MEMORY POLITICS IN POST-TOTALITARIAN SOCIETIES
THE CASE OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Ludmila Cojocari, dr.
“ProMemoria” Institute of Social History
Moldova State University

Course overview (32 hours)

After dramatic transformations of the 1989/91, the attention of European societies was redirected toward studying and understanding of old regimes’ historical legacy. The end of cold war and liberation from Soviet authority encouraged approaching the painful process of confronting long-buried pages from recent history, whether crimes committed during the Second World War or traumatic episodes associated with decades of Communist rule.

This course aims to examine the memory politics in the Central and East-European societies in order to understand the problems and challenges of coming to terms with the traumatic post-totalitarian legacy and to analyze the memory practices involved by the state and society toward the aim of reconciliation. Through the concept of memory politics, the course is focused on the strategies, practices, and rituals of past’s revisiting and reassessing: What are the main approaches of memory studies regarding the post-conflict societies? What are the main issues of memory politics at the level of community, region, nation that lead to systematic remembering or/and forgetting? Which commemorative practices are most appropriated to the process of reconciliation at the level of community, region, and nation? What persists in collective memory that resists historical and ideological interpretations? How and why do sites of collective memory acquire emotional and political importance and how to use them in reaching reconciliation and democracy building in the countries with a totalitarian legacy?

The course will introduce students to critical perspectives on memory politics in the post-totalitarian societies through readings, discussions, and small research projects (case studies). Case studies will be used to examine memory as an active process of official and public reconstruction - a process in which multiple representations about the past contend for recognition, for moral judgment, and emotional impact. The comparative dimension of the analysed case studies will emphasize the constructed nature of memory, mainly expressed in rituals, practices, and attitudes of different communities of memory.

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:
- Understand main theoretical and methodological approaches in the field of memory studies;
- Undertake a critical analysis of the relationship between theory and practice in dealing with problems of politics of memory in the post-conflict societies;
- Analyze problems related to the traumatized experience of the post-totalitarian societies and to identify the appropriate strategies and policies toward national reconciliation;
- Apply theories and research methods of studying the memory of totalitarian societies to a wide range of problems arising in the contemporary societies that are undergoing dramatic transformations.

Course evaluation:
25 % - weekly critical essays (1 page each);
25% - weekly class participation and guiding one seminar discussion;
20% - memory study (3 pages);
30% - final term paper (10-12 pages).
Weekly critical essays (one page, due each week): The critical essays are presented each week and aim to help students prepare for seminar and develop their skills of critical thinking and equidistant original approach. The essay will start with a brief statement of the main argument(s) of the reading materials and will be developed by student’s reflections on her/his own critics and arguments: What is the aim of the reading? How well did the author accomplish her/his intentions? How does it reflect and shape larger trends of discussion in the field of memory studies and memory politics/policies? What questions does it raise for some concrete case/country?

One seminar discussion (choose a week to present): Each student will take a turn presenting a week of readings during the semester (the date will be chosen from the course schedule at the end of 1st class meeting). It assumes to prepare a handout with discussion questions for the class and any additional information to support discussion. Student’s task is to frame the discussion and get audience started with a presentation of 10-15 minutes at the beginning of class. The preparations might expand student’s own reading for this week by bringing in other literature or might encouraged looking up book reviews or other works that cite or make use of the readings at hand. Strategies to help the class achieve the goals of connecting the week’s reading to previous readings, to larger intellectual trends within and/or outside the problem of memory politics are strongly encouraged.

Memory study (three pages, due at the end of the 4th meeting): This is a practice exercise in doing a study in the field of collective memory. The students will pick a memory site they will visit and write field notes on active/passive observation, looking at the mnemonic landscape and thinking about the place from the perspective of realm of memory. The brief text of 3 (three) double-spaced pages should describe the realm of memory and present toward class audience. The study will include a brief evaluation of methodologies used or considered to be used for a longer research project. This memory study can serve as a point of departure for final term paper.

Final term paper (due last class days): The final term paper (approximately 10-12 pages, double-spaced, 12-pt. font, 1-inch margins, text only) should engage a number of the theoretical perspectives and empirical problems that have formed the foundation for this class. Students are encouraged to develop the topic they explored in early elaborated memory study, but they are also welcome to connect these themes to their own dissertation or thesis research. During one of the last two class meetings a brief presentation of 15-20 minutes on the results of research/writing efforts will be presented.

The main topics
- Collective memory studies: theories, concepts, research methods
- Post-conflict communities of memory: historical contexts and commemorative agencies
- Approaching traumatic past: aims, issues and challenges
- When silenced memory goes public history: struggles and paths to reconciliation
- Memory makers (official & public initiatives): monuments, museums, textbooks, films, anniversaries, memoires etc.
- Making sense of totalitarian past: memory as a form of justice
- Toward a trans-national (European) memory

Topics and Readings

Collective memory studies: theories, concepts, research methods (4 hours)
Reading list:


Post-conflict communities of memory: historical contexts and agencies (4 hours)

Reading list:


Approaching traumatic past: aims, issues and challenges (4 hours)

Reading list:


When silenced memory goes public history: struggles and paths to reconciliation (4 hours)
Reading list:

Memory makers (official & public): monuments, museums, textbooks, anniversaries, films, memoires etc. (4 hours)
Reading list:

Making sense of totalitarian past: memory as a form of justice (4 hours)
Reading list:

**Toward a trans-national (European) memory (4 hours)**

*Reading list:*


**Essay Presentations (4 hours)**

*Additional readings*