

Pitești: a project in reeducation and its post-1989 interpretation in Romania

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(Received 27 October 2014; accepted 27 October 2014)

The purpose of this article is twofold: to provide a critical account of the Pitești experiment and its significance within the history of Romanian Communism and to examine current public disputes relative to memorializing the Pitești experiment that concern issues of legitimacy, collective memory, and identity construction. The main argument pursued here is that within the recent postcommunist politics of memory, one major prevailing trend is to reincorporate a nationalist ideology within a postcommunist rhetoric. This leads to the conclusion that such mnemonic practices indicate a strong relationship between collective memory and political culture.

Keywords: postcommunism; memory; reeducation; Pitești; Stalinism

In much post-1989 historical analysis and memorialization relating to the 1950s and 1960s Stalinist repression in Romania, the so-called Pitești Phenomenon or experiment has often been identified in public discourse with the view that the Communist regime was essentially both alien to the country and criminal in nature. This project in political reeducation took place between 1948 and 1951 and was first introduced by the newly installed Communist authorities in Suceava prison in 1948.¹ A year later it was again utilized and violently applied in Pitești prison (Pitești is in Argeș county in the central-southern part of the country). In Pitești, students, the majority of whom were affiliated with the *Iron Guard Movement* (Mișcarea Legionară, ML) – an interwar Christian nationalist and fascist style organization – were the principal target. The goal was ideological conversion to Marxism–Leninism of these allegedly highly dangerous political elements through an intensive application of physical and psychological torture carried out by cell mates, other groups of prisoners, and prison officials. As part of a larger effort aimed at destroying class enemies, high-level officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI) and the Communist Party (PCR) secretly developed this plan. It involved the co-optation and use of political prisoners with previous Iron Guard affiliations. In the design of the experiment, the only recourse for the initially chosen victims was to become reeducators themselves to escape continuation of their ordeal. Although on a smaller and less successful scale, the project was expanded for the next three years into other prisons and in some of the far-flung work colonies of the Romanian gulag.

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My aim in this article is twofold: (1) to provide a critical account of the Pitești experiment and its significance within the history of the Romanian Communism, (2) to examine current public disputes relative to memorializing the Pitești experiment that concern issues of political legitimacy, collective memory, and identity construction and affirmation. The chief argument to be pursued here is that within the recent postcommunist politics of memory, one major prevailing trend is to reincorporate a nationalist ideology within anti-communist rhetoric. Right-wing conservative attempts at transforming the victims of Pitești into martyrs and heroes, even as far as conferring sainthood on them, illustrate this trend. Interestingly, this form of discourse involves quasi-religious organizations such as *Fundația Sfinții Închisorilor* (Prisoners' Saints Foundation) and *Fundația Arsenie Boca* (Arsenie Boca Foundation), together with representatives of the Orthodox Church, and can sometime overlap with a liberal anticommunist rhetoric promoted by former dissidents and civic associations. By naming or renaming the reeducation project a "phenomenon," and by stressing its apparent genocidal characteristics in the broader context of overall Communist repression, these different political actors have become unwitting partners in the reconstruction of the recent past. They have, however, generally provoked negative reactions. These have come primarily but not exclusively from those involved in the memorialization of the Holocaust during World War II in Romania and represented by the *Institutul Elie Wiesel* (Elie Wiesel Institute).

A brief first section of the article presents the memorialization of the Pitești experiment within the politics of memory in postcommunism. The second section provides an overview of the Iron Guard during the interwar period. The third analyses the reeducation project itself by emphasizing the irreconcilable conflict between the Iron Guard and the Communist regime. A fourth section examines the memorialization of the Pitești experience as part of an ongoing and problematic process of coming to terms with the past. This appears as an issue in new forms and in new circumstances after 1989. Finally, the initial question of the place of the Pitești experiment in the history of Romanian Stalinism and, more broadly, in the context of Communist repression in general is considered.

The Pitești experiment and the postcommunist politics of memory

In the context of the reproduction of pre-1989 elites during the first decade and a half after the overthrow of the Communist dictatorship, the task of reckoning with the past was taken up by nonstate civil society actors. The most vocal among them were the former victims of the repression (the Association of Former Political Prisoners, AFDPR) and civic associations consisting of former dissidents and liberal intellectuals (the Group for Social Dialogue, GDS, and the Civic Alliance, AC).² Since the early 1990s, former political prisoners and their descendants have published a large number of testimonies, memoirs, and autobiographical accounts of those who experienced the Stalinist repression. At the same time, some anticommunist civic groups and intellectuals attempted to integrate the experience of the Communist gulag within a larger narrative of a heroic anti-Soviet national resistance.³ The ultimate aim was to unify the various facets of opposition to Sovietization and Stalinization – including peasant opposition to collectivization, acts of rebellion carried out by disparate but numerous armed resistance groups, and protests of intellectuals, students, and religious groups – into a coherent and consistent historical reconstruction of Romanian anticommunism (Ciobanu 2014). Referring to the museums, exhibitions, and monuments built to keep alive the memory of the victims of Communism, Lavinia Stan distinguishes a broad pattern characterized by the representation of the past as "[...] built extensively on Christian symbols, especially the cross which symbolizes both the death

of the victims of communism and their religiosity, a mark of anticommunism under a self-avowed atheistic regime.” (Stan 2013b, 219).

But when the reeducation system in Pitești prison is discussed in the media and other public forums by survivors, victims, and some public intellectuals, this religious and nationalist symbolism is even further emphasized. This particular phase of early Communist repression is here defined as integral to the genocidal character of the Communist regime from its inception in 1947 until its revolutionary collapse in December 1989.⁴ This characterization of the Pitești project gave itself to descriptions such as “unique in the world,” the “most horrific crime conceived by the human mind” (Rădulescu 1990), or, in Aleksander Solzhenitsyn’s words, “the archipelago of horror” (Ierunca 1990). It was also seen as an illustration of the larger prison to which the country had been transformed under Communism (Mungiu-Pippidi 1995; Patapievici 1997; Boldur-Lătescu and Iorga 2003; Ioniță 2008; Purcărea 2012). This perhaps explains the preferred usage of the term *phenomenon* over *experiment* in academic as well as public speech. The Pitești phenomenon has then come to refer to a reeducation project that had expanded beyond its origins in Pitești prison to become generalized in a culture characterized by fear of the regime, ideological conformity, and severely weakened solidarity. It has in fact been interpreted as a nationally traumatic event. In addition, this conception has been validated through the work of various Western researchers who have argued for an examination of the twentieth century Communist regimes in Europe and Asia as genocidal. The most popular and widely cited of these is Courtois’s *The Black Book of Communism* (1999), which contains specific references to Pitești.

However, despite such an elevation of suffering to the status of martyrdom, the victims of reeducation in general and those associated with the Iron Guard in particular have become marginalized and even excluded from the compensatory policies aimed at providing some measure of restoration for the victims of Communism. For example, in 1999, when an emergency government ordinance (OUG 214) awarded the honorific title of “fighter in the anti-communist resistance” to anyone sentenced by the regime for political reasons, former Iron Guard members were excluded. Similarly, the *Law on Politically Motivated Court Sentences and Their Related Administrative Measures from 6 March 1945 – 22 December 1989* passed by the Romanian legislature in January 2009 made specific provisions regarding the ineligibility of former members of fascist organizations (i.e. the Iron Guard) to any political rehabilitation and compensation benefits. This law, however, was never implemented.

Such ambivalence toward former Iron Guard political prisoners was also reflected in their relationship after 1989 with political parties. Some even found that the reestablished historical parties – the National Peasant Christian-Democratic Party (PNȚ) and the National Liberal Party (PNL) – were too restrained in their postcommunist anticommunist activity. Instead, they chose to rally around the All for Fatherland Party established in 1993.⁵ Again, in the mid-1990s, parallel to the formation of the AFDPR, a smaller organization was founded that rallied former political prisoners affiliated with the Iron Guard. This was the *Federation of Former Political Prisoners and Anticommunist Fighters* (FRFDP). It commemorated former legionaries victimized by the Communists but also promoted anti-Semitism and nationalism (Stan 2013a, 19). FRFDP’s activities focused on restoring the image of the Iron Guard as a nationalist and patriotic organization independent from fascist ideology and on legal actions aimed toward assimilating former legionaries with other political prisoners (Federația Româna a Foștilor Deținuți Politici și Luptători Anticomuniști 2010 and 2011).

The Iron Guard in historical context

In order to understand the intricacies of the Pitești experiment, the history and ideology of the Iron Guard in interwar Romanian politics and society require some explanation. The Iron Guard, which was initially known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael, was founded in 1927 as an offshoot of the National Defense Christian League (LANC) under the leadership of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Codreanu, a former student at the University of Iași who was the leader of a dissatisfied and nationalistic student body, gained some popularity and notoriety among nationalist intellectuals after his expulsion from the university in 1921 for rebellious and anti-Semitic activities. However, thanks to the intervention of the dean of the Iași law school, A.C. Cuza, he reenrolled in the university and continued to promote the nationalist cause through various illegal and terrorist means.⁶ The newly founded legion developed a rigidly structured hierarchical organization and elaborated a xenophobic and fundamentalist Christian ideology. Many adherents, if not most of them, came from small towns and rural areas and had little or no previous exposure to ethnic or religious diversity.

The organizational structure of the Legion was designed to promote among its members strict discipline, solidarity, brotherhood, honor, hard and altruistic work, self-sacrifice, piety, and ascetic behavior. The organizational unit was the nest (*cuib*) consisting of a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 13 members under a leader. The function of the nest was education and the creation of a legionary family. The leader recruited and initiated members and led by example. Quarrels or disagreements within the nest meant dismissal or resignation with no possibility of transfer. Nests were organized by age and gender: youths up to 19 years old were enrolled in Cross Brotherhoods (*frății de cruce*), 14–19 years old into Little Cross Brotherhoods (*frățiorii de cruce*), and girls into a Fortress (*cetățuie*). Within seven years, the nests expanded to local and regional units (Codreanu 2003, 37–65).

The ideology of the Guard expressed a totalitarian project. It was based on the premise that the interwar political landscape was both corrupt and subservient to foreign interests, the effect of which was to shape a fearful and selfish society. The movement was thus to act as a school and an army and pursue the development of a new heroic man as a servant of God and the community (Codreanu 2003, 33). The effect of this was to elevate politics into a religion, a “sacralized politics” (Ioanid 2004; Bănică 2007). Naturally such a program could only be accomplished in a death struggle with enemies of the country – principally Jews, freemasons, capitalists, and Communists – all often indiscriminately confused with one another. This anti-system program of action led inevitably to the persecution and violent suppression of members of the movement by a state that attempted to crush it.⁷

The village, with its patriarchal and religious structure and which was to be defined as the model for the whole society, was the chief focus of the Legion’s interest.⁸ Codreanu sent his men to develop construction projects in work camps in the countryside such as bridges and churches. They also undertook long marches through country villages and impressed the rural population with their uniforms and songs. The leader’s authority was seen as providential and that of the legionary elite asserted in a cult in which the relation between elite and masses was defined as one of complete subordination. Yet what set the movement apart from other contemporary fascist movements and attracted a large following among youth, country folk, disenfranchised elements, and even a segment of the church was its mysticism and promotion of a cult of the dead. The death of two leaders on Franco’s side in the civil war in Spain in 1937 – Ion Moța and Vasile Marin – provided the movement with an opportunity to promote just such a romantic death cult and raise its dead to the status of martyrs.

The funerals of Moța and Marin were transfigured by a nationwide funeral procession. The presence of a significant number of clergy in this processional was essential in creating a profound symbolic image and impression on the national audience. Codreanu himself conceived an oath – the Moța–Marin oath – that was “meant to solidify the Legionary desire for self-sacrifice in order to achieve the higher goal of resurrecting the decaying Romanian nation” (Săndulescu 2007, 264). This increased the appeal of the Guard as was immediately reflected in a spectacular growth in membership. According to Săndulescu (2007, 267), the Legion’s membership grew in less than a year from 96,000 to 272,000 members (1937–1938).

Here it is important to note the insignificant role played by the PCR during the same interwar period. In fact, after its creation in 1921 as a dissident faction of the Socialist Party, the authorities banned the PCR three years later as antinational and dangerous to the sovereignty and integrity of the state. This decision was the direct result of the PCR’s expressed approval of the return of Bessarabia (the northern part of the country acquired in 1917 through the Trianon Treaty) to the Soviet Union. The PCR never grew beyond 1000 members and it never appealed to the general population (Tismăneanu 2003). The weakness of the Communist movement in interwar Romania, in conjunction with the predominantly agrarian structure of the country, allowed for the development of the Iron Guard. Its xenophobic rhetoric, impregnated with rural nostalgia and elements of religious mysticism, appealed to a predominantly agrarian and traditional society. Also, some of the most well-known and outspoken intellectuals of the interwar period – including writers, journalists, philosophers, and academics such as Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Petre Țuțea, and Radu Gyr – subscribed to and promoted in their works the religious spiritualism of the Iron Guard.

The Legion as a result became an important political actor. In the 1937 parliamentary elections the party representing the movement – All for the Fatherland (*Totul pentru Țară*, TPT) – was third and gained 15% of the votes. But in 1938–1940, the years of King Carol’s brief dictatorship, the Legion lost its legal political status. The Iron Guard was declared a terrorist organization. Codreanu was condemned to 10 years of hard labor and in November 1938 (with 13 others involved in previous political assassinations) was taken from prison and assassinated by the authorities. Following this, the Codreanu cult grew still stronger among his followers who now sought to avenge his death during a short-lived alliance between Marshall Ion Antonescu and the Iron Guard following the abdication of Carol II. After his abbreviated royal dictatorship, Carol had found himself at the beginning of World War II without his traditional Western allies France and England. Constrained by an international context dominated by the division of Eastern Europe between Stalin and Hitler, Carol tried to save his throne by appointing Antonescu (a pro-German general) as head of state in June 1940. However, Antonescu forced Carol’s resignation and invited the Legionary movement (a powerful enemy of the king) to participate in the government. Romania thus became a national legionary state and began to formulate anti-Semitic policies against the Jewish population. But the two allies fundamentally disagreed on the governing style. While Antonescu believed in military discipline and a pragmatic politics, the Iron Guard leaders in the government under Horia Sima wanted a radical transformation of the whole society based on a totalitarian legionary doctrine. During their brief participation in government (1940–1941), the legionaries embarked on a violent campaign of revenge and engaged in targeted political assassinations. After Sima’s dismissal as deputy prime minister in 1941, they organized riots against state institutions and Jewish communities in Bucharest. Antonescu defeated this attempted coup-d’état, dissolved the Legion, and, according to Georgescu (1991, 215), 8000 of its members were arrested

and given long sentences. Some of them (including Sima) were smuggled out by Germany and interned in German camps where they benefited from special treatment (Weber 1966, 566). Sima soon realized that Hitler was on Antonescu's side and, after an unsuccessful attempt to establish an alliance with Mussolini, he and 130 legionaries were arrested in 1941 by the Gestapo and interned in Buchenwald.

Three years later, a few legionaries led by Nicolae Petraşcu returned to Romania and began to reorganize the movement (Jijie 2011, 271–278). Meanwhile, after refusing to switch sides and join the Allies, Antonescu was removed from power in August 1944. This coup was orchestrated by King Michael (Carol's son), some elements of the historical bourgeois parties, and representatives of the PCR. In this context, in August 1945 Petraşcu signed an armistice with the new regime which was now increasingly dominated by the Communists. It was agreed that the legionaries would surrender arms in exchange for the release of those imprisoned by Antonescu. However, both sides violated the pact. The new Communist-controlled government feared the potential role of the Iron Guard as a catalyst for anticommunist resistance in alliance with the three historical parties – the National Liberal Party (PNL), the National Peasant Party (PNT), and the Social Democratic Party (PSD). But after the historical parties and other democratic forces (including the monarchy) were completely eliminated from the political arena by the Communists, the latter turned their attention to the legionaries.

In contrast to the new regime, which was perceived as atheistic, antinational, and imposed by an external occupier though Soviet agents, the Iron Guard's ideology and its followers were rooted in an indigenous nationalist-Orthodox rural sentiment that also appealed to segments of the church and the intellectual establishment. In addition, core sympathizers and members of the Legion were already thoroughly socialized in techniques of clandestine war resistance, which appeared to be a good physical and psychological preparation for later persecution. This could only have unnerved the still insecure Communist authorities for they quickly launched a massive operation against the legionaries. By 1948, 17,000 Iron Guard members had been arrested. In the next 15 years, the legionaries were to become the most hated class enemies of the regime. After receiving long-term prison sentences, they were all subjected to an extreme regimen of repression, of which reeducation through torture was the ultimate means to effect their physical and mental destruction.

The reeducation project

It was in Suceava prison, one of the most important penitentiaries in the Moldova region, that a reeducation program was first introduced in 1948. Suceava had become a major political prison in 1941, where Marshall Antonescu imprisoned many legionaries after the Iron Guard's rebellion that same year. But it was not until 1947 that the PCR undertook the first wave of mass arrests of legionaries. Following this, those arrested from Moldova were sent to Suceava and subjected to Soviet-style interrogations utilizing torture. Brutal prison interrogations had persuaded a small number of legionaries to initiate a form of ideological self-reeducation to protect themselves and to reduce the level of violence. What I try to show here is the gradual shift from an informal inmate-inspired program, meant to help inmates deal with prison conditions, to a more formal structure of reeducation. This was eventually taken over and applied by prison authorities using prisoners as "reeducators," which simply reinforced the brutality of prison life and forced victims of the program to find any means at all of protecting themselves from its abuses. The leader of this first group was Alexandru Bogdanovici, a member of the Iron Guard since 1937. His

reeducation activities were ideological and involved the dissemination of Marxist and communist propaganda among fellow Iron Guard prisoners. Meanwhile, in March 1949 an association known as the Organization of the Detainees with Communist Convictions (ODDC) was set up. However, self-reeducation had limited success at Suceava and failed to attract many followers (Stănescu 2010a, 39–89). Together with Bogdanovici, Ion Țurcanu (a law student) played an instrumental role in the organization's creation. His commitment to the Iron Guard at age 14 in 1940 was probably the result of peer influence and opportunism. His subsequent membership in the PCR in 1947 and an attempt to launch a political career – which, unfortunately for him, was stalled after his legionary past was revealed – seem to confirm this. In the immediate aftermath, Țurcanu became a quintessential adept promoter of the violent reeducation program and the loyal servant of Securitate (the secret police) and prison officials during the experiment. But Țurcanu and Bogdanovici had already begun to clash over the use of violence (which Bogdanovici came to reject) and as a consequence, the ODDC was dissolved.⁹

The insertion of the Securitate service into the penitentiary system in March 1949 led by Major Iosif Nemeș represented an important turning point. The same year, several groups of prisoners led by Țurcanu were transferred from Suceava to Pitești prison. However, it became so overcrowded that in some cells there were as many as 16 detainees. But a significant deterioration in prison facilities and conditions was not the only indication that a new and much harsher detention regime was about to be introduced. Inmates were to find themselves isolated both from the outside world and from each other. This was accomplished through the construction of external walls surrounding the prison and of walls with connecting doors which separated the various sections of the facility. In addition, the leaders and the most influential elements among the students were removed from their cells and transferred to where reeducation was scheduled to begin (Stănescu 2010a, 123). In November, a reeducation committee appointed by Ion Țurcanu initiated the process by beating a group of 45 detainees who refused to participate in their own reeducation.

The reeducation program consisted of five stages. During the first, the reeducators' goal was to gain the victim's trust. Members of the reeducation team were placed in the cells in order to gain information about targeted inmates and to construct a moral and psychological profile of each of them. Information related to their political affiliations and activities, which they had sought to conceal during earlier interrogation and trial, was elicited. To ensure a complete and final breakdown of any potential resistance to reeducation, intimate details of an inmate's life were established about religious beliefs, family, and emotional attachment to family members, as well as attachments to friends, teachers, or other associates. At this first stage, the investigators addressed their own cell mates as "dear friend" or "dear comrade." At the second stage of reeducation, this friendly tone was abruptly dropped and replaced by addressing to them as "bandits" or other demeaning names. Unexpectedly, seemingly friendly comrades turned ugly and physically attacked their own cell mates. Taken by surprise, the victims of this transformation had no time to react or defend themselves. Systematically applied physical beatings represented only the beginning. Prisoners were forced to engage in demanding physical activities and other acts leading to exhaustion and humiliation. After subjection to ongoing and repeated tortures, they were then required to beat each other. Under permanent surveillance by the reeducation committee and the threat of further punishment, there was no possibility for inmates to escape coercion into performing these acts. Many survivors have recalled how they were closely watched to ensure that they were genuine in attacking each other. Any pretense or refusal to attack another cell mate would provoke Țurcanu and his team to even harsher responses.¹⁰

According to one prisoner who was ordered to attack a fellow cell mate, faking cruelty was also a part of the inmate game, as any expression of pity would be interpreted by the leaders of reeducation as support (Negrescu 1992).

Such an extreme and extensive system of torture could not have been made possible without the direct involvement and complicity of the authorities, a fact that was later acknowledged by the regime itself. In 1968 a secret gathering of senior party officials, including the new leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, had specifically addressed the role of the MAI in reeducation.¹¹ In fact, in Pitești and elsewhere, prison authorities never intervened to halt these ordeals. Instead, they assisted Țurcanu and his teams in these activities either by dismissing victim complaints or by becoming directly involved in the violence. It is important to emphasize that Alexandru Dumitrescu – the director of Pitești prison – was initially ill-disposed toward reeducation. He changed his mind, however, after Ion Marina – the representative of Securitate in Pitești prison – put pressure on him. Marina was in constant communication with the higher levels of the General Directory of Penitentiaries (DGP), particularly with Iosif Nemeș (head of Operations Service) and Tudor Sepeanu (chief of Inspection Services). By fabricating death certificates concealing the real cause of death of 22 men brutally tortured in Pitești, the medical staff of the prison also became accomplices to the reeducation experiment and subjected to the same pressure from Marina as was Dumitrescu. Ion Bogdanovici, the initiator of the experiment in Suceava, was one of these 22 victims.

Yet, these extreme abuses were simply a prelude to the movement of the reeducation project toward its most morally degrading stage designated as “exposure.” The victims – whose physical and moral resilience was already weakened by torture – were now brought to the point of revealing information they had previously been able to conceal during interrogations. They acknowledged not only their own anticommunist activities, but also denounced those of friends, acquaintances, and family members. This stage of reeducation – “internal exposure” – ensured the transformation of political prisoners into informers and collaborators of Securitate. In fact, some of these “exposures” led to mass arrests among targeted groups.¹²

But, it was the fourth stage of reeducation – “external exposure” – during which a “bandit” was forced to break with his criminal past completely and manufacture an entirely new biography. These hand-written autobiographical accounts represented the prisoner’s renunciation of himself as an autonomous person. It was the equivalent of a rite of purification from a bourgeois upbringing or of later fascist influences. Inmates were required to reject the totality of their pasts including political beliefs and affiliations, family and community ties, romantic relationships, religious values, and beliefs. Like the family, the church and its representatives were condemned as degenerate institutions. Theology students performed in offensive parody the most cherished of Christian Orthodox practices and ceremonies (confessions, baptisms, funerals, Easter and Christmas services). These rituals were acted out in a macabre and degrading fashion that frequently implied obscene sexual practices antithetical to Christian morals.¹³ All the institutions that were central to childhood socialization – family, school, and church – were systematically reviled as instruments of bourgeois indoctrination and Western imperialism. In Pitești, a few prominent leaders of the Iron Guard – Nutti Pătrășanu, Constantin Opreșan, and Constantin Păvloaie – submitted to this “external exposure.” This capitulation was received with satisfaction by the heads of the DGP, but obviously with great distress by other inmates.

Finally, after passing through these four stages of physical and psychological violence victims were forced to join the reeducation team. The prospect of enduring reeducation again was always a real possibility, so any hesitation or resistance to using the now standard

methods could mean renewed subjection to reeducation. In fact there were many instances in which inmates were to experience reeducation twice or even three times. At such points the victim gave in and appeared to become a perpetrator himself.

Subsequent attempts to expand and apply the experiment at other penal sites – including the Braşov prison, the juvenile facility of Târgşor, and the Târgu-Ocna penitentiary (a facility reserved for tuberculosis patients) – were not successful. These failures were the result of a combination of factors such as resistance from prisoners and sometimes from prison authorities, as well as the physical layout of these facilities, which unlike Piteşti could not ensure the secrecy of the torturers (Stănescu 2010b, 2012). There were, nonetheless, two facilities where the reeducation project took a very similar form to the Piteşti experience: Gherla prison (1950–1955) and the work colony of the Danube–Black Sea Canal (1949–1955).

Gherla remains in popular imagination one of the most dreaded places in the Romanian gulag.¹⁴ An old correctional facility, dating from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Gherla is located in the northwestern part of Transylvania. After 1945 and until 1964, it housed a large number of political prisoners and some common felons. Since it was one of the largest facilities in the country, the regime used it for the incarceration of those sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Initially political offenders were chiefly peasants, industrial workers, and youths, but later other categories were added (the self-employed, students, and intellectuals). In 10 years of operation after 1948, the prison became significantly overcrowded. From 703 detainees in 1948, it housed 1600 in 1950 and then 4500 by 1959 (Roman 2008, 323).

In 1950 approximately 300 inmates were transferred from Piteşti to Gherla to undergo reenactment of the stages of the reeducation project. Here, former Piteşti inmates led by Alexandru Popa Ţanu and Ţurcanu together with a nucleus of hardened prison guards, and with the consent of the MAI authorities, led the reeducation. That not all students who were brought from Piteşti were convinced believers in reeducation was demonstrated by occasions when some either warned their future victims about their required role in the protocols or refused to engage in beatings and other tortures. However, these gestures of humanity were summarily punished through violent assaults or with further subjection to reeducation.¹⁵

With the transfer of 80 college students from Piteşti to the Danube–Black Sea Canal colony in 1950, reeducation was introduced to another new setting. Set up in 1949 under Soviet guidance, the officially declared goals of this construction project at the Black Sea were the industrialization and modernization of the southeastern part of the country by creating an irrigation network in the Danube delta and ensuring cheaper transportation. In reality, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the leader of the party, envisioned the transformation of the canal into the “cemetery of the bourgeoisie” through forced labor. It is estimated that during its six years of official existence (1949–1955), 100,000 men – including people brought from different parts of the country and men drafted into the military or as political prisoners – worked at the colony’s various construction sites. These sites (Cernavodă, Saligny, Kilometer 5, Capul Midia, Megidia, and Poarta Albă) were located across the 70 kilometers of the length of the canal’s route. Two of the worksites were to experience the trauma of the reeducation project: Peninsula and Poarta Albă.¹⁶

Upon the arrival of the students from Piteşti, three new brigades were created: a disciplinary brigade that included those who were not completely reeducated and two others (Nos. 13 and 14) that included those who had already completed the two stages of internal and external exposure. The purpose of these transfers to new brigades was to mold students into informers and/or potential torturers of other prisoners who were themselves assigned to the same brigades (Stănescu 2012, 187–198). However, it was the 1951 tragic death of one

victim of reeducation that ended the project in its most violent forms at the Danube–Black Sea Canal as well as in other prisons of the Romanian gulag. A well-known surgeon and former state secretary at the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ion Simionescu, had been constantly exposed to physical violence by Toma Chrion and other brigade leaders. Simionescu attempted suicide by pretending an escape and was fatally shot by a guard. This incident was publicized outside Romania and reflected negatively on the regime. The government sought to maintain its credibility by shifting the entire blame onto the Iron Guard. In the ensuing show trial, it denied that Securitate officials had any direct or indirect involvement in the reeducation project. According to this claim, the imprisoned legionaries led by Eugen Țurcanu received and transmitted orders from their exiled leader in Spain, Horia Sima. It was Sima who allegedly ordered them to construct the reeducation program in order to compromise the regime. This attempt to undermine the newly established socialist order was further amplified by ties alleged to exist between the Iron Guard movement and the American CIA. Twenty-two defendants (including Țurcanu) were charged with terrorism and plotting against state security in order to compromise popular democracy. They were all sentenced to death, but only 17 of the sentences were carried out. During the trials, the involvement of top-level MAI officials and their instrumental role in the project were minimized. Only seven members of the labor camp administration and prison staff were indicted in a separate trial and charged with common law crimes that carried short-term sentences. They were almost immediately pardoned (Voinea 1996; Stănescu 2011).

Stalin's death in 1954 was followed by a de-Stalinization process initiated by the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and pursued in both the Soviet Union and its satellites. In this context an amnesty law was passed in 1955 in Romania. However, the reforms were apparent and short lived. De-Stalinization in Romania was essentially symbolic and confined to Dej's elimination of the Moscow faction represented by Anna Pauker, Gheorghe Luca, and Teohari Georgescu (Deletant 2006, 130). In the next three years two major events stalled this brief relaxation and led to a return of earlier mass-scale political suppression. The Hungarian uprising of 1956 was greeted with hope for renewal by a new generation of university students engaged in public demonstrations in Bucharest, Iași, Cluj, and Timișoara. This event, coupled with the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country in July 1958, resulted in repressive legislation that targeted different enemies of the regime. These included former Iron Guard members previously incarcerated and released who were to be placed in various work colonies of the Danube delta, high-school and university students who opposed the regime in literary or quasi-political circles, intellectuals, peasants who continued to resist collectivization, and the *frontieriști* (those who tried to escape the country illegally). Legionaries continued to be labeled as the most dangerous elements of the political opposition. After a brief release of prisoners (1955–1957), some re-organized as a clandestine legionary command (Iulian 2012). An internal order issued in April 1955 by the administration of penitentiaries, however, increased restrictions on inmates in maximum security prisons and charged that stricter rules be applied to former Iron Guard elements (Roman 2008, 33–36). According to official documents in 1957, the highest numbers of arrests were among the legionaries.¹⁷

It was in this political context that the reeducation project resurfaced almost a decade later, although in a predominantly ideological and nonviolent form in the penitentiary of Aiud (1960–1964). The legionaries were again the target of reeducation. A total of 1834 individuals with some Iron Guard affiliation were brought to Aiud in 1958 (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu, and Vasile 2007, 246). In this case the authorities relied on the physical deterioration of prisoners after many years of incarceration. Those who refused to participate in

reeducation (to discuss Marxist literature, to confess their criminal activities, and to criticize the Iron Guard) were threatened with deprivation of food and medicine (Pandrea 2000). Several important figures who inspired others to resist (the poet Radu Gyr was the most notable case) were blackmailed (and their reputations demolished) with the lie that the release of other inmates was dependent on their own conversion. Other important intellectual and political leaders underwent this process with the same result, including writer Nichifor Crainic, philosopher Petre Țuțea, Victor Biriș (former secretary of the MAI), Dumitrescu Borșa who was part of the legionary group that fought in Spain, Nicolae Petrașcu (secretary general of the movement), and Nistor Chioreanu (former legionary commandant of the Transylvania region).

In terms of the Pitești project, it is clear that the treatment applied in the Romanian gulag against those defined as undesirables was based on an indiscriminate use of violence and terror that was justified and supported by ideology and propaganda. Although the Pitești prison population was homogenous (students), in places such as Gherla or the labor colonies of the Danube–Black Sea Canal the incarcerated or interned population was quite diverse. People of different social and professional backgrounds (peasantry, working class, middle class, intellectuals, the upper bourgeoisie, or, in some cases, common delinquents and criminals), all with many political sympathies and affiliations (Iron Guard fascists, liberals, socialists, or even former Communists), different religions (Greek-Orthodox, Greek-Catholics, Catholics, and Adventists) and ethnicities (Germans, Jews, Armenians, Macedonians, and Tatars) all shared the same label of *class enemy*. The treatment endured in these facilities and the constant reminder of inferior status (the pejorative “bandit”) were aimed at deconstruction, even dehumanization, but with a view to rehabilitation through reeducation. However, some of the features of the reeducation program during the stages of internal and external exposure – in particular destroying the individual’s trust in friends, family, and mentors and his religious and political beliefs – do indicate extreme forms of repression. The initial systematic manner in the application of the project that was used on the imprisoned students at Pitești incorporated specific methods of mental and physical torture (including parodies of Orthodox religious rituals and the selection of higher echelons within the Iron Guard hierarchy for internal and external exposure). Given the type of total organization that the Guard was – understood as a brotherhood between members, the perception of the movement as equivalent to the family, and deference and adulation toward its leaders – one realizes the devastating impact that the experiment had on these young people, most of whom were from the countryside.

These features pose further questions respecting the extent to which the newly installed Communist regime felt threatened by the potential influence that the Iron Guard movement might have in a society hostile to Communization and Sovietization. For almost two decades, the Communists continued to view the Iron Guard as their principal enemy and feared its capacity for regeneration and resistance. As long as the Legion was able to present a competing model for the future, the ability of the Communists to offer themselves as the only legitimate alternative was jeopardized. The preemption of any appeal that the Legion might have had among a population hostile to the new regime could only be accomplished by its complete demystification and de-legitimation.

The memorialization of the Pitești project after 1989

After 1989 three classes of actors became involved in the historical reconstruction and political utilization of the reeducation program: (1) participants and witnesses to reeducation; (2) intellectual elites seeking an explanatory model of the Communist regime; and (3) civil

society groups engaged in the dissemination of traditional religious and national values through the memorialization of the victims of the Communist repression.

As noted, the prevalent attitude among survivors and intellectuals has been to generalize the reeducation project as a society-wide phenomenon. In this view reeducation was not simply a series of isolated episodes. The “Pitești syndrome” has come to symbolize the prostration of a society by a political regime superimposed through Soviet military occupation. It has been seen as indistinguishable from an old myth of collective suffering (Petrescu and Petrescu 2010). However, it might be argued that any empirical analysis of repression both from within and outside prison cannot really validate this kind of assertion. After release from prison, former political prisoners (including the survivors of the Pitești program) faced the stigma of a criminal past. Most experienced the outside socialist world they re-joined in the 1950s or 1960s as a larger prison. But unlike the gulag where the enemy was tangible and immediate (the prison guard, the director of the penitentiary or work colony, the Securitate officer, the interrogator, or the informer), on the outside repression was diffused. People lived under a permanent state of vague fear. Whether at home, at work, or among friends, they learned to refrain from criticism of the regime. Family and friends were regarded with suspicion and there was always the fear of reprisals for any association with them. Some gave in to pressures from the authorities and became informants. Securitate officers blackmailed or intimidated former political prisoners into provoking or spying on old prison mates. But subsequent opening of the Securitate files showed that in most cases collaboration with the secret police was generally of no particular interest or significance (Mureșan 2009, 251–259). In a few cases, former prisoners became long-term informers in exchange for financial or other types of benefits. This suggests that once the regime was fully consolidated, brute-force no longer represented the chief mechanism of repression. Conformity and obedience to the system were ensured through a combination of threats, blackmail, promises, and a reliance on the sheer passivity of the mass of the population.

After 1989, however, mistrust and suspicion toward anyone regarded as a genuine reeducator were evident within the AFDPR.¹⁸ In the face of accusations targeting the survivors of reeducation, some former prisoners chose to retreat into silence while others tried to restore their reputations. In one instance during the 2011 proceedings of the Pitești symposium, George Cușa, who was formerly incarcerated in Pitești and Aiud, publicly cleared his name by exhibiting a document issued in January 2011 by CNSAS stating that he was not a secret police collaborator. He had previously been accused as a participant in Aiud and then as an informer (Cușa 2012, 104–114). Dan Ottiger Dumitrescu, a victim of reeducation who subsequently became an active participant in Pitești and Gherla, felt torn by guilt during exile in Switzerland in the 1980s (Dumitrescu 2012, 130–134).

But the more common response in attempting to cope with the traumas of reeducation and the humiliations associated with it was through religion. For those involved in violence or injuring others, salvation and forgiveness could be found through faith. This view is best exemplified by those choosing a spiritual life in the priesthood or monastic orders. This included many such as Gheorghe Calciu, Mihai Lungeanu, Tudor Stănescu, Justin Paven, George Cușa, and Nagy Geza. The cases of Gheorghe Calciu and Tudor Stănescu illustrate this radical change from self-described criminal to servant of the church. Calciu, a former medical student and member of Cross Brotherhoods, experienced the reeducation experiment in Pitești in 1950 and then participated in it. After his transfer to Gherla penitentiary in 1951, Calciu became a notorious informer. But in 1955, as a witness at the reeducation trial, he had a change of heart. He defied the authorities in court by defending those accused of collaborating in the experiment and stated that the reeducation teams led

by Țurcanu were nothing but instruments in the hands of the regime. After the trial he was imprisoned again with eight others involved in the same trial in Jilava prison and harshly treated. In prison he was said to have ministered to cell mates suffering from malnutrition and tuberculosis (Petrișor 1994). He was among the last group of legionaries to be released from Aiud in 1963. He refused to become a Securitate informer for which defiance he remained under close surveillance of the secret police. After graduating from the Theological Seminary, Calciu became an outspoken critic of the regime and in particular of Ceaușescu's campaign to demolish churches. He was arrested again in 1979, but released in 1984 following international pressure. A year later he emigrated to the USA and served in a Romanian parish in Alexandria, Virginia, until his death in 2006.

The second case concerns Tudor Stănescu, an active participant in the Pitești stages of exposure and later a political prisoner in Gherla, Malmaison, and Brașov until released in 1957. While imprisoned in Gherla, he signed a collaboration agreement with Securitate. This was to continue after his release. After 1989 Stănescu entered a monastery and devoted himself to the memorial honoring the victims of Communism. In a 2008 interview, despite claiming a loss of memory (through repressing his role in torturing fellow prisoners), he acknowledged shame and a sense of self-disgust about his past. He asked Constantin Rodas (one of his former victims) to forgive him.¹⁹

This ritual of rehabilitation through religion by following an altruistic and ascetic life is similar to the mysticism adopted by the Iron Guard during the interwar period. But this particular form of Christian legionary ideology had its original appeal in the idea of martyrdom and the cult of the dead. In various associations it promoted the memorialization of the victims of Communism and especially of the legionaries killed by Securitate. One of these associations is significantly called the Prisoners' Saints Foundation (*Fundația Sfinții Închisorilor*), which in 2010 took custody of part of the remaining prison in Pitești intending to transform it into a memorial. This project is currently under way. The site where the program formally began on 6 December 1949 (ironically Saint Nicholas Day), known as "Room Four Hospital," has already been decorated as a chapel where future visitors can find a place for contemplation. In August 2012 the prison was visited by participants in the Pitești summer school that brought together students, historians, and a few survivors of reeducation. Several priests presided over a ceremony in "Room Four Hospital."²⁰

In Pitești, and in other cities where political prisoners were tortured (Gherla, Aiud), there have been persistent rumors about the existence and discovery of the remains of victims that were never properly buried. Some Orthodox priests (joined by believers and researchers involved in exhumations) argue that these exhumed body parts are like the relics of saints. Their appeal, forwarded to the Patriarchy of the Orthodox Church to beatify such martyrs of Communist repression, has so far remained unsuccessful. As had occurred in the interwar period, the church appears reluctant to support those clergy in their sympathies for the Iron Guard. This particular view has been recently articulated in March 2013 on *Antena 3*, a private television channel owned by Dan Voiculescu who worked prior to 1989 in the export business. His alleged onetime collaboration with Securitate was confirmed by CNSAS. In August 2014 Voiculescu was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment by the appellate court of Bucharest. He is currently appealing this decision.

The other association promoting the memory of victims through a religious appeal is the Arsenie Boca Foundation (*Fundația Arsenie Boca*), an organization founded in 2008 to support the rebirth of the national spirit and with it the reconstitution of a true national elite. It is named for Arsenie Boca, a monk and former political prisoner, who was well-known before his death in 1989 for religious paintings and an apparent gift for prophecy.

Both associations present on their websites testimonies of the lives of political prisoners who, during imprisonment or after release, engaged in various activities of sacrifice and piety.²¹ Their funerals (including Gheorgeh Calciu's in 2006, Arsenie Papacioc's in 2011, and Justin Pârvu's in 2013) were marked by collective expressions of grief. The media seized the opportunity to honor them as saints, martyrs, and prophets, although both Papacioc and Justin attempted to rehabilitate the Iron Guard's aims and ideology. These displays of public recognition have become parables for the future in the eyes of many. Their promoters point to their importance in educating the public, and in particular disoriented youth, in national values of patriotism, self-sacrifice, and service. In uncertain times, when individual and group identities are not well-defined, memory can function as a source of psychosocial stability and historical episodes can be transformed into myths.

As Michael Shafir characterized this clash of memories, acts such as these inevitably provoke controversy over interpretations of the past, "memory wars," or "competitive martyrdom." (Shafir 2014). The most recent interesting case involves a dispute over an honorary citizenship in the city of Târgu Ocna in 2008 to Valeriu Gafencu. According to his supporters, Gafencu, a former head of the Cross Brotherhoods in Iași who was imprisoned in Târgu Ocna before dying of tuberculosis in 1952, was considered a genuine martyr for the cross. According to his sympathizers, he had sacrificed his own life by donating medicine to save another prisoner, a former Communist and Jewish convert named Richard Wurmbrandt. Yet the *Institute for the Study of Holocaust Elie Wiesel* appealed the city's decision in November 2012 and demanded that Gafencu's honorary title be revoked. It argued that such an award to an individual involved in an extremist fascist organization was against liberal democratic values. Nonetheless, in May 2013 the city council decided to sustain it. Outside city hall, protesters from different parts of the country representing various right-wing groups and civic associations, former political prisoners, and some clergy rallied in behalf of Gafencu's memory.²² This particular episode and other campaigns of beatification illustrate attempts at reincorporating nationalist ideology in the new discourse of post-1989 anticommunism. Ironically these themes of heroes and martyrs, national suffering, and external occupation represent a continuation of the main features of nationalist-Communist doctrine propagated and practiced by Ceaușescu's regime in the 1980s. Only the names have been changed. The forms of the memorialization of the Pitești project support an analysis of collective memory that is fundamentally shaped by both the politics of the present (whatever these might be) and conflict over status and recognition between competing groups. Moreover, looking at the various mnemonic practices involved here, including rites, rituals, commemorations, public displays such as museums and monuments, or official titles, we can discern a direct relationship between collective memory and political culture. As Olick (2007, 54) put it, "political cultures operate as historical systems of meaning ... in which collective memory obliges the present (as prescription) and restricts it (as proscription) both mythically and rationally."

Conclusions

Two questions can be addressed in conclusion: How does this analysis contribute to the understanding of Stalinist repression in general, and its Romanian version in particular, and how can we situate the memorialization of Pitești in the post-1989 politics of memory?

First, it is clear that the experiment in reeducation was ultimately rooted in a Stalinist repression against class enemies. At the same time, empirical evidence suggests that the experiment was initially and primarily conceived against a particular and unique fascist

enemy of Communism, the Iron Guard. But since a secularist (and atheist) Communist ideology had little chance of success in post-World War II Romania where religion and church were powerful forces, a priority for the PCR was to destroy and compromise the quasi-religious and mystical appeal of the Iron Guard for its followers and sympathizers. Both were totalitarian movements based on deeply antagonistic antidemocratic ideologies, one Christian and the other not. There could be no possibility for coexistence between them given their mutual enmity. This antagonism between the two faiths seems to explain the extreme degree of dehumanization inflicted on the legionaries by the Communist regime in all instances of the experiment. But with the consolidation of the regime, its leaders understood how important it was to legitimize it by appealing to deeply nationalist traditions and incorporate them into Communist ideology. In this way two antithetical systems of thought found that they had more in common than a hatred of bourgeois democracy. The result of this “*rapprochement*” between opposing forces was a nationalist-Communist doctrine promoted by Ceaușescu in the 1980s. General Ion Pacepa (1999) – a former head of Securitate who defected in 1978 and became a severe critic of the Ceaușescu regime – has emphasized the constant and permanent obsession that the regime had always had with the legionary movement, its own dark mirror image. He argued in fact that the secret services were never completely successful in controlling it.

This brings us to the second question concerning historical reconstruction and memorialization. My presentation of current controversies involving the victims of reeducation leads to one fundamental question: are those who underwent this traumatic experience to be thought of as martyrs or heroes and thus deserving some sort of public recognition? Ambivalence and suspicion toward anyone connected with the Guard surfaced even among other political prisoners. The distinction between the survivors of Pitești from other political prisoners continued to persist after 1989. It conferred on the former a distinctive identity. This has given other more contemporary political actors the opportunity to capitalize on their suffering. Right-wing attempts to transform them into martyrs and heroes is now part of a political agenda that seeks to recreate an old nationalist ideology within a modern anticommunist rhetoric for postcommunist times. Significantly, this type of discourse sometimes overlaps with a liberal anticommunist rhetoric promoted by former dissidents and civic associations. By naming or re-naming the reeducation program a “*phenomenon*,” and by stressing its apparently genocidal characteristics in the broader context of overall Communist repression, these political actors have become “*partners*” in the reconstruction of the recent past. In fact the search for a “*master commemorative narrative*” transcends political and ideological divisions.²³ It illustrates at the very least how ongoing and contradictory ways of coming to terms with a terrible past operate in a still unstable present. It is revealing that during this process both ethnic nationalism and Christian Orthodoxy provide individuals and groups with a sense of continuity in the face of the obduracy of the past. In this sense at least the clarification of the Pitești project has had some effect in heightening awareness of the Communist experience.

Acknowledgements

The research for this article was funded by a Redcay Award granted by Plattsburgh State University of New York in 2013. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Mircea Stănescu for his ongoing support while doing my field work in Romania in March–April 2013. Also, many thanks to my SUNY Plattsburgh colleagues – Drs. Jeff Hornbrook, Dan Lake, Jessamyn Neuhaus and Connie Shemo – for commenting on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

Notes

1. By describing what happened in Pitești as a project rather than an experiment, my intention is to pursue a critical analysis of the specific realities of Stalinist repression in Romania. Although I do not contest its similarities to the ideological system of reeducation implemented in the Soviet Union and inspired by the pedagogical writings of Anton Makarenko, what I do here is emphasize how this extreme repression targeted a particular class enemy, the Iron Guard.
2. For the role of civil society in the postcommunist politics of memory, see (Stan 2013a).
3. The most notable efforts to document the history of the Communist repression were undertaken by a television journalist, Hossu-Longin (2007), and by the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism. The latter is under the custody of the Civic Academy Foundation led by former dissident and poet Ana Blandiana (see www.sighet.ro, accessed on 5 September 2014).
4. After 1989, many memoirs and autobiographical accounts about the reeducation program in Pitești and in other prisons and labor colonies were published. The most popular include Ionescu (2001), Bordeianu (2001), Buracu (2003), Ioanolid (2009), Mărgirescu (1994), Paven (1996), Voinea (1996), Purcărea (2012), and Goma (1990). Since 2011, the Argeș branch of Fundația Memoria (the Memory Foundation), with professor Ilie Popa and former political prisoner, Ionescu Aristide (who died in 2013), each year organized in Pitești a symposium that brought together victims and their families with witnesses to the experiment. The conference proceedings were published in 12 edited volumes coordinated by Ilie Popa.
5. Although this party never became a significant player in Romanian politics, it is currently contested by legal authorities as the heir to the Legionary Movement. For more information about the party see, www.totul-pentru-tara.ro, accessed on 20 September 2014. Also, for the views expressed by former legionaries who experienced reeducation and their political preferences, see Budeancă (2011).
6. Two of the most notorious acts involving Codreanu as the leader of the Association of Christian Students were (1) the failed 1923 conspiracy to assassinate Jewish bankers, rabbis, journalists, and Romanian politicians who were in favor of Jewish citizenship rights; and (2) the assassination of the Iași police prefect Gheorghe Manciu in 1924. While in 1923 Codreanu escaped legal prosecution in the Manciu murder case, the trial was moved from Iași to another town. He was acquitted. For the origins of the Iron Guard and its early history, see Livezeanu (1995, 245–296).
7. Weber (1966, 537–538), shows that the extensive use of violence against such groups was characteristic of the state in the 1930s and the 1940s. He estimates that from 1924 to 1939, 501 legionaries were killed by the authorities and that under Antonescu 292 more were killed without trial in less than a year (November 1938–October 1939). At the same time, two prime ministers were assassinated by the Guard within seven years (I. G. Duca in 1933 and Armand Călinescu in 1939).
8. For an analysis of the main characteristics of the Iron Guard's ideology, see Ioanid (2004, 419–453).
9. The most comprehensive work on Pitești covering all aspects of reeducation as applied in all incarceration facilities is represented by the three-volume monograph of Mircea Stănescu published in 2010 and 2012 with Polirom, Iași. For Pitești prison, see Andrei Muraru (2008).
10. After refusing to beat up another inmate, Nicolae Purcărea was so badly hit by Țurcanu that for a while he lost his hearing (Purcărea 2012). Traian Popescu also recalls a similar event (Popescu 2003).
11. CNSAS, Dosar 19 [File 19], volume 6: document issued by Securitate classified as strictly confidential "Notă privind atrocitățile săvârșite în penitenciarele din Pitești, Gherla și Suceava de unii deținuți legionari în cadrul activității de reeducare în perioada 1948–1952" [Note regarding the atrocities committed by some legionary inmates in the Pitești, Gherla, and Suceava penitentiaries during the reeducation period from 1948 to 1952].
12. One case involved a Macedonian student, Gheorghe Cucoli, whose confessions led to the arrest of 60 people of Macedonian origin. Given its sympathies for the Iron Guard and resistance to collectivization, this ethnic minority was targeted by the regime at the time. See Cucoli Nicu and Totir Constantin, in Ilie Popa (2009, 233–242).
13. These episodes are described or at least alluded to in the memoirs quoted in footnote 4.
14. Interesting accounts on Gherla were provided by Timaru (1993). According to the report published by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania in two years alone (1958–1960), 28 political prisoners were executed in Gherla, including members of the armed resistance, peasants who opposed collectivization, or simply some who expressed dissatisfaction with the regime (2007, 213).

15. Constantin Rodas and Traian Popescu were two such cases. See interview with Rodas in Cosmin Budeancă (ed.) (2011, vol. 5, 287–305). For Popescu's testimony, see Traian Popescu (2003).
16. For a detailed empirical analysis of the Danube–Black Sea Canal, see Andrei Muraru, 2008.
17. CNSAS, Dosar no. 53 volume 1 (file no. 53): Situația arestărilor și condițiilor din aparatul central și din direcția generală de securitate pe anul 1957 [The situation regarding arrests and the conditions of the central apparatus of security in 1957].
18. There are a few documented cases of instances when some AFDPR branches were reluctant to accept as members some “perpetrators” of reeducation and refused to assist them in receiving compensation to which former political prisoners were entitled after 1989.
19. The scene when the two met and embraced is presented in the documentary “Demascarea” (“Exposure”) produced by Alin Mureșan and released by the Institute for the Investigation of Crimes of Communism and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER) in 2010.
20. The author of this paper visited the former prison and “Room Four Hospital” in March 2013. For the 2012 summer school, see Dan Gheorghe, “Cum au vrut comuniștii să ștergă din istorie Experimentul Pitești” [How Communists wanted to erase the Pitești Experiment from History], România Liberă, accessed on 2 August 2013, at <http://www.romanalibera.ro/index.php?section=articol&screen=print&id=273951>.
21. See www.fundatiasfintiinchisorilor.ro and www.arsenieboca.ro.
22. For a detailed presentation and photos of this demonstration, see <http://ogoranu.ro/78-evenimente/slides/131-foto-victorie-valeriu-gafencu> (accessed on 14 June 2013).
23. The idea of a “master commemorative narrative” was developed by Zerubavel (2011, 237–239).

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