Post-Socialist 'Cancel Culture'? The Contested Politics of Memory in Post-Socialist Romania

Mihai S. Rusu, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu

On 1 April 2021 – farcically on All Fools' Day – a monument dedicated to Octavian Goga was unveiled in the Romanian city of Iași, the historical capital of Moldova. Goga (1881–1938) is hailed as one of Romanians' greatest poets, second only in the literary pantheon to the national poet himself, Mihai Eminescu (1850–89).[1] In his poetry Goga, born in a Transylvanian village, bemoaned Romanians' oppression under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and inspired their struggle for emancipation. But Goga's poetry, politically charged with the tropes of nationalism, is only the poetic part of a broader historical personality. In the aftermath of the First World War, when Transylvania became part of Greater Romania, Goga stepped from the literary field deep into the trenches of party politics. The political parties he led promoted an ideology of integral nationalism inflated by a rabid rhetoric of anti-Semitism. When he was appointed as Prime Minister by King Carol II, Goga formed a government of intellectuals. Despite its short-lived power – the so-called Goga-Cuza government was ousted after forty-four days – it was enough for Goga to enact state politics of anti-Semitic discrimination with long-lasting consequences. In particular, he used governmental power to pass legislation that withdrew Romanian citizenship from over 225,000 Jewish Romanians, thus setting the steppingstone towards what would become the Romanian Holocaust during the Second World War under Marshal Ion Antonescu's military dictatorship.

Cultural History 14.1 (2025): 96–122
DOI: 10.3366/cult.2025.0329

www.euppublishing.com/cult

While the echoes produced by the recent toppling of statues in the United States and the United Kingdom were intensifying in Romania, in Iași – the very place where the Pogrom of 1941 took place, savagely killing over 13,000 Jews – political authorities and the local cultural establishment were carrying out the ceremonies for the unveiling of Goga's bust. The stark contrast between the vandalism of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol, toppled from its pedestal and dumped into the harbour, and the unveiling of Goga's bust in Iași provides the context for engaging critically with the so-called cancel culture in post-socialist Romania. Alarmed by the escalating bids for racial justice raised by the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, conservative intellectuals and media pundits in Romania were quick to label the notion of cancel culture as the latest expression of political correctness. Drawing on several examples of memorial projects embedded in the broader politics of memory enacted during Romania's prolonged period of post-socialist transformations, in this study I challenge the notion of cancel culture at two distinct levels: firstly, at the conceptual level, by contesting the analytical value of cancel culture as an academic concept; and, secondly, at the level of a localized geo-temporal area and empirical region, by pointing out that the politics of memory enacted in contemporary Romania are quite opposite to the direction indicated by a supposed cancel culture.

Cancel Culture: An Essentially Contested Concept

Following the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement as a reaction to instances of police brutality against African Americans – culminating with the killing of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 – increasingly radical calls for racial justice took the form of reconsidering the racial and colonial past.[2] Besides legal and social objectives, another crucial aim of the movement became the removal of symbols such as Confederate monuments, street names and other memorial artefacts that celebrated the figures and values of white supremacism inscribed in the public space.[3] As these calls gained momentum throughout the Western world, contesting the racial injustices of the past that had been institutionalized in memorial landscapes dotted by monuments and street names, the conservative backlash consisted of framing the BLM's quest for racial justice as an expression of cancel culture.[4]

In this intensely charged political context marked by contentious ideological confrontations between the proponents of symbolic justice and the conservative defenders of 'History' (with a capital *H*), *cancel culture* emerged as a keyword in the disputes over identity and memory.

The term is entangled in a conceptual nexus populated by equally contested notions such as culture wars, political correctness, call-out culture, and wokeness. Political scientists have defined *cancel culture* rather ideologically neutrally, as consisting of 'collective strategies by activists using social pressures to achieve cultural ostracism of targets (someone or something) accused of offensive words or deeds'.[5] Although, as a category of practice, cancel culture was criticized from the political left as a radical programme of woke activism rooted in a socially divisive identity politics, the term was championed as a battle cry in the contentious politics of memory by right-wing ideologues.[6] While the former emphasized its excessive intolerance and challenged its approach to empowering groups based on particular identities as opposed to a universalist framework of social justice, conservative detractors denounced cancel culture as an attack on tradition, identity and liberal values by the progressive left that promotes the rewriting of history in line with an allegedly hegemonic political correctness.[7]

In this study I build on the premise that *cancel culture* is a misfit term for serving as an analytical concept. Instead, as Sean Phelan has stressed recently, cancel culture is rather an ideologically loaded 'object of discourse' deployed primarily by far right actors 'to fight old ideological battles, or amplify the impression of new threats and dangers'.[8] Along these lines, I argue that the notion of a cancel culture gripping Western societies and sapping their basic historical foundations by challenging their pantheon of heroes and limiting free speech to fit into the straitjacket of political correctness constitutes an ideological instrument that became central in the terminological repertoire of conservative circles. Moreover, the category of cancel culture was articulated discursively and employed ideologically to undermine the quest for racial justice, symbolic reparations and a democratic ethos of memory pursued by the progressive activist movements.

In the remainder of this article, I discuss the discursive appropriation of cancel culture and document its instrumentalization to (mis)frame current memorial practices and debates in contemporary Romania. The analysis starts by embedding the recent debates surrounding three public monuments in different Romanian cities – the analytical core of this article – in the broader historical context of Romania's memory politics during the protracted period of post-socialist transformations. Then, after documenting how cancel culture talk was used to frame and unframe the unveiling and contestation of three public monuments – those dedicated to Mircea Vulcănescu in Bucharest, Octavian Goga in Iași and the Unknown Soldier in Timișoara – I argue that instead of a post-socialist cancel culture, in contemporary Romania we

are actually witnessing a contested culture of memorial consecration that reinforces the celebrative paradigm of remembering the nationalist past.

'Cancelling' Communism: The Politics of Memory in Post-socialist Romania

After the violent overthrow of the socialist regime and the proclamation of the democratic republic – epitomized in the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu following the sentence issued by a drumhead court martial on 25 December 1989 – the new rulers rushed to remove the symbolic traces of the defunct regime. The post-dictatorial authorities which seized political power inherited a territory riddled with monuments dedicated to Soviet leaders and the Soviet army as well as commemorating Romanian Communist Party figures and heroes of the working class. Erected during the four decades of socialist rule in Romania (1944/7–89), this symbolic geography now constituted an unwanted legacy and a dissonant memorial legacy.[9]

Cultural anthropologists and political sociologists were keen to point out that the overthrow of a regime is most spectacularly expressed in the toppling of monuments.[10] This was certainly the case in post-1989 Romania, when the first to fall (in March 1990) was the monumental statue of Vladimir I. Lenin in Bucharest, the country's capital city. Later that day, Lenin's statue was followed by that of the Romanian communist leader Dr Petru Groza, which was also uprooted from its pedestal by a crane and dumped in a courtyard on the outskirts of Bucharest together with the discarded statue of Lenin, where they were repeatedly vandalized. While many communist monuments suffered the same fate, other statues and busts were either completely destroyed in collective rituals of iconoclastic destruction or left in place as ruins bearing the violent marks of vandalism.[11]

Another memorial legacy inherited from the defunct regime that required de-commemoration consisted of place names. Renaming the streetscape together with all the other places bearing names associated with the socialist state featured among the political priorities of the new democratic authorities.[12] In March 1990 – less than three months after proclaiming the end of state socialism – a decree-law was adopted by the central government urging local authorities to purge the namescape of the memory of communism.[13] Streets and squares, schools and other public institutions (hospitals, theatres, cinemas), factories and stadiums, and even seemingly banal places such as food shops and grocery markets all fell under the provisions of the law and have been subject to toponymic change.[14] Regarding the transformation of the streetscape, the process which was most thoroughly documented in empirical analyses,

thousands of thoroughfares were renamed during the 1990s and the ensuing decades. Place names evoking communism were replaced en masse with figures, dates and symbols commemorating either the revolution, its heroes and democratic values or various aspects of the country's pre-socialist past, including its monarchical tradition.[15]

Removing the monuments and renaming the landscape as a means of de-commemorating a past that no longer corresponds to the political values of the present constitutes the standard memory politics following regime change. This was documented in scholarship focused on various historical contexts, starting with the French Revolution of 1789 and numerous geopolitical settings where abrupt shifts in the structures of power occurred.[16] Consequently, what conservative critics decry nowadays as cancel culture is actually the political default in the management of a burdensome past. While cancel culture as a conceptual category emerged only recently and therefore cannot be applied retrospectively without committing the fallacy of anachronism, as a category of practice what is denounced as cancel culture is certainly not novel. During the post-socialist transformations in Romania, driven by a broad cultural consensus rooted in anti-communism, there was little to no concern for the 'cancellation' of the socialist memorial heritage. In fact, in the prevailing ethos of anti-communism, the proponents of breaking from the socialist past – state actors, civil organizations and public intellectuals – pushed for complete removal of all the communist monuments and place names still scattered across the country and even initiated legal projects to ban them altogether.[17]

As scholars in memory studies have emphasized, changing the symbolic geography in the aftermath of a significant shift in the structures of power and authority involves a dual process: de-commemoration, that is, purging the unwanted memories, heroes and values inscribed in the landscape, is followed by the commemoration of new legitimizing symbols. The memorial void created by the removal of communist artefacts was instantly filled, mainly with monuments and place names drawn from the country's pre-socialist past. The traditional paragons of Romanian national identity (pre-modern rulers of Moldova and Wallachia, nineteenth-century nation builders and cultural personalities) had already been reinstated in public memory in the 1970s after the regime's ethnonationalist turn. During the 1990s the process continued with the incorporation of monarchical figures of the royal house that ruled Romania between 1866 and 1947. The reappropriation of the national past also included the celebration in the public space of controversial figures from the interwar period and the Second World War.

During the 1990s, a transitional period marked by socio-economic rifts and spurts of ethnonationalism, the figure of Marshal Ion Antonescu became a key symbol of Romanians' heroism and military authority. Antonescu (1882–1946) was Romania's wartime ruler; under his military dictatorship, the country entered the Second World War alongside Nazi Germany.[18] Under his command, the Romanian army followed the Wehrmacht and invaded the Soviet Union. In the occupied territories governed by the Romanian military administration, the army enacted wide-scale anti-Semitic massacres, deported its own Jewish and Roma population, and carried out the genocide in Transnistria. The Romanian Holocaust orchestrated under Marshal Antonescu's direct orders resulted in a death toll of 280,000–380,000.[19] After the coup of 23 August 1944, Antonescu was arrested, tried and sentenced to death for war crimes by a Romanian People's Tribunal overseen by the Allied Control Commission and particularly by the Soviet High Command. He was executed by a military firing squad on 1 June 1946.

Marshal Antonescu's rehabilitation started during the mid-1970s, and his cult of memory developed fully during the 1990s as part of a broader resurrection of the cult of the nation that also included the celebration of the interwar fascist legionary movement – the Legion of the Archangel Michael.[20] In 2002 it was eventually outlawed, as the Romanian government issued an emergency ordinance that forbade fascist, racist and xenophobic organizations and symbols as well as memory cults for individuals sentenced for committing war crimes.[21] The adoption of this negative 'law of memory' was meant to prove Romania's credentials in addressing its anti-Semitic past and curbing the rise of the extreme right on the international stage, in a geopolitical context characterized by the country's bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). As part of the same efforts, the then-sitting President of Romania – Ion Iliescu – commissioned Holocaust survivor and Jewish intellectual Elie Wiesel to chair the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. Subsequently, in 2002 the Romanian state endorsed the *Final Report* prepared by the Wiesel-led commission documenting the historical roots of Jewish persecution, the extent of anti-Semitism, and the scope of the Shoah in Romania and the occupied territories.[22]

The resulting conservative backlash unleashed by these legal and symbolic developments in the post-socialist politics of memory succeeded in delaying the full enforcement of the memory law. In the wake of its adoption, statues and busts of Antonescu, and streets named for him, have become memorial sites of contentious struggle between the marshal's defenders, who hailed him as a heroic martyr of the nation

(even portraying him as saving Romanian Jews from Hitler's extermination camps), and the civic actors requesting his removal from public space as a war criminal. The ongoing dispute was mediated by the reluctant state authorities and local governments, whose policies of half measures dissatisfied both parties. As a consequence, after prolonged proceedings pursued by institutional actors – in particular, the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania – some of the memorial artefacts dedicated to Marshal Antonescu have been removed. Others, fiercely protected by local authorities, were kept in place, despite repeated calls to remove them. Still others long remained in a state of memorial limbo: the marshal's bust in Bucharest was neither completely removed nor fully kept in place but was covered by a metal box that prevented the bust from being viewed.[23]

The prolonged memory-related strife was eventually settled in 2015, when the Romanian Parliament passed the Law 217 based on the government's 2002 emergency ordinance forbidding fascist organizations and symbols and the cult of memory dedicated to persons convicted of war crimes. During this interval of intense public debate and ideological strain, twenty-seven of the thirty-six streets honouring Antonescu were renamed, and six monuments (two statues; three busts, including the one in Bucharest; and a wooden cross [rom. *troiță*]) were removed from public spaces. Besides the nine streets still evoking his legacy, Antonescu's memory continues to be perpetuated in a statue placed since 1993 in a public square in Slobozia and a bust in the permanent collection of a military museum in Bacău (where a plaque also commemorates the Romanian army during the Second World War, installed by the Marshal Ion Antonescu Association), while another bust was erected in the private courtyard of a history professor in a Moldavian village in 2012 (Tătărășeni, Botoșani county).

Nationalism Unbound: A Contested Culture of Memorial Consecration

The removal of Marshal Ion Antonescu's memorial presence from public space – although an unfinished purging – under the legal prerogatives issued by central authorities in 2002 and 2015 has sparked widespread contestation within Romanian society. In the context of the emerging global movement for racial justice and symbolic reparations surrounding the BLM movement, the notion of cancel culture was rapidly appropriated by conservative voices in Romania. The latter enthusiastically embraced the term imported from the United States and western Europe and applied it to any critical questioning of the reviving heroic paradigm of Romanian national memory.

A brief perusal of the discourses developed by conservative intellectuals in Romania in this regard demonstrates the point. In both mainstream news media outlets and especially conservative publications, the advent of cancel culture was framed as a moral panic, that is, presented as a great threat to the integrity of Romanian society's identity, values and tradition.[24] As the BLM movement gained momentum across the Atlantic and spread globally, Romanian conservative voices were at pains to convince the public that cancel culture constitutes 'one of the most aggressive weapons of political correctness'. The 'cancel culture guerrillas', the same journalist wrote, are 'ideological gangs reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution in Maoist China'. He concluded his argument by quoting Donald J. Trump's characterization of cancel culture as the 'new totalitarianism'.[25]

Once the media narrative was structured along these lines, other discourses followed suit. The idea of cancel culture as a 'Maoist revolution' was reiterated by a well-known Deutsche Welle editorialist. In a public debate, Petre M. Iancu asserted that 'cancel culture is a revolutionary formula of social exclusion and censorship of persons and works'.[26] Other journalists cautioned against the 'dangerous phenomenon' of 'Romania's alignment to the "cancel culture" aberration'. After noting that 'Romania invented for herself – hoity-toity – the label of a grave anti-Semitism', the journalist asks rhetorically, 'When will the statues start falling in our society too?'[27]

The journalistic discourse was strengthened by the authoritative voices of conservative public intellectuals. Ioan-Aurel Pop, the President of the Romanian Academy, warned of a coming 'wave of anti-culture' that seeks to institute 'the dictatorship of minorities'.[28] More incisive was Mircea Mihăieș's designation of cancel culture as 'cultural racism'. For the literary critic, cancel culture is the latest attack of political correctness that undermines the 'civilized society' with 'revenge, censorship, arbitrariness, dictatorship and madness'.[29] These criticisms of cancel culture rearticulate the old tropes denouncing political correctness that were recited by Romanian conservatives during the 1990s. In one of the most influential texts on this subject, published in 1994, Horia-Roman Patapievici equated the 'programme of political correctness' with a 'Nazi'-like 'intellectual terrorism'.[30]

Teodor Baconschi, an Orthodox lay theologian and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, was also among the chorus of conservative public figures warning that '[t]he "woke" and "cancel culture" type of movements can only destroy the memory of our common heritage, whose consciousness we need now more than ever'.[31] Meanwhile, Mihail Neamțu, also a lay theologian, ranted about the danger of cancel culture

in Romania, claiming that 'it is not actually a culture, it is simply a form of barbarism'. 'Cancel culture', he continued, is 'a contemporary barbarism' based on a state of 'permanent cultural revolution' rooted in 'hatred, contempt, ignorance, self-sufficiency and arrogance'.[32] For Adrian Papahagi, another influential conservative public intellectual, cancel culture is 'downright terrorism' whose mission is none other than 'the destruction of the western Christian civilization'.[33]

The moral panic constructed discursively by this vocal chorus of right-wing journalists, Orthodox lay theologians and conservative public intellectuals is countered by the actual politics of commemoration currently unfolding in contemporary Romania. In the remainder of this study, I discuss three case studies of recent debates focused on public monuments dedicated to different aspects concerning the national and socialist past that – although hotly contested – suggest the (mis)use of the notion of cancel culture in the country's contemporary context.

Mircea Vulcănescu's Monument: Contesting the Commemoration of a War Criminal

The first of the memorial projects that bring into question the legitimacy of claims that a cancel culture is dominating the public sphere in contemporary Romania is the monument dedicated to Mircea Vulcănescu. The bust was unveiled in 2009 in Saint Stephen Square, Bucharest, seven years *after* the 2002 governmental ordinance came into effect. The ceremony was attended by city officials (e.g. the mayor of Bucharest's Sector 2, where the monument is located), representatives of state institutions (e.g. the director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Romania), and high-profile public intellectuals (e.g. Mihai Sora), as well as family members (Vulcănescu's daughter). The monument, created by the Romanian sculptor Valentina Boștină in the early 1990s and donated to Bucharest's Sector 2 city hall, consists of a two-and-a-half-metre-high pillar on which the head of Mircea Vulcănescu is placed. On the pedestal an engraved inscription commemorates the '[m]an of letters, economist, and philosopher who pondered in a fundamental way on the Romanian language and spiritual identity. Slain in Aiud's dungeons.'[34]

Indeed, Mircea Vulcănescu (1904–52) was a Romanian intellectual whose philosophical works are pervaded by the quest to define the Romanian 'ethnic soul'. The inscription is also correct in pointing out, albeit by resorting to a rather affected language, that he died in a communist prison. After 1989, within the burgeoning anti-communist thrust imbued with the mystical tropes of eastern Orthodoxy, Vulcănescu was hailed as a martyr. He began being worshipped, together with other

victims of the communist regime who died in prison, among the Saints of the Prisons (*Sfinții închisorilor*).[35] What brought Vulcănescu this posthumous (and non-canonical) status, besides his ethnicist writings glorifying 'the Romanian dimension of being',[36] was especially the deeply moving way he died. According to various prison memoirs published during the 1990s, Vulcănescu lay down on the cold concrete of the cell so that a fellow inmate, suffering from tuberculosis, could sleep on top of his body. Several days later, he became ill from sleeping on the ground. Before passing away, he purportedly uttered the words: 'Do not revenge us!' which has survived as his testimonial legacy for the upcoming generations.[37]

What the inscription is silent about is equally important. In parallel with developing a mystical philosophy of the nation and articulating an ethnicist view on the 'Romanian soul', Vulcănescu pursued a political career within the state apparatus. He held numerous offices, as an administrative expert in 1929, Director of Customs in 1935 and Director of Public Debt in 1937. In 1941 he was named Undersecretary of State within the Ministry of Finance in the government led by General Ion Antonescu, an office he held until the coup of 23 August 1944.[38] During this period he was directly involved in fashioning the government policies of 'Romanianizing' the economy, which meant the economic destruction of Romanian Jewry.[39] Moreover, as Undersecretary of State, Vulcănescu was part of the military government led by General Antonescu (marshal after August 1941), which organized the deportation of the Romanian Jews and Roma in Transnistria, ordered the perpetration of mass killings in the Soviet-occupied territories and orchestrated the Romanian Holocaust. For his involvement in Marshal Antonescu's government, Vulcănescu was arrested, tried by the Bucharest Court of Appeal and sentenced, in 1948, to eight years in prison for war crimes.

After 1989 a triple struggle was launched to rescue his tainted memory from the limbo between public damnation and social oblivion: the first of these memory-related battles was carried out in the editorial field: Vulcănescu's interwar books were reissued, and their author was reclaimed as one of Romania's major intellectuals, among other philo-fascist thinkers such as Constantin Noica, Emil Cioran and Mircea Eliade. The second front was opened in the official memory of public space, where streets and schools were named after him (in Bucharest, Aiud and Bârsana), and the monument in Bucharest's Saint Stephan Square was erected. Thirdly, the fight to rehabilitate Vulcănescu was taken to the courts. In 2016 Vulcănescu's daughter, then aged eighty-two, initiated a lawsuit requesting that the Tribunal of Bucharest

annul the sentence for war crimes issued in 1948. She claimed that her father was the victim of a political sentence, as his trial and subsequent condemnation were, in fact, the outcome of victor's revenge masked as post-war legal justice. However, although the tribunal accepted the argument and established the political character of Vulcănescu's sentencing, in 2019 the High Court of Cassation and Justice – Romania's supreme court – ultimately rejected the legal action to rehabilitate Mircea Vulcănescu and maintained the 1948 sentence.

In contrast to the legal failure to rehabilitate Vulcănescu within the justice system, his monument stood up against a sequence of failed political and administrative actions. Backed by the new legal prerogatives that came into force with the government's emergency ordinance no. 31, a first initiative to remove it from the public domain was launched in 2014. Other attempts to remove the bust were made in 2017 and 2022 but similarly failed.[40] The latter provoked the largest demonstrations, with hundreds of protesters waving the national flag, wearing Orthodox icons and holding political banners gathered in front of the town hall. A far right senator stormed into the local council meeting and qualified the initiative as an 'act of anti-Romanianism' and 'an abominable project against Christianity and the national being'. She also furiously demanded the abolition of the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, denounced for sponsoring the motion. The councillor who initiated the project, a member of the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal), received multiple death threats from members of nationalist organizations.[41]

Responding to the protesters' anger, a large majority of the councillors for Bucharest's Sector 2 disregarded the law and voted to keep Vulcănescu's monument in place.[42] As expected, this legally questionable political decision did not end the contention around this issue. In May 2023 the monument was vandalized (Fig. 1). A crossed-out swastika was painted in red over the inscription engraved on the pillar supporting Vulcănescu's bust. Unsurprisingly, his apologists decried the act as 'profanation' and 'sacrilege' not only towards the statue but towards the national identity altogether.[43]

The popular stance against the bust's removal, held by nationalist and far right organizations, also found a strong elite support. Important state institutions, such as the Romanian Academy – represented by its President, the historian Ioan-Aurel Pop – and the Romanian Writers Union, passionately defended Vulcănescu and made the case for his continuing public commemoration. Among the intellectuals, Andrei Pleșu – the 'dean' of Romanian anti-communist conservatives and former Minister of Culture and Minister of Foreign Affairs – pointed

Fig. 1: Bust of Mircea Vulcănescu, Bucharest, Romania. Photograph © Mihai S. Rusu.

out the 'double standard' applied to leftist intellectuals (such as Bernard Shaw and Jean-Paul Sartre, whose political sins are being forgotten) and right-wing thinkers (who are, in contrast, uncritically condemned).[44] His plea for finding the 'just measure between judgment, contextualization and forgiveness' is nevertheless undermined by the classic fallacy of the category mistake: the arguments of Pleșu and other apologists for Vulcănescu rest on comparing intellectuals (e.g. Shaw and Sartre) with state officials (Vulcănescu). While the former developed ideas for which they bear intellectual and moral responsibility, the latter were part of governments that exerted state power to carry out war crimes, for which they were legally sentenced.

The still-standing monument of an intellectual sentenced for war crimes, hailed at the same time as a martyr-saint who suffered in communist prisons and a model of the Christian ethos of altruistic sacrifice, highlights the ethical conundrums, power struggles and flexible legal frameworks of public commemoration. It also indicates the memorial ambivalences and the selective amnesias ingrained in historical memory, which render difficult the commemoration of victims of the communist regime who were also fascists and anti-Semitic perpetrators

during the Second World War.[45] Vulcănescu's still-standing monument is also the landmark for an ongoing memory-related battle: the monument has become a contested site of memory and identity as well as a nodal point within a broader web of political conflicts and ideological tensions among divergent social actors. As such, it has become an object of legal dispute and political unrest between national and local authorities (the government and the local council), as well as between state institutions (e.g. the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania and the Romanian Academy). It is also a landmark representing the social cleavages and identity rifts underpinning post-socialist Romanian society: while the bust emerged as a rallying point for the new far right organizations who gather periodically in its defence, for its contesters Vulcănescu's bust in a public place constitutes a symbolic expression of Romania's unwillingness to acknowledge its genocidal past.

Octavian Goga's Bust: Patchworking the Memory of a Pro-Nazi Statesman

The second case is Octavian Goga's bust, unveiled in Iași on 1 April 2021, briefly discussed in the introduction of this study. As mentioned there, Goga features in the literary canon and is prized as a national bard for his poetic lamentations over the Transylvanian Romanians' drama of living under Austro-Hungary until the end of the First World War. During the interwar period of Greater Romania, Goga stepped into party politics as a vehemently anti-Semitic and nationalist demagogue and gradually abandoned his poetic career. His rise to power reached a climax when, in 1937, he was appointed Prime Minister and formed a philo-Nazi cabinet posed to solve the 'Jewish question'. With this issue at the top of the governmental agenda, Goga enacted anti-Semitic state policies that revised the law of citizenship. Consequently, 225,000 Romanian Jews were dispossessed of their citizenship. Goga's policies of state violence against the Romanian Jewry survived his short-lived government and untimely death in 1938 and were further escalated during the Second World War, when Romania was ruled by Marshal Ion Antonescu, leading to the Romanian Holocaust.[46]

The memorial initiative to place a bust of Goga in Iași was led by a local cultural institution. The National Atheneum, a state institution subordinated to the Iași city hall, purchased the bust, made in 1991, in an auction; took care of its restoration; and managed the bureaucratic procedures for its placement. Besides Goga's literary status, the municipality justified the bust's presence in the Moldavian town by resorting to Goga's biographical relation with Iași. In 1916, after

Romania entered the war against Austria-Hungary, Goga enrolled in the Romanian army as a simple soldier, although he was an Austro-Hungarian citizen. For this act of 'high treason', Goga was sentenced in absentia to death by the Hungarian authorities. A year later, in 1917, he fled the occupied Bucharest and spent several months in Iași before leaving the country for London and Paris. On the 140th anniversary of Goga's birthday, the mayor himself (from the National Liberal Party), accompanied by local notables, unveiled the monument in the presence of soldiers dressed in parade uniforms. On the same day, a memorial plaque was also ceremoniously placed on the wall of the building where Goga was housed during his short stay in Iași.[47]

The first to react critically were local historians. Adrian Cioflâncă, a historian and the Director of the Wilhelm Filderman Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania, responded immediately by qualifying the unveiling of Goga's statue in the location of the 1941 Jewish pogrom as 'an irresponsible act'. In a blog post, he insisted that Goga's anti-Semitic nationalism is consubstantial to his literary works. He also pointed out that Goga cultivated the political values of dictatorship, fascism and anti-Semitism, and documented his philo-Nazism, visible in a group picture in which Goga makes the fascist salute to hail Hitler several months after the latter's seizure of power in 1933.[48]

As the news reached the central media, the local scandal grew into a national row with international reverberations. The Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, followed by the Special Representative of the Romanian Government for the promotion of memory policies and the fight against anti-Semitism and xenophobia, officially requested that the bust be 'either removed or his [Goga's] anti-Semitic and persecuting activities … be specified in a visible and thoroughly detailed manner'.[49] They were joined by the Centre for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism in Romania, affiliated to the Anti-Defamation League, whose director expressed his astonishment and concerns regarding the resurgence of anti-Semitism and demanded the bust's removal from the public space.[50]

Confronted with these reactions from historians, representatives of Jewish organizations, and government institutions, the mayor defended the memorial project by emphasizing that the bust commemorates only the national poet and not the anti-Semitic politician. Eventually, as the pressure from central institutions steadily increased, he conceded to placing a plate on the side of the black marble pillar supporting the bust. The side note briefly informed the viewer, '[U]nfortunately, his political activity is one which is regrettable for the history of Romania, since he was a fascist and anti-Semitic militant.'[51]

This unfortunate post hoc addition to the unveiled monument caused discontent to both parties involved in the politically charged memorial affair. The representative of the Centre for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism in Romania expressed its disappointment about the 'bizarre solution' of adding a side note. 'Wouldn't have been more simple, honourable and correct … that this bust, which should not even have been taken out of storage, be removed from public space?', asked rhetorically the Jewish rights organization.[52] On the opposite corner, the dissatisfaction took the form of moral outrage. Goga's nationalist supporters were infuriated by the appendage. For them, Goga's statue was 'humiliated' by the 'denigratory' plaque, which was seen as yet another measure of 'terrorizing the Romanian people'.[53] With this new act of anti-Romanianism, their conclusion was straightforwardly evident: 'We have cancel culture in Romania as well.'[54]

The side note added to the bust to address the one-sided representation of Goga as a national poet provides a poor symbolic reparation of the memorial artefact. Public authorities – local and central alike – presented the measure as a means of 'contextualization'. However, the memorial patchwork fails to properly address the issue. Even with the informative addendum placed on the pedestal, the monument remained starkly asymmetrical, as it continued to celebrate a controversial personality, although with a grain of salt attached to it. If the bust is left standing, a proper balancing could have been achieved by imagining a sort of counter-monument that would openly confront Goga's legacy and contest his memory as a national hero. This scenario turned out to be unrealistic, as in the summer of 2023 the plaque was removed from the pedestal, probably by nationalist supporters offended by this ad hoc notice (Fig. 2).

I argue that the controversy surrounding Goga's bust, rather than displaying a self-evident cancel culture taking root in Romania, suggests the opposite. In Romania there are numerous monuments and place names (streets, schools, libraries, etc.) honouring Goga. These memorial artefacts were established during the 1970s, when Goga's poetic rehabilitation took place in the context of the communist regime's ethnonationalist turn. During the first decades of the regime, Goga was thoroughly purged from school textbooks and public space, and his writings were censored. As the Romanian communist regime started on a path to autonomy from the Soviet Union and reappropriated the national discourse,[55] in the late 1960s and increasingly during the 1970s, Goga – among other paragons of Romanian national identity – was partially rehabilitated.[56] To this end, Goga's pro-Nazi past was obfuscated, and the great national poet re-emerged, separated from the

Fig. 2: Bust of Octavian Goga, Iași, Romania. Photograph © Mihai S. Rusu.

anti-Semitic policies he pursued as Prime Minister.[57] The notion of the two Gogas – the national poet of Romanians' suffering, worthy of celebration, and the less important politician who was led astray by nationalism – survived the period of national communism and continued to structure the public memory of Goga throughout the long post-socialist period in Romania.

The poetic rehabilitation of Goga launched during the 1970s resulted in a geography of memory materialized in a symbolic landscape of memorial artefacts. Across the country, but strongly concentrated in Transylvania, Goga is currently commemorated in eighty-eight street names, fourteen school names and thirteen busts, including the one unveiled in Iași. There are also public libraries, cultural centres and a memorial museum (where the mausoleum containing Goga's remains is also located) bearing his name.[58] There was no initiative, civic or otherwise, to rename and remove from the public space these memorial artefacts, most of which were established between the 1970s and early 1990s. Because Goga was not sentenced for war crimes, his cult of memory does not fall under the provisions of the legislation, as is the case with Marshal Ion Antonescu and Mircea Vulcănescu. Considering the

uncontested landscape of memory immortalizing Goga in the public space, there can hardly be any talk of cancel culture. The scandal erupted only when public authorities erected a *new* monument to a historical figure whose political activity as a state official cannot be disregarded, in a contemporary context characterized by different structures of sensibility and historical consciousness. As with Vulcănescu, in the case of Goga's controversial bust, instead of a hegemonic cancel culture razing the past, what we are dealing with is a rising culture of memorial resurgence. As it strives to revive the tainted nationalist past embodied in pantheonic figures of Romania's history, this memorial culture is countered by calls for historical knowledge and political responsibility. As such, what is decried as cancel culture – calls to remove illegal monuments and newly erected statues to pro-Nazi personalities – actually constitutes a defensive reaction to a nationalist memorial offensive.

The Unknown Soldier Monument: Removing the Ambiguities of Memory

The third public debate over a memorial artefact is the most recent, although it concerns the oldest of the three monuments examined in this article. The Monument to the Unknown Soldier (Monumentul Ostașului Necunoscut), also referred to as the Monument of the Romanian Soldier (Monumentul Ostașului Român), is located in the Central Park of Timișoara – one of the three cities holding the title of European Capital of Culture for 2023. The monument features a Second World War soldier carrying an oversized flag, on top of an equally impressive pedestal. On its sides, two bas-reliefs depict scenes of fighting and liberation respectively. It was unveiled on 30 December 1962 as the Monument of the Soviet Soldier (Monumentul Ostașului Sovietic) – an artwork created by the Romanian sculptor Ion Vlad – as a monumental means to glorify the 'liberating' Red Army.

After the Revolution of December 1989, which started in Timișoara, and the subsequent democratic regime change, this Soviet monument suffered a different fate than other similar monuments erected in numerous Romanian cities and towns. While such instances of dissonant heritage were most often relocated to military cemeteries (e.g. in Bucharest and Iași), the Soviet monument of Timișoara was kept in place. Nevertheless, it was subjected to two slight symbolic interventions that completely subverted the semantics of history inscribed in it. The first consisted of renaming the monument: in 1990 it was rebaptized in the onomastic waters of national history and became the Monument of the Unknown (Romanian) Soldier (Fig. 3). Besides this renaming, the de-Sovietization and the concomitant Romanianization of the monument were further carried out by rewriting the inscription engraved on its

Fig. 3: The Monument of the Unknown Soldier, Timișoara, Romania. Photograph © Mihai S. Rusu.

marble base. While the original one hailed the liberating Red Army, the text of the replacement plaque now reads: 'Glory to the Romanian soldier, inheritor of the traditions of ancient history, who fought heroically against Bolshevism and Fascism for the freedom and independence of the homeland.'

The inscription is misleading at best and downright mystifying at worse, considering that Romania entered the Second World War fighting alongside Nazi Germany. After the coup of 23 August 1944, when Marshal Ion Antonescu – Hitler's ally – was arrested, and a pro-communist government came to power, the Romanian army switched sides and fought alongside the Soviet army. Like for other countries in eastern and central Europe, Romania's 'liberation' by the Red Army was tantamount to Soviet occupation. On 30 December 1947, the monarchy was abolished, and the communist Romanian People's Republic was proclaimed. Soviet tanks remained on the republic's territory until 1958, by which time the Romanian society, political economy and cultural system had been thoroughly reshaped according to the Stalinist model.[59]

In May 2023 two local civic organizations – Timișoara Initiative (Inițiativa Timișoara) and Timișoara Society (Societatea Timișoara) – launched a call for public debate concerning the status of the monument: 'What should we do with this controversial monument?', wondered the initiators. 'Should we keep it untouched as a memory of our dark past? Should we move it to the museum? Or should we continue to be complacent with a falsification of the symbols relevant for our nation for the sake of not upsetting the invading empire!'[60]

The debate launched by the two civic non-governmental organizations was nevertheless spearheaded by the prefect (from the Social Democratic Party – Partidul Social Democrat). He emerged as the most vocal promoter urging the municipality to move the monument to another location as soon as possible, so that a new monument could be erected in its place. Although he recommended that the mayor discuss the project with the Faculty of the Arts from the West University of Timișoara as well as conduct a public consultation prior to organizing a competition, the prefect indicated that the Revolution of 1989 should be articulated artistically in the new monument. 'It [the Revolution] represents us as a city more than anything else,' he concluded his plea.[61]

The prefect had already taken steps towards reshaping the commemorative geography of the city, in which the Monument of the Unknown Soldier occupies a central position. In 2022 he used his prerogatives to change the location where the official ceremonies dedicated to the National Day of Romania, celebrated on 1 December, took place. Referring to the Soviet origins of the monument, as well as the Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine (started on 24 February 2022), he decided to move the ceremonies from the Central Park – where the event traditionally included laying wreaths at the base of the monument – to the plaza in front of the Orthodox Metropolitan Cathedral.[62]

On 17 May 2023 a public debate was held, attended by local authorities (including the mayor), local representatives of central government (the prefect), army officials, architects and other technical specialists, civil society actors and members of the public. While no official decision was taken, a broad, trans-institutional consensus emerged to relocate the monument. This has, in fact, been the most common practice employed by municipalities in Romania. Because they are protected under international conventions that forbid their destruction, throughout the 1990s most Soviet war memorials were removed from the central spaces where they were erected and relocated to military cemeteries. In Cluj-Napoca, for instance, the Monument of the Soviet Tankmen – a tank on top of a large pedestal placed in one of the town's central squares

in 1944 – was moved to the Central Cemetery in 1990. In its place, a new monument was erected in 1996, dedicated to the Romanian soldier. A similar post-socialist fate was suffered by the Monument of the Soviet Liberating Soldier, unveiled in Bucharest's Victory Square in 1946. Already relocated to a less symbolic location during the 1980s, after 1989 the monument was put to rest in the Cemetery of Soviet Military Heroes.[63]

Civic and political stakeholders attending the debate in Timișoara converged on three overlapping reasons for relocating the monument. The first has to do with political identities: the monument is a Soviet monument that glorifies the Red Army. The second rests on historical truthfulness: its rebranding as a monument dedicated to the Unknown Romanian Soldier constitutes 'a falsification of history'. The third is symbolic in nature and touches on ritual dignity: it is a 'fake monument' in front of which public authorities, including the Romanian army, are 'compelled to bow and recollect' on ceremonious occasions. To continue commemorating Romanian heroes at the monument erected to celebrate the invader not only creates a sorrowful irony but also sparks moral outrage, especially in the city where the anti-communist Revolution of 1989 began.[64]

In stark contrast to the controversies surrounding the busts of Mircea Vulcănescu and Octavian Goga, the debates on the Romanianized Monument to the Soviet Soldier were not framed by the notion of cancel culture. The broad consensus reached by the stakeholders rested on a shared belief in the necessity of removing the controversial monument and relocating it elsewhere so as to clear the ground for another memorial, one dedicated to the Romanian Revolution of 1989. The conspicuous lack of allegations of cancel culture is indicative of the ideological one-sidedness of the cancellation rhetoric, which is employed strictly when nationalist symbols are contested.

In Timișoara, as in other places throughout Romania, streets named for fascist and anti-Semitic personalities emerged in the urban name-scape during the 1990s. Street names commemorating racist and anti-Semitic theorists (e.g. Dr Nicolae Paulescu, 1869–1931), philo-Nazi politicians (e.g. Octavian Goga, 1881–1938) and ideologists of the Romanian fascist movement the Legion of the Archangel Michael (e.g. Petre Țuțea, 1902–93), among others, feature prominently in the central part of the city. Calls to rename these streets, made by intellectuals and civic organizations from outside Timișoara, were largely ignored by the local public authorities.[65]

What the controversial Soviet monument and the broader politics of memory in which the former is embedded suggest is the consolidation of

the already established conservative memory regime governing the city's relation to its past. As the examples discussed earlier emphasize, this memory regime rests on two elements. The first consists of a reinforcement of anti-communism as the leitmotif underpinning the city's politics of memory. This is expressed by the consensus to relocate the former Soviet monument as well as by the city's past measures in renaming streets and erecting monuments dedicated to the anti-communist Revolution of 1989, even against the local residents' opposition.[66] The second element is the political unwillingness to remove the fascist and anti-Semitic personalities inscribed in the street namescape, despite the calls and petitions addressed to the municipality in this regard. These dual developments characterizing the city's post-socialist politics of memory find themselves at loggerheads with what cancel culture is supposed to be, that is, a neo-Marxist movement contesting right-wing conservative values.

Conclusions

Amid the political turmoil brought about by social movements such as Black Lives Matter, the notion of a prevailing cancel culture has taken hold in the United States and then extended across the Western world. *Cancel culture* is used to refer to an ideology of political correctness applied to the past, whose heroic figures – usually belonging to the category of 'dead white males' whose memorial legacies are tainted by racism and colonialism – became objects of contestation. As such, the memorial cult of figures associated with the racial and colonial past, long celebrated as great men of history, is subjected to calls for removing monuments and place names honouring them from public space.

This article discussed the so-called cancel culture developed by the conservative right in the United States in relation to the politics of memory enacted in contemporary post-socialist Romania. After questioning the analytical value of the notion, the study examined the inadequacy of employing it in the Romanian context. After the regime change of 1989, which saw the violent overthrow of state socialism and its replacement with liberal democracy, Romania witnessed a major overhaul of its symbolic geography: during the early 1990s, thousands of street names associated in one way or another with the former regime were replaced, and hundreds of monuments and statues were removed from public sight across the country. Many of these memorial artefacts were substituted with monuments and place names celebrating the national identity, including interwar political and far right military personalities, such as Marshal Ion Antonescu.

An important twist occurred in 2002, when the government adopted an ordinance that forbade the commemoration of fascist symbols and personalities convicted of war crimes, which led to the controversial removal of (some of) the monuments dedicated to Antonescu. The conservative backlash consisted of memorial projects materialized in the erection of other monuments honouring controversial figures of the fascist and anti-Semitic past. The public debates following the recent unveiling of two such problematic monuments – the busts of Mircea Vulcănescu and Octavian Goga in Bucharest and Iași respectively – reveal how the rhetoric of cancel culture is instrumentalized by nationalist groups against critical voices that contest the *resurgence* of Romania's fascist and anti-Semitic past.

Although they both celebrate nationalist personalities whose biographies were tainted by far right politics – Goga as a poet who became a pro-Nazi statesman and Vulcănescu as a philosopher who assumed office in a genocidal government – the two statues nevertheless articulate different narratives. While Goga is hailed heroically as a national poet who (still) occupies a central place in the Romanian literary as well as cultural canon, Vulcănescu is commemorated in a rather tragic register, as he epitomizes the anti-communist discourse of victimhood and martyrdom.[67]

The third case study, focused on the debates on the removal of a former Soviet war memorial revamped to glorify the Romanian Unknown Soldier, reveals the conspicuous lack of similar allegations of cancel culture. This illustrates how the cancellation rhetoric is ideologically instrumentalized strictly to protect far right symbols and the memorial heritage of the nationalist past. Instead of expressing the ideological ethos of the so-called cancel culture, the recent politics of memory, driven as they are by the triple thrusts of conservativism, anti-communism and nationalism, expresses what I suggest calling a contested culture of memorial consecration.

As this study is based entirely on cases of memorial practices and their contestation from Romania, further research will have to move beyond the national boundaries and engage in comparisons among the central and south-eastern European countries. Such a transnational approach promises to map out the varieties of both cancel culture talk and cancel culture practices in the broader region affected by the populist politics of illiberalism. It may also establish whether the Romanian case – where cancel culture is mobilized to consolidate the resurgent paradigm of celebrating the national past as well as to downplay any critical interrogation of the latter – reflects a regional pattern in the discursive appropriation and political instrumentation of cancel culture.

ORCID

Mihai S. Rusu https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5474-3895

Funding

The work was supported by HORIZON EUROPE European Research Council, Grant 101079282 (ELABCHROM).

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express his gratitude to the four reviewers for their critical comments, as well as to Ștefan Baghiu and Dalia Bathory for insightful suggestions on a previous version of the manuscript.

Notes

1. George Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române dela origini până în prezent* (Bucharest: Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1941), p. 540; and Mihai S. Rusu, '"Eminescu Is Everywhere:" Charting the Memorial Spatialization of a National Icon', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 24:4 (2024), pp. 735–53.
2. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).
3. Heather A. O'Connell, 'Monuments Outlive History: Confederate Monuments, the Legacy of Slavery, and Black-White Inequality', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 43:1 (2020), pp. 460–78.
4. Eve Ng, *Cancel Culture: A Critical Analysis* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2022), pp. 73–80.
5. Pippa Norris, 'Cancel Culture: Myth or Reality?', *Political Studies*, 71:1 (2023), pp. 145–74 (148).
6. Umut Özkırımlı, *Cancelled: The Left Way Back from Woke* (London: Polity, 2023).
7. Alan Dershowitz, *Cancel Culture: The Latest Attack on Free Speech and Due Process* (New York: Skyhorse, 2020).
8. Sean Phelan, 'Seven Theses about the So-Called Culture War(s) (or Some Fragmentary Notes on "Cancel Culture")', *Cultural Studies*, 39:1 (2025), pp. 63–88.
9. Caterina Preda, 'Postsocialist Statuary Politics in Romania and Bulgaria: An Ambivalent Socialist Heritage', *Comparative Southeast European Studies*, 71:2 (2023), pp. 147–68.
10. Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 12.
11. Mihai S. Rusu and Alin Croitoru, *Politici ale memoriei în România postsocialistă: Atitudini sociale față de redenumirea străzilor și înlăturarea statuilor* (Iași, Romania: Institutul European, 2021), pp. 51–63; and Craig Young and Duncan Light, 'Corpses, Dead Body Politics and Agency in Human Geography: Following the Corpse of Dr Petru Groza', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38:1 (2013), pp. 135–48.
12. Maoz Azaryahu, 'The Power of Commemorative Street Names', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14:3 (1996), pp. 311–30.
13. Consiliul Provizoriu de Uniune Națională (CPUN), 'Decretul-lege nr. 100/1990 privind atribuirea sau schimbarea de denumiri', *Monitorul Oficial*, pt. I, no. 40, 21 March 1990.

14. Duncan Light, 'Street Names in Bucharest, 1990–1997: Exploring the Modern Historical Geographies of Post-Socialist Change', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30:1 (2004), pp. 154–72; and Mihai S. Rusu, 'Modelling Toponymic Change: A Multilevel Analysis of Street Renaming in Postsocialist Romania', *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 14:3 (2024), pp. 591– 609.
15. Mihai S. Rusu, 'Street Renaming in Postsocialist Romania: A Quantitative Analysis of Toponymic Change', in Sarah Gensburger and Jenny Wüstenberg (eds), *De-Commemoration: Removing Statues and Renaming Places* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2023), pp. 27–36.
16. Maoz Azaryahu, 'German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names: The Case of East Berlin', *Political Geography*, 16:6 (1997), pp. 479–93; and Mihai S. Rusu, 'Street Naming Practices: A Systematic Review of Urban Toponymic Scholarship', *Onoma: Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences*, 56 (2021), pp. 269–92.
17. Mihai S. Rusu, 'Transitional Politics of Memory: Political Strategies of Managing the Past in Post-Communist Romania', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69:8 (2017), pp. 1257–79; Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste în România, *Raport final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007); and Camera Deputaților, 'Propunere legislativă privind interzicerea organizațiilor, simbolurilor și faptelor cu caracter communist', Proiect de lege Pl-x no. 364/2019, https://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck2015.proiect?cam=2&idp=18005.
18. Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and his Regime, Romania, 1940–1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).
19. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report* (Iași, Romania: Polirom, 2004).
20. Michael Shafir, 'Marshal Antonescu's Postcommunist Rehabilitation: Cui Bono?', in Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 333–86; see also Michael Shafir, 'Memory, Memorials, and Membership: Romania's NATO Quest and Marshal Antonescu', *East European Perspectives*, 5:3 (2003), https://www.rferl.org/a/1342473.html.
21. Guvernul României, 'Ordonanță de urgență nr. 31 din 13 martie 2002 privind interzicerea organizațiilor, simbolurilor și faptelor cu caracter fascist, legionar, rasist sau xenofob și a promovării cultului persoanelor vinovate de săvârșirea unor infracțiuni de genocid contra umanității și de crime de război', *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 214, 28 March 2002.
22. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report*.
23. Delia Radu, 'Ion Antonescu și asumarea istoriei', *BBC Romanian*, 1 August 2008, https://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2008/08/080801_serial_antonescu_episod1.shtml.
24. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd edn (New York: Routledge, 2002).
25. Dan Ofrim, '"Cancel Culture", noul război cultural de pe rețelele de socializare. "Găștile ideologice colcăie în social media"', *Universul*, 12 August 2020, https://universul.net/cancel-culture-noul-razboi-cultural-de-pe-retelele-de-socializare-gastile-ideologice-colcaie-in-social-media/. *All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.*
26. Quoted in Sebastian Jucan, 'Dezbatere HotNews.ro despre "cancel culture" și fenomenul "woke": O nouă "Revoluție Culturală maoistă" versus "reacții la

nedreptatea socială"', *Hotnews*, 20 February 2022, https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-25376485-video-dezbatere-hotnews-despre-cancel-culture-fenomenul-woke-noua-revolutie-culturala-maoista-versus-reactii-nedreptatea-sociala.htm.

27. Bogdan Tiberiu Iacob, 'Fenomen periculos: România și alinierea la aberația "cancel culture"', *Politics*, 6 April 2021, https://inpolitics.ro/fenomen-periculos-romania-si-alinierea-la-aberatia-cancel-culture_18448359.html.
28. Quoted in Cătălin Costache, 'Ioan Aurel Pop, președintele Academiei Române: "Ne trezim obligați să gândim cum vorbește o grupare"', *Aleph News*, 22 April 2021, https://alephnews.ro/cultura/ioan-aurel-pop-presedintele-academiei-romane-ne-trezim-obligati-sa-gandim-cum-vorbeste-o-grupare/.
29. Mircea Mihăieș, 'Rasismul cultural', *România literară*, 1 (2021), https://romanialiterara.com/2021/01/rasismul-cultural/.
30. Horia-Roman Patapievici, 'Comunismul american', *Revista 22*, 5:33 (1994), p. 11 (p. 11).
31. Gabriel Bejan, 'Despre AUR și "revoluția conservatoare". Teodor Baconschi: "Nu trebuie să demonizăm această forță politică, pentru că ea exprimă opinia unei categorii de cetățeni români liberi"', *Hotnews*, 9 December 2020, https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-24473083-interviu-teodor-baconschi-despre-partidul-aur.htm.
32. Mihail Neamțu, 'Cultura română în era "cancel culture"', *Sfere de interes* (Canalul 33), streamed live on 20 December 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWf6CNzvKos.
33. Quoted in Monitorul Neoficial, 'Adrian Papahagi: Scopul lui Putin coincide, ca pe vremea URSS, cu cel al stângii – distrugerea Occidentului', *În Linie Dreaptă: Conservatori români*, 19 March 2022, https://inliniedreapta.net/monitorul-neoficial/adrian-papahagi-scopul-lui-putin-coincide-ca-pe-vremea-urss-cu-cel-al-stangii-distrugerea-occidentului/.
34. 'Bustul lui Mircea Vulcănescu, dezvelit în Piața "Sfântul Ștefan"', *Curentul*, 2 November 2009, https://www.curentul.info/social/bustul-lui-mircea-vulcanescu-dezvelit-in-piata-sfantul-stefan/.
35. Ionuț Biliuță, 'Constructing Fascist Hagiographies: The Genealogy of the Prison Saints Movement in Contemporary Romania', *Contemporary European History*, 31:3 (2022), pp. 435–55.
36. Mircea Vulcănescu, 'Dimensiunea românească a existenței', *Izvoare de filosofie: Culegere de studii și texte*, 2 (1943), pp. 53–97.
37. Ionuț Baiaș, 'Sfinții Închisorilor. Mircea Vulcănescu: "Să nu ne răzbunați!"', *Hotnews*, 1 August 2007, https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-arhiva-1045085-serial-sfintii-inchisorilor-mircea-vulcanescu-nu-razbunati.htm.
38. Ionuț Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu: O microistorie a interbelicului românesc* (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Eikon, 2015).
39. Jean Ancel, *The Economic Destruction of Romanian Jewry* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Publications, 2007).
40. 'Mircea Vulcănescu se apără singur în fața atentatului la statuia sa din Piața Ștefan din București. Ultimul cuvânt', *Mărturisitorii*, 9 April 2014, http://www.marturisitorii.ro/2014/04/09/mircea-vulcanescu-se-apara-singur-in-fata-atentatului-la-statuia-sa-din-piata-sfantul-stefan-din-bucuresti-ultimul-cuvant/; and Ion Spânu, 'Bustul și numele liceului "Mircea Vulcănescu" au fost salvate de furia "Elie Wiesel"', *Cotidianul*, 8 July 2017, https://www.cotidianul.ro/bustul-si-numele-liceului-mircea-vulcanescu-au-fost-salvate-de-furia-elie-wiesel/.

41. Bogdan Păcurar, 'Scandal și amenințări cu moartea pentru desființarea bustului lui Mircea Vulcănescu: Șoșoacă l-a salvat pe fostul demnitar antisemit', *Digi24*, 4 January 2023, https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/scandal-si-amenintari-cu-moartea-pentru-desfiintarea-bustului-lui-mircea-vulcanescu-sosoaca-l-a-salvat-pe-fostul-demnitar-antisemit-2203743.
42. Ion Spânu, 'Victoria lui Mircea Vulcănescu împotriva noilor bolșevici: Bustul rămîne pe soclu', *Cotidianul*, 30 December 2022, https://www.cotidianul.ro/victoria-lui-mircea-vulcanescu-impotriva-noilor-bolsevici-bustul-ramine-pe-soclu/.
43. Alesandru Anghel, 'Statuia lui Mircea Vulcănescu profanată în mijlocul Bucureștiului', *Active News*, 19 May 2023, https://shorturl.at/st289.
44. Andrei Pleșu, 'Dubla măsură', *Dilema Veche*, 980 (2023), 19 January 2023, https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/editoriale-si-opinii/situatiunea/dubla-masura-2235471.html.
45. Monica Ciobanu, *Repression, Resistance and Collaboration in Stalinist Romania, 1944–1964: Post-Communist Remembering* (London: Routledge, 2021).
46. Răzvan Pârâianu, *Octavian Goga: Sacerdote of the Nation; Revisiting the Romanian National Idea* (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Argonaut, 2018); and International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report*.
47. Sorin Semeniuc, 'Primarul Chirica a dezvelit bustul lui Octavian Goga, înmormântat cu zvastica pe piept', *G4Media*, 2 April 2021, https://www.g4media.ro/primarul-chirica-a-dezvelit-bustul-lui-octavian-goga-inmormantat-cu-zvastica-pe-piept-institutul-elie-wiesel-goga-a-promovat-o-politica-profascista-in-care-antisemitismul-s-a-aflat-la-loc-de-cinst.html.
48. Adrian Cioflâncă, 'Un act iresponsabil', 5 April 2021, https://adriancioflanca.blogspot.com/2021/04/un-act-iresponsabil.html.
49. Mihai Roman, 'Decizie fără precedent la Iași: Primăria a montat o inscripție în care îl acuză pe Octavian Goga de fascism și antisemitism chiar pe statuia inaugurată de primarul Mihai Chirica', *G4Media*, 2 July 2021, https://www.g4media.ro/decizie-fara-precedent-la-iasi-primaria-a-montat-o-inscriptie-in-care-il-acuza-pe-octavian-goga-de-fascism-si-antisemitism-chiar-pe-statuia-inaugurata-de-primarul-mihai-chirica.html.
50. Alina Batcu, 'Controversă în cazul dezvelirii bustului lui Octavian Goga la Iaşi', *Adevărul*, 2 April 2021, https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/iasi/controversa-in-cazul-dezvelirii-bustului-lui-2087000.html.
51. Quoted in Cristian Otopean, 'Statuia lui Octavian Goga din Iași are o plăcuță care îl acuză de fascism și antisemitism: Ce spune primarul Mihai Chirica', *Libertatea*, 2 July 2021, https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/statuia-lui-octavian-goga-din-iasi-inscriptionata-cu-o-placuta-care-il-acuza-pe-poet-de-fascism-si-antisemitism-3629691.
52. Quoted in Florin Marinescu, 'Comunitatea evreiască, reacție dură după amplasarea plăcuței pe statuia lui Octavian Goga din Iași: Un compromis care scoate în evidență confuzia și atitudinea duplicitară', *G4Media*, 3 July 2021, https://www.g4media.ro/comunitatea-evreiasca-reactie-dura-dupa-amplasarea-placutei-pe-statuia-lui-octavian-goga-din-iasi-un-compromis-care-scoate-in-evidenta-confuzia-si-atitudinea-duplicitara.html.
53. Simion Marin, 'Statuia lui Octavian Goga, "umilită" cu o plăcuță care îl acuză de fascism și antisemitism', *Mesajul*, 2 July 2021, https://www.mesajul.ro/statuia-lui-octavian-goga-inscriptionata-cu-o-placuta-care-il-acuza-de-fascism-si-antisemitism/; and Vlad Voicu, 'Octavian Goga pe cale să fie interzis', *Incorect Politic*, 3 July 2021,

https://www.incorectpolitic.com/octavian-goga-pe-cale-sa-fie-interzis-primaria-iasi-ii-vandalizeaza-bustul-cu-inscriptia-din-pacate-activitatea-sa-politica-este-una-regretabila-pentru-istoria-romaniei-intrucat-a-fost-militant-fa/.

54. Teona Gherasim, 'Octavian Goga, acuzat că a fost antisemit și fascist', *Aleph News*, 2 July 2021, https://alephnews.ro/guvern/octavian-goga-acuzat-antisemitism-primaria-iasi/.
55. Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
56. Pârâianu, *Octavian Goga*.
57. Ion Dodu Bălan, *Octavian Goga: Monografie* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1971).
58. Mihai S. Rusu, *Locuri ale memoriei: Politicile simbolice ale spațiului public într-un oraș memorial* (Sibiu, Romania: Editura ULBS, 2023), pp. 163–6.
59. Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
60. Claudia Ionescu, 'Timișoara: Monumentul Ostașului Necunoscut în dezbatere publică', *Buletin de Timișoara*, 13 May 2023, https://buletindetimisoara.ro/timisoara-monumentul-ostasului-necunoscut-in-dezbatere-publica/.
61. Cristian Mîrț, 'Ritivoiu îi cere primarului Fritz să mute Monumentul Ostașului Necunoscut din Parcul Central', *Timiș online*, 18 May 2023, https://www.tion.ro/stirile-judetului-timis/ritivoiu-ii-cere-primarului-fritz-sa-mute-monumentul-ostasului-necunoscut-din-parcul-centrul-1716589/.
62. Ștefan Both, 'Fără depuneri de coroane la Monumentul Ostașului Român, de Ziua României', *Adevărul*, 25 November 2023, https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/timisoara/fara-depuneri-de-coroane-la-monumentul-ostasului-2222988.html.
63. Rusu and Croitoru, *Politici ale memoriei în România postsocialistă*, p. 60.
64. Mîrț, 'Ritivoiu îi cere primarului Fritz'.
65. William Totok, 'Ehrung für Faschisten', *Die Tageszeitung*, 15 May 2023, https://taz.de/Kulturhauptstadt-Europas-2023/!5927997/; and Valentin Cernat et al., 'Pentru o cultură a memoriei democratice în spațiul public din Timișoara', *Petiție online*, 24 May 2023, https://www.petitieonline.com/pentru_o_cultur_a_memoriei_democratice_in_spatiul_public_din_timioara.
66. Remus Crețan and Philip W. Matthews, 'Popular Responses to City-Text Changes: Street Naming and the Politics of Practicality in a Post-Socialist Martyr City', *Area*, 48:1 (2016), pp. 92–102.
67. On the 'mythology of anti-communism' in post-communist Romania, in which heroes and villains are conflated in the category of victims, see Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 194–222.