Using the Past in Populist Communicational Strategies

How the Memory of Securitate is Instrumentalised in Romanian Politics?

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Abstract

This article investigates how political strategies interrelate populist rhetoric with memory issues. By looking at the case of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) from Romania, between 2017-2019, this article reveals how the slide to populism, generated by cyclical confrontations with the rule of law institutions, steered the PSD to adopt conspirational beliefs and appeal to traumatic memories to frame the judiciary as the new Securitate. Through the use of discourse analysis and virtual ethnography, this article analyses party resolutions and political rallies. This article explains how the populist rhetoric created a new hegemonic narrative of the judiciary, by intersecting its values and symbolism with the memory of the former Securitate from the Communist period.

Keywords: parties, Romania, populism, memory, rule of law

1. Introduction

Between 2015-2019, the Romanian political scene witnessed a return to populism spearheaded by the rhetoric of the Social Democrat party (PSD), which was centred on strategic exploitations of the past to fix the problems of the present. Similar to other parties from Central and Eastern Europe, such as PiS (Poland), FIDESZ (Hungary) and ATAKA (Bulgaria), PSD, along with the Alliance of the European Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) developed a mixture of populist and institutionalist discourses to alter the rule of law institutions that threatened their power grip.

Historically, the PSD governed Romania for much of the last three decades, with many leaders transitioning from the Communist party and establishing a clientelist network that exhorted a far-reaching sway in politics. Their ideological heritage and institutional grabbing prevented a coming to terms with the crimes of the Communist regime until 2006. The entry of Romania to the European Union in 2007 made the realisation and rehabilitation of a climate governed by the rule of law inevitable.

The loss during the presidential election in 2014, and the emergence of a crisis in the health system, witnessed the emergence of a strongman, Liviu Dragnea. He went on to change PSD's politics and policies. Entrenched in legal battles for corruption, Dragnea shifted PSD's narratives towards populism. To this, the PSD espoused strategic communication that transferred to its electorate a new hegemonic narrative vis-à-vis the legacy of Communism in the democratic age. During 2017-2019, notably, the coalition used memory in their fight against the judiciary. They did so by instrumentalising the trauma of the Securitate, as well as its symbolism, to invalidate the values of the judiciary to their benefit.

This article contends that the PSD-ALDE coalition instrumentalised a mixture of populist discourses and memory issues to construct a new hegemonic narrative that aimed to change people's perception of the judiciary and obtain validation for their reform. Thus, this article adopts the conceptualisation of populism proposed by Kurt Weyland[1] as a political strategy, "through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated support from large numbers of followers". This article will analyse via discourse analysis and virtual ethnography the PSD resolution "the Parallel and Illegitimate State" and the political rally "We want Prosperity, not Security(ate)" to determine how memory is instrumentalised in the present for political benefit.

This article agrees that, "populism can thrive in an environment of tight party discipline and organisation"[2]. Therefore, this study perceives PSD, the biggest party in Romania and the heir of the Communist Party, as an analogous case study of party discipline and organisation. Scholars argue that populism as a political strategy centres on the politicians, historical preconditions and policies[3]. Hence, by selecting the PSD-ALDE coalition, this study will show how emergent politicians implement coherent strategies that serve to win and maintain power[4]. The article analyses how populist leaders implement new hegemonic narratives that change the mnemonic consensus concerning Communism to serve their policies in the present.

Following this discussion, this article moves onwards by presenting the conceptual framework of memory politics. Afterwards, this article discusses the role of cultural traumas in the mnemonic process. In the third empirical discussion, the section highlights the factors that pushed the PSD-ALDE towards populism and to adopt Securitate's memory as a political leitmotif. Next, this article concludes with a discussion of findings generated from the methodology adopted for this study.

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[1] See Kurt Weyland, "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics", *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 14, https://doi.org/10.2307/422412; Kurt Weyland, *Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al., vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.2.

[2] Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), 29.

[3] Kirk A. Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511730245.

[4] Weyland, *Populism*, 1:59.

2. The "Collective" in Memory Politics

The past's faults reverberate in the mirror of the present, especially in today's political arena. Not many aspects are more salient for a political agent than the use of the past. Depending on how the political agent interprets the past and subsequently decides to bring it in the present, it may affect the people's repository of collective memories. The focus in this article is on the conceptual underpinnings of memory politics from a collective perspective. Subsequently, this section layers the types of memory used in this study and describes the agency of those who instrumentalise it.

This study adopts the conceptual framework of Confino[5] vis-à-vis the politics of memory as to "who wants whom to remember what, and why?" Memory politics is a flexible procedure. The logic of communication entailed in the process aims to change the hegemonic narrative that became immovable in time. It does so by targeting particular entities within the political milieu and communicates to the people new memory narratives from which the agent who initiated the remembrance process is benefiting. From this perspective, scholars analysed the mechanisms of collective remembrance and underlined its importance concerning identity groups[6]. Others from the sociology of memory consider that the process of remembrance represents an attempt to come to terms with the past[7]. However, this study analyses how political agents and parties reinterpreted the past and constructed new hegemonic narratives for their benefit.

Kubik and Bernhard[8] underlined the importance to "focus on strategies that political actors employ to make others remember in certain specific ways and the effects of such mnemonic manipulations". Given this situation, the agent pursues representations of the past that are referential for the community and, most importantly, which can be reinterpreted for one's advantage. Romano and Raiford[9] argue that "representations of the past can be mobilised to serve partisan purposes […] they can shape a nation's sense of identity, build hegemony, or serve to shore up the political interests of the state; and they can certainly influence how people understand their world". Suitably, mnemonic manipulation is employed by political agents who "deploy the past strategically, manipulating memory to legitimise their actions concerning formative events in the collective consciousness of their community"[10]. Kubik and Bernhard

[5] Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method", *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1393, https://doi.org/10.2307/2171069.

[6] c.f. Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–133; Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures", *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 333–348.

[7] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 19, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520.

[8] Michael H. Bernhard and Jan Kubik, eds., *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014), 7.

[9] Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (University of Georgia Press, 2006), xxi.

[10] Hayden, M. (1992) quoted in Peter J. Verovšek, "Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm", *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 529–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1167094.

describe these sorts of actions as befitting memory warriors[11]. The communication logic adopted by these warriors reveals the contours of the discursive strategies that deliberately trigger a collective representation of memory in particular groups. When conceptualising "collective representation", this article subscribes to what Eliasoph and Lichterman[12] mean as "conventional vocabularies or moral narratives that put people's motives into words and stories that others easily can apprehend".

The warriors use people's social constructs of collective memories for their political benefit. People's "understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward"[13]. Thus, understanding the strategic mechanisms via which the political agent anchors the past in one's discourse not only "highlights the processual character of memory"[14] but also may offer clues vis-à-vis what meaning is sought to be reinterpreted from history and "propagated in the present more widely or imposed on other members of society"[15]. Consequently, the mnemonic discourse follows to a certain extent "the Gramscian assumption that discourses shape the way people think and the role that leaders play in these debates"[16].

This article investigates how political actors, for their political benefit, frame particular mnemonic narratives, transfer them from the past into the present and reinstate an organic experience of collective memory. Kansteiner contends that "memories are at their most collective when they transcend the time and space of the events' original occurrence".[17]. Subsequently, Kubik and Bernhard[18] argue "that remembering the past, particularly collectively, is always a political process", while Maurantonio[19] argues that "memory is political". Accordingly, this study asserts that political agents count on the psychological significance of the particular memory they want to use within their discourses to influence people's perception and political choice. The agents target both the people who experienced the memory within their lifetime and those who received it in cultural settings. They reckon how the people cognise the significance of the particular type of memory they deem worthwhile and frame it in the current state of affairs. The purpose is to make people understand and empathise with the meanings provided by the political agent.

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[11] Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years after Communism*, 11.

[12] Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, "Making Things Political" (Routledge, 2019), 470, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315267784-50.

[13] Katharine Hodgkin, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2003), 1, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203391471.

[14] Joanna Jasiewicz, "When the Past Matters: Memory Politics and Ethnic Relations in Poland", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 9 (July 15, 2015): 1576, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1005640.

[15] Richard Ned Lebow et al., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Duke University Press, 2006), 13.

[16] Verovšek, "Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past", 13.

[17] Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (2002): 189.

[18] Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years after Communism*, 3.

[19] Nicole Maurantonio, "The Politics of Memory", The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication, August 24, 2017, 3, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.026.

Nets-Zehngut[20] identifies five types of collective memory. In parallel with the approach of Kubik and Bernhard, this study focuses on the "official memory" endorsed by political parties or other agents in the public space based on the "structural-institutional constraints of the political field in which they act"[21]. The modus operandi of the "official memory" requires careful examination concerning how the political agent incorporates memory as a strategy to change the cadres of current institutions in the post-Communist space. The engagement with the past in the realm of politics is a selective and rational process that seeks to interconnect the cultural significances and symbolism of occurrences that have gained meaning over time for particular cultures. This study uses the types of mnemonic strategies adopted by the warrior to influence the narratives in current affairs.

In her work, Nancy Wood "addresses several possible sources that 'purposefully' shape public memory, ranging from social groups to institutions"[22]. Similarly, Nets-Zehngut[23] argues that the effective manipulation of the past "caused through activities of various institutions" is a conscious and deliberate manipulation in the interest of the present. For example, memories of Communist institutions still play an active role in Eastern Europe's politics. Hence, their symbols are still employed recurrently in the playbook of political actors. The frequent usage of Communism by political actors makes "Communism a useful political resource"[24] given its traumatic meaning for some communities.

The field of memory politics is particularly crucial for mnemonic warriors because they can select discursively and intentionally the memories of the past and attach it to their opponents who are embodied either by parties or institutions that prevent warriors from power-grabbing. As Kubik and Bernhard relate, their only problem is "to make others [e.g., the people] accept their 'true' vision of the past"[25] because, as Benhabib argues, "a story that is not well told will not be remembered"[26].

For the agent's political purposes, memories are strategic arguments that can be transferred in the present narratives. In particular, mnemonic actors seek to vilify the image of political opponents and highlight their failures as part of an extension of memory nowadays. The mnemonic actor intentionally wants people to know that the memory and the human agency of those who committed it reverberate in the present. Nancy Wood in her work describes it as such[27]:

[20] Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "The Passing of Time and the Collective Memory of Conflicts: The Case of Israel and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus", *Peace & Change* 37, no. 2 (2012): 254–55.

[21] Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years after Communism*, 12.

[22] in Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", 188.

[23] Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "Origins of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: Changes in the Historical Memory of Israelis/Jews 1949-2004", *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 2 (March 1, 2011): 326, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310396112.

[24] Kate Korycki, "Memory, Party Politics, and Post-Transition Space: The Case of Poland", *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 31, no. 3 (August 2017): 519, https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325417700263.

[25] Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years after Communism*, 26.

[26] Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2002), 102.

[27] Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1999), 2.

> The emanation of individual memory is primarily subject to the laws of the unconscious, public memory – whatever its unconscious vicissitudes – testifies to a will or desire on the part of some social group or disposition of power to select and organise representations of the past so that these will be embraced by individuals as their own. If particular representations of the past have permeated the public domains, it is because they embody an intentionality – social, political, institutional and so on – that promotes or authorises their entry.

The intended purpose of reenacting the memories through a surfeit of social and discursive strategies is to convey upon the opponents' values the same mnemonic identity that affected the past of the people. Nets-Zehngut admits that memory's role is to "shape the psychological reactions of each party negatively towards the rival and positively the in-group"[28]. As such, people can associate the values of the traumatic experiences of the past with the current political parties, politicians or institutions which had their values altered by the strategic discourse of the mnemonic warrior. The collective memory's broader purpose is to distract people from the primary objectives of the political agent, downgrade the trust in other parties and institutions, and incriminate the opponents as successors of the agency that created the memory. Kubik and Bernhard worryingly remarked that, "from there it is a short step to prioritising substantive outcomes to the detriment of the procedural norms of democracy"[29]. Henceforward, this study looks at the case of Romania and examines how political agents associated in aide-mémoire contexts the image and values of the former Securitate.

3. The cultural trauma of Securitate

This section examines how the mnemonic aspects of cultural traumas ensure strategic salience in the populist rhetoric. Before that, the article will chart how the myth of Securitate – this study's understanding of cultural trauma – was perpetuated in Romania after the democratic transition.

Cultural traumas have a distinct role within the conceptualisation of memory. Alexander[30] suggests that cultural traumas are processes of representation, whereby collective groups define a situation from the past. Others[31] have specified that cultural trauma "functions as a discursive knot in contemporary culture due to its vast associative powers of generating interactions between disparate ideas". The concept of trauma, some believe, "neither captures

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[28] Nets-Zehngut, "The Passing of Time and the Collective Memory of Conflicts", 255.
[29] *Twenty Years after Communism*, 290.
[30] Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Univ of California Press, 2004).
[31] Anne Rothe, *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media* (Rutgers University Press, 2011), 4.

nor illuminates the forces that contribute to the making and unmaking of collective memories"[32]. Smelser[33] adds to this debate, perhaps, the most holistic definition:

> Cultural trauma is a memory accepted or given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural pre-suppositions.

Cultural traumas can function as harmful stylistic elements in populist discourses. Their role is to amplify the psychological significance of the occurrences that caused harm in the past to particular groups. Naturally, traumas are rearticulated as symbols that fashioned the current collective identity of the society as a whole. Through constructions expressed in the media and politics, the symbolic composition of the trauma is perpetuated. This study focuses on the Communist institutions, specifically at the role of the Romanian Securitate. The Securitate was the popular name given to the Department of State Security. The latter was a general intelligence surveillance unit formed after the Communist regime took control of Romania. Its role was to silence any societal dissent during the Dej and Ceaușescu regimes[34].

The perpetuation of the Securitate memory is attached to the procedures that follow the transition to democracy. It enables its citizens to come to terms with the past via mnemonic processes that reenact the context of the painful experience. The transition to democracy also permitted a reinterpretative process of challenging the accepted hegemonic narratives, even by those with ties to the Communist regime. Such processes perpetuated the myth and symbols attributed to past trauma across generations. As an illustration, after the fall of Communism, and as a requirement to admission to the European Union, Romania established transitional justice trials[35]. Their role was to come to terms with the oppressive past, by revealing the regime crimes that were hidden heretofore[36]. However, dealing with the oppressive past means preserving the narratives that retain the memory of the trauma alive. In Romania, the perpetuation of the Securitate was kept threefold.

First, the myth was preserved by the peculiar transition of communist institutions to democratic settings, which enabled many of the former communist elites to work in democratic

[32] Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", 187.

[33] Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma", *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* 4 (2004): 44.

[34] see both Dennis Deletant, "The Securitate and the Police State in Romania: 1948–64", *Intelligence and National Security* 8, no. 4 (October 1, 1993): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684529308432223; Dennis Deletant, "The Securitate and the Police State in Romania, 1964–89", *Intelligence and National Security* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 22–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684529408432238.

[35] see Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania: The Politics of Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139104227.

[36] Monica Ciobanu, "Criminalising the Past and Reconstructing Collective Memory: The Romanian Truth Commission", *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 2 (March 1, 2009): 313–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130802630870.

institutions, without being discovered until later years[37]. The irregular reforms adopted by the democratic Romanian governments did not affect the power structures that were constructed after Communism fell, mainly the intelligence services. The old vanguard preserved its decision-making in the new institutions of the state. As democracy strengthened in Romania, former communists were discovered by new procedures. Such processes continued even after Romania's entry in the EU, as the independence of its judiciary crystalised. The development of the rule of law institutions was associated by the PSD-ALDE coalition with the former Securitate institutions as soon as they felt threatened by indictments.

Second, the Tismăneanu report[38] and the investigations of the National Council for Studying the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) were the prime vectors in dealing with the past and rediscovering the truth about the Communist regime. In the words of Rusu,[39] "emancipation from the grip of the past is achieved simply by telling the truth about the horrors of the former regime". The report investigated the crimes of the former Communist regime and exposed that much of the vanguard had transitioned to democracy straightforwardly. In the process, many Communist elites became rich during the first chaotic years of Romania's adherence to the market economy. They did so by taking hold of the state's major industries, entered politics or financed parties to assert their sway[40].

Confronting the truth about the past, notably through the Tismăneanu report's findings, accomplished three purposes. First, it reenacted the memory of the Securitate in the public consciousness, as a factor that changed public identity. Second, the decision to investigate Communism through the report reactivated the meaning-making of the regime's memories and its institutions like Securitate as political leitmotifs[41]. Third, it "identified the guilty [and] promoted the principle of accountability [and] gave President Traian Băsescu, who appointed the commission and endorsed its report, further impetus to pursue institutional reforms based on the rule of law"[42]. Hitherto the release of the report, the former Communist elites who transitioned to democracy preferred what scholars refer to as the "elusive strategy", by trying to bury the difficult past in collective oblivion through the "politics of amnesia"[43]. However, the report annulled the "politics of amnesia" that the old vanguard hoped, making the past a

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[37] see Dennis Deletant, "Ghosts from the Past: Successors to the Securitate in Post-Communist Romania", in *Post-Communist Romania: Coming to Terms with Transition*, ed. Duncan Light and David Phinnemore (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2001), 159–210, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780333977910_3.

[38] Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Final Report - The Presidential Commission for the analysis and investigation of the Communist Regime - Romania* (Humanitas, 2007).

[39] Mihai Stelian Rusu, "Transitional Politics of Memory: Political Strategies of Managing the Past in Post-Communist Romania", *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 8 (September 14, 2017): 1262, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1380783.

[40] c.f. Tom Gallagher, *Modern Romania: The End of Communism, the Failure of Democratic Reform, and the Theft of a Nation* (New York: University Press, 2005).

[41] see Vladimir Tismăneanu and Marius Stan, *Romania Confronts Its Communist Past: Democracy, Memory, and Moral Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139198929.

[42] Monica Ciobanu, "Conclusion: Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five and Hopes for the Future", in *Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five: Linking Past, Present, and Future. Edited by Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea.* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015)265.

[43] Rusu, "Transitional Politics of Memory", 1259.

political strand that had to be confronted, as all emergent political forces were able to be linked with the Communist regime.

Last, the third category that perpetuated the myth of the Securitate and sedimented it in the democratic age were political scandals that debunked how the past and the new intelligence community amalgamated in the democratic regime. Examples, in this case, were the discovery of the under-cover Securitate officers that instigated and led the 1991 Mineriade[44]. Called by Ion Iliescu, a former Communist elite, the miners violently crushed the Bucharest protesters who demanded that democracy be installed in Romania by those with no ties to Communism[45]. Other examples that kept the hegemonic narrative of the Securitate alive are the trials of the former Communist prison torturer Alexandru Vișinescu,[46] and the exposing of many plutocrats, such as Dan Voiculescu, as informants to the Securitate. The memory was kept alive by the troubling unmasking of journalists like Robert Turcescu, who was an undercover agent for the intelligence services[47]. All the factors underlined in the above prolonged the consensual hegemonic narrative of the Securitate as a meaning-making dynamic that affected Romanian society.

However, what distinguished the perpetuation of the Securitate myth were the protocols between the National Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA) and the Romanian Secret Services (SRI) in 2018, which "organised wiretaps for DNA in the cases the agency was investigating"[48]. At this juncture, the least reformed of the state agencies, the SRI, was discovered to have conducted more than a quarter of a million wiretaps between 2005 and 2014[49]. Such procedures from the least responsible agency allowed its officers to "compromise politicians and judges by handpicking which of them would be handed over to the DNA or would be reserved for blackmail and extortion"[50]. The revelation of this case tarnished the name of the DNA and fuelled the populist speechmaking of PSD-ALDE, who had already began in 2017 "to modify the Penal Code under a pretext of fixing the problems of overcrowding of prisons in Romania"[51]. The protocols were stressed in the public arena as practices of the former Securitate by the PSD-ALDE members who were charged with corruption. The revelations fuelled their populist narrative and policymaking to demand reforms for the rule of law institutions, but not for SRI, which remained untouched.

The cherry-picking of the judiciary institutions and not of the SRI, as the scapegoat for the reforms, was adequate for the PSD and ALDE leaders who faced corruption charges. Now

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[44] Deletant, "Ghosts from the Past", 219.

[45] *Romania Confronts Its Communist Past*, 35.

[46] Peter Janku, "Dungeon of Silence: Romania's Struggle with the Past | DW | 10.02.2016", DW.COM, 2016, https://www.dw.com/en/dungeon-of-silence-romanias-struggle-with-the-past/a-19041240. Article accessed May 2020.

[47] Dennis Deletant, "Romania's Commitment to the Rule of law?" in *Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five: Linking Past, Present, and Future. Edited by Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea.* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015)234.

[48] Andi Hoxhaj, *The EU Anti-Corruption Report: A Reflexive Governance Approach* (Routledge, 2019), 141.

[49] Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "Romania's Italian-Style Anticorruption Populism", *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): 124, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0048.

[50] Hoxhaj, *The EU Anti-Corruption Report*, 141.

[51] Hoxhaj, 140.

that the context was possible for their proposed changes, the political strategy needed to be polished and disseminated in the public arena. It began by reactivating the myth of Securitate as a cultural trauma and associated it with DNA's practices. Moreover, it changed the conventional settings with a new hegemonic narrative that suited the political purposes of political agents. Thus, this article layers the case of Romania during 2017-2019, when the memory of Securitate is introduced in the public arena as part of the strategic political communication of the PSD and ALDE coalition, which sought to alter and demonise the image of the judiciary.

4. Methodology

The emphasis of PSD and ALDE on the Securitate memory and the rule of law institutions between 2017-2019 had implications for the nature of the narratives propagated in the public arena. On the one hand, it sedimented and redeployed the memory of Securitate as a traumatic factor that changed the national identity of Romanians. On the other hand, it reconfirmed the image of Securitate being active in the democratic transition and transferred it on the structures of the judiciary and opposition parties to legitimise their reforming actions. This is a populist communicational strategy, as it instrumentalises the traumatic experiences through a new hegemonic narrative espoused in speeches and statements.

Thus, this study conducted a discourse analysis of the speeches of the PSD and ALDE from 2017 to 2019 inspired by the work of Kaya and Tecmen[52] on the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in Turkey. Using a novel approach that combined the virtual ethnography[53] of digital images and videos of political rallies, this study analysed how the narratives were structured in different stages and how the mnemonic elements were instrumentalised in populist rhetoric. The research provided the contextual framework for articulating the alliance's populist discourse, leading to the identification of memory and cultural trauma as critical elements of the discourse. Thereby, the Communist past, encompassing the Securitate memory and its propagation as a cultural trauma in the democratic transition, acts as a noteworthy component in the populist communication strategy. By doing so, it provided salience for amending and "othering" the judiciary.

5. PSD: "The party of power"

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[52] Ayhan Kaya and Ayşe Tecmen, "The Use of the Past in Populist Political Discourse: Justice and Development Party Rule in Turkey" (Routledge, 2020), 69–91, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429454813-4.
[53] Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (London ; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2000).

In 2014, a political commentator noted: "Romanian politics is not about ideology, about left or right. All our political battles are about corruption and the rule of law"[54]. Thirty years after Communism, the battles about corruption and the rule of law are affecting democracy[55]. Overall, Romania's transition to democracy has been an uneven road peppered with countless events that postponed the changeover to a robust democracy. Scholars warned that "Communism robbed societies of their trust in institutions beyond the family or other highly personalised networks"[56]. Others cautioned that "the post-Communist legacies would haunt the region even after the democratic systems and rule of law were instituted"[57]. These words accurately relay what would become the case in Romania. In black and white, they describe the hopes of Romanians to have a Western-style democracy. Such wishes were shattered by a nefarious stream of political episodes that postponed the expectations of the 1989 Revolution[58] and which set the trend for years to come[59]. Two factors hindered the democratic transition in Romania. First, the slow process of coming to terms with the Communist past. Second, the means by which the communist elite transitioned into Social-Democratic parties. The old-vanguard formed clientelist networks who exploited the legal confusion, profiteered from the post-1989 "jungle economy", and sabotaged the independence of the rule of law institutions in time[60].

Kubik and Bernhard[61] describe the PSD as a "party of power […] as their functionaries, almost all of them ex-communists can convert their positions of power in the party-state into institutions of influence in the post-communist economy and politics". PSD, "the direct descended of the Communist Party"[62] evolved in time as FSN (e.g., National Salvation Fond – 1992-1996) to PSDR (e.g., the Romanian Socialist Democrat Party 1996-2001) to its current form PSD (2001-ongoing). In the aftermath of the 1989 Revolution, the PSD became the biggest Romanian party helped by the "second-level echelon of communist apparatchiks and elements of Ceaușescu's Securitate"[63]. Dressing the successors' mantle, the socialists were "able to control the struggle over memory [until] issues of public memory became depoliticised

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[54] Andrew Higgins, "Spy Allegations in a Presidential Race Conjure Romania's Authoritarian Past", *The New York Times*, October 31, 2014, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/01/world/europe/presidential-candidates-spy-allegations-in-romania-conjure-a-dystopian-past.html. Article accessed June 2020.

[55] Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg, eds., "Autocratization Surges–Resistance Grows DEMOCRACY REPORT 2020 | Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)" (V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg, 2020), https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/f0/5d/f05d46d8-626f-4b20-8e4e-53d4b134bfcb/democracy_report_2020_low.pdf. Link accessed June 2020.

[56] Deletant, "Romania's Commitment to the Rule of law?", 224.

[57] Schöpflin, 1993, quoted in Emilia Palonen, "Performing the Nation: The Janus-faced Populist Foundations of Illiberalism in Hungary", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 26, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 310, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2018.1498776.

[58] Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[59] c.f. Alison Abbott, "Romania after the Ceauşescus", *Nature; London* 372, no. 6507 (December 15, 1994): 605, http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1038/372605a0; Stephen D Roper, *Romania: The Unfinished Revolution.*, 2004, http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=201168.

[60] Deletant, "Romania's Commitment to the Rule of law?" 221.

[61] Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years after Communism*, 26.

[62] Ciobanu, "Conclusion: Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five and Hopes for the Future", 260.

[63] Ciobanu, 262.

by a political and mnemonic actor [who perceived] an advantage in challenging the mnemonic consensus"[64]. Having won most of the post-1989 elections, PSD left unaddressed the crimes and abuses of the Communist regime, as it endangered the structure of its clientelist network. Instead, they focused along with moguls like Dan Voiculescu to discredit the reforms and mounted constant pressures that derailed the judiciary's development. Gallagher argues that, "the justice was seen hugely problematic for the PSD"[65]. Despite targeting politicians from both ideological aisles, the DNA's significant anti-corruption victories included the conviction of a former PSD PM, several ministers and regional politicians[66]. After failing to change the judiciary in 2012, the PSD resumed its actions in 2017 under a new mnemonic actor facing criminal charges. Unlike the nationalist playbook of 2012, the PSD tuned into a populist strategy that "othered" the judiciary.

Between 2015-2019, the PSD was run by an emergent politician, i.e., Liviu Dragnea, who brought victory in the 2016 parliamentary election, despite having a criminal record. PSD won the election on a campaign platform that included a Europeanist discourse, economic reforms and social justice for the lower echelons of society. Like the populist literature suggests, during the 2016 election, the PSD was primarily supported by the poor areas of the society[67] and by those who wanted to transition to new political attachments[68]. Despite securing a majority with ALDE in parliament, the focus shifted from the electoral platform to the judiciary, mainly because its leadership was entrenched in legal trials. Mungiu-Pippidi argues[69] that corruption was more prevalent among the PSD because "this party, having been in control for most of the transition, was indeed more corrupt". Successive prosecutions of PSD members hardened the party's position towards reforming the judiciary.

The parliamentarian majority obtained by the PSD-ALDE in 2016 permitted leeway to amend the judiciary. They did so through a mixture of populist and institutionalist discourses, supplemented by emergency ordinances (OUG)[70]. However, such processes were controversial, especially after the 2012 attempt, which drew the EU's attention and civil society. The latter perceived the PSD's actions as political undertakings that shielded its leaders from prosecution. Consequently, in 2016, civil society created a new party, the Save Romania Union (USR), which provided new opposition to mainstream parties. In 2018, the former technocrat PM Dacian Cioloș (2015-2017), whose tenure was used as a scapegoat during the 2016 elections by the PSD, formed the Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party (PLUS+). The PSD-ALDE narratives represented both parties as creations of the Securitate[71].

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[64] *Twenty Years after Communism*, 29.
[65] Gallagher, "Unsocial Democrats: The PSD's Negative Role in Romania's Democracy", 177.
[66] Mungiu-Pippidi, "Romania's Italian-Style Anticorruption Populism", 105.
[67] Kaya and Tecmen, "The Use of the Past in Populist Political Discourse", 72.
[68] Mabel Berezin, *Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times: Culture, Security and Populism in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), http://cadmus.eui.eu//handle/1814/10968.
[69] Mungiu-Pippidi, "Romania's Italian-Style Anticorruption Populism", 108.
[70] Ionut Chiruta, "Challenging the Rule of law in Romania: The Metamorphosis of Political Discourse towards Populism", *Forthcoming*, 2020.
[71] Loredana Voiculescu, "Liviu Dragnea vede securiști și în stânga, și în dreapta: "Securiștii și-au făcut două partide", Republica, 2019, https://republica.ro/liviu-dragnea-vede-securisti-si-in-stanga-si-in-dreapta-zsecuristii-si-au-facut-doua-partide. Article accessed June 2020.

The emergency ordinances (OUG) acted as a shortcut that bypassed parliament's approval, created instability[72] and drew criticism from the EU. Therefore, to muster public support, the PSD imported the conspiracy theory of a parallel state, while refreshing the public discourse with references to the Securitate. It aimed to change the perception of the public vis-à-vis the judiciary and imposed a new hegemonic narrative.

Separately, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, a centre-right party, was formed from the splinter cells of the Liberal Reformist Party (PLR) and Voiculescu's Conservative party (PC) in 2015 under the leadership of Călin Popescu Tăriceanu. During the 2016 elections, ALDE received 5.6% of the vote and signed an accord with the PSD to join the coalition as a junior partner[73]. Tăriceanu, a former rogue PM from the time of President Băsescu, with a history of intervening on behalf of the oligarchs[74], was saved during a vote in the Senate, which granted him immunity from prosecution, despite being indicted for taking bribes in 2018 by the DNA. Suddenly, the leaders of the ruling coalition were being prosecuted by the judiciary. Both leaders would change the nature of the institutions in the parliament. Both attempted to diminish society's trust in the rule of law institutions by using Securitate's memory and symbolism against the judiciary. The commitment of the alliance to change the narratives related to the judiciary, by stimulating society to re-engage the fears felt during the Communist regime, brought the parties into the populist narratives.

6. PSD's swing into populist narratives

In the thirty years since Romania has transitioned to democracy, PSD has governed for twenty-two years. During its time, it derailed the findings of the Tismăneanu report[75] and shouldered the efforts to disrupt the reforms of the judiciary. PSD preserved its Communist heritage, by shielding the elites who transitioned into politics. During the Dragnea era, the populist discourse reached its high points[76]. In its attempt to explain to its electorate the social movements like #Rezist who protested against anti-corruption[77] or political movements like the Save Romania Union (USR), PSD adopted conspiracy theories. Like FIDESZ from Hungary, the George Soros campaign theme was introduced by party-friendly media organisations, such as Antena 3. After massive protests, supported by civil society, led to the repeal of the first legislation that amended the Penal Code on 31 January 2017, the PSD-ALDE

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[72] Mungiu-Pippidi, "Romania's Italian-Style Anticorruption Populism", 113.
[73] "Romania's PSD and ALDE Sign Coalition Protocol", Romania Insider, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.romania-insider.com/romanias-psd-alde-sign-coalition-protocol.
[74] Adriana Saftoiu, *Cronica de Cotroceni* (Iasi: Polirom, 2015), 247.
[75] Tismaneanu and Stan, *Romania Confronts Its Communist Past*.
[76] Chiruta, "Challenging the Rule of law in Romania: The Metamorphosis of Political Discourse towards Populism".
[77] Ana Adi and Darren Lilleker, "#rezist – Romania's 2017 Anti-Corruption Protests: Causes, Development and Implications", Monograph (Berlin, Germany: Quadriga University, July 20, 2017), http://www.romanianprotests.info/. Link accessed June 2020.

alliance began to favour another populist incentive, i.e., polarisation. The coalition proposed a dichotomy, on the one hand, between the youths who protested, as agents paid by George Soros and, on the other hand, its electorate, which supposedly supported the judiciary reform.

Such intense polarisation did not make sense for a centre-left party. Despite PSD emerging from the 90s with a political platform captured by local capitalists that encapsulated a social-democrat ideology, the party nevertheless implemented a neo-liberal agenda[78]. PSD's ideology included social justice and social solidarity, pluralism and pro-European values. With such a platform, PSD rallied the disenfranchised and economically marginalised Communist-era workers, who felt the growing fears and inequalities in the new democratic era. However, the clientelist network of the party and regional barons that taunted entire counties taunted the structure of the PSD in 2015, when the party elected as its leader, Liviu Dragnea, a politician with a criminal record.

The election of Dragnea proved how much political clientelism had come to dominate the PSD's internal affairs. Many political sponsors and local barons supported the election of Dragnea because his legal troubles resembled theirs. Before Romania entered the EU, much of the funds distributed by the European Commission[79] for regional development were siphoned by local politicians like Dragnea, for which he was indicted in 2017[80]. Accession to the EU, the failure of Victor Ponta in 2012 to undermine the progress of the judiciary[81] and the loss during the 2014 presidential elections to the incumbent Klaus Iohannis led to the party's transition into the hands of a strongman that might safeguard the barons' fortunes. After his elections, Dragnea brought victory for the PSD in the 2016 elections, based on a manifesto that connected both left and right, partly because the party wanted to appeal to young people and because it wanted its association with the Communist memory to disappear. However, two consecutive trials of Dragnea in 2016 entrenched the socialist leader and prompted him to seek opportunities in populist narratives to benefit his position.

In 2017, pressure from civil society and the judiciary revitalised an institutional polarisation between the party and the rule of law institutions. Securitate's revitalisation seemed opportunistic for the PSD, as the party dived further into populist narratives by appealing to conspiracy theories. The revival of the Securitate myth was part of a broader strategy that aimed to convince Romanians of an alternative reality, whereby the judiciary was the new Securitate. The strategy began on 17 November 2017, with the resolution "the Parallel State and Illegitimate", a conceptual thesis of politicians with legal issues. Through this new narrative, PSD appealed to Romanians to take to the streets and fight the so-called parallel state – a leitmotif expressed during future political rallies. In its resolution, PSD underlines the motifs of why such a parallel state existed:

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[78] Liviu Dragnea, "Mitingul PSD Din Piața Victoriei, București - 09.06.2018", June 9, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etGzQ_ykbb8.

[79] Gallagher, *Modern Romania*.

[80] Sophie Balay, "Romanian Politician Indicted for EU Funds Fraud", November 14, 2017, https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/7256-romanian-politician-indicted-for-eu-funds-fraud. Link accessed June 2020.

[81] Vladimir Tismaneanu, "DEMOCRACY ON THE BRINK: A Coup Attempt Fails in Romania", *World Affairs* 175, no. 5 (2013): 83–87.

[…] PSD analysed the tense situation present in the public space due to the numerous information about the serious abuses of some persons who activate, have led or still lead public institutions of force and which indicate the existence of a so-called "Parallel and Illegitimate State", which seeks to take control of political power legitimately constituted by free and fair elections, posing a danger of concern to public opinion. PSD notes several vulnerabilities of the rule of law, which are speculated by the exponents of the "Parallel and Illegitimate State" to control the political power or the judiciary discretionarily. […] The Parallel and Illegitimate State uses public financial resources and tools specific to the state authority to intimidate, blackmail or remove political decision-makers who support or promote legislative changes aimed at restoring state powers to their constitutional core in line with democratic principles and fundamental human rights and freedoms. […] Moreover, the recent actions of the "Parallel and Illegitimate State", disguised under the so-called "fight against corruption", have as their blatant goal harassment and, ultimately, the beheading of the legitimately elected political power, because it not to be able to fulfil the Government Programme committed before the electorate. […] Therefore, out of the desire to have control over political power, the "Parallel and Illegitimate State" adopts anti-national and anti-citizen conduct and is prepared to block all public policies that increase people's incomes, create jobs, support domestic capital and the reform of the judiciary[82].

The text of the resolution, although puzzling, presented the broader context for the revitalisation of the Securitate myth during the 2018 rally and 2019European election. The decision introduced another populist characteristic, i.e., the parallel state. Journalists critical of Dragnea believe that the term was borrowed from Erdogan's repertoires[83]. In turn, this has been integrated from the US[84]. In Romania, the conspiracy's strategic purpose was to eliminate the independence of the judiciary discursively and establish the context for a second decisional actor. Asked during the press statement if the resolution was about institutions, Dragnea stated "yes" and added:

There has been talk in the public space about something like this for a long time, and everyone understands; it can be seen with the naked eye, honestly. […] The Parallel

[82] read the full text here Iulia Rosca, "DOCUMENT PSD a adoptat o rezolutie impotriva' statului paralel si ilegitim' care consuma resursele financiare ale Romaniei: 'Presedintele Klaus Iohannis isi incalca atributiile' - Politic - HotNews.ro", November 17, 2017, https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-22118258-document-psd-adoptat-rezolutie-impotriva-statului-paralel-ilegitim-care-consuma-resursele-financiare-ale-romaniei-presedintele-klaus-iohannis-isi-incalca-atributiile.htm. Link accessed June 2020.
[83] Marian Voicu, *Matrioska Mincinosilor: Fake News, Manipulare, Populism* (Humanitas SA, 2018).
[84] Mehtap Söyler, *The Turkish Deep State: State Consolidation, Civil-Military Relations, and Democracy*, vol. 73, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics (London: Routledge, 2015).

and Illegitimate State will disappear when it no longer has the tools that can interpret the laws that allow some to commit abuses[85].

The first sign of populism argues Müller[86] is how the political actor diminishes the significance of the separation of powers. PSD, while claiming to be the only legitimate actor, underlined the anti-corruption fight as unjust/illegitimate. The decision to slide into populism after its institutional arrangements were kept in place by numerous checks and balances is a strategic decision because "populism forms a coherent political strategy that has often served for winning and maintaining power"[87].

This resolution resulted from two stimuli that forced the PSD leadership to change its political strategy, from institutional decision-makers to populist strands. First, the pressure from civil society forced PSD to repeal its amendment adopted in January 2017, which otherwise decriminalised abuse – a crime for which Dragnea was accused. Second, in 2017, Dragnea was charged by the DNA of fraud with European funds, based on information compiled by the European Anti-Fraud Office. These stimuli forced PSD to respond with a broader strategy. First, it constructed a context whereby an outside entity, not checked by public oversight, controlled the state's institutions. Second, it created the incentive for a new story that revitalised the Securitate, by using both memory and mythology to manipulate public perception, vis-à-vis the values of the judiciary.

The publication of the resolution three days after the DNA accused Dragnea of fraud with EU funds revealed the U-turn adopted by the party from institutional decision-making to populist strategies. Also, it encompassed conspirational thinking meant to convince the people of the necessity to amend the rule of law institutions. The resolution revealed that cyclical confrontations between the judiciary and embattled politicians have forced the latter to adopt new strategies to muster public support. Dragnea's reference to time centres on the general understanding of the methods and mythology of the parallel state perpetuated in society. The tangible reference attested to the parallel state's existence in institutions and their processes that affected Dragnea. The parallel state created the context under which the myth of Securitate survived in time, beyond public scrutiny.

7. Old Vanguard, New Vanguard – Overlapping new hegemonic narratives during the ritualistic processes of political rallies

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[85] Liviu Dragnea, "Liviu Dragnea, Mihai Tudose Şi Marian Neacşu După CExN al PSD - 17.11.2017", November 17, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nFQ-M0fvyA. Link accessed June 2020.
[86] Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 84–86.
[87] Weyland, *Populism*, 1:59.

The cultivation of the Securitate myth acted as a strategic deterrent for the PSD-ALDE coalition during their assault on the rule of law institutions. Much of the revitalisation of Securitate was achieved during June 2018. Twelve days before Dragnea was convicted for incitement to abuse, the PSD organised the rally "We want Prosperity, not Security(ate) / Noi vrem Prosperitate, nu Securitate", on 9 June. Its purpose was to protest against the abuses committed by the judiciary and portray Dragnea as a victim of the new Securitate. The name of the rally strengthened the idea that Dragnea cultivated throughout the 2016 elections and during the 2017 resolution: namely, that prosperity and development are prevented by anti-corruption efforts. The conceptual ambivalence between prosperity and security cultivated the populist idea of trading democratic principles for material wellbeing.

Endorsed by an online campaign that encouraged street protests, PSD flexed its organisational skills and brought about 150,000 people, mostly old, by bus and train from its poor and regional strongholds to Bucharest. The rally's political drive was to pressure the judiciary and impress the opposition vis-à-vis the party's political cohesion, despite its leader being indicted. Most importantly, the rally's purpose was to show the support it receives from the people – in the words of Dragnea, "the voice of the People must be heard outside of the Securitate propaganda, which wants to make us believe that we are few".[88]

The rally was organised in Victory Square (Piața Victorie) – the same site that saw the revolutionaries take down the Ceaușescu regime in 1989. The square signified the place where civil society protested against the laws that sought to revise justice in February 2017 and during the Diaspora #Rezist protests, which were violently crushed on 10 August. For PSD, reclaiming the square where protesters prevented the amendments was necessary for its political prowess. However, when picking the Square, the PSD considered the mnemonic significance the place has for society. Through a ritualistic takeover, the PSD tried to recreate and transfer to 2018 the same mnemonic conditionality people felt during the 1989 Revolution. Nevertheless, this time, the revolutionaries were to wrestle against the New Securitate.

Centred on a militaristic organisation, which is typical for a party with tight discipline and organisation, as the populism literature suggests, PSD imposed white shirts, white national costumes and national flags to convene a new revolutionary movement – one against the judiciary. The colour white was intended to signify purity and cleanliness. According to Dragnea:

> We chose white for today, for our rally, because white symbolises cleanliness and good people, and that is what we do. We are cleaning the country of the misery spread by these rats (judiciary). Someone told me we look like the white brigades. Even so, we are the white brigades, if necessary, because this is an open struggle.

The open struggle held by the coalition during the rally was against the judiciary, which troubled both the leaders of the parties and other MPs. The recital during the rally was focused

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[88] Liviu Dragnea, "Mitingul PSD Din Piața Victoriei, București - 09.06.2018", June 9, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etGzQ_ykbb8. Link accessed June 2020.

on uncovering the origins of the parallel state, which, retrospectively, created confusion via its conceptual underpinnings. The rally interrelated conspirational beliefs with mnemonic recollections to obtain salience. It attributed to the parallel state an identity and narrative that the people would recognise, i.e., Securitate. First, the chairman of ALDE, Tăriceanu, outlined the new hegemonic narrative vis-à-vis the Securitate.

> If someone asks you why you are here, tell them that you are coming because we all made a mistake in believing that after 1989 we won our right to democracy and freedom [...] Our democracy is threatened. Our freedom and independence are threatened. This is the ubiquitous parallel state from the political environment, from the media, from the judiciary. Today, I find that after 1989, our hopes for democracy to take root in Romania finally are not fulfilled. We must continue to fight until the healthy forces of legitimate democratic institutions defeat the sick forces, the obscure forces, the forces of darkness, the occult forces that have seized this country [...] I am convinced that after 25 years you will not accept that the Securitate, so feared during the Communist time, has not died out and has merely changed. It wants to be more treacherous and dangerous in power than it has been before. The Securitate no longer has Soviet tanks behind it, but [...] it listens to our phones, it watches us, and when we resist, it does everything possible to put us in prison. From 2008 until today, thousands of Romanians have fallen victims to the new Securitate. I'll tell you something else. Democracy is said to be orphaned. Well, we have two parents of Securitate. You know both parents. One is called Traian Băsescu and the other Klaus Iohannis. Traian Băsescu created the new security, and Klaus Iohannis uses it against political opponents.

Tăriceanu began by admitting that the 1989 narratives were deceitful, mentioning that it is a "mistake" to believe that what Romanians had hoped for after the regime tumbled had come to fruition. As in the populist literature, the liberal-democrat leader considered that democracy was defenceless and under siege by "occult forces"; therefore, these threats needed to be addressed by political agents, as the last form of defence. Tăriceanu sees how the enigmatic parallel state survived by infiltrating the pillars that separate powers from a democracy. The replacement of the public consensus vis-à-vis the Securitate is achieved when Tăriceanu claimed that the Securitate did not disappear but transitioned into the democratic regime. It intentionally recounted the memory contexts of Communism, by linking it with the Soviet past, whereby tanks acted as the democratic deterrents.

Image 1. Images projected behind Tăriceanu that translate "down with the parallel state"; and on the right a picture with the revolutionary flag used in 1989. It says, "the people are the sovereign, and the revolution goes on".

Source: https://www.vice.com/ro/article/vbqxb4/cum-a-fost-miting-psd-bucuresti

However, Tăriceanu reconnected the mnemonic tenets for which Securitate was feared during Communism, particularly, its surveillance techniques, and transferred it to the present day. Tăriceanu connected the mnemonic traumatic contexts of Securitate with the current situations by linking them with Băsescu and Iohannis, the former and current president of Romania, who ran on anti-corruption platforms. Tăriceanu's purpose was to frame Securitate's revival with the first year when Romania entered the EU. The transfer of memory was situated when Romania began its anti-corruption fight. Tăriceanu then employed a victimhood theme by recounting how the new Securitate, i.e., the judiciary, acted against political opponents who thought the anti-corruption battle was committing abuses.

Later during the rally, the narrative thread is handed to Liviu Dragnea. His speech, behind iconography that symbolised the parallel state/new Securitate which from the onset sets out to define and link the parallel state and Securitate conceptually:

I was asked, as were other colleagues of mine, what the parallel state is that we are protesting against today? The answer is simple. It's exactly as the name suggests. It is a system that uses state institutions illegally, outside and in parallel with democracy, out and in parallel with fundamental rights and freedoms; it also appears in parallel with the will expressed at the polling booths, in parallel with the rights and freedoms of each of us, in parallel with the Constitution. All these things can be summed up in one word, that is, Securitate. It has been three and a half years since the Băsescu regime, the one that built this system, left, but its tools have remained. [...] corrupt prosecutors remained, [...] the head of DNA remained, [...] the generals are left [...[

undercover journalists remained, […] the undercover magistrates remained […] They speak today through the mouths of many opposition politicians, and they react today through their network of Securitate propaganda. Democracy is being attacked by them and by illegally-funded NGOs. […] It's a vile brotherhood, a dangerous conspiracy, a contract that wants to take democracy out of the game. This is the portrait of the parallel state. We can call it whatever you want, the invisible state, the underground state, or you can call it very simply, the Securitate. […] This disease that is worse than in the old days of the Securitate, good people; and these are not propaganda words […] Let's not envy them; and many like them who believe that if they are always using the term "anti-corruption" they will escape. They will not escape from captivity, and they cannot escape responsibility. They use the parallel state. They enjoy the so-called power that the parallel state gives them, but they are pathetic tools of these Securitate guards.

The conceptual underpinning emphasised by Dragnea framed the illegality and unlawfulness of the entity, as opposed to democracy. As suggested by populist literature, the political actor struggles to mount the antithesis between we/us and the outsiders/elites. Dragnea strengthened his argument by connecting the populist context of crisis with democracy and personalising the abstract structure of institutions into the antagonists, destabilising the democratic process and causing human rights violations. By reducing the meaning-making of the parallel state that curtailed democratic principles and institutions, Dragnea focused its narrative strategy on connecting the collective memory of the people with the entity that is asymmetric to democracy, i.e., Securitate. The focus is on the actors who supported the anti-corruption fight: its founder, president Traian Băsescu, and the instruments of power that remained after his tenure.

Unlike Tăriceanu, who identified the institutions that account for the separation of powers, as Securitate operatives, Dragnea added the common populist element of NGOs, as entities that destabilise democracies. Dragnea perceived this association with persuasive words such as "vile brotherhood, dangerous conspiracy" to correlate with their criminal procedures that seek to subvert democracy. Once again, Dragnea reduced the meaning-making of the context to identify the Securitate as the entity responsible for threatening democracy. Not only overlapping a new hegemonic narrative was enough to connect the mnemonic framework of the Securitate with the judiciary; he also recreated a mnemonic transfer of the symbols that embedded the Securitate collective memory like a trauma.

8. Recreating the symbolism and language of Securitate in contemporary politics

Populist actors give particular attention to the values and symbols that constitute one's narrative framework, mainly one's nemesis. For instance, once the image of its enemy is constructed, the populist actor embarks on defining its values and symbols. During the rally, the speakers, supported by iconographic elements projected on the screen overlooking the audience, focused

on correlating the mnemonic contexts for which Securitate was famous, i.e., surveillance and informants. Both leaders wanted this mnemonic recollection to be transferred and intersected with the practices of the judiciary. Both leaders compared and stressed the scale to which surveillance was conducted. According to Dragnea:

> There are still six million Romanians bewing monitored. There are secret protocols between the services and the prosecutor's office, between the Securitate and the courts. Blackmail and threats remained […] We have all been, or are, or could be, or I could at some point be touched by the extended hand of this parallel state of these Securitate guards. Six million people were intercepted, tracked, monitored, recorded and supervised by the parallel state. It's worse than we could have ever imagined. Look at the one on your left; look at the one on your right. At least one of them was listed to or intercepted. It is likely that you are among the six million Romanians whose rights and freedoms have been violated. 6 million, over two-thirds of the active population of this country. It is too much; it is unacceptable; it is intolerable.

By stressing the scale of the surveillance, Dragnea recreated the collective recollections of Romanians concerning the Securitate during the Ceausescu regime. Approximately 400,000 informants surveyed eight million people at the behest of the secret police[89].

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[89] Dennis Deletant, "The Securitate Legacy in Romania", in *Security Intelligence Services in New Democracies: The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania*, ed. Kieran Williams and Dennis Deletant, Studies in Russia and East Europe (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2001), 198, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403905369_6.

Dragnea's contextual focus is to envision the current judiciary not only as the inheritors of the Securitate but also of those who apply their techniques illegally under democracy. Dragnea, not only stressed the collective recollections but also strengthened the meaning of collective, as victims in the present of the same trauma as the past. Herein, Dragnea interrelated the mnemonic remembrance of the Securitate with the Manichean tenet, we vs. them. Stressing the collective is a populist framework, whereby the agent seeks to portray itself as a like-minded victim resembling the people.

The second element that seeks to overlap the symbolism of the judiciary with the Securitate is the informants, who sedimented the notoriety of Securitate. When crystallising the informant context in his speech, Dragnea identified, according to populism literature, how the division is achieved in the present by the hands of elites:

> Stalinists and Securitate want to turn everyone into informants, to denounce, to accuse, to lay blame amongst ourselves for things that we didn't do. We are urged, threatened, blackmailed to file complaints against relatives, friends, colleagues or people we have never even seen. It is an odious plan of division and hostility in Romanian society. But it is a cunning plan to insinuate terror. Like anyone, it can be taken at any time. Fear, like anyone, can always be turned into a suspect or culprit. It has become much too much. Indictment has ended up taking the place of evidence in Romania, and accusation has become the preface of a conviction – in this scenario the whole of society becomes a prisoner of terror. […] Although you don't have to be a suspect or a defendant to be monitored or intercepted, none of this matters. It is only essential for the parallel state to know what you are talking about, what you are thinking, what you are feeling and what you want because the more it knows, the stronger and more repressive it becomes; and we all become more vulnerable and exposed to abuse of any kind. They know this well, and they know the next thing even better. Everything you say, absolutely everything you say, will one day be used against you or someone else.

In this paragraph, Dragnea recounted the mnemonic procedures of the former Securitate and transferred them to the judiciary, often stressing the collective "the whole of society". To give more meaning to his context, Dragnea recreated the feelings that described the Securitate, i.e., "fear, terror". Once again, the typical populist framework of polarisation is employed to differentiate between the people whose validation is sought after by the coalition to amend the judiciary. The regular recital of the words that describe the Securitate activities, "informants, denunciation, monitored, intercepted, repressive", strengthened the mnemonic recollection of the people, while validating the assumption that the judiciary is the new Securitate. While recreating the mnemonic recollection, Dragnea moved on to define the victimisation process, from the personal to the collective.

Don't delude yourself that you don't count. Everyone matters, because no one is off the radar of the parallel state. We are all targets, or we can become targets at some point. You must not delude yourself that only high dignitaries will be the victims of false accusations and evidence. Do not fool yourself that only those in public office are the targets of these Securitate guards; they are the targets of these executions; you can all become living targets of this odious system. So did those who once thought they were not targets. This is what we see in doctors who have been followed and humiliated and ridiculed. This is what we see in teachers who are being chased for a bouquet. This is what we see in government officials who fear that by signing a public deed for the good of their community, they can end their condemnation. This is what we see in business people who are afraid to talk to even a porter from a public institution, so as not to be accused of conducting politics, trafficking in influence, and last but not least; we see this in ordinary people who have been singled out to provide as an example for all Romanians of how strong they are to everyone else. Nobody is safe! Anyone, absolutely anyone in Romania, can be targeted by an indictment that would lead to an arrest or conviction. You quarrel with your neighbour; you have a complaint to the DNA. You have a dispute at work; you are left with a complaint to the DNA. If you talk to someone on the phone and it is intercepted, you immediately risk becoming a suspect in a criminal case, and if you are unlucky enough to meet someone, talk to someone, be friends with someone who is in the sights of the parallel state, then you will be called to become an informant to denounce your friend.

The purpose of this discourse is to engender a sense of victimhood among all the people. By counting the professions that are the most respected in Romania, Dragnea wants the people to consider the petty crimes they commit as abuses of power. After that, Dragnea connects the category of the people, his intentional rhetoric interest, with the context of victimhood. Hence, by connecting contextually "government officials and businesspeople with ordinary people", Dragnea seeks to interrelate the blame brought to his people's category of interest. Dragnea's strategy is to correlate the context of insecurity at the collective level by highlighting that daily activities are surveilled. Last, Dragnea's strategy seeks towards the end of the rally to underline the democratic values that are transgressed by the judiciary.

For them, truth does not matter; nor do your rights or your freedoms. For them, falsified proof matters; only an invented story, a simplified process, the deceived interception matter. However, I ask you, can we stop all this? Are we determined to end them once and for all? Are we determined to take back our democracy that was stolen from us? Are we ready to fight and stick with it to the end? [...] We can no longer accept these things. We have to stop; we have to say no to abuses, no to indictments and no to Securitate. No more Soviet-type investigations. No more political police. That's enough!

Populist literature suggests that there are two components to political power, a) the type of actor that exercises power, and b) the power capability that the political actor mobilises as a support basis[90]. The political actor embodied by Dragnea mobilised support using the brand of the PSD, the biggest party in Romania, for his political benefits. Herein, Dragnea seeks support from the people for his interest by interrelating populist strategies with mnemonic recollections. Dragnea's populist approach "constructs a vision of the past that generates the most effective legitimation for [his] efforts to hold power"[91].

9. Conclusions

The chaotic distribution of powers in Romania after 1989 has echoes in contemporary politics. The Communist heritage still has repercussions for mainstream parties and its leaders. The late coming to terms with the Communist past in Romania facilitated a fusion between mainstream politics and political clientelism. The admission of Romania to the EU, fashioned on the principles of the rule of law, precipitated cyclical confrontations between the judiciary and the political class. Entrenched legal warfare between political agents and the judiciary increased the political instability of the country. Failed attempts to amend the judiciary or grant amnesty to those who exploited public funds before Romania entered the EU facilitated the emergence of political strongmen like Liviu Dragnea, who had ongoing legal wranglings. Dragnea shifted a mainstream party like the PSD to populism to seek public support for his own benefit. While nationalism has always been in the political platform of the PSD, despite being a centre-left party, its slide to populism and conservatism hardened the party's new ideological positions. The successful results of the institutions of the rule of law, supported by positive reviews from the European Commission, were in antithesis with the interests of the PSD, which sought to obtain amnesty for its political sponsors and members. This coincided with a shift to populism and, later, Euroscepticism. Dragnea's increasingly erratic populist behaviour, partly generated by the judiciary's efforts to prosecute him in consecutive trials, changed the PSD's narratives. Strengthened by electoral victories along ALDE, the junior coalition partner, the alliance spearheaded by the PSD's status as the largest party in Romania, led a battle against the judiciary.

This article revealed that the political strategy strives to intermingle imported populist conspirational belief into the political culture. This article also showed that populist narratives could absorb mnemonic issues of the past to streamline a more coherent message to the people in the present. This article showed that people act as a catalyst in the rhetoric of populist actors, as they are sought by the former to validate their platform and maintain the agents' power. Moreover, this article has shown that the past represented in populist rhetoric as a trauma "is an efficient way of coming to terms with the socio-economic and psychological constraints of

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[90] Weyland, *Populism*, 1:54.
[91] Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years after Communism*, 9.

the present"[92]. Additionally, this article revealed that memory could be an essential tool in populist rhetoric. It can be discursively portrayed during rallies to separate the elite from the people. Remembering the past is no longer a static performance for political parties; instead, its role metamorphosed under democracy. For PSD, memory was instrumentalised to consolidate its power in the present and design the legal basis for Romania's future.

Acknowledgments

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[92] Kaya and Tecmen, "The Use of the Past in Populist Political Discourse", 88.

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