensions between remembrance and critique in a society navigating its historical complexities.

The communist past has consistently played a crucial role in power dynamics in post-communist Romania. During the 1990s, the legacy of communism was leveraged for legitimization and to shape political, social, and cultural identities. By the 2000s, communism transitioned into a topic of irony and critical discourse, often treated as a form of entertainment and as a consumerist practice.

Following its condemnation in 2006 as an ‘illegitimate and criminal’ regime, communism was memorialized under the sign of anticommunism. This transformation was reflected in public policies aimed at crafting a negative image of the recent past for future generations. However, official memory in pluralistic societies does not always enjoy a plenary and univocal reception from the general public. In Romania, although anticommunism became the official paradigm for describing the regime that disappeared in December 1989, many Romanians show nostalgia for it, regretting an ordered and stable time in the face of a labile present and an uncertain future. Fear of the future plays an important role in appreciating the communist past. At this stage, refuge in communism can be more reassuring than the leap into an unpredictable future.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Education and Research, CCCDI-UEFISCDI, project number PN-IV-PCB-RO-MD-2024-0039, within PNCDI IV.

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