

University of Groningen

## Introduction. Remembering Transitions

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*Published in:*  
 Remembering Transitions

*DOI:*  
[10.1515/9783110707793-001](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110707793-001)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
 Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
 2023

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Robbe, K. (2023). Introduction. Remembering Transitions: Approaching Memories in/of Crisis. In K. Robbe (Ed.), *Remembering Transitions : Local Revisions and Global Crossings in Culture and Media* (pp. 1-29). (Media and Cultural Memory; Vol. 38). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110707793-001>

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Ksenia Robbe

# Introduction. Remembering Transitions: Approaching Memories in/of Crisis

## Querying transitions

This volume probes the ambiguous meanings of the 1970–1990s political ‘transitions’ across postsocialist, postapartheid, and postdictatorship contexts. I begin the introduction to this collection by discussing two poems – one by South African poet Tumelo Khoza and the other by Russian/Ukrainian poet Galina Rymbu. Although they may seem an unlikely pair, these poems represent the entangled desires to forget, to recover, and to question the solidified or ignored meanings of the historical turning point of transition and the evolution of these meanings over time.

There’s a teenage boy / who presently chills at  
the corner / where the future intersects with our  
history, his name is Democracy / he’s forever  
mumbling what sounds like poetry / forever  
high on a spliff of our dis(joint)ed society /  
forever sniffs on the stiff aroma of whiskey /  
counting how many governing bodies make the  
front page daily.

This stanza of Khoza’s (2017) poem “Democracy” opens a collection showcasing the work of young spoken-word South African poets.<sup>1</sup> Speaking about the experiences of the so-called ‘born free’ generation – those born during or soon after South Africa’s transition to democracy in the 1990s – the poems confront head-on the failure of the postapartheid state to improve the lives of the majority. Among the symptoms of the new generation’s dis-ease with the contemporary moral economy, the poem mentions the elites’ “revolutionary hypocrisy” and overall “obsess[ion] with the honey of money,” which is underpinned by the routine “forget[ting]” of “what happens in the rural vicinity” and, more broadly, to all those who have no access to economic and cultural resources. This poem, like many in the collection, expresses the discontent of the time. It resounds with the student

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Kylie Thomas for drawing my attention to this collection titled *Home is Where the Mic Is*.

**Acknowledgments:** I’m grateful to the colleagues who shared their thoughts and feedback on drafts of this chapter, especially Ioana Luca, Kylie Thomas, and Kevin Platt.

protests that took place across the country in 2015 and 2016, starting with action for decolonizing university campuses and curricula and then extending to resistance against the socioeconomic policies of universities, which included the lack of proper housing and the outsourcing of workers, and ultimately to protest against the state. The poem also signifies the despondency of a generation faced with the predicament of chronic unemployment and, more generally, at the resentment of the dispossessed, which may break out in violence.<sup>2</sup>

[. . .] such leaves  
 Democracy angry / it leaves him tearing his  
 book of rhymes in fury / because no one wants  
 to listen to him as he speaks whole-heartedly /  
 so Democracy lights a ciggie and chills by his  
 corner silently with his container of gasoline / he  
 folds his country flag neatly / slowly takes a drag /  
 pours the gas / lights another match and utters,  
 "Phuck this man!" (Khoza 2017)

The extreme indifference and cynicism with regard to any talk about law or democracy is also the context reflected on by Rymbu (2020),<sup>3</sup> for instance in "The Law is Not in Force Here":

The law is not in force here  
 and constitution will not save us from pain  
 or hatred. I have only two hours of free time  
 to write this – from 5 to 7 am.  
 The rest of the time doesn't belong me,  
 just like the law. Constitution has never 'belong to me'  
 Guaranteed safety  
 For me or my family,  
 We were hiding under a blanket every time something happened (85).<sup>4</sup>

These lines convey the enormous gap between appeals to constitutional rights and the reality of lives among the majority of people in Russia. They, and especially the underbelly sketched in this poem, do not encounter or perceive the Law, just like the Constitution does not recognize who these people are and how they live, since it does not acknowledge their daily pain and deprivation. The poem was part of a writing

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<sup>2</sup> The riots that broke out in July 2021 across South Africa, in response to the imprisonment of former president Jacob Zuma (for ignoring a corruption inquiry) and fueled by the economic crisis as a consequence of COVID-19, were a recent case. Having claimed over 300 lives, these riots were the most large-scale case of civil unrest in South Africa since the end of apartheid.

<sup>3</sup> Born in 1990, Rymbu is of the same generation as Khoza.

<sup>4</sup> My translation (KR).

project – a collective reflection on the event of introducing amendments to the Constitution in 2020 – which resulted in a series of texts titled *Constitution Passion*.<sup>5</sup> The amendments proposed by the Russian president and legitimized through a national referendum conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic included several conservative and populist positions – most importantly, the ‘nullification’ of the presidential terms served by Vladimir Putin, which, therefore, allows him to be elected again. This event, along with the intensified neo-traditionalism and violence of biopolitical power in Russia and the expulsion of oppositional voices, has generated a state of hopelessness; but it has also, as we see from the writing project that resulted in *Constitution Passion*, generated a wish to explore the meanings of the Constitution and, more particularly, its relationship to daily life. Passed into law in 1993, during the ‘transition period,’ the Constitution points to a time of hope for new, democratic beginnings<sup>6</sup> and, simultaneously, to the time when precisely this future appeared to be foreclosed as the then President Boris Yeltsin used military force to suppress opposition to his fast-paced economic reforms. The Constitution that was subsequently adopted, thus, already incorporated the fundamental contradiction between the rhetoric of democracy and the concentration of power in the hands of the president enshrined in this document.

Both poems are *writings in crisis*. From this viewpoint in the present, they re-envision the past of transition as a time of crisis too; this nurtures a dialectic of ends and beginnings, of hoped-for possibilities and their foreclosures, and of the institution and the subversion of democratic principles. The poems are also inter-related through their imagery and structures of affect. At the core of both is the complete disconnection between the states (and the elites) and the masses (‘the people’ who should be the subjects of democracy and constitutional protection). Instead of the more familiar voices of politicians or intellectuals speaking for or against transitions from public platforms, the poems speak with those who are unseen and unheard by the latter; their voices and gestures, rendered in this poetry of the everyday, are disconcerting and uncanny. These subjects hold the power to negate and destroy everything as they have nothing to lose; yet, they remain downtrodden and “beaten up again” (Rymbu 2020, 89). Other aspects that interconnect these poems are their tone of urgency and the perceived necessity of reckoning with the past of transitions, as well as the sharpness of their critique and the power of affect. But they also reach beyond “the politics of impatience”

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<sup>5</sup> The collection is based on the online platform *Bookmate*: <https://ru.bookmate.com/series/ttKqwjrP>.

<sup>6</sup> As studies of public opinion in Russia indicate, before the 1993 crisis, ideas of liberal democracy and leaders associated with them (Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin) enjoyed popular support (Levinson 2007, Simonyan 2011).

(Mbembe 2015) as their insistent questioning does not merely mediate feelings of betrayal; it inquires into the subjectivity of those who feel betrayed, particularly among the dispossessed, and into the social conditioning of this being and feeling.

Such sensibilities, generationally specific or not, whether characterized by “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011) or longing for a revolution, are global in their scope and resonance; they are the signs of our crisis-ridden, discontented, and seemingly future-less times. But they have a particular urgency, as this volume proposes and outlines through a variety of cases, in societies that underwent transitions from authoritarian regimes of different kinds during the late 1970s to the early 1990s (for example, state socialist governments, military dictatorships, colonial and apartheid regimes with variations, of course, within these categories). In these societies, the appeal to the moral narratives of overcoming the politics and legacies of repressive authoritarianism is especially strong as it is grounded in experiences and memories of the recent past, either directly or mediated through positive narratives of transformation in education, media, and cultural production. In other words, the ideals of democratic transformation in these societies (also in those cases where they have been seriously compromised from the very start of the transitions) are alive and serve as a meaningful reference point and cultural resource. Furthermore, through the narratives and practices of transitional justice, references to the transitions (particularly those framed as the success stories of Germany, Poland, or South Africa) have been circulating globally in recent decades as transitions have been carried out, or attempted, in places such as Rwanda, Bosnia, Cuba, Iraq, Tunisia, and Colombia. At the same time, scholars have increasingly questioned the idea of turning transition practices into templates and have contested the rather mechanistic use of these templates in other sociopolitical contexts (David 2020, Gabowitsch 2017).

These and similar tensions between the local and global aspects of transitions, the historical entanglement of various transitions, and the possibilities as well as limits of translatability, form the focus of this volume. After all, recent historical studies have demonstrated how globally mediatized transitions, which have often been proclaimed ‘miraculous,’ were undergirded by complex and long-term transactions between politicians, democracy experts, and economists from the Global South and North (Mark et al. 2019). While regime transformations that led to the end of the Cold War were interdependent,<sup>7</sup> it would be mistaken to assume that each of these processes took the same or even a similar direction. As

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7 To cite an example elaborated by Chari and Verdery (2009), South Africa’s transition through negotiation between the apartheid government and the ANC would not have been possible, at least in the form it took, had the Soviet bloc not collapsed in 1989–1991.

Monica Popescu (2003) has argued, drawing on South African writer Ivan Vladislavic's astute enquiry into the false analogies between transitions in South Africa and the USSR, these simultaneous processes are characterized by a wealth of both "mirrorings and reverse-mirrorings" (421). On the one hand, societies of Southern and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and East and Southeast Asia were all 'transitioning' from regimes characterized by authoritarian control, massive state-organized repressions, and intolerance to non-conformity; on the other hand, the economic structures and ideologies differed significantly and, in fact, even stood in opposition to each other: varieties of state socialism, on the one hand, and dictatorships underpinned by (neo-)liberal economies and racial capitalism, on the other. Hence the divergence between various critiques of transitions and conflicts in contemporary politics of remembering these pasts. This volume is an attempt to make sense of these diverging and converging imaginaries of transitions and their dynamics over the last few decades. It certainly is not able – and does not aim – to represent the entire variety of national contexts or practices that challenge and revise dominant narratives of transition. However, by placing selected cases from different regions in conversation, it highlights parallels and variations that are rarely reflected upon.

As will become clear from the set-up of this collection and each individual chapter, our use of the term 'transition' is informed by extant critiques of the teleological and Eurocentric imaginaries invested in this concept (Buden 2010, Chakrabarty 2000, Grunebaum 2011, Petrov 2014, Velikonja 2009). At the same time, political uses as well as critiques of this term serve to interconnect very different societies and regions; addressing the experiences of 'transition' as a way of understanding social processes is what makes the past of the 1970 to 1990s in several regions 'recognizable' to contemporary publics and what triggers memories, their transnational circulation, and transregional analysis. Due to the multivalency of remembering these periods and the specificity of local political and mnemonic processes that the chapters approach, the volume keeps open the temporal coordinates of when the remembering begins. In some societies, particularly those that experienced political transformation during the 1970s and 1980s, but also in Russia where states of indeterminacy during the 1990s were closed off by the beginning of Putin's presidency, 'transitions' are commonly associated with a finalized past. In other societies such as Romania, as the chapters that engage with this context suggest, 'transition' became a subject of intense public engagement only during the 2000s, and it is currently perceived as an ongoing process. Whatever the temporal perceptions of transitions are (which may also differ within societies), the common condition addressed by this volume is the unsettling presence of the social questions opened by or tackled during the transitions and their demand for reconsideration.

## Memories of transitions and the role of the media

Particularly during the last decade, transitions have turned from a subject of ‘cold’ to a matter of ‘hot memory,’ to use the terms with which Charles Maier (2002) described the dynamics of memories of communism and fascism in Europe two decades ago. The mnemonic instrumentalization of transitions in political discourse takes diverging forms and directions, and it is propelled by different political actors, even within a single region of East-Central Europe (Bernhard and Kubik 2014). If we broaden the scope beyond the region, the directions become certainly more diverse or even opposing, although not incomparable. This is also the case when the same idiom is used in different contexts: think of the calls for completing or radicalizing ‘unfinished’ transitions. In East-Central European countries such as Hungary and Poland, this slogan, adopted by right-wing populist parties, refers to the insufficient decommunization during the 1990s and the need to reinvigorate traditionalist social norms as the ‘forgotten’ foundations of ‘real Europeaness’ (Dujisin 2021, Mark 2010); in countries of the Global South such as Chile or South Africa, critiques of unfinished transition often point to the ideals of social justice being compromised by neoliberal transformations (cf. Beresford 2014, Borzutzky and Perry 2021). In yet other contexts where no transitional justice processes have taken place, where no official apology for state-directed atrocities has been expressed, and where democratic principles have been delegitimized (Russia is an example of this tendency in the long term, but we can also think, for instance, of Brazil in the time of Bolsonaro (Schneider 2020)), oppositional movements perceive transitions as ‘undone’ or never properly initiated. At the same time, recent protests and revolutions that resulted in a change of government, as in post-Euromaidan Ukraine or post-Mugabe Zimbabwe, tend to refer to the ongoing or desired transitions as returning to the moments of independence and restarting processes of democratization.

Even this quick glance at some tendencies of recalling transitions in contemporary politics demonstrates the radically unsettling and highly contentious uses of memory. The latter are directly linked to contemporary social imaginaries of democracy and the declining role of future-orientations within them (Assmann 2013, Hartog 2015, Huyssen 2003). If the role of transitions as points of moral and political orientation has been discredited, what is there to rely on to counter cynical abuse of power? If promises of democratization and cosmopolitanism have been paired with neoliberal transformations from the start, can we even think about transitions outside of the contexts of predatory capitalism and globalization? The broad disillusionment in the promises of redistribution of access, socioeconomic opportunities, and social justice releases the energies that are easily appropriated by nationalist and populist leaders. This disillusionment also finds expression in ‘left-wing melan-

cholia,' Walter Benjamin's concept that has been used by cultural theorists more recently in critiques of contemporary closures of political horizons (Brown 1999, Traverso 2017). Between and beyond these trajectories lies a landscape of multiple variations on discontent, disappointment, and ambiguity (expressed in statements such as 'a transition was necessary, but this is not what we expected it to be'). The currency of these affects and their channeling into political projects have motivated recent intellectual reckoning with earlier ideals and frameworks of imagining transformation (Krstev and Holmes 2019).

To comprehend the variety and ambiguity of post-transitional feelings and memories, to make sense of their complexity beyond political (ab)uses, and to imagine productive ways of dealing with them, practices of cultural memory and mediation can be a particularly apt terrain: this is where reflection on personal and collective experiences and recollections of transitions is actively underway, incorporating new voices and subjectivities and shaping new social imaginaries. Certainly, mediations of memory also often involve practices of homogenizing, silencing, or obscuring memories that do not fit into frameworks of a 'usable past'. It is these tensions between the openings and closures of memory that contributions to this book closely examine. The volume approaches 'cultural' and 'media' processes in a broad sense, offering reflections on practices of literature, film, theater, photography, and social media along with critiques of post-transitional time and memory. With this focus, the collection begins to outline and theorize cultural memory perspectives on transitions and to engage with these perspectives' local and global dynamics. Since transitions often serve as points of narrative and visual orientation – of plot, identity, or temporal-spatial coordinates constructed through endings, beginnings, turning points, symbolic or historical visual references – close examination of these forms can yield a more nuanced understanding of how these pasts make up part of our cultural vocabularies. Scrutinizing cultural mediations of transitions can also help us to make sense of how our perceptions of historical time and the present are continuously 'haunted' by transitions: we keep demarcating our present as 'postcolonial,' 'postapartheid,' 'postsocialist,' or 'postdictatorship,' despite repeated attempts at introducing new terms or rethinking these periodizations. Indeed, as long as we use these terms to mark the beginning of the present, transitions hold sway of our sociohistorical imaginaries. Reading the texturing of these imaginaries in arts and media can facilitate our understanding of how they come into being.

The approach taken by this volume is two-fold. Chapters included in the first part examine the forms of memory and time that became hegemonic post-transition, with the focus on how they influence present-day memory cultures, as well as those forms that harbor alternative visions and counter-hegemonic potentialities. These chapters dialogue with recent studies into the new trajectories of post-transitional



memory as developed by postdictatorship, postapartheid, and postsocialist generations (Blejmar 2016, Gook 2015, Legott 2015, Ros 2012, Schwartz et al. 2020; Wale et al. 2020) as well as the research on the politics of time and time regimes initiated by transitions (Barnard and Van der Vlies 2019, Bevernage and Lorenz 2013, Grunebaum 2011, Platt 2020, Van der Vlies 2017). The second part of the volume traces the ways in which transitions come to be regarded as *pasts in their own right* (though undoubtedly, closely entwined with the ‘before’ and ‘after’). The main focus of these chapters is on the mnemonic forms of re-writing earlier temporalities and imaginaries of transformations. By focusing on contemporary revisions of transitions, these readings bring into close scrutiny the chronotopes, as Kostis Kornetis points out in his chapter, that current performances of memory form in relation – and often with explicit reference – to earlier practices of envisioning change.

In foregrounding transitions as objects of inquiry, the work of this collection aligns with recent historical research into the intellectual trajectories (Kopeček and Wciślik 2015) and global entanglements of the 1980–1990s transitions (Mark et al. 2019) as well as the ways in which the processes and meanings of the transitions are being interrogated by activists and movements in the context of recent crises (Cavallaro and Kornetis 2019), the latter coming close to the focus of our inquiry on the present. The volume complements the focus of this research with its inquiry into the (re)mediations of transitions and the forms that allow certain aspects of these historical pasts to become memorable. Overall, with its focus on the ‘texturing’ of transitions – of recollecting these pasts as turning points in stories of individuals and communities as well as spaces of experience and projection that resonate in the present – this volume makes a novel contribution to the vast field of research on the (trans-)formations of memory in post-transitional cultures.

With the transformation of political practices and outlooks (the demand for direct democracy), with the financialization of markets and the growth of socio-economic precarity, and with increasing nationalization and border closures (resulting in so-called ‘migration crises’), the “horizons of expectation” established by the 1970–1990s transitions do not meet contemporary “spaces of experience,” to use Reinhart Koselleck’s (2004) terms. Hence, this volume addresses the need to re-examine the ideas and experiences of transitions through mnemonic constellations between the present and past as well as the many different pasts and futures emerging and circulating in the present. re-framings of the transitional past through experiential lenses have recently become the focus of studies into the vernacular memories of transitions in East-Central Europe (Hilmar 2021, Laczó and Wawrzyniak 2017, Massino 2019, Wawrzyniak and Leyk 2020). The current volume, in turn, presents the first book-length examination of mediated

memories of transitions, charting a broad transnational field of locally specific and globally entangled practices.

To summarize, this volume, on the one hand, explores the practices and modes of recollecting transitional pasts which feature new voices, perspectives, and experiences; on the other hand, it examines the silences produced by established frameworks of memory and time and possibilities for intervening into these frameworks. Since cultural memory of these transitions (as a stabilized, institutionalized set of narratives) has not yet formed, in most contexts, the examined memories are ways of challenging dominant narratives and positing alternatives. They can, thus, be considered ‘deterritorializing’ practices that propose radical ambiguity (by considering multiple experiences, sites, resonances, or durations of crises) while also charting, by using related tropes and evoking similar affects, grounds for articulating new narratives and subjectivities.

## Crisis in memory

Looking back at the rapid development and institutionalization of memory studies as an academic field alongside public memory work and memory activism, several scholars have observed a close interconnection between the ‘memory boom’ since the 1980s and the end of the Cold War. Andreas Huyssen points out the “emergence of memory as a key concern in Western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity” (2011, 21). Aleida Assmann (2013) further theorizes this development as the unfolding of a new ‘time regime’ which perceives the past as something that can be ‘reversed’ and re-made, rather than discarded, according to the ethical concerns of the present. This time regime is characterized by an emphasis on victimhood, recognition of trauma, ‘politics of regret’ (Olick 2007), and the ethics of human rights (Assmann 2013, 51–56). The discarded future-oriented paradigm involved, along with the grand narratives of progress, memories that combined a strong anti-fascist stance with anticolonial orientation (Forsdick et al. 2020, 2–3; Traverso 2017). In addition, more recent historical-theoretical reflections have emphasized the economic aspect of these transformations: in other words, the entwinement of the contemporary memory and time regime with the emergence of neoliberalism as a leading paradigm in the West during the 1970s and the globally extended model since the 1980s and especially post–1989 (Ghodsee and Orenstein 2021, Pehe and Wawrzyński 2023). As Kristen Ghodsee (2017) has noted, “[if] the communist ideal had become tainted by its association with twentieth-century Eastern European regimes,

today the democratic ideal was increasingly sullied by its links to neoliberal capitalism” (xv–xvi).

In recent years, the human rights-centered mnemonic regime has come under fire from both right- and left-wing actors, who have expressed their discontent with the normative aspects of ‘cosmopolitan memory’ (Levy and Sznajder 2002), although these critiques are dissimilar and are underpinned by vastly diverging ideals. In their introduction to a recent special collection tracing these dynamics, Forsdick, Mark, and Spišáková (2020) refer to this present condition of conflict between memory frameworks as “the global crisis in memory.” The present volume traces the ways in which contemporary culture and media take part in shaping and responding to this crisis while also exploring the alternative, ‘non-crisis’ memory practices they advance. In other words, the chapters inquire into the different facets of *remembering transition ‘in crisis’* (the current ‘crisis in memory’ as well as a plethora of other perceived and announced ‘crises’). In what follows I outline the place of ‘transitions’ within the present-day shifts and conflicts between and within memory frameworks.

However diverse memory processes have been in countries ‘transitioning’ to democracy, “as a powerful ideal they were also linked [. . .] by a common idea that the defense of civic and human rights, and thus of liberal citizenship, required that we remember past atrocities and state violence” (Forsdick et al. 2020, 2). The powerful ethical claim of remembering victims served as a way of connecting the varied transformations and “stabilizing the ‘transitions’ to a politically liberal democratic and neoliberal economic order” (Forsdick et al. 2020, 5). However, employed within the standardized practices of a global memory industry (often linked to transitional justice mechanisms), this potentially empowering perspective turned out to carry with it colonial undertones and, eventually, to have counter-democratic effects. The instrumentalization of memory within human-rights initiatives has led to creating frameworks that ignore the complexity and incommensurability of mnemonic processes in different locations. “Securing the past” to make sure that everyone remembers in a correct way (Huysen 2011, 621), as recent critical examinations have shown (David 2020, Gensburger and Lefranc 2020), erases locally or nationally specific histories of violence and invests even more power in those who have politically and financially benefitted from the transitions.

The gradual shift of perspective from international networks of resistance to national communities “removed a consciousness of structural interconnected violence from countries whose modernization had been attempted by dictatorships” (Forsdick et al. 2020, 6). On a broader scale, this was part of displacing the paradigm of politics and memory that centered on anticolonial and anti-fascist resistance and substituting it with the opposition between dictatorship and liberal democracy (Forsdick et al. 2020, 6). Finally, in adopting developmental perspec-

tives, transition narratives framed all ‘democratizing’ societies as needing to ‘catch up’ and become re-educated in order to be admitted into the family of democratic nations (Buden 2010). To refer to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s critique of similar tropes in colonial ideologies, the subject of transition narratives will always remain “grievously incomplete” (2000, 40). As this brief overview shows, the politics and ethics of past and future in globalized post-transitional memory involved a number of erasures as well as the foregrounding of categories, such as victimhood, that appeared to be open to essentialization and abuse.

Most critical reflections on how the mnemonic framework outlined here has been challenged and abused have focused on right-wing denunciations of Holocaust memory (for its alleged ‘imposition’ of a culture of guilt) as well as the politics of equating Nazism and Communism. Memory of transitions forms the flip side of this framework; although divergences and conflicts in these memories also cause serious tensions, they are often overlooked in memory studies scholarship. On the one hand, the currently authoritative framework based on Holocaust memory promotes the remembrance of victims of all totalitarianisms; on the other, it envisions democratic transitions as end-points of major atrocities (with celebrations of ‘1989’ in Germany as an example). As memories of suffering have become the most accepted and powerful mnemonic template over the past decades – even employed by populists to create nationalist narratives of victimhood while contesting transnational memory projects (David 2020, Lim 2010) – memories of resistance and activism have lost their global appeal or institutional support (Rigney 2018). Activist memories or celebratory commemorations of ‘1989’ have not shaped a European *lieu de mémoire* (Sierp 2017) or a template that would facilitate transregional connections and ‘travelling’ memory.<sup>8</sup> The reasons behind this are the vast diversity and fragmentation of meanings attached to the transitions in different national contexts and the (often politicized) controversies that these different interpretations cause within and across national borders (Kovács 2019, Laczó and Wawrzyński 2017). However, as Della Porta et al. have argued in the context of Spain, “the weakness of a memory of conflict during the transition period may give more space for new frames and new memories to emerge, especially in a weak and relatively autonomous civil society” (2018, 28).

This volume starts from the premise that memories of transitions need to be approached in their complexity, contradictions, and global entanglements to yield more open, non-divisive, and social equality-oriented ways of remembering. To instrumentalize transitions as acts of overcoming totalitarianism obscures the historical realities which involved, along with new freedoms and re-established connections, much

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<sup>8</sup> For the concept of ‘travelling memory’ see Erl 2011.

conflict and even violence with present-day continuities and repercussions (Betts 2019, Kenney 2021, Marinovich 2019). Precisely in light of these controversies and the ongoing nationalist-populist appropriations of the symbolism and meanings of transitions (Jacob, Mark, and Rupprecht 2019), a closer look at the possible alternatives harbored in memories of these periods could make a valuable contribution to creating mnemonic frameworks that focus on both democracy *and* social justice. Certainly, remembrance of transitions can serve nationalist interests equally well. This has been the case, for instance, with conspiracy-inspired memories of the collapse of the Soviet Union, advanced since the 1990s (Oushakine 2009, Borenstein 2019) or narratives of the ‘stolen transition’ in Poland and Hungary (Kofta and Soral 2019, Krekó 2019), including literary mediations of this trope in alternate histories (Noordenbos 2016, Oziewicz 2011, Tabaszewska 2020). These narratives can also circulate and generate affect transnationally. This collection, however, zooms in on the narratives and performances of memory that address the complexity of transitions while shedding light on the structural omissions of transformation processes and experimenting with new mnemonic perspectives. With this focus, the volume contributes to research on memories that could counter right-wing populist mnemonics (De Cesari and Kaya 2020) and propose alternatives. In Astrid Erll’s (2020) formulation, such memories should be based on the principles of ‘truthfulness,’ ‘non-divisiveness,’ and ‘humane generativity’ in order to help imagining a better future for all.

## The structure of the book: Working and reworking memories

As already mentioned above, the contributions to this volume look in two directions – at the forms of time and modes of memory that were produced in the course of the transitions (having varied public presence and power today) and at the revisions of those forms and modes, particularly during the past decade. Hence, the book elaborates two complementary and entangled optics, which render the ‘remembering’ in its title as both an adjective and a gerund: on the one hand, the collection engages with how the transitions generated memories (which were focused on the earlier periods but, in the same breath, produced the structures of thinking about transitions as ‘hinges’ between the past and the future); on the other hand, it explores the practices of looking back at the transitions as turning points from the viewpoint of a new present. How do we make sense of such memories of a recent past that have not formed a stabilized and generally recognizable cultural memory (Assmann 2008) but have been actively mediated and remediated (Erll 2008)? In her

book on the modes of remembering socialism at the time when socialist states and forms of organization were coming to an end during the 1980s and 1990s, Charity Scribner uses the term ‘working memories’:

Metaphorically, working memory is that which remains ‘in living memory.’ In the lexicon of digital technology, however, it designates ‘random-access memory,’ or RAM: the space of temporary storage where programs are created, loaded, and run. Once a programmer has manipulated this data on the screen or desktop, he or she has the choice of writing it into the computer’s hard drive. Our recollection of life under socialism now hovers at the same level as digital working memory. It remains to be determined how the second world’s history might be recollected. Will it be permanently inscribed into Europe’s collective memory or merely deleted from the disk? (2003, 17)

Now, two decades later, memories of socialism and their mediations have generated much research; yet, the subject remains riddled with ambiguities, which makes its inscription into Europe’s collective memory an uneasy task. Memories of transitions, in turn, still await proper recognition as a subject of research and public remembrance. However, to make sense of their emergence, circulation and impact, this volume proposes to focus on their ongoing workings and reworkings before they become more solidified.

The first part, ‘Transitions’ Working Memories,’ focuses on the forms of remembering and time-making that were developed during and in the aftermath of the political transformations. In their readings of these forms, the chapters explore how the ‘break’ between the past and the present has been imagined, what kind of subjecthood and values these imaginaries foreground, and how they are being questioned or reclaimed. Placing these memories in (trans)national political and aesthetic contexts, they reflect on the tenacity or ephemerality of these imaginaries. The section is framed by Florin Poenaru and Kylie Thomas’ chapters that develop critiques of the dominant forms of time and modes of remembering in a postsocialist and a postcolonial context, in Romania and South Africa. The three middle chapters, in turn, provide critical perspectives on alternatives to hegemonic memory frameworks – in the re-readings of a play about the Spanish transition (Bonifacio Valdivia Milla and Pablo Valdivia Martin) and in forms of (post) postmodern writing in Hungary and Romania (Mónika Dánél) and in Taiwan (Darwin Tsen).

Florin Poenaru’s chapter provides a critique of the damaging effects of transition narratives that involved an obsession with revealing the ‘truth’ about state violence in Romania. This obsession manifested itself in acts of searching through one’s files in the Secret Police archives, in other words, relying on the very instruments of violence that manufactured lies about individuals during communist rule. Poenaru’s reading of two ‘file-memoirs’ by the writer Herta Müller and anthropologist Katherine Verdery, distills how the authors remain confined to the

subject positions of ‘victimhood’ by following the logic of traumatic repetition inherent in the archives. Mourning the loss of their past friendships makes them re-evaluate their whole lives and eventually leaves them dispossessed of their agency: the past remains nothing but emptiness and defeat. This imaginary of loss associated with life under communism formed the dominant narrative of transition in Romania and other countries of Eastern Europe. Through the popularity of the ‘file-memoirs’ in the West, this narrative participated in the global mnemonic turn, which, as the argument goes, reinforced Orientalist visions of the European East as the realm of experience and orality.

Bonifacio Valdivia Milla and Pablo Valdivia Martin’s re-reading of the play *Trampa para Pájaros* by José Luis Alonso de Santos, written and first staged in 1990, turns to the related questions of victimhood and perpetratorship and shows how more recent interpretations of the play by the director represent the conflicts of the transition with greater complexity than was afforded by the narratives of reconciliation and oblivion. This analysis reveals the play’s transgression of the conceptual metaphor of the ‘two Spains,’ an imagined domain of ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ under Francoism – a displacement that remained unarticulated by the playwright and the reviewers in the initial interpretations of the play. These early readings approached the play as a Manichean allegory of the struggle between good and evil. The chapter’s re-reading based on a qualitative-quantitative analysis of the metaphorical structures in this play demonstrates ‘multidirectional’ and ‘agonistic’ memory at work, which “negotiates” between “the conflicting poles of reconciliation and oblivion,” however, without addressing the questions of “justice and reparation.”

The next three chapters focus on the productions of temporality in transition narratives and the ways in which dominant times and time-scapes are questioned, queered, and revised in practices of remembering. Mónica Dánél explores the figures of metalepsis and collage as devices that displace the linear temporality of transition and the concomitant forgetting of the many dissonances present during that time. Her reading of a Romanian novel and a Hungarian film from the mid-1990s,<sup>9</sup> juxtaposed with more contemporary memories in a photographic exhibition and a film,<sup>10</sup> demonstrates the continuous use of these devices for foregrounding the conflicts of world-views, perceptions, and ideologies, thereby contesting the scripts organized around ‘resistance’ vs. ‘passivity,’ ‘revolution’ vs. ‘stagnancy,’ and showing how the analyzed counter-scripts transcend national boundaries.

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<sup>9</sup> *Bolshe Vita* (1995) directed by Ibolya Fekete and *Hotel Europa* (1996) written by Dumitru Țepeneag.

<sup>10</sup> The exhibition titled *Cluj 1989 21.12* with the focus on Răzvan Rotta’s photographs and Corneliu Porumboiu’s *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006).

Darwin Tsen's chapter continues by examining the ways in which the poetics of post-postmodernist writing intervenes into the imaginaries of smooth and universal 'transitioning' during the 1980s–1990s in Taiwan. In his reading of two texts by the Taiwanese writer Luo Yijun (駱以軍), a short story "A Roll of Film" from the collection *The Red Ink Gang* (1993) and a novel *An Elegy* (2001), he traces the structures of 'dysrhythmia,' which at the level of style and of narrating generational affiliation pinpoint multiple tensions in relation to the official temporality of transition from dictatorship to 'progressive' capitalist society. Moving from the remembering of White Terror during the transition towards recollection of the transition itself, the chapter reads the forms and aesthetics of dysrhythmia as characteristics of post-postmodernism which has developed since the 1990s as a radicalization of (and in some ways, a counterpoint to) the postmodern sense of global synchronization.

Kylie Thomas concludes this section with a theorization of 'transitional time' in post-1994 South Africa – a structure that echoes the hegemonic temporalities of the Taiwanese and Romanian/Hungarian transitions. Her reading of postapartheid social amnesia (perpetuated despite the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) shows how transitional time performed as 'common' is, in fact, characterized by 'radical dyssynchrony': while for some apartheid is a distant past with no connection to the now, for families of murdered activists knowing the past is a way to claim social justice in the present. Here we see temporal dissonance as a colonial structure of inequality which inheres within the time of transition and is facilitated by the global/local memorialization industry. At the same time, acts of foregrounding this dyssynchrony – like the uses of dysrhythmia or metalepsis – enable a critique of the mnemonic erasures that were/are constitutive of transitions.

The second part of the volume, 'Reworking memories of transitions,' engages with transformations and re-significations of earlier forms of memory and the emerging perspectives and modes. These discussions move from the scrutiny of contemporary activist memories of transitions, at the interfaces of politics and aesthetics, in Spain, Portugal, and Greece (Kostis Kornetis) as well as Russia (Andrei Zavadski) to an examination of aestheticized and commercialized memories of the 1990s on the Russian Instagram (Mykola Makhortykh). The last three chapters offer readings of mnemonic forms and practices in literary writing and focus on transnational and transregional constellations that these memories produce. These cases involve remediations of a popular Romanian novel for local and transnational audiences (Ioana Luca), the development of transnational imaginaries of remembering the end of dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay (Cara Levey), and a comparative theorization of modes of remembering transitions in South African and Russian literatures (Ksenia Robbe).



Kostis Kornetis's contribution examines memories of political activism that led to the establishment of democracies in Portugal, Greece, and Spain during the 1970s. The chapter discusses how forty years later, during the Great Recession of the early 2010s, iconic songs, poems, and theater plays of the transitional period were re-performed and film scenes remediated in new productions, often by representatives of the younger generations with only childhood memories of the 1970s. Through the readings of such artifacts alongside interviews with young activists and reviews in the media, this study considers the political potential and limitations of these mnemonic performances. On the one hand, due to their mediations of affect, some of these artifacts facilitate involvement in political struggles; on the other, they tend to create entrapment in the past. Moreover, some of the productions involve commercialized nostalgia for the 1970s that aestheticizes the revolutions.

In the cases of activist remembering of transition in Russia, as analyzed by Andrei Zavadski – the projects organized by the independent Russian contemporary culture magazine *Colta.ru* – aesthetic practices and references to cultural innovation of the 1990s played an important role in shaping a 'mnemonic counterpublic.' The chapter develops this concept in the context of authoritarian power, focusing on activities and events that sought to develop a public memory of the first post-Soviet decade as vehicles that allowed for reaching wider publics, beyond the core community. In particular, it discusses the productive uses of nostalgia in this process. Together, these first chapters of the section scrutinize the workings of affect and nostalgia in mnemonic activism. In both instances, activist remembrance intersects with political protest and involves representatives of different generations (those who were adults and children during the transitions).

Mykola Makhortykh's discussion of (re)mediations of the 1990s on the social media platform Instagram in Russia inquires into the amalgamation of trauma and nostalgia that characterizes memories of the first post-Soviet decade. Such entwinement is clearly discernible in memories of the 1990s in Russia, although it is far less explored than the complexity of traumatic/nostalgic affect associated with the Stalinist period. The particular intensity of these affects, the analysis shows, is related to the multiple and unresolved traumas of the 1990s (related to massive impoverishment, criminality, and radical change of values) as well as the political instrumentalization of these traumas by representatives of the Russian state. However, while expressions of trauma do occur on Instagram (mainly in posts by male users), nostalgia represents the predominant mode. Commercial exploitation of nostalgic feelings does play a role; yet, as the chapter concludes, the nostalgic representations also challenge the hegemonic narrative about the 1990s as the time of misery and hardship.

By approaching the (trans)formations of remembering transition in Romanian cultural productions – more particularly, the novel *I'm an Old Commie!* by Dan Lungu, which was published in 2007 to much acclaim, and its more recent remediations as a film and a theater play – Ioana Luca's chapter develops a transnational lens that can capture multiscalar articulations of memory. Her readings of these mediations offers perspectives on how political democratization and the development of capitalist relations in Romania during the and 2000s have involved the production of social inequalities and the feelings of nostalgia as well as this nostalgia's commercialization and remediation in recent years. In addition to examining how these productions map the global entanglements of transition, the chapter traces the regional 'travelling' of Lungu's novel and the structures of 'minor transnationalism' that it creates. Like Poenaru's contribution on Romanian memory culture, Luca's readings argue that memories of transition have always been transnational, but this fact is obscured by the predominantly national frameworks applied in public and academic discourse. The elaboration of comparative and transnational optics on the transitions is, thus, an important next step for the scholarship on transitions and their memories, for which examinations of cultural and mediated memories can offer pertinent examples.

The following chapter by Cara Levey inquires into the new voices and associated spatio-temporal modalities of writing the 1980s transitions in the Southern Cone via its reading of autofictional texts by second-generation exiles, French-Argentine Laura Alcoba and Dutch-Uruguayan Carolina Trujillo. It outlines the ways in which the authors reflect on these historical processes from the displaced positions of growing up in Europe while feeling closely connected to their countries of birth. The detailed comparative reading demonstrates how these memories destabilize the myths of 'the Golden exile' which virtually excluded diasporic perspectives or experiences of the younger generations from narratives of transition. The chapter highlights how this transnational autofiction involves the displacement of teleological time-spaces and visions of victimhood that characterize those dominant narratives.

My own chapter continues explorations of the modes and genres of memory developed in literature by considering the possibilities of comparing temporal and mnemonic processes in contemporary Russian and South African writing. It suggests some pathways by beginning to conceptualize modes of remembering via which literary and film narratives engage with typically contradictory states, affects, and feelings that are associated with this time, such as trauma and hope, loss and aspiration, movement and stasis. The focus is on the modes that do not reduce or 'forget' this complexity but, instead, develop frameworks for mediating the 'transitional' crisis-pasts in response to the continuing and intensifying crises

in the present. The chapter approaches memories of transition as a lens for developing intersectional postcolonial/postsocialist approaches. Comparisons across these contexts can elucidate how the decline of anticolonial and socialist imaginaries and the rise of nationalism and neoliberalism constitute points of mnemonic return and persistent social re-assembling across different parts of the post-Cold War world.

Across these explorations of subjectivity, affect, time, and mode, and the strategies used by a variety of mnemonic agents who produce these versions of the past (writers, film- and theater-makers, readers, social media users, and activists), the question about the extent and character of the transnational or global crossings indicated in this collection remains. Visions of transitions, from the very beginning of these historical processes, have developed between national and transnational framings. In each country, transitions were marked as symbolic points in nation-building processes; each nation had their own events and heroes to commemorate. At the same time, the events of transitions were closely interconnected through acts of politicians but also, not least, through the circulation of mobilizing images that would almost immediately become iconic. Some celebrations of '1989,' particularly in Germany, attempted to replicate this transnational interconnectedness as a mnemonic trope (Pearce 2014, 230). However, three decades after, national frameworks proved to be dominant. As Paul Betts (2019) has recently noted, "what is starting to become clear is that for eastern European countries 1989 was less a liberal story of re-internationalization than a tale of de-internationalization on the world stage" (300). Furthermore, as he and other historians confirm, "today's potent brew of nationalism, religious conservatism and racism in eastern Europe is hardly just a recent reaction to 1990s neoliberalism, but found overt expression in 1989 as well" (Betts 2019, 244; cf. Kovács 2019, Krapfl 2019). "The liberal story of re-internationalization" and the processes of de-internationalization that have become apparent more recently can be considered similar to the dynamics of de- and re-territorialization in the Global South which Jie-Hyun Lim and Eve Rosenhaft (2021) identify within appropriations of Holocaust memory. On the one hand, non-Western countries actively draw on the tropes of cosmopolitan (Holocaust-based) memory to create their own memoryscapes. On the other, "the global memory formation has contributed to re-territorializing the mnemoscape by providing a new frame for heightened competition among the parties to contending national memories," thus hampering the possibility of "mnemonic solidarity" (Lim and Rosenhaft 2021, 4).

The persistent national frameworks of remembering and making sense of the transitions which many of the chapters identify and discuss, testify to the limits of the internalization narratives that accompanied and framed the images of the 1970–1990s transformations. At the same time, some of the memories analyzed in

this volume point to practices of alternative or ‘minor’ transnationalism – such as in Ioana Luca’s reading of the ‘communist biddy’s reception across different countries of Eastern Europe’; or Mónika Dánél’s outline of the transcultural effects in Hungarian and Romanian literary and film (re)mediations of the transitions; or my own identification of similarities in the transforming memory modes in post-Soviet and postapartheid literatures. Could memories that locate the beginning or intensification of neoliberal and neocolonial violence at the time of the 1970–1990s transitions build connections across the Global South and European East? For now, we do not see such mnemonic interconnections taking place, but we do witness a range of critical perspectives, expressions of discontent, or new subjectivities and modes of remembering transitions that appear in national or local (below the national) contexts and that sometime draw regional connections. All of them, as the chapters in this book elucidate, are in dialogue with global(ized) memory frameworks and practices, voicing critiques or performing alternatives. The task of this volume has been to chart some of these practices and place them in conversation with each other. Apart from the thematic conversations which structure this collection, the chapters inquire into the dialogues taking place on the regional and global scales.

As a whole, this collection puts in practice what Manuela Boatcă (2021) has called the method of ‘counter-mapping.’ She defines this method as a “relational perspective capable of revealing the constitutive entanglements through which a global capitalism grounded in colonial expansion interlinked all areas of the world,” whereby the focus is on uncovering links between the regions “constructed as fixed and unrelated location on imperial maps” (246). In the context of remembering transitions, the ‘disconnected,’ national(ist) frameworks as well as the homogenizing global ones (usually, foregrounding historical processes in more ‘Westernized’ nations as normative) function as imperial maps. Seeing beyond and against them requires forging links across global peripheries and semi-peripheries (to use the language of world-system theory) as a form of solidarity (which may strategically re-invoke the ‘forgotten’ ‘Second-’and ‘Third-World’ solidarities of the past). This suggests a perspective in memory studies involving intersections between perspectives of the Global South and the ‘Global East’ (including Eastern Europe and Eurasia). Particularly in the case of Eastern Europe, such mnemonic counter-mapping can be a method of counteracting strong Eurocentric sensibilities, articulated, quite prominently, through discourses about transitions. Such perspectives, grounded in ‘Southern theory’ (Connell 2007, Mbembe 2019), can provide a lens onto the intersections of (neo)imperial and neoliberal violence in the course of post-war, post-conflict, or regime change-related transformations. This volume is an invitation to begin such counter-mapping by tracing the critical reopening of transitions as sites of intersecting and continuing ‘crises.’

## Coda: Memories of crisis

This volume began with reflections on memories of transitions emerging in contemporary culture and media as responses to the lasting and erupting systemic crises, including the ‘crisis in memory’ – a notion that points to the limitations of available frameworks and languages of remembering in relation to the emerging practices and the political ends which they pursue. The chapters of this volume chart a diverse transnational field of memories and of critical perspectives on them that zero in on ‘transitional’ pasts and map these pasts beyond imaginaries of a gap or a void. Taken together, these readings open a field of multidirectional (Rothberg 2009) and agonistic (Bull and Hansen 2016) memories beyond the tropes of successful revolution or civilizational collapse, the zero-point time of ultimate beginning or end. If we would like a concept that represents these contradictions and conflicts, we could call this remembering of uncertainty, precarity, and potentialities *memories of crisis*.

Memory studies to date have been characterized by an overwhelming concentration on remembering atrocity: war, genocide, political repression, and state violence have been its privileged subjects. The main causes for remembering such pasts have been to praise the heroes or mourn the victims, ensuring that past violence is not repeated, or to motivate resistance and retaliation. More recent research has proposed theorizing the ‘remembering of hope’ (Rigney 2018) that revives past practices of activism and encourages activism in the present. These memories are activated to facilitate interconnections of “mourning and militancy” (Crimp 1989, Traverso 2017, 21), to create a consciousness of continuity between past and present injustice, and thus validate old and inspire new struggles. Memories of the 1970–1990s transitions do involve ‘mourning’ and ‘militancy,’ as singular modes and as an interconnection. But many of the examined memories involve something beyond these frameworks – the senses of disorientation, indeterminacy, disappointed hope, or permanent insecurity – that do not seamlessly translate into discourses of trauma or resistance. ‘Crisis,’ with its flexibility of use (and overuse in late modernity), multidirectionality (‘crisis’ can lead to both positive and negative turns), but also the urgency it generates regarding a situation (Boletsi et al. 2020), might be an apt term for conceptualizing contemporary memories of those sociopolitical and economic transformations that focus on processes, experiences, and social effects.

Approaching memories of transitions requires a new conceptual language due to the varied, highly uneven, but also interconnected workings of transformations on different levels, within societies and transnationally. In this context, the idiom of ‘crisis’ can be helpful for (re)thinking transition as “an array of temporal experiences and affective registers,” as Rita Barnard (2019, 10) suggests in comparing the no-

tions of ‘transition’ and ‘crisis.’ At the same time, as Janet Roitman (2014) has argued, crisis narratives are epistemological ‘blind spots’ and thus involve the regulative, normative function that is embedded in modern practices of history and memory. *Remembering* crisis, however, can, within some practices, cast a reflective perspective precisely on these blind spots of enunciated ‘being in crisis’ as it engages with processes in the past from viewpoints of the present. such remembering (especially when mediated as narratives) will also often involve an intentionality by putting a spotlight on what the remembering subjects perceive as having been erased, overwritten, or made unrecognizable. In this regard, much depends on the dominant narratives of transitions within a society, against which counter-remembering takes place. In situations where transitions have been framed as catastrophic moments, re-framing them as ‘crises’ can imply the (recalled) possibility of positive transformation. In the contexts of dominant appraisal of transition, the crisis idiom can draw attention to the hardships that were experienced, with feasible effects in the now, if that past is seen as continuing in the present.

With regard to the emerging languages of remembering transitions as ‘crises’ which this volume begins to map, two initial observations can be made. One concerns the different and overlapping temporalities of transitions-as-crises. Interpretations of transitions as ‘collapse’<sup>11</sup> of old regimes or ‘turning points’ (i.e., new beginnings) that were most common during those periods are characteristic of the time regime of modernity (Koselleck 2006). More recently, those transitions have come to be perceived – along the lines of contemporary invocations of crisis – as “a protracted historical and experiential condition,” a chronic state rather than a “critical, decisive moment” (Roitman 2014, 2). As essays in this volume show, remembering the 1970–1990s transitions can involve both tropes – of *rupture and chronicity*. It can emphasize the unresolved, chronic social problems that were neglected, exacerbated, or, in some cases, generated by transition, thus pointing at transitions as a relay stage of a systemic and ongoing conflict.<sup>12</sup> But recalling transition can also create a rupture with or in the present by the very act of looking back and (re)telling stories of crisis.

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11 The recent volume *Collapse of Memory – Memory of Collapse* brings together contributions reflecting on memories of war, terror, migration, environmental disaster as well as systemic collapse (such as the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe), and uses the terms ‘collapse’, ‘disaster’ and ‘crisis’ interchangeably. While such dialogue between studies of memory narratives that are usually discussed within narrower contextual fields (e.g., memories of World War II) can produce new insights, such broad clustering as well as the use of new concepts for it requires theorization.

12 See Robbe et al. 2021 for brief reflections on the temporalities that represent the ‘chronicity’ of crisis from critical perspectives.

The second point pertains to the contradictory and contested memories of transitions that reflect the uneven distribution of suffering and benefitting. With regard to Eastern Europe (including Russia and Eurasia), this characteristic has been highlighted, with the support of various data sets, in Kristen Ghodsee and Michael Orenstein's study. "In the average postsocialist country," they observe, "the transitional recent recession dwarfed the US Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s, a truly epic crisis whose effects will be remembered for generations. [ . . . ] Maddison Project data show the postcommunist recessions to be the worst in modern history since 1870." (2021, 32) However, "the benefits of transition were divided so unequally that majorities of the population no longer support the transition paradigm" (2021, 15). Similar social consequences of transition are at the forefront of popular views on this period in South Africa, the country in which extreme inequality institutionalized under apartheid has not been remedied since its end (Gready 2010). Given the depth and duration of the crises, and the highly differential vulnerability of social actors, what modes, forms, and perspectives of remembering can capture these conditions? What is the politics and ethics of such remembering?

To remember the (often unresolved) conflicts and conundrums of the transitions in the present is to address the lives and perspectives that have been omitted from public histories and memories, the loss and suffering that have not been registered or that have been 'appropriated' in narratives of national trauma, but also practices of resistance and resilience that formed in response to these conditions. Such remembering may involve looking into the power relations that determined the underlying mechanisms of what was or is viewed as crises. To remember crisis is also to generate affinity with those who lived through it, to understand how they acted and re-constituted themselves as subjects in the contexts of rapidly changing values and increased knowledge about the suffering caused by repressive regimes.

While some highly mediatized images such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the toppling of Lenin statues, or footage of Nelson Mandela walking out of prison, just like the popular narratives of transition, have become iconic and formed memoryscapes of '1989,' any simple celebratory memory does not do justice to those revolutionary processes. As Padraic Kenney (2021) has noted with regard to Eastern Europe,

[a]ll of these highly visual moments imprinted themselves globally because they conveyed something true about the desires of Eastern Europeans to express themselves and to claim spaces of freedom. They are not false in any way. They do, however, give us an incomplete, and perhaps even distorted, story of the revolutions.

These spectacular events were characterized by what Ann Rigney calls “melodramatic memorability” which “means that some events are upstaged at the cost of others, or at the cost of failing to grasp the ‘slow violence’ of chronic injustice or the singularity of individual suffering” (2016, 92). The same can be said about the narratives of Truth Commissions (Cole 2009) or of reading Secret Police files (Poenaru, this volume).

What makes other, occluded events and experiences of transitions worth remembering today, as we observed in the poems quoted at the beginning of this introduction, is the moral outrage at the consequences of change (of the lack of it) and the sense of a crisis in the present. Both poems point to the transitions as crises in the double sense: as the moments when ideals of transformation were articulated and positive change was imagined as imminent (crisis of ‘the old’) and, in the same breath, the processes that compromised these ideals or the social sites where these ideals never had a chance to be realized (crisis of ‘the new’). The transitional past is, then, framed as a point of conflict that planted seeds for the tragic, radical mismatching experienced in the present. Starting with expressions like these, the volume begins to inquire into the transformations of languages for thinking and recalling transition, with contributions examining the silences produced by transition narratives as well as the emerging alternatives that may become building blocks for new vocabularies that stem from the ‘problem spaces’ (Scott 2004) of the present.

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The chapters of this volume were written before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army in February 2022; however, in finalizing this book as the war continues devastating the country, the question must be raised about the immediate present and future of remembering transitions in Eastern Europe (as events that brought about the end of the Cold War) and globally. Zooming in on the ‘uses’ of the transitional past within political discourse in Russia, it can be clearly seen how the state and state-supported media have been mobilizing memories of perestroika and the 1990s as an epitome of ‘the dark past’ or the ‘collective trauma’ from which the national body has gradually recovered since the beginning of Vladimir Putin’s presidency (Malinova 2021, Oushakine 2009, Sharafutdinova 2020). This discourse has intensified since the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2014. In hindsight, the documentary *Russia. Recent History* [Rossiya. Noveishaya istoriya]<sup>13</sup> produced by the state-sponsored Russia 1 channel and aired in December 2021 (as a gesture of commemorating thirty years since the break-up of the Soviet Union) can

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13 The film is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deRbBopd2LA&list=PLYP5VWdRJBsAUxQRutSnqUTFFyEwl55XW>.



be seen as one of the key (media) events that legitimized the subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine, along with Putin's "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" published in July 2021 and the banning of Russia's leading human-rights organization Memorial in December 2021 (the institution whose establishment and achievements are firmly associated with the 1980–early 1990s political transformations). At the same time, as a reaction to this outright debunking of democratization during the first post-Soviet/postsocialist decade, political and memory actors in Eastern Europe foreground the achievements of the late 1980s and 1990s as a clear break from all things Soviet, strategically 'forgetting' the socio-economic crises that the political change unleashed for many, with many inequalities persisting today (Ghodsee and Orenstein 2021).

Thus, the war has polarized memories of transitions in this region even more, and just like the terror and suffering in Ukraine are causing repercussions in the rest of the world, these mnemonic wars and competing nationalisms that they feed are likely to have global effects. This volume sets out to draw attention to memories of the late-twentieth century transitions as a field in which major conflicts and contestations of the past and present are taking place. More specifically, it has attempted to elucidate and critically examine the different modes and forms, cultural practices and media of memory that call into question the weaponized and manipulative uses of the transitional past. Whether these forms of memory will gain more traction and 'travel' or become restricted to archives is something to be seen. But at least being able to see these forms and understand their workings equips us with knowledge and, perhaps, hope.

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