

■ Das sozialistische Rumänien im biographisch-zeitgeschichtlichen Gedächtnis

Valeska Bopp-Filimonov, *Erinnerungen an die »Nicht-Zeit«. Das sozialistische Rumänien im biographisch-zeitgeschichtlichen Gedächtnis (1989–2007) (Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen. Geschichte, Gesellschaft und Kultur in Südosteuropa; Bd. 61), Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz Verlag) 2014, 350 S., 54,00 €*

Two and a half decades after the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, public and academic calendars still converge, at least occasionally, in asking what of communism is being remembered, how, and by whom. Romania, oftentimes singled out for having had one of the most oppressive communist regimes in the Eastern Bloc, has also been receiving considerable scholarly attention for its unusual engagement with the past. The title of Valeska Bopp-Filimonov's book is a case in point. »Non-time«, the designation coined by the Romanian historian Sorin Antohi with reference to the communist period, is a good illustration of the paradoxical public discourse promoted by politicians, intellectuals, and scholars in the recent past. Communism is being remembered, argues Bopp-Filimonov, as an aberration in the course of Romanian history, the responsibility for which is often externalized. But how are individual memories articulated within or against

this interpretation of the past that effectively brackets communism out of the country's history? In what language would they be conveyed? And what are the limits of the sayable in post-socialist Romania? These are the questions at the core of Valeska Bopp-Filimonov's study of contemporary biographical memories of socialism.

To the existing literature on the formulation and widespread political appeal of the public anticommunist discourse in Romania after 1989, this study adds the much-needed dimension of family and individual recollections. It asks how state socialism, its demise, and the postsocialist transformations are processed through life stories. Between 2005 and 2007, Bopp-Filimonov conducted 45 oral history interviews in 18 families from Bucharest, Alexandria, and Timișoara. In each family she spoke with members of at least two different generations. As a mediator between individual and society, the family appears as a privileged site to investigate the interplay between personal and public memory.

Apart from the introductory chapter, the book is structured in three parts. The first is a survey of the ways in which the communist past has been framed in public discourse between 1989 and 2007. It seeks to reconstruct the range of available narrative and interpretative frameworks that would inform or organize individual biographies, and asks specifically what were the rules of the sayable about the recent past in the Romanian postsocialist public space? Using the combined methodologies of discourse analysis and *Begriffsgeschichte*, and choosing as sources media »interdiscourses« rather than specialized knowledge circulated among small professional groups (e.g., history writing), Bopp-Filimonov offers a diachronic analysis of the postcommunist, neonationalist, and anticommunist discursive strands after 1989. While this provides a useful overview of the changing political landscape with its coupled politics of memory, the overreliance on »professional politics« misses the crucial point that in postsocialist Romania the most heated, publicized, and consequential debates on the meaning of recent history were carried out in cultural, rather than overtly political terms. In

Bopp-Filimonov's interpretation, the political statements of President Traian Băsescu cut across the existing discursive positions. Together with the wholesale condemnation of communism through the Tismăneanu Report, they inaugurated a new brand of memory politics. A broader focus would have probably made clearer for the reader that they in effect secured the hegemony of anticommunism. That being said, Bopp-Filimonov nevertheless skillfully diagnoses anticommunism as ultimately unable to produce a historical narrative that could integrate on equal footing a variety of life stories.

The main section of the book is an in-depth analysis of a small number of selected oral history interviews, conducted in three Bucharest families. They are presented as a corrective to the little differentiated and overwhelmingly negative public discourse on communism. Each case study replicates the overall structure of the book: first, there is a reconstruction of the historical framework in which the life story unravels; second, the individual biographical narrative is recounted with a focus on the personal experiences shaping the way in which the past is being remembered; finally, the interplay between the individual biography and public discourse is analyzed, through sources such as statements made in parliament by the interviewee, published articles or interviews, penned literature, etc. The subchapter on Dan and his son Dominic will appeal to the reader interested in the life trajectories, experiences, and ideological commitments of the descendants of the interwar intelligentsia. Born in the 1940s to a family of liberal-conservative elites, Dan saw many of his close relatives imprisoned in the 1950s, but lived a relatively peaceful and protected existence as a literary scholar in the 1970s and 1980s. Although a member of the Communist Party before 1989, he actively engaged in politics only following the regime change, within one of the newly reinstated interwar »historical parties« and as a member of the parliament. However, he saw his strand of anticommunism increasingly marginalized. Bopp-Filimonov illuminates the extent to which Dan conceives of his life story as part

of the family history. For him, his actions and meaning-making follow in the spirit of his family's democratic tradition. By contrast, for his son Dominic anticommunism is not a potent or integrative interpretative pattern anymore.

The second case study details the biographical narratives and recollections of Cornel and his daughter Ana. The same generation as Dan, Cornel was born to a poor peasant family from Bukovina but enjoyed a success story of upper mobility. He graduated from Bucharest University and became an inspector in the Ministry of Education. In the early 1970s, he decided to study theology, became a priest, and also began writing literature. Bopp-Filimonov's analysis of Cornel's recollections hinges on the inexplicable career switch, on his general unwillingness to discuss his political past, and on the impersonal narrative style, prone to reproduce tropes of the communist discourse rather than evoke personal experiences. In the case of his daughter Ana, who is trying to harmonize her family history and her leftist sympathies with the moralizing anticommunist public discourse, silences are not so much signs of an unwillingness to communicate, but of the lack of discursive modes on which to pattern one's understanding of the past. In this line of reasoning, the final case study, that of a family of formerly high-ranking communist officials who recanted the consent for their story to be published, is an extreme illustration of the limits of the sayable in postsocialist Romania.

The final chapter distills from the 45 oral history interviews conducted supra-individual features of the processes of remembering and interpreting the past in Romania. It addresses regional and generational differences as well as the absence of an engagement with the issue of fascism from public and private discourses. Bopp-Filimonov concludes that the absence of a master narrative of the socialist past able to integrate the life stories of individuals with different social, ethnic, and generational backgrounds precludes the citizens' identification with the postsocialist state and its political decisions. The lesson is sound but raises the crucial question of its relevance for the present situation in Romania. Close to a decade has

passed since Bopp-Filimonov conducted her research. Reflection on the intervening time-span and especially on the vigorous afterlife of the anticommunist discourse is sorely missed from this insightful account of the memory of the recent past in postsocialist Romania.

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