

COMMEMORATIONS AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: NARRATIVE
DYNAMICS AND THE MEMORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN MOLDOVA

by

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DEDICATION

For my mother Zohra.

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ABSTRACT

COMMEMORATIONS AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: NARRATIVE DYNAMICS AND THE MEMORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN MOLDOVA

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This research aims to understand how the narratives about the Second World War in Moldova are deployed in the political agendas and how these narratives perform in the broader social and political context of Moldova. To explore, understand, and analyze how history and memory are harnessed in the processes of establishing legitimacy for political agendas in Moldova, the research focuses on the dynamics of contestations between historical narratives through the commemorations of Victory Day, the end of the Second World War. The research question is: how are memories and interpretations of World War II are used to advance the political agendas of different political groups, and how do these narratives circulate and perform to produce a particular story of Moldova?

Drawing on qualitative methods such as participant observations, interviews, textual analysis, and narrative analysis, this project reveals that commemorations of Victory Day are seen as sites of contestation through which political elites seek legitimation of their visions of identity and statehood. The master narrative that emerges from this study is about competing identities and their corresponding historical ‘truth’ that is implicated in justifying certain futures for the Moldovan nation. Attention to

politics and narrative dynamics in the study of memory in Moldova reveals how the master narrative of 'competing identities' in Moldova constructs and limits the ways memory, identity, and nation are interpreted and discussed. The contradiction between the simplified dominant narrative about memory and the complexity of the experiences of the war in Moldova that emerges in the study highlights the need for critical engagement with the notions of collective memory and collective identities in the conflict resolution field.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The project sets out to explore the role of the Second World War in the discussions of political agendas in Moldova, where local discourses often get interwoven with global tensions and memory contestations. Through studying commemorations of Victory Day, it becomes possible to see how in Moldova, engaging with the memory of the Second World War, in the context of geopolitical tensions produce narratives that link the memory to the present-day issues and the future. The study is an ethnographic exploration of meanings of commemorations of Victory Day and the Second World War in Moldova. Through this exploration, we come to a better understanding of how certain narratives about history and memory become dominant, while others are marginalized and what are the implications of such narrative dynamics for conflict and conflict resolution.

The Context for the Study

Over the past several years, the commemorations of May 9, Victory Day – the end of the Second World War, have expanded in Russia and the Eastern European region, including the post-Soviet republics. On May 9, 2018, Balkan Insight, a regional analytical publication, reported about different ways the Eastern European countries were commemorating Victory Day. The article on May 9 stated: “Balkan and Eastern European countries again showed on Wednesday that they are divided over whether to

commemorate May 9 as the day on which Nazi Germany surrendered in World War II or to observe the European Union's annual Europe Day celebration." (2018, Balkan Insight). The article went on to report that in some countries while Victory Day marches, others chose to celebrate Europe Day, and yet a few celebrated both Victory Day and Europe Day. Examples included the visit of the Serbian president Vucic flew to Moscow to attend the parade with president Putin, the celebration of Europe Day in Croatia, among others. In Bosnia, according to the article, the Victory Day was celebrated with the Immortal Regiment march, the same procession of people walking with portraits of veterans or family members, as in Moscow. In capitals across the region Minsk, Kyiv, Tallinn, Chisinau, various forms of commemorations of Victory Day have been taking place in recent years, often sparking tensions and debates within these societies about the meaning and the relevance of the observances. The questions raised in these countries are about whether this day should be celebrated as a Victory Day, as it has been throughout the Soviet period, or the remembrance should be abandoned given the cost of war and the complex history of the Second World War period across the region.

In Moldova, on May 9, 2018, the left Socialist and right Democratic parties organized two separate commemorations marking both Victory Day and Europe Day. The Socialist commemoration included Soviet symbolism and slogans drawing from the narrative of the Great Patriotic War, while the Democratic party commemoration celebrated Europe Day along with Victory Day. The same article in Balkan Insight (2018), described the commemorations as being led by the 'pro-Russian President' with

the Socialist Party and ‘pro-European Parliament’ are celebrating Victory Day and Europe Day in Moldova.

In Moldova, as in other Soviet states, the commemorations of Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War were established in the 1960s and became an annual event celebrated in the Soviet period. Following the end of the Soviet Union, the narrative of the Great Patriotic War has been contested by the emergence of alternative narratives across Eastern Europe. The contestations are rooted in the disagreements around the historical narratives about the Second World War in the post-Cold War era. The Second World War period is complicated not only due to the violence of the war and but also the redrawing of the borders that took place. The territories of current Eastern European countries had complex and violent experiences during the war.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent republics created a new context for engaging with the past in these societies. While the original narrative praised the victory of the Soviet Union over fascism, the developed counter-narrative in the post-Soviet period across the region describes World War II and Stalinist repressions as national victimizations. Also, the processes of state-building that followed demanded engagement with histories as the societies attempted to transition from one system to another while defining themselves in the process. As the newly emerged republics embarked on the nation and state-building, many turned to rewrite their histories in support of these processes. Alternative narratives that have developed to challenge the Russian/Soviet narrative about World War II, portray the period during the Second World War as one of occupation and oppression by the Soviet government.

There is also a regional and international dimension to the dynamics around historical narratives. Zhurzhenko (2007, 7) in “Geopolitics of Memory” argues that since the 1990s, the post-Soviet republics have created new national historical narratives, “combining selective appropriation of Soviet heritage with partial victimization of their nations as former “colonies” of Moscow.” Revised narratives help position themselves as victims of the Soviet Union while positioning themselves in the European geopolitical context. Torbakov (2011, 211) argues that such positioning seeks to “to strengthen their sense of Europeanness and distinguish themselves from Russia, which is often cast as a non-European, Eurasian power – in a word, as Europe’s constitutive Other.”

The remembrance of the Second World War in the Eastern European countries is also made difficult by the existence of several historical narratives – Western, Eastern, Russian, about the war (Tismeaneanu and Iacob, 2012). In other words, history and memory get debated and contested locally in the context of competing historical narratives in the broader region. Tensions between the West and Russia since the conflict in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, worsen already existing contestations around history implicating them in the political elites’ agendas (Torbakov, 2011). The dynamics and outcomes of engaging with history in the context of transitions and state-building can vary across the region, depending on the political systems, presence of violent conflicts in recent history, diversity of the population, and the complexity of the historical events in each former Soviet state, to name just a few factors. In some countries, like my native Azerbaijan, despite contestations around the issue of identity in the 1990s, a dominant collective narrative emerged underpinning the nation-building process while also

accommodating the violent conflict that erupted with neighboring Armenia. In this context, history, and memory play a role in constructing a conflict narrative which, over time, becomes simplified. In others, such as Ukraine and Moldova, the contestations over various interpretations of history in nation-building discussions continue (Zhurzhenko, 2007).

In Moldova, since independence in 1991, an official historical policy to promote a shared understanding of the past has not been implemented. History became part of identity politics, which continued to dominate since the 1990s. Often local discourses about history get tangled in the narratives about statehood, identity, and Moldova's foreign alliances. As a country, like many in the post-Soviet space, Moldova continues to deal with the internal challenges of transition, protracted conflict, and while playing a balancing act between the European Union and Russia in the context of growing international tensions. Competing interpretations of history become part of these processes, intersecting with narratives of statehood, and geopolitics. The contestations around the history of the Second World War, become more pronounced around the commemoration of Victory Day when politicians and groups elaborate competing historical narratives.

In Moldova, the implications of these contestations touch on issues of significant importance for the country. History instrumentalized in identity politics and discussions about the notions of statehood are reflected in debates and policy decisions on the issues of minority rights, language policies, education, etc. These discussions about history and memory have become stripped of complexity and nuance, contributing to the existing

cleavages in society and preventing meaningful dialogue about the past. There is also a danger that history becomes an aid in driving global and regional conflicts into local agendas. Discussions and positioning among the elites about the economic and political cooperation with the EU, and Russia, also get drawn into competing historical narratives, creating yet another resource for zero-sum thinking when it comes to foreign policies. In Moldova, the dichotomous narratives of 'pro-European' and 'pro-Russian' in the political space are an example of such thinking. Politicized use of history in identity politics also draws attention away from the present-day issues and conditions that need action and change. As such, history and memory, carry the potential for deepening divisions and conflicts between ethnic and language groups and driving nationalist and exclusivist agendas.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine how the memory of the Second World War is produced, performed, and contested as a struggle for meaning-making of the past to explain and justify the present political agendas and chart a way to the future. The performance of these narratives is a political process, more so in a context where memory becomes implicated in the agendas of the competing political elites like in Moldova and is utilized as a part of legitimation of particular notions of statehood. Understanding the production and politics of narratives of history, therefore, needs to take place before the conceptualization of the process of conflict transformation.

To explore, understand, and analyze how history and memory are harnessed in the processes of establishing legitimacy for political agendas in Moldova, the research project focuses on the dynamics of contestations between historical narratives through the commemorations of the end of the Second World War. The research question is: *how are memories and interpretations of World War II are used to advance the political agendas of different political groups, and how do these narratives circulate and perform to produce a particular story of Moldova?* The study also explores a subset of questions, including how history is narrated to make a case for the political agendas such as European integration, and how is it being embedded within a particular geopolitical narrative? Which narratives are circulating in Moldova, and how do various political groups produce and construct meanings from World War II to narrate history? How do historical narratives used by the political groups help justify the certain political order and the future that stems from it? How is the complexity and multiplicity of collective memories to be understood? How do communities construct their histories, remembering some and either choosing to or being forced to ‘forget’ other historical events? And what are the relations of power that impact what stories can and cannot be told? These questions are at the center of this study, which looks at the processes of memory production in Moldova and at how memory is used to promote or resist ideas about the country’s present and future.

Studying the questions of history and memory in Moldova and how they relate to the present-day political issues opens up a new theoretical space for addressing conflict in such settings. The production of history and memory is always a political process in

which some stories are heard, and others are marginalized or silenced. Trouillot (1995, 26) argues that tracking power requires a complex view of historical production, so we can discover “the exercise of power which makes some narratives possible and silences others.” Attention to the sites of remembrance and actors who participate in it are essential in a more comprehensive study of memory (Trouillot, 1995). Focusing on the dynamics and process by which some narratives become dominant allows us to track power and pay attention to the politics of memory. It moves us beyond inadvertently accepting the dominant narrative as a representative of a more complex set of narratives that can help maintain or further marginalization and conflict.

The more political view of memory helps us to find an opening for engagement with history and memory in a way that captures the complexity and multiplicity of memory, avoiding reproduction of old power structures and relationships. Such an approach creates opportunities for critical thinking, transformation, and change in the present context.

Case of Moldova

One of the most illuminating ways of getting at understanding collective memory can be engaging with it in contexts where main approaches are challenged. Exploring questions of collective memory in multiethnic societies, which have been subjected to cultural policies by hegemonic powers and historical experiences, resulting in diverse and multiple memories, is an interesting context for research. Working in such social settings provides opportunities to question the concepts of collective memory, identity as a shared

common unit. This leads to questioning the notions of collective memory rooted in common historical experience with its collective traumas and victimhood as fixed, static memory. Research in such sites prompts us to pay attention to the complexity of memory and the conditions, which lead to the emergence and domination of certain historical narratives.

Moldova provides an interesting case for understanding the dynamics of history and memory's intersection with conflict. In Moldova, as in many former Soviet Republics, the legacy of the historical truth of the Soviet period have been challenged by the processes of state and nation-building processes following independence. The period of World War II is an especially complicated period of history for Moldova. At the start of the war, the territory had been part of Romania since 1918. In 1940, Moldova was annexed from Romania, becoming part of the Soviet Union. The territory's experience of World War II resulted in complex and multiple memories of the war among most of the population. Still, as in other former Soviet Republics, the dominant narrative about the war has been the narrative of the Great Patriotic War anchored in the history and 'glory' of the Soviet Union.

As Moldova gained independence in 1991, alternative narratives have developed to challenge the Russian/Soviet narrative about World War II, to create new historical narratives for the newly established country. Therefore, since independence, competing for historical narratives became part of the competing versions of nationalism. The period of the Second World War is a particularly contested period of history, where politics of memory becomes pronounced with multiple narratives and interpretations elaborated by

multiple actors. Legitimation of narratives and agendas of political groups remains the dominant way the memory is discussed in Moldova against the context of diverse and complex memory of the population. The contestations of memory in Moldova pervade various discourses on daily politics, geopolitical ‘orientation’ of Moldova, questions of identity and state-building, and even economic future. These distinctive interpretations of the period of WW II are elaborated in the current narratives about the country’s present and future course, presenting themselves in the commemorations, memorials, and celebration events held each year on anniversaries related to World War II. As such, around these points of memory, the performance of narratives becomes more pronounced while the contestations increase. The contestations over the identity and statehood of Moldova remains part of the polity. As King (2012, loc. 5300) writes: “Still, Moldova remained, even a decade after independence, the only country in eastern Europe in which major disputes existed among political and cultural elites over the fundamentals of national identity.” Various interpretations of history became closely interlinked with the contested identities given the events of this period in the region.

Competing interpretations of history also intersect with the broader regional historical narratives about the Second World War. Historically having been part of Romania and under the Russian rule, the people living in the region where Moldova’s current borders are drawn, experienced violence and forced transitions throughout various periods. Volatile history under different empires, as well as the diversity of ethnic and language groups, resulted in a country “with borders that would be challenged as soon as the imperial bonds fell away, and a divided population whose parts were eager to

preserve ties to their historical homelands.” (Ruemmer, 2017). However, despite the conflict with Transnistria in the early 1990s that resulting in the territory’s declaring independence from Moldova, Moldova ethnic divisions did not intensify. However, the discussions over identity, language, and the country’s relations with its neighbors continued dominating the political space. The influence of both Romania and Russia remains strong among different populations due to ethnic, linguistic, culture as well as ideological factors. These preferences among societal groups are widely reflected in the politics underpinning political party agendas, foreign policy preferences, and regional alliances.

Signing the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) in 2014 and the trade agreement that accompanied it and choosing a European course for development and subsequent integration into the EU introduced new challenges to the political elites in implementing reforms that would adhere to the Agreement. The country’s proximity to Romania geographically, culturally, linguistically, and historically constitutes strong pull towards the EU, and due to the current Association Agreement becomes decisive in its political and economic development through financial aid and other support programs (Ruemmer, 2017). At the same time, ties with Russia will continue being crucial due to the Russian speaking population and economic relations, including a large number of labor migrants from Moldova living in Russia. A significant complicating factor is also Russian involvement in the Transnistria conflict (with Russian peacekeepers stationed in the region). Therefore, factors of language shared past as well as economic relations

continue to shape the agendas of political parties and generate support from various groups in Moldova.

Dynamics of relations in the broader regional further complicated the already difficult balancing act that Moldova must play between Brussels and Moscow. Following the crisis in bordering Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, increasing tensions between the West and Russia has become an increasingly influential factor in how the divisions play out within Moldova. Ruemer (2017) argues that the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 resulted in new post-Cold War period security order in Europe dividing along with political, economic, and security structures with NATO and EU on one side, and Russia on the other side. Moldova, which receives financial aid from the European Union, and is on the course of European integration, has to balance its economic and political relations with Russia, which are important for the country. Moldova, therefore, is trying to find a balance and a relatively safe course between two competing centers of power (Ruemer, 2017). For years, this reflected and continues to do so, in the rhetoric of the politicians and political parties in Moldova, who narrate these differences as geopolitical orientation: with Romania, the European Union, and West or Russia. Underpinning these narratives are different interpretations of history and narration of events, which get intensified during the commemorations of Victory Day. For some, the commemoration of May 9 as Victory Day, automatically situates the holiday in the Great Patriotic War narrative from the Soviet period, which is now being actively promoted by Russia. However, this narrative is also contested by other stories that see the Second World War as a period of occupation and emphasize the atrocities of Stalin and the communist state.

The case of Moldova is one that brings to light several issues that arise from engagement with history as people make meaning of the past in order to understand the present and forecast a future. Often entangled with interests and agendas of different groups, memory is interpreted to explain the present-day issues, justify agendas and political orders, and stake claims. Power and politics are not absent from these processes, therefore, requiring the researcher to situate the stories in the political and social context, pay attention to the local while simultaneously locating the processes in the national and global discourses. Through observing the commemorations of the Victory Day in Moldova and exploring the meanings around these events, my research explores the processes of memory production in Moldova.

Research Project

The research seeks to explore how the history and memory of the Second World War are used in advancing legitimacy for the political agendas in Moldova by studying commemorations of Victory Day and meaning-making around the commemorations and the memory of the war. Through exploring commemorations of Victory Day and broader narratives about the Second World War among the elites, the study seeks to understand how the narratives about the Second World War in Moldova are deployed in the political agendas and how these narratives perform in the broader social and political context of Moldova.

These processes are political, and multiple actors engage in the interpretations of the past narrating history. There are always silences present in these narratives, which are

determined by power relations as well as cultural contexts. The narrative approach provides a lens that allows us to study memory as a meaning-making process and attend to the performance of history in the present and the politics of this performance. The meaning-making paradigm in the narrative approach creates avenues for the contestation of memory in the struggle for power through examining stories and practices of people engaged in this process. These contestations are over which meaning gets to be privileged, and as such, they reflect and produce conflict (Winslade and Mouk, 2000). Narrative as a meaning-making is a social process involving the production of stories and action, and through that producing a wider social world (Plummer, 1995). The constant struggle over meaning is what gives way to the creation of a social world where some stories are marginalized, and others are heard.

The research project aims to contribute to the conflict resolution field by exploring the ways and conditions in which these contestations, constructions of alternative meanings can facilitate the creation of more complex and thicker historical narratives. Failure to attend to these questions leaves societies vulnerable and without ways of participating in the conversations and subject to the narratives which perpetuate conflict and tensions. The past is often harnessed by those who wish to use it to advance their political interests. Uncritical ways looking at collective memories and collective identities help perpetuate the way the relationships between groups and the subject matter are structured, preserving existing power dynamics and conflicts. Attention to performance and politics is crucial in enabling us to study memory and to trace its performance and politics in conflict, and in this process, ‘perform’ a new approach to

memory and history leading to new forms of practice in conflict resolution. From a conflict resolution perspective, my interest is on exploring how the production, circulation, and performance of certain narratives of history can give rise to or contribute to the transformation of the conflict to create a healthier social world where one narrative does not produce marginalization. The goal is to move away from the essentialist characterization of entire groups and towards understanding the complexity and uncertainty of people's lives and their relations to the past (Finnstrom 2008).

Methods

Ethnography enables us to capture the complexity and richness of narrative environments and thus yields insights into the conditions and settings which shape narratives, such as places, audiences, issues around which stories are constructed (Gubrium et al. 2012, 27). Narrative ethnography gives attention to the communicative activity in the said setting (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). My living and working in Moldova before and throughout my research and writing allowed me to become part of and observe social and political processes in Moldova over an extended time. Because of my extended professional and research engagement in the field of study, the ethnographic method allowed me to gain insights over time, of how and when the memory of the Second World War becomes drawn upon in current political present and in which contexts and conditions memory becomes important. An ethnographic method was crucial in capturing the complexity of the context and understanding the processes of memory production and performance.

The study focuses on commemoration activities organized by political parties and the interviews with the political elites. This privileging of the political parties and elite narratives is intentional, due to my interest in the politics of memory and the intersection of memory with current political issues and future directions for Moldova. At the same time, the focus on the political elites and party-organized events result in the emergence of certain narratives in the study, while obscuring others. The main findings of the study and the memory narratives discussed throughout chapters need to be taken with this context in mind. Memory narratives dominating and advanced in the political space are not more important but rather provide insights into how some narratives become more legitimate while others are marginalized.

The period of the Second World War in Moldova not only contains events that determined its fate for the next 70 years as part of the Soviet Union, but it was also a violent and complex period for the population of the country. For this reason, the memory of this period is also complex, with multiple and complex narratives still being told in families (Cash, 2016). There has also been an abundance of silences around issues such as the Holocaust, among others (Dumitru 2008; Cash 2016). To this end, I was attentive to the complexity and multiplicity of the narratives in Moldova throughout my research. However, this multiplicity was a context rather than the focus of my research.

To study remembrance activities, I conducted participant observations of two commemorations of Victory Day, which was organized in Chisinau, capital of Moldova on May 9, 2018, by the Socialist and Democratic Parties. Based on narrative theory, the analysis is on the commemorations as a site for meaning-making and a form of narrative

performance, constructing a past through re-enactment in the present. Commemorations can provide us with a window to a performative meaning-making process of narration about history. The myth-making and political nature of commemorations make them a particularly valuable site to study the process of production of memory. Here the individual and group are at once connected but can also be differentiated, and attention to the social and political context is crucial.

The data collection included a combination of tools such as participant observations, interviews, and textual analysis. These methods create opportunities to work with the groups ‘understudy’ in a participatory manner so that the categories and questions emerge in conversation with them. The data collection included a combination of tools such as participant observations, interviews, and textual analysis.

My embeddedness in the field allowed me to gain an understanding of key narratives and be able to explore the connection of memory to these issues. Studying the activities of political parties at producing a particular history, what these narratives are, and how they are circulating is essential to understanding how they become entangled with promoting particular political agendas for the country. I used Connerton’s (1989) approach to commemoration, focusing analysis on the elements of a ritual and bodily performances as a mechanism of conveying and sustaining the past. I also traced and using positioning theory analyzed social media texts of the members of the two parties around the date of the commemoration, to understand how the meanings of the commemorations are conveyed by the party members. Social media texts posted by the

party members were used as a way of studying key messages of the political parties around this day, as represented by the leadership of the party.

To further explore the meanings around the commemorations and memory of the war period, I conducted forty unstructured and semi-structured interviews with the elites, current and former politicians, scholars, intellectuals, experts, and members of the civil society who are actively engaged in shaping the social and political life of their country. In addition to these data collection methods, ethnographic approach and two years spent in the research site, allowed me to become embedded in the daily discourses of politics and memory to understand the ‘narrative reality’ (Gabrium and Holstein, 2012) and trace the performance of memory narratives across the narrative landscape. I listened and participated in many personal discussions on the topic of history and memory, and politics, followed social and political news daily, along with discussions and debates on social media. Furthermore, my professional engagement in politics and conflict resolution work became a constant source of engagement on political issues beyond my research topic, nevertheless providing me a broader knowledge of the political context. Ethnographic research, including the interviews, allowed for the meanings of the commemorations and, more generally, the memory of the Second World, to emerge from the research and be situated in social context and network of meanings that populate Moldovan political space.

Organization of the Dissertation

Engaging with an interdisciplinary topic such as ‘memory’ in an interdisciplinary field such as conflict resolution creates challenges and opportunities for framing the theoretical base from which the study evolves. Chapter two engages critically with the main conflict resolution theories and practical approaches that address the issue of history and memory. With an eye to the nuances of social and cultural contexts in conflicts, Chapter two discusses critical assumptions in the conflict resolution field, which informs approaches to reconciliation, collective memory and collective identity, the notions of trauma, and victimhood. The discussion reveals that although the field had acknowledged and integrated history and memory into its theoretical and practice approaches, key assumptions underpinning these approaches face challenges when presented with the complexity and power that characterize many conflict settings.

A narrative approach to memory allows attending to the narrative dynamics and the multiplicity and complexity of meanings around the memory of the Second World War in Moldova, even as the study focuses on the political party organized commemorations. Chapter three discusses the methodology and key analytical frames used for the study, drawing on narrative analysis tools, positioning theory, and master/counter-narrative dynamics outlines the analytical tools used for the study and the methods and the scope of the method.

Memory is always produced in particular social, political, and cultural contexts, and understanding these contexts is key to understanding narrative dynamics and attending to politics. Understanding the context of the present-day contestations and

narratives of memory in Moldova requires a brief historical overview, which is presented in Chapter four. In addition, this chapter provides the current narrative landscape around the issue of memory by providing a review of the current discussions of history and memory of the Second World War in scholarship by Moldovan and international scholars. Chapter four reveals that history and memory have been widely used in identity politics and legitimization of either ‘Moldovanist’ or ‘Romanianist’ nationalism narratives that emerged in Moldova in the post-independence period. The period of the Second World War and its various interpretations became essential to the legitimation of these narratives and implicated in the various articulation of identity and statehood.

Commemoration of Victory Day as a performance of historical narratives has become a site of contestation through which the political elites over recent history advance their interpretations of the past and promote a certain future for Moldova. Chapter five provides ethnographic descriptions of the two commemorations organized by the Socialist and Democratic Parties. Analysis reveals that the commemorative activities in Moldova by the political parties are implicated in the production of memory, which helps promote their political agendas. Socialist Party commemoration as it carries with itself symbols, bodily performances, music, and rituals of the Soviet period establishes continuity with the past and through that with a continued statehood of Moldova. Democratic Party commemoration, on the other hand, is an attempt to revise the story of the Victory Day by incorporating Europe Day and promoting a European identity. In this case, remembrance is used to break with the past and advocate for a different future.

Through the narrative research and analysis of the stories among political elites interviewed in the study, the master narratives that circulate are a location for understanding the broader context and ways in which memory of the Second World War is produced and the role that commemorations of Victory Day play in it. The stories illuminate how the narrative positions, constrain, or advance discussions of memory of the Second World War. In Chapter six, the master narrative about the memory of the war locates it in the conversation about identity that is needed for Moldova's future and its development. Stories reveal that commemorations of Victory Day in the way they are made use of by the political elites are seen as sites of contestation through which various groups seek legitimation of their visions of identity and statehood and by doing so delegitimize other stories contributing to divisions. The master narrative that emerges from this study is about competing identities and their corresponding historical 'truth' used in justifying certain futures for the Moldovan nation.

Chapter seven provides a discussion for implications of the analysis that emerges from the research and raises questions about whether key assumptions in conflict resolution theory and practice when dealing with collective memory and identity should be applied in diverse settings. Attention to politics and narrative dynamics in the study of memory in Moldova reveals how the master narrative of 'competing identities' in Moldova constructs and limits the ways memory, identity, and nation are interpreted and discussed. Discussion in chapter seven of the contradiction between the simplified dominant narrative about memory and the complexity of the experiences of the war in

Moldova illuminates the need for critical engagement with the notions of collective memory and collective identities in the conflict resolution field.

As researchers and practitioners seek to address the role of history and memory in conflict settings, it is crucial to consider the narrative dynamics that emerge under various social and political contexts. Politics of memory needs to become an integral lens in understanding how memory operates in various settings considering local cultural, political, and economic realities. Memory studies provide openings, whether discursive, symbolic or embodied, which can become ways of engaging with more attention to difference and complexity in various settings and without reinforcing the binary categories of us versus them, victims versus perpetrators. Taking great care to study and understand how memory operates and is contested in various settings is the matter of not only effectiveness but also ethics to the conflict resolution practice. The challenge facing the conflict resolution field both in theory and practice domains is advancing methodology for better understanding the process of production and circulation of narratives to avoid and transform marginalization and violence in groups and societies. Practices that rely on the theories of trauma, acknowledgment, healing through speaking leads to “penetration of the communities who have to figure out the way of living together” (McGrattan 2009, 168). Instead, a more nuanced understanding of memory, which locates it in a cultural, social context with a comprehensive analysis of power, is needed for successful conflict transformation processes.

CHAPTER TWO: MEMORY, NARRATIVE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The choices in the definitions and conceptualization of history and memory, create both opportunities and limitations for engagements in conflict settings. These concepts and approaches allow us to better understand and find pathways for conflict transformation in settings in which history, memory, and conflict interact. Both ‘topics’ – conflict resolution and collective memory, which I engage in my study are interdisciplinary fields with boundaries which are not easy to define. Therefore, what I offer in this Chapter is not a comprehensive review of the collective memory literature, which proliferated through multiple disciplines. Instead, I review how the conflict resolution field addresses the topic of memory, before drawing on key concepts of collective memory to develop a definition of memory for this study.

Although often concerned with the present and the future, the conflict resolution field has moved towards addressing the role of history and memory in conflict. With its interest in group relations, conflict resolution field’s engagement with the topics of history and memory has been on collective remembering, collective trauma, and reconciliation as a way of preventing an escalation or supporting the resolution. This chapter reviews main approaches in conflict resolution towards history and memory with a critical eye towards this complexity, and attention to power often present in the process of memory production.

The literature on collective memory, identities, and reconciliation is relevant to this study from two perspectives. First, given the study's focus on the production of history and memory, approaches to remembering and forgetting the modes of remembering such as speaking or ritual, become relevant to understanding how to explore these issues in the context of Moldova. Secondly, the concept of reconciliation is also important from the conflict resolution perspective, when considering memory in the Moldovan context. The issues of historical justice are of relevance both in the context of the Soviet period and due to the more recent events that took place in the region with the outbreak of violent conflicts in the 1990s. Also, claims for recognition, justice, and accountability to crimes have been raised in the Eastern European countries, such as Moldova, about repressive policies of the Soviet state. From this perspective, reconciliation literature offers key approaches to addressing the past.

Given the complexities of the conflict settings, a nuanced understanding of memory, which locates it in a cultural, social context with a comprehensive analysis of power, is needed for successful conflict transformation processes. The narrative approach as a meaning-making lens offers ways to attend to these issues when studying memory. The last section of this chapter discusses narrative approaches to memory and conflict in laying out the theoretical framework for the study of memory narratives in Moldova.

History, Memory and Conflict Resolution

The purpose of this study is to examine how the memory of the Second World War are produced, performed, and contested as a struggle for meaning-making of the

past, in order to explain and justify the present political agendas and chart a way to the future. The performance of these narratives is a political process, more so in a context where memory becomes implicated in the agendas of the competing political elites like in Moldova and is utilized as a part of legitimation of particular notions of statehood. Understanding the production and politics of narratives of history, therefore, needs to take place before the conceptualization of the process of conflict transformation. The project seeks to understand how the memories of the Second World War are constructed and harnessed in the advancement of political agendas in Moldova, where local discourses often get interwoven with global tensions and memory contestations.

From the conflict resolution perspective, I am interested in exploring how the production, circulation, and performance of particular narratives of history can give rise to or, alternatively, contribute to the transformation of the conflict to create a healthier social world, where one narrative does not produce marginalization and suffering. The question remains; how are we to imagine engagement with history and memory that is authentic so that they capture the complexity and multiplicity of memory in a way that does not reproduce old power structures and relationships and create opportunities for critical thinking, transformation, and change in the present context? How do we engage with history in a way that does not perpetuate existing conflicts and relationships but create new moral frameworks and anchor the development of a more peaceful future? Failure to attend to these questions leaves societies vulnerable and without ways of participating in the conversations and subject to the narratives which perpetuate conflict and tensions.

Uncritical ways looking at collective memories and collective identities can perpetuate the way the relationships between groups and the subject matter are structured, preserving existing power dynamics and conflicts. The past is cast aside only to be harnessed by those who wish to use it as something to advance their political interests.

For conflict resolution field concerned with the study of conflicts and processes of violence and marginalization faces a challenge of understanding the role of history and memory in these processes. Understanding the formation and circulation of narratives about history can reveal various ‘conditions’ under which dominant narratives of memory are more powerful or can be resisted or even unseated.

Understanding how history and memory get implicated in conflict settings requires recognition and conceptualization of these concepts in the conflict resolution field. However, the field’s goal of resolving conflict puts more focus on resolving present-day differences such as in the interest-based and needs-based theory in the field, which deal with conflict through the identification and transformation of parties’ present-day concerns, goals, and interests (Burton 1993, 1997; Fisher 2001; Tint 2010; Kelman 2010; Fisher et al. 2011). Other theories in the conflict resolution field, such as competition and cooperation theories (Deutsch et al. 2006; Schellenberg 1996) and third-party facilitated conflict resolution strategies (Moore 2001; Bush and Folger 2005; Fisher 1997) also focus on present-day conflict issues and the future.

Nevertheless, there has been growing interest in the topic of history and memory. Intractable conflict is one area where scholars in the conflict resolution field have addressed the role of history (Tint 2010; Putnam and Wondelleck 2003; Coleman 2006;

Jabs 2007). Intractable conflicts are defined as rooted in disagreements over material resources, as well as cultural and religious rights, (Azar 1990; Miall 2004) and having a long history of animosity resulting in damaged relationships (Fisher 1990; Bar Tal et al. 2009; Montville 1993; Lederach 1997; Ross 2005). Given the centrality of issues of identity in the intractable conflicts, scholarship has also emphasized the connection between identity conflicts and memory as key to protracted conflicts (Lederach 1997; Coleman 2006; Kriesberg 2007; Rothman 1997, 2001; Azar 1990).

Identity, memory, and conflict

In conflict settings, the processes of memory production often get implicated in the discussions of group identities (Tint 2010, 245). In memory studies too, the connection between identity and memory is much studied due to the socially-shared nature of memory and centrality of narratives to individual and group identities. Given the conflict resolution field's interest in group conflict, the role of history and memory is often considered in the context of identity-based conflicts.

In the conflict resolution field, the scholars define identity conflicts when groups perceive themselves to be oppressed and victimized through a denial of their underlying needs for security, recognition, and equity (Burton et al. 1987). Underlying human needs and values compose people's social identities, particularly in the context of group affiliations, loyalties, and solidarity (Rothman and Olson 2001; Rothman 1997). In this perspective, identities become central to the dynamics of conflict. Social identity theory emphasizes conflict's contribution to the salience of identities in conflict and the

development of ‘us’ and ‘others’ categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). In this approach, the group identity is strengthened by the threat from others, often incorporating the conflict into how it defines itself, leading the conflict to become intractable (Tint 2010; Burton, 1990a; Kelman 2008; Volkan, 1998, 2000).

Tint (2010), drawing from examples of protracted conflicts, argues that memories of the conflict become an essential part of these individual and collective identities (p. 245). Bar Tal’s (2000, 2007) influential work in the field incorporates memory into understanding identity conflicts. According to the author, groups develop and carry societal beliefs and conflict ethos, a historical narrative about a conflict to cope with anxiety, fear, stress. An extended period of conflict also results in the sense of victimhood, which becomes part of these beliefs. Collective memory is considered a part of this ethos and is defined as biased, one-sided or skewed beliefs about the past (Bar Tal, 2000), beliefs that are foundational to the view of history as traumatic, as a source of the conflict, and therefore something from which people must heal. It is in the context of this group or collective identity that the conflict resolution field seeks to address history and memory as an integral part of the conflict. In this framework, when a long history of violence that had damaged relationships, and the sense of victimization and trauma is prevalent, addressing history becomes central to the conflict resolution process (Tint; 2010; Montville 2001; Kriesberg 2007; Galtung 2001). In the theories on collective memory, identity, and trauma, analysis is centered at the group level, focusing on the commonalities within the groups and differences between groups. The role of history is essential to understanding the cause of conflict and group identities, where historical

grievances are embedded. These approaches made a contribution to the conflict resolution field by expanding analysis beyond the present-day interests of groups to exploring how historical narratives get entangled in conflict dynamics. Accounting for history allows for a more complex analysis of the conflict as it brings historical experiences within and between groups that come into focus. This lends a better understanding of the dynamics of the conflict and tracing the role of history and memory, especially in the context of protracted conflicts lasting generations.

When studying memory in conflict settings, the question of how the conflict and violence continue to be remembered by groups and over longer periods of time is key to preventing further violence and addressing long-lasting conflicts. In the study of memory in Moldova, for example, the question of how the memory of the Second World War changes over time is of interest in studying commemorations of Victory Day of an event that took place 73 years earlier. The conflict resolution field addresses this question in the collective memory theories which incorporate the concept of trauma and victimhood.

In the past decades, trauma has become a conventional way of appropriating history, and the dominant mode of understanding groups' relationship with the past (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, 15). The trauma-based approach to memory is based on psychological trauma studies, modeled on the clinic latency of post-traumatic stress, which is characterized by the appearance of first symptoms sometimes after a painful period (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). According to this approach, if not uncovered and healed, the trauma, whether experienced directly or acquired through the shared knowledge, memory results in feelings of victimization in intractable conflicts (Kriesberg

2003; Levine 2006; Montville 2001; Volkan 2001). Victimization then becomes central to the psychological dimensions of conflict (Bar Tal et al. 2009; Bar Tal 2007; Kriesberg 2003; Montville 2001). The perception of being victims of oppression and domination by the 'other' becomes an integral part of collective memories in conflict and perpetuates feelings of mistrust, insecurity, and threat (Kriesberg 2003; Montville 2001). Traumatic memories and perceptions of victimization become groups' constructed understanding of the present, shaped by history in addition to culture, discourse, and belief (Bar Tal 2007; Miall 2004). Construction of the past as trauma and victimization is seen as crucial in the mobilization of groups in conflict, and an important matter to address in conflict resolution process (Miall 2004; Montville 2006). The trauma-based approach to memory is based on psychological trauma studies, according to which, if not uncovered and healed, the traumatic experience of an individual will express itself in some other form. Trans-generational transmission of trauma is modeled on the clinical latency of post-traumatic stress, which is characterized by the appearance of first symptoms sometimes after a painful period (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009).

Conceptualization of victimhood based on trauma in conflict resolution is relevant from the perspective of stopping and preventing further cycles of violence. In this approach, it is natural that there is a preoccupation with revenge and the perpetuation of violence resulting from a sense of victimhood and experience of trauma (Volkan, 2004). Since victimhood is seen as forming biased perceptions of the group, increasing sensitivity to a new threat and creating difficulties in taking the perspective of the other, there is a danger that the victimized group will retaliate without 'corrective experiences,'

becoming perpetrators themselves (Staub et al., 2005). This is not to say that revenge and retaliation are not uncommon in violent conflicts. Still, overarching assumptions about human nature and the inherent view that all victims of violence will react with revenge is problematic. Research in Rwanda, for example, showed that while certain individuals affected by genocide sought revenge or justice, others preferred to forget and co-exist peacefully with other members of perpetrating groups (Buckley-Zistel, 2006). In his work with Holocaust survivors, Kellerman (2007, 56) found that the theories of chosen trauma did not hold, and survivors were much better aware of the destruction of war and violence, arguing that there are groups within Israel that are against the continuation of violence. Such approaches to trauma and victimhood also impose categories of the victim, which is problematic, as it simplifies people's diverse experiences and assumes that people choose victimhood, oppression, and trauma over survival and resilience. Defining a 'victim' is a highly political issue and often defines a particular kind of person and their relationship to the nation and society, often determined by the political agendas of the time (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, 30).

The trauma approach also collapses the difference between history and memory, with the meaning of the past framed as unmediated (Davis, 2005). Groups can, therefore, be passive holders of the experience, with the issues of subjectivity and other contextual and cultural factors shaping the impact of violence are not considered. In this view, a shared meaning of a traumatic event becomes deposited into the collective consciousness. The agency of individuals and groups in experiencing and remembering historical events and the influence of social and cultural factors in these processes are not considered. It

also imposes categories of the victim, which is problematic, as it simplifies people's diverse experiences and assumes that people choose victimhood, oppression, and trauma over survival and resilience. Studies show that individuals and groups are as likely to focus on the practicalities of daily lives and rebuilding their livelihoods instead of choosing to be victimized (Kellerman, 2007). For example, when studying women's experiences in Sierra Leon, Coulter (2009) found that far from one category of victim, women described themselves in multiple roles such as bush wives, rebels, fighters as well as victims of rape and abduction. This example demonstrates how the automatic imposition of the identity of a victim is problematic in conflict settings and ignores the diversity of individual experiences derived from particular roles.

The lens on collectives and the role of memory in the group identities can improve our analysis of protracted conflicts and on-going contestations in many post-violent societies in the former Soviet region and beyond. The war over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the conflict in Georgia, or the wars in former Yugoslavia are contexts where historical narratives became important in legitimatizing conflict and violence. In these contexts, similar to Moldova's, where regime changes overlapped with the violent conflicts between groups, attention to collective aspects of remembering opens opportunities for better analysis. In the study of memory in Moldova, the theories in conflict resolution provide a lens to understanding the relationship between memory, conflict, and identity. In Moldova and many other post-colonial settings, where the nation-building processes are still underway, the connection between memory and identity can improve engagements in research or

practice with attention to the history of the conflict parties. For example, accounting for historical narratives' role in shaping identities in conflict contexts encourages us to incorporate history as one of the dimensions that need to be addressed or, at the very least, makes us aware of the dynamics around historical narratives. Theories on trauma bring forward attention to how violent or radical events throughout history influenced collective understanding in that period and the relationship of these events to identity narratives.

However, conflict resolution approaches on collective memory with their focus on identities and trauma also present us with challenges. Memory as a fixed and latent form of trauma ignores the issues of subjectivity and agency, and the variance with which people and collectives experience and make meaning of events. Emphasis is put on the traumatic event itself as an external factor, while subjectivity and agency remain unexplored. In this view, the line between individual and collective becomes blurred, applying the experience of an individual to a collective. When collapsing the difference between individual and collective memory, the diversity and complexity within a collective are ignored. These approaches prescribe a homogenous and fixed view of memory but while ignoring the complexity, multiplicity, and difference present within various groups within a society. In Moldova, where different ethnic and language groups had dissimilar experiences throughout different periods of history, homogenous and common view of memory is limited in capturing the diversity of experiences that exist. Instead, approaching collective experiences with assumptions of subjectivity shifts focus from the traumatic event to the individuals and communities and how they make meaning

of the violence and conflicts. This allows for a variety of experiences to emerge, exposing the suffering left in the wake of violence but also discovering resilience with which communities rebuild in post-conflict settings. Most importantly, such an approach brings the individuals and communities to the conversation rather than imposing a fixed and shared experience on an entire collective.

Such approaches are also limited in tracing power as they prescribe group histories, group identities, and group narratives. Applying the individual's perspective to a group prescribes the sameness of memory to a far more complex collective, does not consider the politics of meaning-making, and ignores the ways of remembering and recovering from violence developed in local cultural, social, and political contexts. How the Western trauma discourse is appropriated in various settings, and who gets to use it to gain legitimacy, imposing silences and shifting power relations, is of critical importance to avoiding perverse consequences and engaging meaningfully and positively in conflicts. Which identities and group historical narratives are privileged, and which are marginalized? What memories are silenced but continue by being silent play a role in conflict dynamics? What are the dynamics within in-group narratives? What is the multiplicity of narratives and identities? More attention to power is needed to not only improve our understanding of the conflict contexts and role of memory but also to consider whether any conflict resolution approach inadvertently supports the intractability or stands to advance conflict transformation. Lack of attention to power limits consideration of critical issues such as the processes by which specific traumas get 'chosen' and others are forgotten or ignored. In Moldova's case, where following the

Second World War, under the Soviet rule, critical discussions of the war period were silenced, the memory that emerged was highly constricted by the official policies producing silences. Famines and repressions that followed the war were not allowed to be discussed, while official history became the dominant narrative of the war. The negligence of power in these theories does not bring into view how collective traumas can be harnessed in advancing interests and agendas of some and marginalizing others within and between groups in conflict.

A more nuanced approach is necessary in the field, one that would be critical of generalization from the individual to the collective, and as La Capra (1998) proposes, takes a more social, historical and political view of traumatic experiences, as in the case of use of ‘trauma’ discourse in the aftermath of Bali bombing which neglected the local contexts (Dwyer and Santikarma, 2007). Studies show that individuals and groups are as likely to focus on the practicalities of daily lives and rebuilding their livelihoods instead of choosing to be victimized (Kellerman 2007; Coulter 2009).

Reconciliation: Learning from Transition Justice

If memory is most often discussed in the conflict resolution field through concepts of group identities, trauma, and victimhood, then, reconciliation becomes the primary way of dealing with the past, through healing traumas and repairing relationships damaged in the course of history. When it comes to reconciliation, the conflict resolution field has been influenced by transitional justice mechanisms, which have been widely applied across the world in various post-conflict settings. In recent years, international

mechanisms for truth and reconciliation have proliferated to help societies that have gone through mass violence to address past atrocities, heal, and move towards reconciliation and closure (Shaw, 2007). While at the top of these approaches are judicial and law-based mechanisms, which focus on the restoration of justice through the prosecution of perpetrators, many transitional justice mechanisms also involve truth and reconciliation commissions, which seek to address the past through apology, forgiveness and trust building (Teitel, 2003). The conflict resolution field's focus has been more on the relational aspect of these processes, namely reconciliation. Reconciliation is seen as a way of releasing the painful past and addressing victimization, and through these processes repairing the overall relationship damaged in long-standing conflict (Lederach 1997; Kriesberg 2003; Montville 2001; Kelman 2008; Galtung 2001).

The literature on reconciliation makes collective memory central to the conflict resolution process stemming from the theories about societal trauma, its trans-generational transmission (Volkan, 2001), and victimhood (Bar Tal, 2000). Addressing painful history is essential to those affected by conflict can move towards a peaceful future (Lederach and Lederach 2010; Montville 1993; Avruch 2010). The proposed interventions range from inter-group reconciliation processes to national level international transitional justice mechanisms (Kelman, 2008).

Politics of Remembering, Forgetting, and Speech.

Trauma and victimhood are central to most theories in the conflict resolution field, which is considering the history and collective memory in conflict. These studies

brought more attention to how societies deal with the aftermath of violence and suggest a more historical view of conflicts. In the past decades, trauma has become a conventional way of appropriating history, and the dominant mode of understanding groups' relationship with the past (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, 15). Collective memory is seen as a relationship with the past that is primarily located in the 'trauma' or in the traumatic events of the past (ibid). In this framework, groups in conflict identify themselves as victims through their collective experience of violence (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, 16).

The approaches to reconciliation in conflict resolution practice have their roots in the Western psychological and Christian traditions of telling, confession, and forgiveness as a way of moving past traumatic events (Shaw, 2010). The approaches which have become a global paradigm are based on assumptions, which privileges speech over silence in remembering, and verbalizing as the dominant mode of healing (Shaw, 2007). Moving forward without uncovering the past is not possible. Remembering needs to be through the process of truth-telling by both victims and the victimizers, acknowledging their role in creating suffering (Pruitt and Kim, 2004).

However, as scholars have pointed out, examples from various societies contradict the notion that verbalizing and speaking about painful memories is always the preferred and feasible way of dealing with the past (Burnett 2009; Drexler 2009; Shaw 2010). In some instances, individuals and groups choose to 'forget' the past as a way of rebuilding their lives and negotiating their present circumstances, and in other cases, are forced into silences by oppressive political environments. Silence about certain events does not represent a lack of memories but has become a necessary way of living in a

dangerous environment where making links with the violent past can pose dangers due to the political environment and state-sanctioned violence (Dwyer 2009). In other cases, forgetting becomes a coping mechanism allowing for co-existence in post-violence settings (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 134). The author contrasts chosen amnesia to Volkan's (2001) chosen trauma, arguing that the inability to remember certain events about genocide is deliberate on the part of people she interviewed in Rwanda. In her findings, amnesia is chosen because it is a deliberate effort to exclude a specific event from memory and prevent closure, thereby undermining a drawing of the boundary around identities and clearly defining who is in the "we group" (Buckley-Zistel 1991, 134). This suggests a great deal more agency on the part of those who have experienced violence than the 'deposited' view of trauma that the reconciliation literature allows us to see.

Forgetting as an active way of engaging with the past, and silences imposed by social and political structures in conflict settings are not incorporated into understandings of how memory operates and how reconciliation might take place. In such a view, if traumatic memory deposits in the memory, there is limited role attributed to different ways of remembering, assuming that individuals and groups always remember violent events and would, if given an opportunity, prefer to verbalize the memory to come to terms with the traumatic past. Such a view imposes Western psychological approaches to memory, erasing cultural, social, and political contexts, and limiting consideration of non-verbal ways of doing 'memory work.' Some scholarship in the reconciliation literature has addressed the role of ritual (Schirch, 2005) and song (Lederach and Lederach, 2010), and dance and theater have become conflict resolution practice

methodologies in recent years. When it comes to an understanding of the role of memory in conflict, however, these approaches have remained limited in application.

These examples of diverse ways of remembering expand the understanding of memory in the conflict resolution field, which privilege speech and have enormous implications for practice. If collective memories are full of silences, then how do current models of reconciliation privileging speech in the conflict resolution field fit in these settings? How is 'truth' to be shared and acknowledged if there are conflicts, as with cases of sexual violence, which make such memories unspeakable in some communities? There are no easy answers to these questions, but what is abundantly clear is that the conflict resolution field must take a more nuanced approach to work with memory, expanding the current methodology embedded in the notions of truth, forgiveness, and speech as healing.

In the context of this study, the theories in conflict resolution provide a useful lens to analysis of memory dynamics driving conflicts and for developing ways towards conflict resolution. For example, concepts of collective memory and trauma are important in studying the memory of war in Moldova as it provides a lens to understanding the most momentous events in shared memory that might still have salience today. Reconciliation literature also emphasizes the complex nature of conflicts and long-term work that is required for conflict resolution processes with a long history of animosity. Lessons from the transitional justice processes can help us explore questions around grievances and demands for recognition that persist in Moldova when it comes to history.

However, the scholarship in the conflict resolution field continues to overemphasize collective trauma (Bar Tal 2000, Galtung 2001). In this view, the entire society has a collective psyche, which can heal through speaking of the painful past. As Das (2006, 122) argues, “violence does not necessarily lead to solidarity, collective memory, or a shared subjectivity or political position among those it affects. Instead, violence often fragments communities and casts social interactions into tense configurations.” Emphasis on collective aspects of trauma and memory are limited in addressing the complexity in those cases where the past and present are not disconnected, and survivors continue to live with daily reminders of the past, or where perpetrators remain in the power structures. Assumptions about trauma and healing assign linearity to work with memory: reconciliation can happen when a traumatic experience or conflict, in general, is over so that it is then extracted through speech and left behind. However, ‘letting go of history’ while desired is not always possible, in situations where family members are missing or when a lack of the necessities of daily life makes moving into the future difficult, making the feeling of victimization a secondary priority.

The issues that these theories are limited in addressing pertain to the politics in the production of historical narratives and reconciliation processes. Without attention to politics, even when focusing at the community level, there is a tendency to reproduce dominant narratives of conflict, imposing simplified models on extremely fractured, vulnerable and complicated contexts, which cannot fit into ‘speak and heal’ models of intervention (Dwyer 2011; Shaw et al. 2010). The simplified categories of victim and perpetrator also reproduce the dichotomy of ‘us versus them’ to the reconciliation

process. This approach limits us in considering the diverse and multiple categories of social actors and relationships in conflicts by binding them into artificial categories and assigning these groups shared collective memories.

For example, in settings like Moldova, there are multiple interpretations of the past and experiences of people are diverse, ignoring the politics of how these categories get assigned can contribute to the reproduction of the dominant narratives driven by political agendas and constrain conflict resolution work. Recognizing the diversity of actors and their roles in conflicts can assist conflict resolution practitioners to move away from a simplified understanding of shared memories addressed through confession and acknowledgment. For more effective and ethical conflict resolution theory and practice, it is crucial to critically examine the assumptions built into key concepts on collective memory in the conflict resolution field. Approaching memory without consideration of politics can put conflict resolution practitioners in a position of reinforcing agendas that privilege and include certain groups while excluding others, therefore reinforcing systems of oppression. There is a need to push beyond the assumptions and categories which limit nuanced understandings of those settings where memory is more fragmented than collective, where groups engage in active and deliberate ‘forgetting’ and engage in non-verbal forms of remembering. Therefore, a good framework of analysis is needed to be able to deal with politics and power in conflict resolution. The next section draws from the literature from memory and narrative studies to outline a theoretical framework for the dissertation.

Collective Memory – Narrative Approach

To consider the concepts of history and memory requires examining the current conceptualization of the terms in the expansive scholarship. In modern social science, the development of the currently used concept of collective memory is credited to Maurice Halbwachs (1992), who emphasized memory's ties to the present and its socially constructed nature (Cole 2001, 2006). The social nature of memory and its relations to the present, as emphasized by Halbwachs (1992), have become widely accepted and used in the understanding of collective memory (Russell 2006; Cole 2006). Halbwachs (1992, 40) argued, "collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections [but] are precisely the instruments used by collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past, which is an accord, within an epoch with the predominant thoughts of the society." Halbwachs further distinguishes between 'historical memory' – which is the recorded history, 'history' – a past to which we no longer have any connection, and finally 'collective memory' – the "active past that forms our identities" (Ollick and Robbins 1998, 11). These distinctions stress both the social or collective aspect of memory and its relation to present concerns.

Building on Halbwachs' work, Pierre Nora (1989) famously described *Les lieux de memoire* – sites of memories – making a distinction between history and memory while emphasizing the socially constructed nature of memory (Whitehead 2008). Nora (1989, 12) argues that *Les lieux de memoire* emerges with a sense that there is no "spontaneous remembering," resulting in the need to create archives, organize celebrations, create commemorations, and other forms of remembering.

The current conceptualization of collective memory in scholarship emphasizes the social nature of memory and its construction in the present (Connerton 1989; Fentres and Wickham 1992; Jelin 2007). This view suggests that the process of memory and the process of history construction are very different social processes in opposition to each other, and distinguishing between the two “frees historians to search for counter-memories and counter-tradition derived from them” (Hutton 1993, 9). Other memory scholars problematized such positioning of history as “truth” and memory in opposition to history (Olick and Robbins, 1998, 110; Lebow et al. 2002). According to these scholars, the relationships between history and memory are complicated, with history serving as a foundation for memory, while history relies on memory for its sources (Olick and Robbins 1998; Lebow et al. 2002; Olick et al. 2011). Memory’s relation to history continues to be contested and remains a theoretical challenge for scholars (Kansteiner, 2002). This tension between the processes of production of history and memory demand attention to the issue of power.

Power in the production of history and memory has been central to the intellectual movements which challenged the conceptual foundation of memory and expanded its popularity (Olick and Robbins, 1998). Memory and collective memory present opportunities for the imposition of power at multiple points, by the source, process, and context of their production (Boyd 2008; Trouillot 1995; Hutton 1993; Briggs 2001). Presentation of historical narratives as an objective is part of the power production as it conceals the interests underpinning these narratives and their use in justification of oppression (Trouillot, 1995). As Connerton (1989, 1) argues, control of a society’s

memory establishes a “hierarchy of power, its organization, and control of production linked to the issues of legitimation.” These approaches demand a complex approach to power with attention to the context and multiplicity of actors who participate in the construction of history and memory.

Consideration of power and multiplicity of actors requires looking beyond historians and official historical processes implemented by the states. History and memory are also used by previously colonized groups and societies to engage in struggles for recognition and independence (Trouillot 1995). Claims of historicity in the struggle for rights and power reveal the political and contested nature of collective memory, bringing power and politics to the center of understanding history and memory. This view suggests that memory production is done not only by professional historians but also by other actors such as politicians, students, journalists, and other members of the society who expand, reject, and change historical narratives (Trouillot 1995, 25). Foucault’s notion of ‘counter-memory’ was influential in expanding the scholarship with a more complicated view of power in collective memories (Olick and Robbins, 1998), challenging the notion that collective memories are monolithic and that their production by the political forces always produces the intended results.

Commemorations

When it comes to collective remembrance, due to their public and mobilizing aspect, commemorations present an interesting lens to study memory when it comes, groups. Commemorative practices are seen as the storage of cultural memory (Halbwachs

2012), which maintains collective memories that become and remain part of collective identities (Tint, 2010). Influential work on memory by Nora (1984-1992), works on nations such as “Imagined Communities” by Anderson (1983) and Hobsbawm and Ranger’s “Invention of Tradition” (1983) highlighted the constructed nature of nations and the role of memory in these constructions, argues Rigney (2018, 249). That commemoration is highly political and influenced by those in power has been noted by numerous scholars. They have pointed out how selective interpretations of history and the mythic dimensions to many cultural stories are a means by which to create national narratives that further the political aims of the time (Connerton 1989; Pennebaker and Banasik 1997; Olick et al. 2011). Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), writing on commemoration and national identity, argued that commemorations are ways of advancing political power for groups by way of contesting or maintaining constructed collective memories. Rigney (2018) argued that the nation provided a frame of reference to study the large-scale public acts of remembrance over the past two centuries. As such, commemorations are often studied in the context of a nation’s remembering and ‘forgetting.’ As commemorations join people into rituals, over time, they become distorted and take proportions of myth, argues Tint (2010), serving the political purposes of a group. These approaches consider the politics of commemorations. However, this is a simplistic view of power when the ability to establish master narratives, which they are destined to become a myth, is allocated the elites and the state. Events not publicly commemorated are ‘forgotten’ or fading from the memory of the group (Tint, 2010). In

addition, even when studying the existing commemorations, the multiplicity and complexity of memory in the group need to be considered.

The connection between identity and commemorations have been examined by many scholars in memory studies (Schwartz 1982; Hutton 1993; Zerubavel 1995; Neal 2005). In the conflict resolution field, the interest is towards the power of commemorations in creating group myths and beliefs, which lead to conflicts as memory becomes part of group identity (Tint, 2010). From this perspective of contributing to conflict, memory fits with another influential concept in the conflict resolution field, the notion of ‘chosen traumas and chosen glories’ (Volkan, 2001). These are events that are selectively remembered to bring groups together around their history. From this perspective, commemoration fits with the collective memory literature in the field that underlines memory as an ‘ethos’ required and formed by every collective and group to develop their identities. From an intergenerational perspective, in conflict resolution, commemorations do not only pass down memories, but the values, emotions, and beliefs associated with them are transmitted as well (Tint, 2010).

In the discussion of identity, Gillis (1994) takes a bit more nuanced approach to memory and identity by highlights commemoration as a process of maintaining the relationship between group identity and memory. The author argues that the sense of sameness - or identity - in the group is sustained by remembering, while what is remembered is determined by the identities of the group, and both are being constantly revised (Gillis 1994). As such, commemorations can provide insightful understandings of the main stories circulating in a particular group from the perspective of understanding

group memory, and as part of it, the critical issues to its identity (Schwartz 1982; Hutton 1993; Zerubavel 1995; Neal 1998;). Another critical characteristic of commemoration is its role as a process through which the trans-generational transmission of memory can occur (Hutton 1993; Neal 1998; Schwartz 1982; Zerubavel 1995). As the context shifts and changes, commemorations remain anchors of collective memory (Hutton 2000, 14). In the context of developing and maintaining group or collective identities, commemoration serves to structure collective memory, highlighting historical developments of identity groups (Zerubavel, 1995).

Ritualistic and performative aspects of commemorations make them a compelling form of remembrance. Commemorations assert and claim continuity with the past and “do so by ritually re-enacting a narrative of events held to have taken place at some past time, in a manner sufficiently elaborate to contain the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances.” (Connerton 1989, 45).

Commemorations, therefore, are a material part of the narrative story about a particular period of history that groups can remember. They are a performed account of a story that continues to live in the group in a particular way. Narrativity, therefore, is important in establishing the “continuity, coherency, and meaning” of the proposed history (White 1990, 11). The narrative form allows the nation to be imagined as continuous, and commemorations come to acquire meaning as part of a story (Papadakis et al. 2003).

Even though commemorative events aim to uphold a particular meaning of the past and ‘erase’ others, they still can combine tensions between different interpretations of the

past, what she calls “amazing capacity of the myth to mediate between highly divergent readings of the past.” (Zerubavel 2011, 40).

The role of commemorations as a way of forming and maintaining memory in the context of nations, groups, and identities presents relevance to the study of memory in Moldova. However, the study of commemorations needs to be considered with attention to power and the multiplicity of memories. Politics, as mentioned earlier, is central to commemorative events, but a nuanced approach to power needs to be used when examining commemorations. Viewing commemorations as instruments of manipulation is problematic, as it assumes that organized events always have intended results and reduces the subjectivity of the participants. Trouillot (1995) argues that multiple actors engage in writing history, and the sites and participants in the production of memory are unlimited. From this perspective, attention to the official events, such as commemorations, does not provide us with insights on why certain events are remembered, and others are forgotten. He argues that only by examining the process under which circumstances history is produced, we can understand how the exercise of power makes some narratives possible and silences the others (Trouillot, 1995).

In order to better understand how history and memory function within different contexts and societies, we need to take a more complicated view of how memories are interpreted, appropriated, and contested. The power lens can improve our understanding of memory and open opportunities for examining and studying memory in various settings like Moldova with attention to the process, context, and actors.

Narrative Approach to Memory

A narrative approach provides a unique lens for the study of collective memories as a meaning-making process and the role of memory as an integral part of conflicts. The narrative approach is based on a social constructionist view, according to which reality is not considered objective but instead is constructed by humans through the process of meaning-making (Sarbin and Kitsuse 1994, 2-8). Within this paradigm, humans are considered active agents in the meaning-making process, and language and stories are the essential tools for constructing their reality (Archakis and Tzanne, 2005). As storytellers, humans are always telling a story from a moral standpoint that speaks to our human experience, and there is always an evaluative aspect (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Language and interaction are central to the meaning-making process (Klapproth, 2004). We make meaning of the experience through narrating it, the process that also applies to the past experience. From this perspective, humans are actively engaged in constructing their social worlds, connecting the past, present, and future. Shotter (2003, 134) argues that our ways of talking about experiences work not to represent the nature of those experiences in themselves but to represent them in such a way as to constitute and sustain another kind of social order. Bruner (1990), interpreting Bartlett (1995), argues the process of remembering includes forming an attitude towards the memory at the same time. In other words, the process of remembering takes place in our current context and, as such, constructed to make sense of the present and imagine a future. Language and everyday interactions between people are the centers of constructing a social world, according to Winslade and Monk (2000, 40), who argue that when people talk, they “are

not only expressing what lies within, but they are also producing their world.... Thus, the language is performative, and its use is a form of social action.” People make meaning narratively, and then they enact performance on that meaning (Winslade and Monk, 2000). According to this view, social relations are narratively produced and reproduced through narrative.

The process of making meaning of the past takes place in a narrative form is developed into memory, and then applied to our current understanding of the world (Bruner, 1990). Therefore, the narrative is both the form through which memory is constructed and also serves an interpretative function of memory, helping us negotiate meaning with the social world. Such conceptualization of memory as a meaning-making process moves us beyond seeing memory as fixed, and allows us to see it as a dynamic process that evolves over time. Through the study of narratives in this way, it becomes possible to understand the evolution of meaning and get insights into how the social and political dynamics change as they become narrated in the stories.

The narrative approach highlights the social aspect of remembering. Memory through a narrative lens is a social process as the process of meaning-making always takes place within certain cultural frames. This view advances the study of collective memory from seeing it as analogous of individual memory to a meaning-making process in a social context. Scholars, both in memory and narrative studies, have criticized approaches that collapse the individual and the group memory (Keinsteiner 2002; Ollick and Robbins, 1998; Bartlett 1995). In moving away from this approach, and through a narrative lens, memory is not as something recalled ‘from within’ an individual and

equally shared by the group but rather a social process of making and negotiating meanings which are influenced or determined by social conceptions of our world – “the constituent beliefs and the larger-scale narratives” (Bruner 1990, 59). According to this approach, the social context strongly influences and even determines the memories (Bartlett, 1995). There may be lived experience or shared through the collective body of cultural knowledge (Jelin, 2007), but in all cases constructing the meaning of the past an active process involving subjectivities and drawing on a “cultural interpretive framework.” (Jelin 2007, 41). The shared cultural knowledge these scholars pointed to means that when individuals construct meanings, they draw from larger narratives that already exist in our culture.

According to Cobb (2013), there are ‘lived’ and ‘told’ narratives; however, individuals cannot control any of these narratives. ‘Lived’ narratives provide the structure of the experience itself, often within the larger socially shared master narratives, and “‘told’ narratives are those we elaborate with others over a lifetime.” (Cobb 2013, 23). This distinction, according to Cobb (2013), allows for an acknowledgment of the social nature of narratives provided to us by our culture, which we inherit and do not make ourselves (Cobb 2013, 23). In other words, when making meaning of the world, we are already drawing on existing narratives and meanings. This, however, does not mean that the narratives are static and unchanging. The dynamic and social nature of dynamic production is what makes them so challenging to deal with in conflict settings.

The narrative approach to memory emphasizes the multiplicity of memories. There are varying interpretations of experiences and events (Jelin 2007); there is not one

collective memory. In moving away from an approach of one collective memory, Wertsch (2008) makes a distinction between “memory of the group” and “memory within a group” or, in other words, a “distributed version” of memory. In the distributed version of memory within a group, remembering takes place in small group interactions. People in this view are active agents who engage with the instruments of memory, such as texts, the Internet, and other digital sources available today (Wertsch 2008, 222).

Based upon the characteristics discussed above, I take the ‘definition’ of memory as a process of making meaning from the past, constructed in the present social context, in a context shaped by contested power relations and using cultural frameworks to do so. It is an active process conducted in dialogue and involving subjectivities (Jelin 2007). The link between past and present is complex. Neither is merely informing the other but instead forming a relationship, which needs to be considered in the cultural and political contexts in which memory is produced. Multiplicity and plurality are also key characteristics, as collective memory does not necessarily result in a single shared collective memory. Instead, there are always multiple and competing interpretations of the past (Jelin 2007) and on-going contestations over a particular version of memory and truth. Viewing collective memory as multiple and socially constructed as a part of negotiations between the past and the present, allows us to apply a more sophisticated approach in studying the processes of memory production and performance in Moldova.

Memory, Power, and Narrative – From Neutrality to Politics of Memory

There is a recognition among the scholars of memory studies that due to the contested nature of memory, power, and politics are necessary for studying memory (Olick et al. 2011). There are always competing groups in society that are trying to advance their view of the past, and these contestations interact with, escalate, or maintain conflicts. With its aspiration toward neutrality, the conflict resolution field has the challenge of incorporating power into the analysis of collective memories. As I have already noted in the discussions of the collective memory and identities, insufficient attention to how memory is always entangled with power, and how politics is at the heart of memory, remains one of the limitations in the conflict resolution field. The emphasis in the field is on the ‘deep’ understanding of history to reconcile and resolve the conflict. The neutrality paradigm and equating reconciliation with justice lead to ignoring the crucial cultural and sociopolitical factors which often frame remembering and forgetting and present-day relationships in conflict settings. In other words, how power relations and politics determine the production, domination, or marginalization of narratives is not well accounted for in the conflict resolution field. For example, the need for multi-level processes (elite, community-level, etc.) in reconciliation is to acknowledge by scholars in the field, (Galtung 2001; Bar Tal 2000; Kriesberg 1998; Lederach 1997). Still, there is not enough attention paid to the politics of reconciliation processes in the political agendas of nation-building. From this perspective, often, individual and national healing are seen as operating at two levels at the same time (Shaw, 2007). Yet examples from various conflict settings show that transitional justice processes are often entangled with

politics even at the community level. The efforts to establish ‘truth’ are often restricted by who can be heard and which stories can be told, a process which also casts various actors into categories of victims and perpetrators or else excludes them (Hinton and Robben, 2011). A multitude of factors, such as local and national political goals and agendas, and the mandates of the international organizations who fund and organize these initiatives shape and influence the process, resulting in the domination of certain groups and narratives while others are not heard (Hinton and O’Neill, 2009). Scholars studying reconciliation processes in various settings have highlighted examples where national agendas shape the results of reconciliation processes (Robben 2009) or how media accounts and official discourses influenced the way groups and violence are narrated (Das 2006). Approaching memory without consideration of politics can put conflict resolution practitioners in a position of reinforcing agendas that privilege and include certain groups while excluding others, therefore reinforcing systems of oppression. Therefore, a good framework of analysis is needed to be able to deal with politics and power in conflict resolution.

The view of memory as a meaning-making approach with the characteristics I described in the previous section, opens new avenues for accounting for the dynamics of, the multiplicity of actors and the role of power in the production of memory. In this view, remembering is a dynamic process that takes place in specific social contexts, rather than being a fixed representation of the past (Bartlett 1995). The study of multiplicity and complexity of narratives with a more nuanced analysis of power can yield an

understanding of how discourses of history and memories are contested, appropriated, and challenged by various groups.

The framework of meaning-making in approaching memory also expands opportunities for better consideration of the concept in conflict transformation processes. The focus in such a framework shifts the binaries of ‘us’ versus ‘them,’ ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators,’ ‘state’ and ‘opposition,’ and memory as a homogenous and fixed concept. Instead, there is a multiplicity of memories and narratives, which cut across all these commonly used categories creating a far more complex picture. Conflict transformation starts with a better understanding of the politics of memory and exposing the simplicity of categories and memory, which often leads to conflict, domination, and marginalization. Jelin (2007, 140) argues that struggle for meaning accompanies periods after repression and violence, the struggle for the memory of what happened, and the meaning of memory itself. The struggles, which are ongoing on various levels: institutional, symbolic, and subjective, include memory as an integral part of it, producing its gaps and silences (ibid). Memory is often contested, while certain social and political contexts determine the intensity of contestation and the level of marginalization and domination between various narratives.

My research focuses on the processes of contestations of the meaning of the past in the struggle for power. Examining the ways and conditions in which these contestations, constructions of alternative meaning, and narratives take place, can help understand potential ways into facilitating the creation of more complex and thicker historical narratives. From the conflict transformation perspective, I am interested in

exploring how the production, circulation, and performance of certain narratives of history can give rise to more violence or, rather, contribute to the evolution of the conflict, creating a healthier social world where one narrative does not produce marginalization and suffering.

The underlying principle of the narrative approach to conflict is in the notion that there is a diversity of stories, and all persons have a story, which, when in conflict, can also get become stuck with dysfunctional narratives and perpetuate conflict (Winslade and Monk, 2000). These contestations are on-going and play out in various contexts and settings (Cobb, 2013). However, these processes are highly political: in them, some stories dominate, and others are silenced (Cobb, 2013). Some narratives are considered more legitimate within discourses, while others are marginalized (Winslade and Monk, 2000). Through the processes of narrative, erasure, and marginalization, one can work to reduce the narrative capacity of others and increase the legitimacy of self. According to this view, power is not a commodity but operates through discourse, and as the discourse shifts, so do the power relations ((Winslade and Monk 2000, 41). Conflict, therefore, is the product of the operation of power, emerging out of contestations over which meaning gets to be privileged and which stories can be spoken, and which can be silenced (ibid). Cobb (2013, 163) linking narrative to critical theory argues that the way speakers are positioned in narratives, legitimate or not, is important to critical narrative theory and conflict resolution that takes power into consideration. From a narrative perspective, according to Cobb (2013, 154), through stories advanced by speakers, or in institutionalized narratives, individuals and groups get positioned as legitimate or are

delegitimized, constraining capacities for moral agency, for the ability to speak and be heard. This produces inequality and marginalization. From this perspective, according to the author, the central concern for conflict resolution becomes the transformation of meaning so that speaking and being heard becomes possible. Nelson (2001), attending to power in the narrative, argues that in making meaning of past events, we often draw from the stock of stories and plots in the master narrative. In explaining marginalization through identity construction lens, Nelson (2001, 107) argues that master narratives construct certain meanings and identities legitimating some while marginalizing and delegitimizing other groups that do not fit these constructs. From the narrative perspective, power operates through discourse to shape practices and relationships but also as the way persons and groups positioned as moral agents (Cobb 2013, 161).

The scholars of narrative practice have written about tendencies of narratives that remain in patterns that are difficult to shift in conflict settings complicating resolution of conflict (Cobb, 2013; White, 2007). This dynamic is exacerbated by the unpredictable process of narrative production and evolution, which happens when people make meaning with others in particular contexts. Narrative evolution becomes even more difficult in conflicts. As conflicts become protracted, narratives change and lose their complexity (Cobb, 1994). When telling stories, the blame and the causes of the conflict become attributed to 'Other. In this process, the meaning gets consolidated, and opportunities for meaning-making are further restricted while the narrative develops shortcuts (Cobb 2013, 86). As sides continue to deny or contest the other side's story, this contributes to the escalation, further simplifying their own narrative (Cobb 2013, 86).

The dynamic of the conflict, which then leads to simplified narratives, which in turn, limit opportunities for the evolution of meaning, is critical to understanding how conflict narratives function and persist in maintaining their power and, by extension, the conflicts.

In studying memory in the context of Moldova, definitions of conflict through a narrative lens open new ways of seeing how power operates in memory production, and the implications of such a process. In Moldova, various interpretations of history, examined beyond the neutrality paradigm, allows us to pay attention to how political agendas of groups and at times even international agendas of global actors operate through memory advancing and contesting meanings. The advancement of storylines and the way they position groups, communities, and the state have implications as these narratives become institutionalized creating power relations, marginalization, or closing off opportunities for speaking and being heard. Understanding how power operates in the production and transmission of collective memories, where and how memory contestations take place helps address the legacies of the past that fuel the conflict. These examinations need to be conducted accounting for a more complex set of factors, contexts, and environments both within and outside groups than the ones prescribed by social-psychological approaches in conflict resolution field to understanding collective memories and identities. From the perspective of critical narrative theory, attention should be to the creation or evolution of narratives, which are not used to delegitimize and marginalize. In the context of my research study, I examine both the ‘content’ of the historical narratives as they are advanced through the commemorations of Victory Day and how these narratives of history operate and perform outside of commemorations to

constitute a particular social order where power relationships are defined. Examining the structure and dynamics of narratives in conflict allow us to capture the way history and memory operate in the broader social context in Moldova, enabling some and closing off other conversations.

Memory studies through narrative approach provide openings, whether discursive, symbolic, or embodied, which can become ways of engaging with more attention to difference and complexity in various settings and without reinforcing the binary categories of us versus them, victims versus perpetrators. Taking great care to study and understand how memory operates and is contested in various settings is the matter of not only effectiveness but also ethics to the conflict resolution practice. Further inquiry into collective memory, its role in creating, reproducing, and transforming conflict needs to take these limitations into account while incorporating learning about the complexity of memory production and performance from other disciplines. The narrative lens, and attention to the process legitimation and delegitimizing of narratives, can be useful for mapping the narrative landscape of collective memory and can serve as a powerful tool for transforming the stories of conflict.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY – NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF MEMORY

In Moldova, as in many other settings, multiple actors are trying to map out a narrative past that legitimates their agendas, assert or reject various rights (Hinton, O'Neill 2009, 4). Different versions of the truth exist for different historical actors, and they choose specific historical events for several narrative elaborations of their political agendas and proposed futures (Malkki, 1995, 104). Moldova is a unique place to study narratives of memory and commemorations, and how they intersect with narratives about identity and nation-building. After 75 years since the end of World War II, across the former Soviet Union countries, the memory of the war continues to be contested as the now independent states attempt to break with their Soviet past, re-write their histories and reconsider the meaning of victory to their societies. As the meanings of the historical events are negotiated with present and future in mind, the historical narratives are constructed to advance political agendas and justify political action. The contestations stem from the emergence of the alternative historical narratives after the collapse of the Soviet Union as the new countries reconstructed their histories to fit the nation-building processes and tried to situate themselves in the new order of international relations. As the geopolitical tensions grew in the Eurasia region following the crisis in Ukraine, former Soviet republics such as Moldova have been challenged in positioning themselves vis-à-vis the hegemonic powers in the region such as the EU and Russia. The memory of

the war, therefore, gets contested not only in the local contexts but intersects with the global interpretations of the Second World War.

At no time are these different interpretations of history more evident than on May 9, the end of the Second World War. In Moldova, like in other Soviet republics, May 9, Victory Day, have been an important part of the remembrance of the Second World War during the Soviet period and has continued after independence. The commemorations have been central to memory contestations from the early days of independence in the 1990s. In a more recent period, competition around Victory Day has grown, resulting in multiple commemorative events by political parties. Victory Day commemorations as part of the broader discussion of memory have become closely intertwined with discourses about identity, foreign policy preferences, and political divisions in Moldova. Due to their public and mobilizing nature, and as sites of active remembrance, the commemorations of Victory Day provided opportunities to advance particular narratives about the war and become sites of resistance.

In Moldova, the contestations over victory day commemoration are more than a rejection of a single event but rather challenge to the historical narrative or a storyline as a whole. As Zerubavel (2011, 241) argues, “when counter-memory challenges the commemoration of a single event, it is considered highly subversive precisely because the implications of this challenge tend to go beyond the memory of that particular event, targeting the master commemorative narrative.” Commemoration, therefore, is not just about one event but rather space where various groups can promote contesting views of history. Through commemorations, different actors form different relationships with a

particular past and construct different meanings to explain an advocate for a particular social world. These processes are on-going negotiations of realities, where contestations of narratives about a past that forecast a different future are produced and circulated. The competing and performative nature of commemorative ‘victory’ narratives in Moldova and their embeddedness in global contestations of memory led me to choose this site and these narratives for my study.

Research Design

Commemorations are only one way of remembering, and they constitute only part of the stories about the past that are being told. Attention to politics requires consideration to a multiplicity of narratives when it comes to memory in order not to fall into the ‘trap’ of dominant discourses in studying memory.

To gain a better understanding of memory of the Second World War in Moldova, it is necessary to expand the boundaries of the stories to include “the diverse everyday contexts in which stories are elicited, assembled, and conveyed.” (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, 2). Hinton and O’Neill (2009, 4) argue that post-violence contexts are constructed with socially and historically located cultural practices. These practices are best studied through extended contact and experience-near method of data collection. Studying memory means studying the everyday and embodied and looking beyond the dominant historical narratives which are often prescribed to entire collectives. Paying attention to the context of narrative production gives insights not only to the meanings that emerge but also to the process of narrative production. Only such type of research can allow us to

go beyond the dominant historical narratives to understand how individuals and groups in conflict make meaning of their past and current struggles, and how they negotiate their present-day lives with the past.

Taking a narrative approach enables us to take a more nuanced analysis to study memory and contestations in Moldova than identity-based approaches to collective memory in conflict resolution. The narrative approach allows us to attend to the dynamics of legitimation and delegitimization and consider the context that produces the environment for certain narratives to dominate and others be silenced. It also helps to attend to the multiplicity of narratives and stories within stories. Exploring the dynamics of contestation in commemorations can show how different groups negotiate the future in Moldova through the discussion of a single event in the past. The narrative approach expands the view of the commemoration from a single commemorative act to a narrated story situated in a bigger story and how the contestations of memory produce and perform narratives about present-day and future Moldova among the political parties and elites. Production of narratives of memory is always a political process, and only through examining the process of their production and understanding the context, it is possible to understand how the exercise of power makes some narratives possible and silences others (Trouillot 1995).

Understanding the ways meaning is constructed around the memory of the Second World War in Moldova requires engagement with the social settings where the commemorations take place. As stories are constructed and told in numerous settings, understanding these settings is critical to making sense of the stories themselves (Gibrium

and Holstein 2009, 27). The narrative approach demands attention to every day and broader social and political contexts in which stories are produced and told. Gubrium and Holstein (2012, 2) offer the term ‘narrative reality,’ which requires consideration of “socially situated practice of storytelling” with attention to both circumstances under which the stories are told but also to “what is at stake on the occasions stories unfold.” Paying attention to narrative reality is to pay attention to how narratives operate in a society, link them to the broader context, and to attend both to the timing and context of stories told. In the case of this study, it means paying attention to how “the environments of storytelling mediate the internal organization and meaning of accounts (Gubrium and Holstein 2012, 2).

Ethnography enables us to capture the complexity and richness of narrative environments and thus yields to the examination not only the narrative text elicited in the interviews but also how to observe the narrative field going beyond the text (Gubrium Holstein 2012, 27). An ethnographic approach is crucial to providing insights into the conditions and settings which shape narratives, such as places, audiences around which stories are constructed. Ethnography facilitates a rich understanding of the field, which can help situate the study in social settings. Narrative ethnography gives attention to the communicative activity in the said setting (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009).

In Moldova, the study of commemorations and narratives of memory demands attention both to the broader political context, recent political history, and the timing of the interviews. Narrative ethnography provides with instruments not only to trace and describe the narratives but understand the conditions and processes of their production

and transformation and how these narratives interact with present-day issues and concerns in society. Using a narrative lens, the study examines the processes of narrative production and contestation as political parties advance their versions of history through commemorations and how the processes give way to particular meanings of history and memory in a broader context.

Data Collection

This study utilized ethnographic methods to trace the narratives of the memory of WW II in Moldova and understand how in present-day Moldova, various groups make meaning of history and perform memory through commemorations. My research focused on the stories and processes of the re-memorialization of recent political history on Victory Day (May 9), as created and performed by different political groups, politicians, and influential actors in society. I study the production of narratives of memory through commemorative practices of political groups and explore how these narratives ‘perform’ in a broader political and social context through the interviews of elites in Moldova.

To explore the landscape of meaning around the Second World War in Moldova, I utilized ethnographic methods such as participant observations, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. These methods help examine how commemorations produce particular versions of history and investigate the meanings of these commemorations in the broader political context. By the time I started research on the commemorations and memory of the war in Moldova early in 2018, I had been living in Moldova for 2.5 years doing work connected to politics. My position was with an international non-profit which

implemented activities in support of the Transdniestrian settlement process and facilitated dialogue between Moldovan parliament and the legislature of an autonomous territory of Gagauzia. Being embedded in conflict resolution work at the political level and regularly interacting with politicians within and outside of Moldova's Parliament and the government allowed me to observe and participate in various discussions about on-going political events as well as the topic of my study. Also, through my work, I have built relationships and regularly interacted with the members of the diplomatic community, civil society organizations, and expert community, which further enriched my understanding of the narrative landscape. Personal relationships and friendships further enriched my understanding as I have spent many hours over coffees and dinners discussing various social and political issues. By the time I started data collection, I have accumulated a broad network in Chisinau among politicians, civil society members, and expert community. This experience has allowed me to gain an understanding of the broader social and political context, which served as a background to the study. Regularly being engaged in discussions with various people across the political spectrum in formal and informal settings, following the news, political analysis, and social media discussions as well as witnessing and observing the commemorative events two years before my study started gave me opportunities to study narratives about history, memory in various contexts in Moldova. As my professional position in Moldova gave me insights and access to a wide range of people, it also restricted me in the ways I could engage on the topic. Given numerous divergent meanings around issues such as language, identity, even the name of the war, and May 9, I had to consider carefully the use of language and the

questions I could ask when conducting interviews, exploring meanings, asking questions in different settings and probing deeper into sensitive issues topics. These restrictions were balanced by more trusting relationships I have developed in Moldova, so I was able to explore more sensitive issues in those conversations further.

The data collection took place between January 2018 to October 2019, starting with background research on secondary sources on Moldova in January 2018 on the topic of memory. To study historical narratives around World War II and to understand the politics of memory in Moldova, I reviewed and analyzed scholarship on the history and memory in Moldova using academic articles and online sourced news articles. In addition, I interviewed scholars working on memory, formerly or currently affiliated with state scholarly and other public institutions, who have articulated stories about World War II or are knowledgeable about this period of history.

Observations of commemorative events and data collection of the social media and initial interviews were conducted between May and July 2018, but my research continued after into autumn of 2019. During this time, I continued to live and work in Chisinau, and continued to be engaged in discussions and conversations about the commemorative events, the political groups and dynamics and other issues directly and indirectly relevant to my research. The conversations and stories I heard during meetings and dinner tables, or which I read and heard in the news, also shaped my understanding of the narratives of memory and identity circulating through the politically active communities in Chisinau.

The research project, therefore, is composed of three core sets of data around which the study is organized. The first two data sets include observations of the commemorations and the analysis of the Facebook posts by the party leaders on and around the events related to commemorations. The findings and analysis are described and analyzed in Chapter five. The analysis of the unstructured and semi-structured interviews, which describe the meanings around the commemorations and memory of the Second World War, are included in Chapter six. This chapter provides us with stories that situate history and memory of the war in the broader social and political context. The rationale for dividing the data into two chapters stems from the design of the research analysis. In Chapter 5, the description of the commemorations and narrative analysis of the texts and the rituals allow us to examine how narrative is structured and how it advances certain storylines by positioning actors in certain relationships in moral landscapes. Here the lens is focused on the analysis of competing narratives themselves. Chapter six, based on interviews, explores the meanings around the commemorations allowing us to see how the narrative performs across networks, what other issues they are implicated in, and narrative dynamics function in a broader context. While in Chapter five, I apply analysis to the commemorations, in Chapter six, the meanings of the commemorations are derived from the conversations with informants.

To study the dynamics and evolution of narrative performance, I simultaneously conducted secondary data collection about the events I was observing. This analysis helped me to contextualize the data from commemorative events and the interviews and connect it to the social context, analytical approach important in narrative studies. I also

traced narratives of memory through the speeches made by the President, Speaker, and Prime Minister, statements and charters of movements and organizations among the various parties holding contrasting views, resolutions and addresses at important conferences, and other similar public activities. I reviewed and analyzed content across published materials from various groups, including governmental, pro-governmental, independent, and oppositional media outlets, to understand the multiplicity of narratives of history circulating in Moldova. In addition, my presence in the country over an extended period, combined with my work in the country, allowed me to regularly attend events and conversations on various issues related to identity. During the time of my research, I intensified these efforts to ‘hear’ the discussions and debate around memory and commemorations, which take place in these communities. My secondary research and interviews also looked into how commemorations were conducted in recent years. Interestingly, often this ‘historical’ perspective on commemorations came up without prompting in interviews as a way of explaining how important the political context of a given year to understanding commemorative events.

Sites of Memory Narratives – Commemorations of Victory Day

To study the different narratives in Moldova surrounding May 9 – Victory Day, I conducted participant observations of the two commemoration events organized by Moldova’s Democratic and Socialist Parties on May 9. I also collected and analyzed narratives around the events few days before and two weeks after May 9, on various news outlets and social media – Facebook. The events themselves took place on May 8 and 9,

with two different sets of events organized by the two parties in key spaces in the capital city of Chisinau. I attended commemoration by the Socialist Party on the morning of May 9 in the central square and the events organized by the Democratic Party in the afternoon of the same day. Also, through the secondary media sources, videos and photographs, I followed the public outdoor concerts organized by each party at the central square in Chisinau, on the evening of May 8 by the Socialist Party, and the evening of May 9 by the Democratic Party. The concerts, which organized in celebration of Victory Day, provided additional insights into the narratives of the two parties, including sporting symbols, flags, and speeches by the party leaders.

Although there are several political parties and groups in Moldova who narrate different interpretations of history and memory, the study focused on the Democratic Party (PD) and Socialist Parties (PSRM), for several reasons. First, it is these two parties who organized the large-scale public events involving thousands of people and multiple activities around the anniversary of Victory Day. Second, both sets of events were advertised as commemorations of the ‘Victory Day,’ although the narratives of the two parties are different. Finally, as I further discuss in the next chapter the political context in Moldova at the time of the study, the PDM and PSRM were the key influential parties in the left and right of Moldovan politics. For these reasons, my focus is on the processes of memorialization and contesting narratives by these two parties.

Social media

In Moldova, important political issues and events are discussed and, at times, heatedly contested on Facebook. The importance of the platform is underlined by the regularity with which online news outlets publish news stories summarizing the discussions on social media by different key opinion-makers and experts on various issues. Facebook also provides a possibility for people to react to different issues, for groups and individuals tell their stories, and to circulate them among the wider community. In other words, in Moldova, Facebook is a virtual space for debate and discussions.

Around the key events important for public memory such as Victory Day, social media is used by the politicians and the political parties to convey key messages, advertise the organized events in order to position themselves vis-à-vis the issues and mobilize public for participation. The leaders of the two parties which organized commemorations are active on Facebook using it as a platform to present party and their own positions to the public. Texts posted on Facebook, therefore, represent interest from the narrative perspective as they communicate the meanings that the parties and politicians convey about commemorations specifically but also about the memory of the Second World War in general. Social media, and Facebook, in particular, is one of the 'spaces' where Moldovan politicians promote their visions, campaign for election, and engage with their constituents and the greater public.

For the analysis of commemorative events, I collected and analyzed Facebook posts of several most prominent members of the Democratic and Socialist parties at the

time of commemorations. These include top leadership and those members who were particularly active in public messaging at the time of the study. The data that informed the analysis of commemorations included only posts by these party members as it focused on the narrative advanced by the parties. This text was analyzed using positioning theory, which I discuss later in this chapter.

While the posts of the party leaders became the focus of the analysis as part of the commemorations analysis, for understanding broader discussions around commemorations, I also followed and studied posts shared by key activists, journalists, and representatives of other parties in the left and right of Moldovan society. In addition, I followed important speeches made by party leaders and members related to or on the topic of commemorations through secondary media sources. I studied social media posts of broader political community and civil society to collect information on what kind of meanings they attached to May 9 and what kind of issues were discussed in connection to this date by people of different political views. This knowledge helped me better understand the broader narrative landscape of meanings around Victory day commemorations and the memory of the Second World War.

Interviews

Another way to understand narrative performance is an exploration of how the narratives of history matter to individuals. To explore the meanings around the commemorative events and memory, I conducted a series of unstructured and semi-structured interviews. While ethnographic engagement in the field and analysis of

‘narrative reality’ requires access to naturally occurring data, interviews are important for collecting stories to further explore the meanings around the memory of the Second World War and commemorations (Gabrium and Holstein 2012).

To understand the meanings around the commemorations of Victory Day and, more broadly, the Second World War, I conducted forty unstructured and semi-structured interviews with the members of Moldova’s political elite and civil society. In addition to interviewing members of the two parties, the research project explored how the active members of Moldova’s political life – civic society - make meaning of the memory of World War II. My focus here is not on ‘civic society’ – defined as the intellectuals, experts, former and current politicians in various capacities, and members of civil society who actively participate in the political life of the country. I spoke with a diverse group of people who are active participants in the political life of the country, former and current politicians, members of the parliament, members of civil society and non-governmental organizations, journalists, experts in various areas, and other politically active individuals. The emphasis in the interviews was on individuals who held public positions previously and continued to be politically active. This is the community of people who actively engaged in conversations about political processes in their country, either publicly as writers, commentators, activists, and through private interactions between each other and members of the international and diplomatic community in Moldova. These choices for the interviewees were predicated by the focus of the research project on political and on the exploration of the narratives of memory in a broader political context. These individuals participate in ‘conversations’ about various political

issues, current and long-term in various ways. Conversations in this sense include not only the interpersonal between speakers, but also “‘conversing’ via the media, in blogs, or in art, as well as in all manner of public forums.” (Cobb 2016,7). Conversations in this sense are where the struggle for meaning takes place. According to Cobb (2016, 8), individuals draw on master narratives and existing narrative resources to develop “storylines” when discussing problems and issues about the past, present, and future. These stories then become part of the narratives and materialize into policies, actions, projects. Often these people are able to advance projects, make recommendations, speak and write on media. From that perspective, they are the broader elite that has the potential for driving intellectual projects, advancing policies, and issues, including engaging with history and memory.

I used the snowball method to choose and locate interviewees while ensuring a balance of subjects representing the full spectrum of Moldovan politics, language, and identity. History is a sensitive topic in Moldova, and it is not uncommon to get entangled in heated social media debates and become targets of attacks by different groups on account of your views. For this reason, and to allow for more open discussions in the interviews, the identities of interviewees are kept confidential.

Through my interviews, I explored how these narratives perform across networks of people who constitute a politically active society in the country. Here my goal was not to understand how memory lives in their daily lives but rather to understand how they make meaning of the commemorations in their country and how memory is made meaningful to Moldova’s present political context and its future. This focus on meanings

of memory in the political rather than daily lives was determined by my choice to study the production of historical narratives in the political context and to explore the meanings and relations to present-day issues.

To this end, my conversations with various informants explored questions of how they made meaning of memorialization practices and how this memorialization fits within their own stories with regards to the current situation in their country, its development and its future. I sought to examine how the narratives of history matter to the individuals I interviewed, what meaning they constructed from current remembrance activities, what are memory narratives produced and circulate in Moldova, and what issues do these narratives anchor in Moldova's political space. The purpose of the interviews was to understand what narratives about the Second World War are circulating in Moldova and understand people's relationship to the stories they hear and tell. This approach allowed for the meanings of the commemorations I observed and analyzed emerge from the interview data, rather than be constructed by me.

Narrative analysis

The narrative theory offers multiple models for the analysis of data, which can be used to understand narrative processes. The analysis in the project makes use of ethnographic descriptions and narratives which emerged from my extended presence in the field and uses narrative analysis tools to make sense of the commemorative events and how they link to the broader social context in Moldova. I present the data from the commemorative events describing symbols, colors, slogans, and the dynamics of the

events to give “sense of the personalized sensory experience gained from extended immersion in the field.” (Jarzabkowski et al. 2014, 2). These descriptions present the story of Victory Day and connected storylines of the past, as told through a ritual of commemoration in Moldova. As such, in the study, the stories are located and performed in commemorations.

The analysis of narratives in this project relies on positioning theory to make sense of how two political groups through commemorative events are positioning themselves in Moldova vis-à-vis the past and what implications it has for the future of the country. When analyzing the data, I focus both on the content of the narratives and the performance of narratives, what Mishler (1995, loc 665) described as “the interactional and institutional contexts in which narratives are produced, recounted, and consumed.”

Positioning theory (Harre and van Langenhove 1998, 3) is in the language of the authors, a scheme to understand and study “dynamic analysis of conversations and discourses.” It is based on principles of social constructionism, which implies that social phenomena are produced “in and through conversation and conversation like activities.” (ibid). According to this view, the discursive activity is the place where the social and psychological processes of interest are located and can be studied. Positioning theory is offered then as a conceptual framework that assumes that the social world is not an objective reality to be discovered but rather is a set of shared meanings between individuals that are constantly being negotiated (Taylor et al. 2003, 204). Positioning theory stipulates that individuals discursively position themselves and others in conversations through social acts that give them certain rights and duties (Harre and van

Langenhove, 1998). These actions are part of and are situated in storylines that connect it back to the social activities, which are then can be interpreted based on the context given by the storyline. The illocutionary force of a social act determines its place in a story-line, and at the same time, its meaning is determined by the storyline. This makes up the positioning triangle where the three components: position, social act, and the storyline influence and mutually determine each other (Bartlett, 2006).

Bartlett (2006) explains the theory by saying that positioning theory views “action as the setting up positions, for oneself and others, through the performance of socially meaningful (often discursive) acts within an ongoing storyline (comprising the narrative understandings of the context and contingent rights and obligations of the participants).” (Bartlett 2006, 115). A position in conversation embodies the person’s ‘moral’ and personal attributes, a character that assigns certain rights and duties to the person (Harre and van Langenhove, 1998). Depending on the positions of a given individual in a conversation, then such rights and duties are distributed differently and not always equally, therefore impacting the social meaning of each social act (ibid). Positions can naturally emerge out of the conversations and social context but also be initiated intentionally by the speakers.

An important element in positioning is the attention to the moral orders in which positioning takes place through social actions when the speakers locate themselves and others in a conversation (Davis and Harre, 1990). Indexing is one of the discursive practices of positioning when someone indexes “their statement with the point of view one has on its relevant world” (Davies and Harre 1990, 62). In other words, by way of

speaking, one can index one's view of the world and one's responsibilities to take action (Muhlhauser and Harre, 1990) and, as such, position themselves in a particular moral location. The interesting aspect of using positioning theory in studying social discursive processes is the attention not only to the process but also by which it produces certain intended and unintended consequences (Davis and Harre, 1998). In the case of Moldova, studying two competing commemorations allows us to see how distinct groups position themselves not only vis-à-vis one event in the past that is being remembered but how this positions them in the stories about statehood, present, and the future.

To categorize a variety of modes of analysis in the narrative field, Mishler's (1995) approach, which is classified as three functions of language: meaning, structure, and interactional context. One of the ways of study the social and performative aspect of the narrative is to examine how narratives are connected to "wider negotiated social worlds" (Elliot 2005, loc 866). This approach helps see what kind of role the stories play in the life of an individual or broader society with attention to the function of stories (Plummer 1995; Elliot 2005). In this view, the stories can serve various functions maintaining the status quo or transforming and shifting processes and live (Elliot 2005, loc 877).

From a conflict resolution perspective, positioning theory helps understand how two parties come up with different stories about the same event in the past. Positioning theory assumes that storylines are being constantly challenged, negotiated, and transformed within social interactions. Applying positioning theory to analyzing conflict, Cobb (2013) argues that in conflict, speakers position themselves and others in storylines

in a way that legitimizes and justifies the speaker while delegitimizing the Other and assigning them negative attributes (Cobb 2013, 61). Cobb (2013) argues: “These positions are established in discourse via the elaboration of moral orders or moral constructs that create the moral landscape within which people are located.” The important feature of the positioning theory is that there are multiple storylines, or conversations, happening at any given time. The unique contribution of positioning theory lies in the fact that it gives us a lens to examine rights and duties assigned in conversations as primary explanatory variables for social interaction. These are outcomes of intersection between positions, speech act, and storylines. Warren and Moghaddam (2012, 326) argued that “By highlighting storylines, positioning theory can address rights, duties, and normative meanings in a way that is true to the complexity of social life, where multiple stories and storytellers can exist in the same moral space.”

The narrative approach and positioning theory is a useful tool for studying memory in Moldova for several reasons. Firstly, this conceptual framework allows us to move beyond the fixed roles and identities of individuals and groups and focus on the meaning-making process and positions within particular discursive processes. At the same time, this analytical frame gives attention to not only the roles and positions in a particular setting but also to the history of the relationship, in addition to what is being said. Therefore, when studying commemorations, the analysis can incorporate both the target social episode (commemoration) but also multiple storylines and the moral orders within which the commemoration are taking place. This allows us to understand the role of a particular episode, such as a commemorative event in broader narratives in the

society on an issue and where various groups locate themselves in the moral order of things. As positioning theory implies that positions are constantly negotiated through the assignment of duties and rights, it allows us to study the dynamics of the contestations while tracking how conversations about memory connect to others about the present and future in Moldova.

In addition to an ethnographic approach, this study also attends to the politics of memory by paying attention to which narratives are positioned as legitimate and powerful and which are marginalized or silenced. Narratives and institutionalized discourses produce certain relationships between various actors, the state and communities, privileging some and silencing the emergence of other stories. Attention to power allows us to consider the cultural and political factors which often frame remembering and lead to the production of dominant narratives. It propels us to explore further, looking beyond dominant narratives and attend to the multiplicity and complexity of meanings that inhabit the narrative landscape.

Timing and context

As I was repeatedly told by many informants in Moldova, the anniversary of the end of World War II in Moldova is a divisive period when politicians and group commemorations bring forward the conflicting narratives of history in Moldova. The spring and summer of 2018 also saw the country in ‘pre-election campaigning’ mode, with parliamentary elections scheduled to occur in late fall 2018. This pre-election context colored both my own analysis and the stories of informants in making sense of

the memorialization and narratives of political groups. I assumed because of its reportedly divisive nature that the discussion of history and commemorations would be a topic that would draw interest and attention. However, in the summer of 2018, when I was interviewing experts, civil society members, members of non-governmental organizations, activists, and former and current politicians, the topic of the politics of memorialization was overshadowed by the cancellation of Chisinau mayoral election results in June 2018. These elections, which initially resulted in the victory of one of the key opposition figures from the Truth and Dignity Platform, Andrei Nastase, were challenged in court by the Socialist Party and were eventually announced invalid, after several levels of court hearings including in the Constitutional Court. Cancellation of election results drew outrage from civil society and the political opposition, and also strong condemnation from the European Union in the form of a resolution from the European Parliament. The court ruling on the lack of validity of the election also had implications for the upcoming parliamentary elections, weakening the position of the opposition. This occurrence created widespread disbelief and outrage, especially among the politically independent and those aligned with opposition political groups. In meetings with various politically minded individuals around this time, I heard how ‘the red line was crossed’ in terms of democratic electoral processes. This created a shift in the importance of the commemorations as the election cancellation obscured other events. The political community became more concerned with the election crisis at hand than the contestations of history that commemorations usually heighten. The implication for my research was that during the interviewing period, most people were concerned about the

current political crisis while the attention to the contestations of the memory through commemorations was eclipsed. At the same time, the situation is indicative of the periodic intensification of contestations over commemorative events or other important dates between groups and individuals who give competing meanings to these events and historical periods.

My positionality

The narrative approach focuses on identifying meaning-making practices, and on understanding how people participate in the construction of their lives (Elliott 2005; Gubrium and Hosltein, 1997). In other words, attention is paid to how social activities are locally organized and conducted, and to the production of the social world. Following the tenets of this approach, I focus on “how a sense of social order is created through talk and interaction.” (ibid). Following Mishler’s research in “Context and narrative” (1991), I pay attention to the meanings produced in the interaction between interviewee and interviewer. Mishler (1991) suggested that due to the structure of interviews in general, stories and narratives are interrupted and shaped by the interviewer, even in in-depth interviews and conversations. While I framed discussions around the topics of my interest, I left my interviews as unstructured as possible to allow for stories and meanings to emerge. My attention is to the meaning produced in the interaction, and the interview as a site for the production of this meaning (Elliott 2005, loc. 408).

At the time that I started my data collection in Moldova in May 2018, I had already been living in Chisinau for 2.5 years in the capacity of Country Manager for Crisis Management Initiative. I managed and implemented two projects that put me in

direct contact with key political groups and officials, and representatives of civil society in Moldova. My capacity as a member of an international organization positioned me in a particular way within the community of civic society, my research concerns. Neither the work of my organization on conflict resolution and dialogue nor my positioning, specifically aligned me with any particular political group or party or position within Moldova. Even with the assumption that no such thing as neutrality is ever possible, it is especially important to note that in a small and contested political and civil society space as Moldova, it would be difficult to be seen outside of any interests. While I am aware that my professional engagement might have positioned me in a certain way, my already existing networks and previous time in Moldova was an advantage to my research. I began my work with a wide, already-established network of contacts across different political, identity, and language groups, which enabled me to conduct my field research.

My role as a member of an international organization, my identity as an ‘expat’ or ‘international,’ and also my heritage as an Azerbaijani, someone with a shared ‘Soviet’ history with informants (at least with those of my generation and older), positioned me in a way that shaped the interviews.

In addition, in Moldova, the language is spoken by an individual often defines their identity. Considering my languages of use are English and Russian, and that I do not speak Romanian, I see language as a factor in the interactions with various people. Not speaking Romanian naturally limited my exposure to the complexity and multiplicity of people and stories in Moldova that I had been exposed to during my time there. I took efforts to include and balance a variety of perspectives in the interviews,

with some interviews being also conducted in English while the majority were in Russian. However, my language of use might have had implications for a broader research project in Moldova. Given that language often determined the social interactions I was able to have and maintain over extended periods, it follows that I spent more time in Moldova around Russian and English-speaking individuals. My use of Russian might have also positioned me as a 'Russian-speaker' when English language communication was not possible with Romanian speakers. It is more my awareness of having people compromise on their choice of language than any problems I faced during the interviews that propel me to mention this here. I was treated with the openness and politeness that would be reasonable for me to expect from my interactions with informants, based on our familiarity and relationship. Despite the narratives of division around language and identity that circulate in Moldova, my experience with languages has been positive, with people willing to speak any language that would enable us to communicate. However, considering various aspects of my identity, the language used might have affected the kind of stories people shared with me during the interviews.

Scholars of narrative argue that the context of the teller and the role of the listener are important in the construction of narratives (Gubriuni and Holstein 1998; Holmes 1997; Mishler 1991). This approach requires attention to the meanings produced within the interaction between interviewee and interviewer (Elliott, 2005). During my time in Moldova, I participated in many meetings that would sound similar and share elements of discussions that emerged during the interviews. Meetings between local experts, politicians, civil society representatives, and members of international organizations and

the national and international staff of various embassies to discuss on-going political events are a common practice. The narratives produced during my interviews are located in a context where conversations about politics take place every day. The meanings constructed during the interviews also draw from the larger structure of the narratives circulating in the current social-political sphere and the interactions between the representatives of the international community and local experts, politicians, activists, and researchers.

Highlighting the importance of reflexivity for narrative research, Mishler (1995, 119) argues: “We do not find stories; we make stories.” In other words, we are retelling the stories of people we interview through our own way of describing them (ibid). We then also become storytellers co-authoring stories, either during the process of the interview or indirectly through our retelling the stories (Mishler 1995). Having lived and worked in Moldova for four and a half years, I do not posit myself as objective. Rather, through my work and my personal relationships with the people there, I am invested in positive change and success for Moldova and Moldovans. This engagement that I, as a researcher, have with the place and people influenced my research by pushing me to not only trace and describe narratives of memory but also explore stories that can bring forward opportunities for positive change.

Language, terms

Having spent time in Moldova as a conflict resolution professional, I am well aware of the sensitivities that different ways of calling things might engender in the

country. The differences in how Moldovans define and label their language and their ethnicity are described in the next chapters. These are concepts Moldovans don't always agree on themselves, and as someone working there and as a researcher, I tried in my writing to treat these differences with respect.

I am also aware that multiple interpretations exist directly related to the terms and concepts used in my research and writing. To account for these complexities and sensitivities, in my writing, I used English language versions of the geographical locations and names. Therefore, I call the river Dniester and not Nistru or Dniestr. When saying Moldovans, I refer to all citizens of Moldova and specify when referring to minority ethnic groups living in Moldova as Gagauz, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, etc. When using Moldovan or Romanian as an ethnic group, I use the language used by the informant or the text that I analyzed. I follow the same rule regarding language. When speaking on my own behalf, I refer to the language used in Moldova as Romanian, out of practicality, even as I am aware that I privilege one name of the language. During my interviews with informants and often when speaking about language in Moldova, I used the term 'state language' used in Moldova to avoid the choice between 'Moldovan' and 'Romanian.'

When describing various historical events that might have different interpretations, I am careful to avoid using one or another narrative about history that exists in Moldova. Alternatively, I retell the stories told to me in the language of the teller (and specify). Throughout the text, I use the 'Second World War,' unless describing and analyzing the narrative of the Great Patriotic War – as it was commonly referred to in the Soviet Union, and still now by some across the post-Soviet space. When saying WWII, I

refer to the period 1939-1945, while the Great Patriotic War narrative defines the timeframe as 1941-1945, denoting the time after the Soviet Union joined the second world war. It is also important to note here that I am aware that using one or another term in reference to WWII might, in some context, position someone with one or another historical narrative or political view.

I struggled to settle on categorizing various identity groups in Moldova and the identities of people I interviewed to describe them in the text. The complexity of identities and language use in Moldova does not make this job easy. Here too, I followed the rule of using the language groups and the categories of identities as described in the interviews. In my analysis, I make sense of these categories based on the scholarship and the surveys where self-reported identities in Moldova are published.

When describing the people I interviewed, I use two main categories based on the language spoken: Romanian or Russian speakers. While this does not solve the complexity of the identity of the persons described, this was the identification most often used by the people I interviewed. Other categories used were Romanian nationalists or Moldovanists. Still, these are not descriptions I could or want to use in describing my interviewees, so language provides a broad category that enables me to contextualize the conversation. I am aware that the perspectives of Romanian and Russian speakers on identity, memory, and politics can vary greatly, and I try to clarify this through specific descriptions of the person in the text. Often, the contents of the interview provide the answers, but mostly, the 'precise' identities of the individuals are not defining to the research, as it does not analyze the information provided based on identity, ethnic or

language groups. Rather, the descriptions of the interviewees, along with their political and professional affiliations, help provide a context for the stories told and the commemorative practices that take place.

CHAPTER FOUR: MEMORY AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN MOLDOVA

Before attempting to understand how Moldovans make meaning of the Second World War period, it is essential to understand the historical context and its influence on Moldova today. In this chapter, I outline historical events, focusing on critical periods and events, which provide the background to understanding the historical narratives in Moldova today. The chapter is organized into three parts. Part 1 relies mostly on secondary sources to describe critical historical events and their influence on the present-day Moldovan state and society. Constructing a narrative of a country's history is a selective process. I have included events that, during my field research and the scholarship review, presented as relevant to the discussion of Moldovan memory of the Second World War. Part 2 of the chapter draws on scholarship of the politics of memory and history, to describe the main narratives and frames of analysis used to examine history in post-Soviet Moldova. Examination of the literature on memory in Moldova shows that, since independence in 1991, history has been interlinked with identity politics resulting in contestations. Understanding these contestations and how various political actors position themselves in broader historical narratives is vital to setting the context for the commemorative events of 2018 described in this study. Part 3 provides an overview of the political context at the time of the study. Finally, the memory contestations in Moldova are often discussed, both in scholarship and in everyday

politics, in the context of relations between its larger and more powerful neighbors, the EU, Romania, and Russia. Moldova is hardly ever removed from the context of international tensions between Russia and the West, and the local historical narratives connect to global contestations of history. To address this, Part 3 of this section also ‘locates’ the politics of memory in a regional and global context to highlight how Moldova’s foreign policy and geopolitical directions come into play in the competing narratives of local elites.

Part 1. Historical background

Moldova’s ethnic and linguistic diversity, its current relationships with its neighbors, and the present-day discussions within political agendas all have origins in historical events through the past centuries. To understand and contextualize the present-day discussions around history and memory, a brief review of key historical events is necessary.

The origins of the current Republic of Moldova can be traced to the principality of Moldova in the middle ages (King, 2012). The principality of Moldova emerged in the early fourteenth century, founded by a Wallach prince, along with the principality of Wallachia (King 2012, 510). Moldova’s most celebrated historian, Prince Dimitrie Cantemir, claims that people of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldova argued for their Roman origin and their continuous presence in the region of Dacia, while also downplaying the influence of Slav migration (King, 2012). By the end of the 1350s, Moldova and Wallachia became two entities, which lay beyond the Carpathians and

constituted important areas in southeastern Europe due to their location on trade routes, which linked the Baltic Sea with the Black Sea (Meurs, 1994). During this period, two princes played an essential role in strengthening the principality of Moldova, Alexandru cel Bun (the Good) and Stefan cel Mare (the Great) (1457-1504), who developed its institutions and were continually fighting off attacks by the Ottoman Turks and Hungarians (King 2012, 530). The next two decades remained a time of conflict for these two principalities caught between the Ottomans and Poles, and after the fifteenth century, Hungarians. King (2012, 530), based on historical research, argues sources described people living in the principality as *moldovean*, and but also *vlah* or *roman*. According to the author, the choice of language was often determined by the identity of the writer, with *moldovean* used by western European chroniclers while *vlah* and *roman* by local scholars. Following Stefan cel Mare, and under the leadership of weaker rulers, Moldova was eventually defeated by the Ottomans in 1538 along with Wallachia becoming a vassal of the Ottoman Empire, but not wholly falling under its direct administration (King 2012, 535). Both principalities came to agreements with the Ottoman Empire allowing local princes to govern the principalities in exchange for taxes and war-time support to the sultan (Mitrasca 2007, 18). The weakening of the Ottoman Empire led the two principalities to be caught in the center of conflicts between Austria, Russia, and Ottomans (ibid). Eventually, during the Russo-Turkish war of 1812, the Moldovan principality fell under Russian control, following the May 28 peace treaty signed in Bucharest.

The current territory of Moldova, the land between Prut and Dniestr rivers, consists of only an eastern part of the principality of Moldova, with historical Moldova defined by a larger territory, including eastern Romania (King, 2012). The current name of Bessarabia referred to Moldova's territory between the Prut and Dniester rivers, and was coined by the Russian commander in the nineteenth century. The name originates, however, from the Basarab dynasty, whose land in the fourteenth century extended between the Danube and Dniestr to the Black sea (King 2012, 621). The treaty of 1812 transferred the territory between the Prut and Dniestr rivers, known as Bessarabia, from the Moldovan principality to Russian rule. According to historical sources, Russians granted Bessarabia a special autonomous status, which applied certain privileges and allowed for application of Moldavan laws, only to lose the status again in 1871 to become a regular gubernia (Mitrasca 2017, 47).

Bessarabia under Russian rule (1812-1918)

Under Russian rule, which lasted a century, cultural policies centered around a russification of the administrative system, and integration of the region into Russian imperial structures (Mitrasca 2017; King 2012). Romanian language education was forbidden in 1867, and Romanian printing presses were stopped in 1883 (Meurs 1994, 48). The official language of the region became Russian, and the Bessarabian orthodox church became subordinated to the Moscow patriarchate, according to King (2012). Referring to Lashkov (1912), the author argued that Russians did not challenge the notion that the Moldovans and Romanian principalities formed distinctly separate nations, but

when making an argument for the annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 promoted the idea of liberation of the Christians of the region from the Ottomans and return of Slav lands. As the Russian policy repressed local nationalism from growing, designed to promote loyalty to the tsar and the Russian empire and “not the liberation of a distinct Moldovan nation.” (King 2012, 749).

At the time it fell under Russian rule, the Bessarabia region was sparsely populated, with Romanians or Moldovans making up the majority of the population. Although numbers from different sources vary, one source places their number at around 85 percent (Meurs, 1994). Meanwhile, Mitrasca (2007, 21), referring to the official Russian census of 1856, claims a population of 990,000, of which 74 percent were Romanians. Russian rule brought demographic changes, tripling the population of the territory, which was only 250,000 - 300,000 (Popovici, 1931). The Russian government attracted an influx of colonists to the territory, including Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, and Jews, who came to the region in search of a better life (Popovici 1931; Meurs 1994). Migration to the area changed the demographics of the region in just a few decades, making it home to various ethnic groups and reducing the ratio of Moldovans to 47.6 percent (King 2012). According to Mitrasca (2007, 21), the official statistics of 1897 showed a population of 1,935,000, of which 56 percent were Romanians.

The cultural policies implemented under Russian rule affected urban and rural areas differently, due to the demographic composition of these areas and more aggressive implementation in the cities. Urban areas became more Russified, while hard to reach

rural areas remained indigenous in culture, language, and tradition. Chisinau and other urban regions became Russian speaking while also being populated by Jews, Russians, and Russian speaking Moldovans. Despite the efforts of Russian rulers in Bessarabia, argues Meurs (1994, 48), Russian literature and education did not reach rural areas en masse, which “remained loyal to their folk culture and language.”

The period containing the fall of the Romanian principality of Moldova to Russian rule, and the cultural and language policies implemented during this time, is therefore critical to the present-day historical narratives that inform discussions of the origin of the Moldovan state and nation. The rule of the Russian Empire, which lasted a century, resulted in diversification of the population of the region and led to great differences in ethnic composition and language between urban and rural areas. Cultural policies enacted by the Russian empire created an urban-rural divide, which had consequences in later periods of history in the Bessarabia region and eventually determined the social and political dynamics of the modern-day Republic of Moldova. According to Mitrasca (2007, 21), the use of the Romanian language in rural areas during 1917-1918 was valuable to the national movement and the union with Romania, as the new administrators were able to reach rural areas and speak the same language when engaging in propaganda.

Unification with Romania and Romanian rule (1918 – 1940)

The turmoil of the civil war in Russia and the fall of the Tsar in 1917 weakened Russian control in the region and created an uncertainty in the Bessarabian province.

Changes within Russia created an opening for the strengthening of nationalist movements, which had been underway in the region for several years (King, 2012). In 1917, in an assembly convened in Chisinau with the participation of more than 900 people, delegates called for autonomy of the Bessarabian province and the creation of a National Council or “Sfatul Tarii”, that was to serve as the government of the new autonomous republic (Cusco, 2017). Cusco (2017) argued that the leaders of the Moldovan Nationalist Party who were at the front of the nationalist movement shifted back and forth between various models, which still maintained relations with the Russian center. The deepening political crisis in Russia and the threat of annexation of the territory by the Ukrainians led to a radicalization of the program, and the declaration of a Moldavian Democratic Republic by the provisional parliament of Sfatul Tarii (Livezeanu 1995). By January 1918, following the arrival of Romanian troops and after the Ukrainian declaration of independence, Sfatul Tarii followed suit and declared an independent Moldovan republic (ibid). However, the republic was short-lived as just a couple of months later, on April 9, Sfatul Tarii voted for unification with Romania while maintaining semi-autonomy. The process of unification between the Romanian Kingdom and Bessarabia was completed on March 27, 1918, when the Act of Union was voted into Law (Cusco, 2017, 292).

The period following World War I saw a redrawing of borders in Europe, including the transfer of Transylvania to neighboring Romania, which now had the opportunity to expand its long-held political goals of creating a ‘Greater’ Romania’ (Iordachi, 2019). From 1918 to the start of World War II, Bessarabia remained part of

Romania. Romanian rulers focused on policies to integrate the province into the new kingdom. Efforts included agrarian reform that redistributed land and gave property to peasants, infrastructure projects which paved roads in Chisinau and introduced new trains to connect Chisinau to Romanian towns (King, 2012). In the 1930s, several bridges were also built across the Prut river, along with airports, radio stations, and telephone exchanges, among other resources (ibid).

Livezeanu (1995), in her book *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle: 1918-1930*, argued that Bucharest was concerned with the heterogeneity of the population in Bessarabia, and the fragility of the Romanian national consciousness. These concerns informed the administration's cultural policy, which was to target cultural propaganda and the development of the Romanian school system in an attempt to weaken the impact of Russian educational institutions (Livezeanu 1995,100). The core of cultural policy therefore became focused on education, targeting schools and (re)introducing the Romanian language to the region. These efforts included the development of curricula, textbook materials, teacher training, and the introduction of Romanian language lessons to kindergartens all over the region. The policies also targeted cultural life outside of schools, supporting cultural societies, which needed books, national pictures, folk costumes, postcards, etc. These needs were addressed by publishing and distributing books, pamphlets, calendars, periodicals, and maps to rural audiences (Livezeanu, 1995). Livezeanu (1995, 103) states: "In 1919 and 1920, ten titles were published in editions of 15,000 for teachers' free distribution to villagers. From February 1919 to February 1920, the department distributed 794,835

books, 449,000 periodicals, 4,950 pictures, and 820 maps.” Educational efforts and those promoting patriotism and culture at times overlapped. According to King (2012), specialized adult education courses and “cultural hearths” (*cămine culturale*) that were set up by the Romanian Ministry of Education and the Army targeted both literacy and a sense of patriotism in the province. Livezeanu (1995, 110) points out that the military not only supervised propaganda staff, but also carried out educational activities in Bessarabia to promote Romanian literary as well as political loyalty among army recruits.

Livezeanu (1995, 116) argues that the Romanization of the school system was officially finished by 1922, but only partially reflected the actual situation. Nevertheless, the gains were significant. For example, she states that in 1922, in Chisinau, 181 out of the total 184 schools were teaching in Romanian, while national minorities were able to attend minority state schools up to the third grade, after which the language of instruction would switch to Romanian. By 1930, literacy in Romanian had risen to nearly 30 percent.

As is often the case, when a language and culture policy is implemented in a territory, integration efforts had mixed results. King (2012) argues that during this time, Romania’s efforts integrate the region were met with obstacles by the local population. The population itself seemed not so easy to integrate into its new power, notes King (2012), as various reforms and policies introduced by the Romanians were met with resistance. One factor was the ethnic diversity of the population, especially in urban areas, which protested against the cultural policies of Romania. This created difficulties in promoting a language and culture policy among a population which had several native languages. After two decades of Romanian rule, the minorities in Bessarabia remained

resistant to studying the Romanian language. The language and culture policies gained more success among the rural Romanian speaking community, which was easier to work with (Livezeanu 1995, 98). The manner of implementation of the policy and the rule of local Romanian administration was also a factor. The local population did not always welcome Romanian administration representatives, and reports of harsh policies and rough treatment of locals were commonplace. Corruption in the local Romanian administration and harshness in the behavior of local administrators created tension and feelings of disrespect, sometimes magnified in the eyes of the local population. King (2012) states:

“The reticence of Bessarabians to embrace the pan-Romanian ideal and the disillusionment experienced by some provincial leaders should not have been surprising. After 1812 the Prut had become an ever-widening gulf between the Bessarabians and their western neighbors. The Bessarabians had missed out on the defining moments in the emergence of Romanian national consciousness among political elites in Wallachia and the rump Moldova. At each historical turning point, they had been absent: the rebellion against the Ottomans in 1821, the standardization and Latinization of the Romanian language and alphabet in the 1840s and 1850s, the creation of a unified Romanian state in 1859, the creation of a Romanian dynastic house in 1866 and 1881, and the achievement of independence from the Porte in 1878. The Moldovan peasant’s view of his own national identity was thus not solely the product of Russian assimilationist policies, but had remained virtually frozen since the Russian annexation of 1812, a time when the idea of a Romanian nation stretching from the Tisza to the Dneestr— even the idea of a “nation” in a modern sense— was still in its infancy.” (Locations 1265-1274)

Scholars (Mitrasca 1994; Livezeanu 1995; King 2012) point out the mixed results of Bessarabian integration into Greater Romania. The period of Romanian rule did not create loyalties to their new rulers among the urban Russified elites of Bessarabia. Instead, they continued to look to Russia rather than embracing the idea of a greater Romanian nation (King 2012, 1274). Multi-ethnic and Russified elites in urban areas

which resisted romanization, the attitudes and harshness of the local Romanian administration, and the difficulties of the rule of territory by outsiders along with the continued activity of Russians in the region were some of the key reasons the Bessarabian integration came short of expectations.

However, for Romanian historians and publicists of the period, Bessarabia was part of Romania, and unification represented a victory at the end of a centuries-old struggle (Mitrasca 1994; King 2012). In this narrative, Bessarabia, which was demographically and territorially part of Romania, with a population mostly made up of Romanians, was militarily annexed by the Russians at the end of World War I. Current Romanian historiography maintains this narrative. As for the Russian narrative, scholarship shows that it evolved over various periods. Mitrasca (1994), argues that according to Russian accounts, Romania did not exist in 1812 so the territory could not be annexed – rather, Russia liberated Slav Christians from Ottomans. Liberation from Ottomans was the rationale for the 1812 annexation, and Russia never promoted the differences between Moldovans and Romanians as a group. In the interwar period, even as the integration effort went on, the Soviet Union never recognized Romanian sovereignty over Bessarabia (Casu, 2015).

The efforts to create new opportunities for the return of the territory by Moscow continued. This was important to Moscow, according to Moldovan historian Casu (2015) because of its plan to create a security zone for its biggest port on the Black Sea, Odesa. In the 1920s, the Soviet regime came up with a new formula for ‘reconquering’ Bessarabia – a Bolshevik ideology mixed with an ethnic one, argues Casu (2015). To

legitimize its interest in the region, the Soviet center created a Moldavian Autonomous Republic (MASSR) across the Dniester river from Bessarabia. With a third of its population Moldovan or ethnic Romanian, MASSR demonstrated to the world that unification with Romania divided people who were now across different parts of the Dniester river. By the 1930s, the limited outcome of integration into Romania and the new Moldavian Soviet republic across the river created new discussions of Moldovan identity in Bessarabia (King 2012, 1401-1407).

Bessarabia during World War II (1939-1945)

On August 23, 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany signed the Ribbentrop-Molotov nonaggression pact. The treaty bound both sides to not to attack each other or support third parties against each other, and to solve any differences through negotiation or arbitration. The pact also included a secret protocol that divided Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence and allowed the Soviet Union to expand into Eastern Europe. The secret protocol put Bessarabia under the Soviet sphere of influence, with Germany acknowledging its lack of interest in the region. The signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact paved the way for the Soviet Union to pressure Romania for the return of Bessarabia without fearing the interference from Germany (King 1994). In June 1940, the Soviet Union issued an ultimatum to Romania acting on the terms of these protocols and demanded the secession of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. Following an agreement from the Romanian government and annexation on August 2, 1940, Bessarabia became part of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic established by the

Soviet Union in the 1920s. The southern part of Bessarabia became incorporated into Ukraine. This allocation of land designated territories with access to the Black Sea to the republic already under Soviet control rather than keeping it under Bessarabia, which may not be loyal (King 2012). The period of departure of the Romanian army and annexation was violent. King (2012) states:

Romanian officials, former Sfatul Țării members, and average Bessarabian citizens were rounded up or executed on the spot. 7 As many as 90,000 fell in the wave of repression and deportations that immediately followed the annexation. 8 Retreating Romanian troops, humiliated at the loss of the eastern province, also took their own revenge against those they held responsible for betraying Greater Romania.” (Locations 2266-2270).

In less than a year, on June 22, 1941, the Romanian army (by now allied with Germany) along with German troops advanced to Bessarabia and took the territory under control. Bessarabia and Bukovina were officially integrated into the Romanian state. In July 1941, despite lack of political support for further expansion in the Bucharest Romanian army, the troops advanced further into Transnistria. While receiving domestic support for the war up until that point, this expansion across the Dniestr brought Romania into conflict with Britain and France, prompting them to declare war on Romania (Anderson 2013; King 2012). A special military administration was established during this time in the territory between the Dniester and the Southern Bug rivers, known as Transnistria. From 1941 to 1944, many local male residents in the region were recruited to the army, and hostilities took place in the area as the Romanians attempted to keep control of the territory.

According to accounts, a special administrative unit set up by Romanians and Germans in the 1930s deported and killed 123,000 Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina during this period, along with scores of thousands of other Jews and Roma from Transnistria (Mitrasca 1994; Dumitru 2008; King 2012). Population census data indicates that the numbers of Jews and Roma living in Bessarabia significantly decreased from 204,838 Jews and 13,518 Roma in 1930 to 95,107 Jews and 7,265 Roma in 1959 (Dumitru, 2008). In the capital of Moldova, the percentage of Jews shrank from 36.05 percent of a total 117,016, to 35,000-40,000, just 2 percent of an estimated 717,000 population argues Dumitru (2008).

In April 1944, following an offensive by the Soviet Union, Transnistria was taken under Soviet control as the Red Army advanced west. Bessarabia and Bukovina fell under Soviet control, and the Soviet – Romanian border was established along the Prut river by the peace treaty of 1947 (King 2012). The redrawn borders of the Moldova Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) included Bessarabia, but also added a strip of territory east of the Dniester river, which was never part of Bessarabia before. Therefore, the Second World War period, in addition to the violence that took place, was one of the defining periods in the history of the region, when Bessarabia once again changed ‘rulers’ becoming under control of the Soviet Union.

The era immediately following the integration of Bessarabia into the Soviet Union was characterized by famines and deportations, deepening the hardships of a region which had already been damaged by several military operations. Along with Ukraine, Belorussia and the Baltic republics, Bessarabia was one of the areas targeted by large-

scale resettlement campaigns (Mawdsley and Mawdsley, 1998). In the years 1946-1947, about 150,000 to 200,000 people died of famine, killing five percent of the population of the Republic (Casu 2014, 213). The droughts of 1945 and 1946 contributed to these deaths, but Soviet policies played a more significant role in the scale and impact of the famine (ibid). The destruction of livestock during the war years also contributed to low agricultural production and famine (Gribincea, 1995). Deportations organized and carried out by the Soviet government inflicted further suffering on the population. Romanian speakers who fled before Soviet annexation became targets, and refugees in Romania were handed over to Soviet authorities (King, 2012). Also, the policy of “de-kulakization” resulted in the deportation of about 16,000 families outside the republic between 1941-1951 (Gribincea 1995; King 2012). The expulsion of Moldovans continued into the 1950s, with 40,000 more Moldovans leaving the MSSR as a result of ‘voluntary’ migration to Russia and Kazakhstan (King, 2012). These events, which led to the death and suffering of thousands of Moldovans, received significant attention and became part of the historical narrative in the period following independence, making up the narratives of ‘Soviet occupation’ and violence inflicted by the Soviets, also leading to the memorialization and commemoration of certain events in the Republic of Moldova.

Nation-Building in Moldova within the Soviet Union

During the period of Soviet rule in Moldova, policy was focused on Soviet nation-building projects while creating barriers between Moldovans and Romanians. Soviet-era administrative management involved the redrawing of borders and the redistribution of

populations in the region. Deportations of thousands of Moldovans and migration of Russians and Ukrainians into the area also changed the demographic making up the territory (King 2012; Tom de Waal 2017). In addition to deportations and exiles, the absence of many Jews killed during the war and the influx of many Russians and Ukrainians during the Soviet period after World War II changed the composition of the population, increasing the number of Russians and Ukrainians to 13.8 percent and 11.1 percent respectively (King 2012). The Moldovan population dropped from 68.8 percent to 64.5 by 1989, but remained secure in numbers (ibid). The Soviet policy of moving cadres of people from one republic to another resulted in the concentration of various demographics in different areas of the economy. Moldovans were mostly concentrated in agriculture, while Slavic and immigrant populations worked in heavy industry. This division further defined the urban and rural specificity of the communities, with the concentration of Russian speakers and mixed ethnic groups in urban areas and Romanian speaking Moldovans in the rural areas (King, 2012). King (2012, 2517) whose work focused on the politics of culture and identity in the region, argued that cultural policy shifted from the technicalities of language (Romanian versus Moldovan) to the discussion of “historical origins of the Moldovan nation and the ethnic links between the Moldovan and Romanian peoples.” Analyzing the Soviet nation-building ‘project’ in Moldova, King (2012, 1648-1665) explains that between the 1920s and 1930s, with the encouragement of the Soviet center’s policy on ‘moldovanization,’ cultural policy chose a track of creating a notion of a distinct Moldovans as an independent nation.

The nation-building project from the Soviet period had a lasting effect on Moldova and is part of the historical narratives contested today. Demographics, along with language policies, the introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet, and implementation of cultural policy focused on the Sovietization of Bessarabia, all contributed to distancing the region from its recent history with Romania.

Language During the Soviet Period

The Soviet period brought yet another wave of cultural and language policy to Bessarabia. In the 1920s, the Soviets had already started its policy of creating a distinct Moldovan language in the MASSR, focusing on identifying differences between the Moldovan and Romanian languages. Efforts included mapping the terms and words used by the region's peasants and developing a list of words derived mostly from Russian, and taking peasant speech forms and formalizing these to get them up to new literary standards argues King (2012). The standardization was done in the Cyrillic alphabet, which was already used by Bessarabians before 1918.

Discussing the linguistic trends of the Soviet period, King (2012, 2539) points out several interesting trends. Despite the majority Moldovan population and the standardization of the Moldovan language as almost identical to Romanian, use of the Russian language grew and remained high. But while the population learned and used Russian, they kept their native language and resisted linguistic assimilation, especially compared to other republics (ibid). Moldovan historian Negura (2014, 64), writing about Bessarabian writers during the Soviet period, argues that during the 1950s, cultural and

linguistic policy shifted towards ‘latent Romanization’ of literary language and cultural heritage. The Romanization that took place during this period had significant implications for the years after independence.

Part 2. History, Memory and Identity Politics in the Republic of Moldova

National Revival: Language and Identity in the Late 1980s

In the 1990s, as the Republic of Moldova sought to establish itself, the concepts of language, identity, and nationhood were being increasingly debated (Cusco 2012; King 2012; Dumitru 2008; Tulbure 2002). History came center stage in the discussions of identity during the national revival period and the early days of the Republic. Like many of the newly independent republics after the fall of the Soviet Union, Moldovan political elites turned to history in the process of their nation-building processes. The times of revival and independence demanded a review of key periods in Bessarabia’s history, and the recognition of some historical narratives that had been silenced during the Soviet period. This period, argues King (2012), became a time of searching for and reaffirmation of an authentic Moldovan identity after the period of Soviet rule.

By 1989, argues King (2012), the Moldova Soviet Socialist Republic represented an ideal context for the emergence of the national movements that resulted from the reforms and opening of the perestroika period under Gorbachev. By the late 1980s, urban areas were already populated by the Moldovan-speaking population, and this group was forming into a new elite. King (2012, 2760) states:

“By 1989 the MSSR was in demographic terms a Moldovan populist’s dream: an economy based on agriculture; a largely rural society with the countryside inhabited mainly by members of the indigenous ethnic group; and urban centers populated by a mass of newly arrived immigrants from the countryside competing with “foreign” populations that had traditionally held the reins of political and economic power.”

The period of perestroika, which opened opportunities for reform, led to the emergence of a movement in 1988 made of writers, journalists, intellectuals, and musicians, like in other Soviet republics. This movement took up issues of language and the history of the Bessarabian region which were previously closed for discussions (King 2012). Scholarship on this period points to language as a central component of the national revival movement, a debate that was started by the reformist movement of the Popular Front before independence (Hegarty 2001; Tulbure 2002; King 1999, 2012; Ciscel 2008; Casu 2015). Tulbure (2002), a Moldovan historian, argued that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, if it was not clear what the national revival movement could be about, there was clarity among the elite and the public that the revival of the Moldovan language and its status as the state language were important. The Front demanded a proclamation of Moldovan as the state language, and a switch from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet.

On August 31, 1989, a law passed by the Moldova Supreme Soviet adopted Moldovan as the state language, changing the language to a Latin alphabet and recognizing its unity with Romanian languages, and set out a program for the use of this language in the government, economy, etc. (King, 2012). This step signified a significant departure from the official policy at the time and became the start of the independence movement (King 2012; Tulbure 2002). The passing of the law was the culmination of

language discussions throughout the summer of 1989. But the law also resulted in backlash and sparked tensions from minorities such as Gagauz and Russian speaking groups, which argued for Russian to have equal status alongside Moldovan, instead of giving it a secondary status as the language of interethnic communication. (King 2012; Mitrasca 2007). Language, therefore, became both the symbol of national revival and the issue of contestation between minorities and the national revival movement. On August 27, 1991, the Moldovan parliament declared the full independence of the Republic of Moldova.

Following the language debates, identity and history continued to dominate the Moldovan political scene during Moldova's first decade of independence (Tulbure 2002; Dumitru 2008; King 2012; Casu 2015; Iglesias 2013). Front movement politicians, who saw Moldova as part of Romania, split into those who supported immediate unification with Romania and more moderate ones who saw unification as a gradual process (King 2012). Yet another group promoted a different identity and, subsequently, a future for the new country. Former Communist agricultural and agro-industrial elites supported the idea of Moldovan independence and statehood arguing against becoming a province of either Romania or Russia, writes King (2012). The most radical within this group wanted to emphasize the separateness of Moldovan ethnicity and language from that of Romania, maintaining a Soviet version of a distinct ethnic group. King (2012, 3671) says: "By the time of the 1994 parliamentary elections, this reborn "Moldovanism" had become one of the central tenets of the Agrarians' platform and an ideology promoted by the party's most prominent spokesperson at the time, Mircea Snegur." Although the idea of a

separate Moldovan nation-state received a lot of criticism from intellectuals and historians, the support of the public for the concept became evident in the 1994 elections. The Agrarians received 40 percent support, while the supporters of Romanian identity received only 20 seats (King, 2012). The public voted for Moldova's independent statehood, with only 10 percent of the population supporting unification with Romania (ibid).

History and Memory in Competing Narratives of Identity

Building on 'latent romanization' during the Soviet period, by the mid-1990s, the old Soviet-era cadre of critical cultural institutions such as Chisinau State University and the Academy of Sciences was replaced by a younger, Romanian speaking elite, setting up dominance and a strong presence of the pan-Romanianists in these institutions (Dumitru 2008; Cusco 2012; King 2012; Suveica 2017). Most of these historians of the Moldovan Republic uncritically accepted the Romanian version of this history, while maintaining old Soviet methods of historiography. Dumitru (2008) and Cusco (2012) argued that after independence, Moldovan historians trained in the Soviet-style of constructing a nation reinvented themselves in turning themselves to nationalism, but following similar uncritical approaches. The importance of history and public debates on the issues also provided historians with the opportunity to participate in public life and politics, serving as additional motivation (Dumitru, 2008).

According to Cusco (2012), an interesting dynamic emerged in Moldova, where the historical narratives produced by official institutions and elites were not determined

by the official national narrative. Historians and educational institutions dominated by Romanian speakers and Romanianists were not instrumentalized to promote the idea of a nation. Instead of contesting narratives of identity, one connecting Moldova to Romania and another arguing for distinct identity and statehood emerged within official institutions and political elites.

Pan-Romanians (Dumitru 2008) or Romanianists (Cusco, 2012) claim that Moldovans are part of the 'greater Romanian nation', holding negative views of the Soviet period (Dumitru 2008; Cusco 2012; King 2012) while idealizing the period of the region's inclusion in Greater Romania in 1918-1940. Romanianism, which originates in the national revival movements of the 1990s, is seen as promoting an exclusive Romanian identity which excludes ethnic minorities. This movement has been mostly supported by urban and educated elites and has been represented by right-leaning parties such as the Liberal Party, and the Liberal Democratic Party (Anderson 2005; Iglesias 2013). In the early days of independence, the Popular Front party narrated history as leading to unification with Bessarabia, from the medieval principality to the brief Bessarabian Republic (King 2012, 3708).

While Romanianists in some institutions adopted Romanian historiography, the post-Soviet political elite, in their need to strengthen the newly acquired statehood, was in search of historical narratives that would reveal a distinct Moldovan identity significant enough to legitimate Moldovan statehood and political agendas (Tulbure 2002; Cusco 2012; Zub 2012). Therefore, narratives that legitimized particular identities became central to the discussions of history in newly independent Moldova, providing

the basis for the politics of a given elite. The emergence of a Moldovanist narrative as a legitimization of Moldova's newly achieved sovereignty, based on its continued statehood over history, also emerged in the 1990s. This new narrative stood separate in both the Romanian narrative and the Soviet narrative (Cusco, 2012). According to Cusco (2012, 186), this approach was in many ways a 'recycling' of the Soviet concept of Moldovans, proving the existence of an "uninterrupted tradition of Moldovan statehood, finding its purported roots in the Middle Ages and emphasizing the (mythical) continuity between the medieval Moldovan Principality and the contemporary political entities which emerged in the territory of Bessarabia." The period of the Soviet Union in this narrative was seen as a continuation of Moldovan statehood, with the story connecting various points of history until arrival at the current Moldovan state.

By the 1990s, history and memory became widely used in identity politics and legitimization of either 'Moldovanist' or 'Romanianist' narratives, which emerged in Moldova after independence.

Historical Narratives of World War II and Politics of Memory

The period of the Second World War is a particularly contested period of history, where the politics of memory become pronounced with multiple interpretations by various actors, but also by silences (Cusco 2012, Dumitru 2008). According to much of the scholarship on memory in Moldova, interpretations of the Second World War period by Moldovan historians are split along the lines of Romanian and Russian historiographies (Dumitru 2008; Miller 2012; Suveica 2017). Suveica (2017) argues that

two narratives ‘victory/liberation’ and ‘occupation’ emerged about the Second World War in Moldova. The ‘victory/liberation’ narrative, which draws from and linked to the Soviet narrative about the Great Patriotic War, has been a dominant and master narrative in Moldova due to the tradition of commemorations and Moldova’s Soviet past (Cusco 2012, Suveica 2017). The second narrative, seen as a competing narrative by the Romanianists, framed the Second World War period as a time of occupation of the Bessarabia region by the Soviet Union and has been characterized by some as ‘occupation’ narrative (Suveica, 2017).

Competing Master Narratives of the Second World War

Moldovanist historians adopted the historical narratives published in Russia in the 1990s ‘recycled’ from Soviet times, which ‘reinvented’ the history of this period but drew heavily from Soviet historiography. In the historical accounts of ‘Moldovanists,’ the period of World War II is a tragic but ultimately victorious period, with a positive ending where the Soviet Army defeated the German army and liberated the population, restoring peace. Bessarabia’s experience of the war is interpreted as liberation from the Romanian regime, which exploited the local population and caused suffering (Suveicu 2017). It has also been noted by the scholars that the ‘Moldovanists’ group itself cannot be considered a homogeneous political group, as it contains various narratives of Moldovan identity and statehood (Zdaniuk, 2014). ‘Moldovanists’ consider Moldovans as a distinct nation tracing the origin of Moldova to the Principality of Moldova (ibid).

Of a particular significance in this narrative are the events of June 1940 and August 1944. Scholars studying the politics of history and memory argued that in the Great Patriotic narrative, the events of June 1940, when the Romanian Army and administration left Bessarabia (at the time territory of Romania), and August 1944, when the ‘Iasi-Chisinau’ military operation ensured the success of the Red Army over Romanian-German army, are described as ‘liberation from the yoke of the Romanian invaders’ which had a positive impact on the local population (Cusco 2012, 194; Suveica 2017). The narrative frames Bessarabia’s transfer from Romania to the Soviet Union in June 1940 as ‘liberation’ from the negative rule of Romania in the territory (ibid). The annexation of Bessarabia in this narrative is framed as a ‘final solution to the Bessarabian question in favor of the USSR’ with Moldovanist historians claiming that it was Romania’s tacit agreement that led to the recognition of Bessarabia as a USSR territory (Nazaria and Stepaniuc 2010; Suveica 2017). Historians in support of this narrative base their argument on the fact that the Soviet Union never officially recognized the Bessarabia region as part of Greater Romania when it changed hands from the Russian empire in 1918 (King 2012; Suveica 2017; Casu 2015). The military success of the Soviet Army over the Romanian-German Army in 1944 is further depicted as liberation from ‘fascism’ in the context of the Second World War (ibid).

Another important point in the ‘victory’ narrative is linked to Moldovan identity and the creation of Moldovan statehood. If the Soviet historiography presented the date of Bessarabia joining Soviet Union as the cornerstone for the subsequent creation of ‘Moldovan statehood’ within the Soviet Union, Moldovanists (re)interpreted the event for

the purpose of legitimizing Moldovan statehood in the 1990s (Casu, 2015). In this interpretation, 1940 is the “legitimate restoration of the Soviet regime in a region that for centuries belonged to the Russian political and cultural sphere and claimed that the local population had eagerly awaited ‘liberation’” (Suveica, 2017, 396).

The Romanianist narrative of the Second World War is different. Drawing heavily from Romanian historical narratives, the core of this narrative is Moldova’s historic belonging to Romania from which it had been separated. The period of Bessarabia’s inclusion in Romania is idealized, while the Soviet period is seen negatively (Tulbure 2002; Dumitru 2008; Cusco 2012). According to these scholars, the period of the Second World War is especially crucial in the timeline of events as it marks the period when the Soviet Union’s Red Army occupied Romanian territory forcefully annexing Moldova. Crucial events from the period of the Second World War are the signing of the Ribbentrop Molotov Act, and the June 1940 annexation of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina from Romania, which is called ‘occupation’ with subsequent ‘domination’ (Suveica, 2017). According to Suveica (2017), these historical narratives position the Romanian government a victim of wartime circumstances and Soviet aggression. Relying on research by Moldovan historians, which largely drew from Romanian historiography, Suveica (2017, 397) argues that according to Romanianist Moldovan historians, the war against Romania by the USSR was prepared in advance causing Romania extensive losses. Such positioning of Romania as a victim releases it free from any responsibilities towards local populations when it comes to wartime events (Suveica 2017, 397). If, in the Moldovanist narratives, the annexation is positioned as a ‘solution’

or positioned as done with tacit agreement from Romania, in the Romanianist narrative, emphasis is placed on the calculated and forced nature of the event. The advancement of the Romanian-German Army into the territory of Bessarabia in 1941 is framed in the narrative as an effort to liberate its historical land and to save Bessarabia and northern Bukovina from the Soviets (ibid). Atrocities committed by German-Romanian armies against Jewish populations during this period and accounts of the Holocaust are absent (Dumitru 2008; Tulbure 2002; Suveica 2017). The aftermath of the Second World War and the plight of the population in Bessarabia under the Soviet regime are also part of this narrative. These emphasize the suffering and discrimination of the Romanian majority during the Soviet period, while minorities such as Jews, Ukrainians, and Russians were privileged (Suveica, 2017). Other historical injustices and events of the Soviet period as consequences of occupation are highlighted in the narrative. These include the famine of 1946-1947, the Stalinist deportations, and forced collectivization, which resulted in the death and suffering of the local population of the region (Dumitru 2008, 53).

The description and analysis of competing narratives of the Second World War by the Moldovanist and Romanianist historians reveals the importance of this time to present-day discussions about statehood and identity in Moldova. In the Moldovanist narrative, the Soviet Socialist Moldovan Republic is part of the history of statehood and identity, formed in the middle ages, and continued throughout the Soviet period as the Socialist Republic. As such, the Second World War period presents a crucial period, legitimizing the establishment of a Soviet Moldova, and the memory of the Soviet period is part of the narrative of continued the statehood of Moldovan since middle ages. In the

Romanianist narrative, the interpretations of events of the Second World War are crucial to the narrative of the identity of Moldovans as Romanians, separated from Romania. This narrative about the Second World War is important in legitimizing the story of Moldova as part of Romania, which had emerged and maintained in the political sphere in Moldova since the 1990s. Diverging meanings of this period of history cannot be examined as related only to the past, as these narratives play an important role for various groups in constructing the history of Moldovan statehood and the legitimacy of its existence and future, or lack thereof.

The Public and Multiplicity of Narratives

The scholarship on history and memory in Moldova reveals a master narrative about history in Moldova, which positions memory as an essential element in the competing and divisive identity politics that have prevailed in Moldovan politics since independence. In this narrative, the memory of the Second World War plays a central role, as various interpretations of this period legitimize different and competing identities and groups. Historical narratives have remained influential in politics since the revival of nationalist movements in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Dumitru, 2008). In Moldovan political life, distinct ideologies did not emerge, and the national question remained the most important determinant of political affiliation (Mitrasca 2007; King 2012; Iglesias 2013). One of the reasons for the production of multiple competing memory and identity narratives was the domination of Romanianists in the history and education institutions, which prevented the establishment of national narratives by official structures. In a way,

such a set-up of institutions prevented the development of one singular official national historical policy that could be implemented. This context was determinate in the emergence of contesting narratives of history within official institutions and political elites, one connecting Moldova to Romania and another arguing for a distinct identity and statehood. In Moldovan political life, distinct ideologies in party life did not emerge, and the national question remained the most important factor of political affiliation (Mitrasca 1994; King 2012; Iglesias 2013).

King (2012) points out that the structure of the electoral system was also partially to blame for creating conditions that allowed competing identity narratives to become salient in day-to-day politics. The electoral system and cycle of elections played a role in the prevention of the emergence of partisan politics while keeping groups in a perpetual state of campaigning with identity and memory as central issues (King, 2012). Various interpretations of history, therefore, become key to the legitimacy of the identities argued by different groups. This trend has continued over the last decades, as the electoral system has not presented voters with classical left-wing or right-wing party ideologies (Casu, 2015). Instead, building on existing trends, the parties position themselves in ways that can appeal to a particular electorate based on cultural cleavages.

Scholars point out that despite the prevalence of identity politics in Moldovan party politics, the response from the public over the last decades since independence on identity issues has been varied (Dumitru, 2008). Within the first few years of independence, public voting shifted from issues of identity and ideology to economic problems (ibid). Some studies of Moldova's voting patterns in the context of identity

politics have revealed that voters' preferences on socio-economic issues have become more salient even as cultural policies and issues remain important (Protsyk, 2006). For example, when taken in context, the decline in support for the European Union, reaching a record low of 30% in 2015, points to disappointment with the government and lack of improvements in the economic sphere rather than for ideological reasons (Casu, 2015). On the issue of unification with Romania, which is often discussed in the political space, support has been stable but low. Tulbure, (2002), a Moldovan historian, argues that Romanianism stabilized in its popularity after the 1990s. Unification with Romania remains part of the political discussions affecting the dynamics around discourses of memory, identity, and statehood. King (2012) comments on the polls in the early years of independence and argues that the results showed little support of the Moldovan population for a union with Romania, and when given a choice in self-identifying, 87 percent chose responses of Moldovan over Romanian. Cash (2007) argued that the decrease in support for pan-Romanianism that took place suggests that Moldova's citizens would not support ethnic-based and exclusionary policies, and that the government's legitimacy also depended on addressing issues beyond the sphere of politics (Cash 2007, 589). Moreover, with the sweeping victory of the Communist Party in the 2001 parliamentary elections, the public sent a message that economics rather than ideology was the most critical issue. A stable percentage of voters remained supportive of the parties advocating for unification with Romania, but those numbers have not significantly grown.

Another explanation for the contradiction between the salience of identity and history narratives and the public response can be the ‘meanings’ around the issue of identity that exist in Moldova. The polls, for example, show that the public’s division along these identity lines is not straightforward. In a publication “The Unfinished State – 25 Years of Independent Moldova,” Calus (2016) argued that many in Moldova do not strongly identify with the identity narratives promoted by the elites. Key trends in voting patterns and polls show that in Moldova, there is a multiplicity of meanings and stories about what it means to be a Moldovan. Calus (2016, 18) cites a poll on citizenship where 75 percent of those polled responded that they were citizens of Moldova, while only 50 percent identified as ‘local.’ The author’s reflections on the results of these polls suggest that “supra-ethnic state identity exists in Moldova; this identity lacks significant substance.” According to this argument, while most identify as part of the Moldovan state, there are significant differences when it comes to people’s relations to historical events, symbols, values, and language (Calus 2016, 19).

When it comes to the different narratives of memory of the Second World War, the context is also interesting. Cash (2016, 2), when discussing the relationships between local knowledge and remembrance and official history, argues that the simpler Great Patriotic War narrative provides a framework for remembering while erasing the diversity and contradictions of the local experiences in Moldova in the pre-war and war period. In the post-independence period, argues Cash (2016), many communities shifted to commemorate in a way that challenged the Soviet narrative while commemorations at the national level saw the return of the Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War (ibid).

According to the author, anthropologists studying memory in Moldova concluded that the “severity of political, social, and economic traumas of the 20th century have made people unwilling or unable to articulate historically conscious narratives of themselves or their communities.” (Cojocaru 2005; Cash 2016). Studies of memory in Moldova at the village and local level have revealed a reluctance to remember, and a presence of ‘collective trauma’ (Cash, 2016). These studies point to the multiplicity and complexity of the memory of the Second World War in Moldova. At the same time, national level narratives were more simplified and dominant during and after the Soviet period

The dynamics between national level narratives (whether one single official narrative, like during the Soviet period, or the post-Soviet competing narratives of the elite) and the multiplicity of memory and identity narratives in Moldova raise questions about politics in the production of memory. The examples of studies and surveys I outlined above show that even after the independence, Soviet-period narratives dominate, while the more complex stories of the war could not be told. Similarly, despite the multiplicity of identity narratives, discussions at the political level have lacked nuance.

From a narrative perspective, the dichotomy of the identity narratives which have prevailed in politics and the multiplicity of narratives that we can glimpse from the polls directs the question towards the issues of narrative dynamics that I explore in this research project. The narrative lens provides us with insights into the questions of how some narratives can dominate even when there is complexity. Attention to conflict and domination is not to ignore or dismiss the complexity of people’s experiences. It is rather to point out how narratives become material and take over and constrict the production

and circulation of meanings. The complexity of people's experiences in Moldova requires us to pay close attention to context when studying the dominant narratives of history and memory.

Part two and three of this Chapter provided a brief overview of Moldova's history, highlighting key periods and areas which have shaped the current republic but also remain important in the narratives about the past. The legacy of the past has influenced and served as a resource for the identity politics which emerged in Moldova after the independence and continue dominating politics today. The next section describes the present-day political context that provided the background for the research.

Part 3. Republic of Moldova Today

Bordering Romania in the west and Ukraine in the east, Moldova occupies a territory of some 37,000 square feet and has a population of 3.5 million. The World Bank rates Moldova as a middle-income country, although it is often described as one of the poorest in Europe (World Bank, 2018). Moldova declared independence on August 27, 1991, during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1992, following tensions that escalated into a military conflict, the Transnistria region declared its independence, becoming an unrecognized state, the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic. Brief unrest from the Gagauz minority in the south was settled with a negotiated status of autonomy. The Moldovan constitution, adopted in 1994, following independence, provided autonomy to the regions of Gagauzia and Transnistria.

Moldova is a multi-party parliamentary republic with the president as the head of state, elected by a popular vote, and a prime minister as head of the government.

Moldova's economy is heavily reliant on the agriculture sector, including the production of fruits, vegetables, wine, and tobacco. The country imports almost all of its energy supplies from Russia and Ukraine, and its dependence on Russian energy is also defined by its debt of more than 5 billion US dollars to Russia, according to recent report by Infotag News Agency (2019).

Historically, this region had a diverse population, and the demographic policies of the former Soviet Union sustained and reinforced this trend, resulting in the Republic of Moldova inheriting a mix of ethnic and linguistic identities. The 2014 Census identified that 75.1 percent of Moldovans self-reported their ethnicity as Moldovans, while others included Romanians at 7 percent, Ukrainians at 6.6 percent, Gagauz at 4.6 percent, Russians at 4.1 percent, Bulgarians at 1.9 percent and Roma at 0.3 percent, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova (2014). In addition to ethnic self-identification, the 2014 Census collected information about the use of language among the population with the following results: 54.6 percent Moldovan language, 24.0 percent Romanian, 14.5 percent Russian, 2.7 percent Ukrainian and 2.7 percent Gagauz with 1.7 percent Bulgarian (National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova 2014). The ethnic and language diversity of the region and the present-day Republic of Moldova led to the development of various identities and historical narratives which continue shaping the present-day politics in Moldova.

Today, Moldova is often described as struggling to build well-functioning public institutions and ensure the well-being of its citizens. Corruption, lack of government accountability, and transparency are the main problems usually included in international organizations' assessment of Moldova's performance on economic and governance indicators (ibid). Large scale migration of its population in search of jobs and economic opportunities is indicative of Moldova becoming a more economically stable country, with a significant percentage of Moldovans migrating for labor, according to International Labor Organization (2018).

In 2014, Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the European Union (EU), choosing a European course for development and subsequent integration in the EU with an obligation to conduct necessary reforms. This Agreement was accompanied by another on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), establishing parameters for trade and economic cooperation with the EU. This move put Moldova in the situation of having to balance its foreign relations in the region between Moscow and Brussels. As such, ties with Russia and Romania, integration into the European Union, and the Transnistrian settlement process are all essential topics in political agenda.

Political Context at the Time of the Study

This section gives a brief overview of the political context in Moldova in 2018, at the time of this study. In the fall of 2015 and the months that followed, I was in Moldova working with the Parliament of Moldova, as the project I managed was engaged in supporting a parliamentary working group on dialogue with Moldova's autonomous

region of Gagauzia. Therefore, over many meetings with various political and international stakeholders in Chisinau, I was able to directly witness and discuss the political events of that period and their implications for the country, for our work, for regional politics, etc. The political events described below are, therefore, partially based on my active following of Moldovan political life since 2015.

In 2014, a few months before my arrival in Moldova, the country has experienced a political crisis. In November 2014, it became known that approximately \$1 billion had been stolen from the country's banking system¹. Moldova made international headlines while investigations were launched, which discovered the complicity of the country's leading politicians. During the first few months of my stay in Moldova, local political life was animated by discussions of the theft and the events that followed. Over the next few months, the conflict for control between the country's two influential businessmen, Vlad Plahotniuc, leader of the Democratic Party, and Vlad Filat, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, the two pro-European parties in the Parliament intensified against this background (Socor, 2015). In the autumn of 2015, Filat was stripped of his immunity and arrested on charges of corruption and involvement in the banking scandal (ibid). The massive banking fraud resulted in a drop-in confidence in government institutions and mass protests in Chisinau, the capital city, throughout 2015. This period also coincided with a worsening of the economic situation and a decline of GDP by 18% since 2014 – the biggest drop since independence (BTI report 2018).

¹ Moldovan Parliament Publishes Second Report on 1 billion Bank Fraud. July 05, 2019, [RFE/RL's Moldovan Service](https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-bank-fraud-investigation/30039492.html), <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-bank-fraud-investigation/30039492.html>

Following a turbulent year in 2015, and the appointment and resignation of three prime-ministers, Moldovan politics and government entered a phase of relative stability in 2016, following the selection of Pavel Filip as the prime minister under a Democratic Party majority in the parliament. In this new configuration of political forces, the Democratic Party achieved a majority in the Moldovan parliament. It held most of the ministerial appointments in the government in the fall of 2015. The attainment of this majority was swathed with stories involving pressure and bribery of the members of various parliamentary parties, which had switched to the Democratic Party or declared themselves independent, joining the majority coalition. The events that I had witnessed during my first few months in Moldova became the focus of the local news, and many discussions I had in Chisinau. With another pro-European party's majority in the parliament, Moldova also regained financial assistance from the European Union, on which the country depended on income after a period of worsening relations following the bank fraud. Therefore, by early 2016, Moldova entered a new political configuration, with the Democratic party's strengthened position in the parliament and the government. Two other right parties remained in the parliament, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) – a pro-European party, and the Liberal Party (LP) – a farther right party which positions itself as pro-unification with Romania and historically held less than 10 percent of electoral support. As I often heard in discussions in Chisinau, with the weakening of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the Democratic Party remained the only right-centrist pro-European political group on the right field of Moldova's politics.

On the left of Moldova's politics, the situation was also changing. Up until the 2014 parliamentary elections, the Communist Party had dominated the left field of politics while the Socialists had not succeeded in entering the parliament (Socor, 2014). However, in 2014, the Socialists won 21 seats in the parliament, becoming the strongest party on the left, and 'stealing' a significant portion of the Communist Party's electorate. Some analyses attributed this success to support from Moscow and President Putin, who invited the leader of the Socialist Party to visit Moscow, therefore making him more appealing to Moldova's large electorate with a favorable view of good relations with Russia (Socor 2014; Soloviev 2018). In 2015, following the transfer of several Communist Party members in the parliament to the ranks of the Democrats, the Communist party further weakened, placing the Socialist Party as the main political group on the left of Moldovan politics.

While the Socialist Party remained the dominant political group on the left, the political right had other players in the field. Two other political groups emerged on the right in the aftermath of the political crisis of 2014. Following the organization of mass protests in Chisinau against bank fraud and corruption, the citizen's platform 'Dignity and Truth' (DA) was created under the leadership of Andrei Nastase. In May 2016, another pro-European Party, the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) was founded under the leadership of Maia Sandu, a contender in the presidential elections of 2016. PAS defined itself as center-right, liberal party promoting the full integration of Moldova into the European Union (Calcea 2016, moldova.org). DA and PAS emerged as key opposition parties to the Democratic party, with core ideas of fighting the corrupt and

oligarchic system established by the Democratic Party and its leader Vlad Plahotniuc. These parties positioned themselves as being the proponents of democratic and European values, and in opposition to the corrupt and undemocratic practices of the Democratic party and their covert cooperation with President Dodon in implementing policies. Enter the presidential elections of 2016, which became enveloped in what one Moldovan analyst called a “deathly fight of pro-Russian and pro-European forces” in what he calls a typical way of describing elections in Moldova (Soloviev 2016). Two contenders, Igor Dodon of the Socialist Party, and Maia Sandu from PAS on the right received 52.2 percent and 47.8 percent respectively, with Dodon winning the elections.

The dynamics described above, based on what I had witnessed and followed in Moldova, resulted in a situation that was often described to me as a polarized political space, with the ruling pro-European Democratic party on the right and the Socialist Party on the left becoming Moldova’s main political actors by the beginning of 2016. The presidential elections which took place at the end of 2016 further intensified the ‘geopolitical’ rhetoric of political actors in Moldova. At the same time, the competition between the left and right of politics in Moldova since the election of Dodon was often also described as a ‘marriage of convenience’ and a mimicking of public confrontation, while behind the scenes collaborative relations between the leaders of two parties continued. This story of secret collaboration was one of the narratives I frequently heard circulating among local analysts and experts in party politics, with the competition between left and right, and pro-European and pro-Russian politics serving as a convenient slogan for the electorates.

The dynamics of the events described above led to the configuration of political forces on the left and right and prepared the ground for the parliamentary elections of 2018, scheduled for November 2018, six months after the commemorations of Victory Day I was studying. The pre-election and polarized political context in the spring of 2018 described in this section set the background for the Second World War commemorations that were to take place.

Narratives of Geopolitics, Identity, Divisions

Memory is continuously ‘re-made’ in the present based on present-day issues and perspectives. As a continually negotiated and contested meaning-making process, it is political and therefore requires attention to the context and processes in which production of memory occurs. Understanding the narrative landscape and political context at the time of this study provides ways of attending to politics and understanding the conditions under which some stories take hold, and others are silenced.

At the time of the study, several narratives dominated the political space in Moldova. The configuration of political forces at the beginning of 2018 created an environment resulting in polarized stories about foreign policy priorities — the Socialist and Democratic Parties promoting closer alliances with the EU and Russia, respectively. With the upcoming parliamentary elections in November 2018, the month of May, with its atmosphere of commemorating the end of WWII, already felt like a time of pre-election campaigning. The Democratic Party’s declared ‘pro-European’ course was

further strengthened by intensified anti-Russian rhetoric while positioning Dodon as a symbol of Russian influence in Moldova. For example, in an opinion piece, V.

Plahotniuc, the leader of the Democratic Party wrote,

Moldovans went to the polls four months ago and elected a pro-Russia president. That could worry Americans, but the good news is that the political party I head, the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM), still holds the majority in parliament and leads the government. We have no intention of changing Moldova's pro-US, pro-European Union policies.

I include it here because it describes the positioning of the party in clear terms. This opinion piece is a good example of the kind of positioning parties did vis-à-vis each other, not only for domestic audiences but also for international ones. Conversely, since becoming President, Dodon actively advanced and increased his rhetoric about the importance of cooperation and partnership with Russia, and had frequented Moscow with visits to Vladimir Putin, the Russian President² (Soloviev, 2018). ‘Geopolitics’ and ‘pro-European’ versus ‘pro-Russian’ narratives became especially prominent during this period, often declared in the statements of politicians and becoming key categories within the analysis I heard in various discussions and meetings in Chisinau and abroad. Doing an internet search with keywords such as Moldova, elections, and putting in 2014, 2016, and later 2019 brings up several headlines in prominent international news and analysis sites where keywords include ‘Russian-backed,’ ‘pro-Russian Socialists,’ etc. For example, the Freedom House Annual Report (2018) reported that “the East/West

² How Moldova was Capture without Revolution or War, Soloviev, October 2018, Newsmaker.md <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/kommersant-gibridnaya-strana-kak-moldovu-zahvatili-bez-voyny-i-revolutsii-39545/>

geopolitical dichotomy would be further debated by the two parties, dictating the country's political agenda." As a local analyst pointed out (Popsoi, 2016), "it is well known that elections in Moldova have increasingly become a referendum on the country's foreign policy."

This section has outlined the political context at play in Moldova in May 2018, revealing that various circumstances led to the domination of pro-European and pro-Russian political narratives during that time. The purpose of tracing these narratives is to pay attention to the narrative dynamics at play, and be able to better understand, but also take a critical approach to the study of memory as it intersects with dominant political narratives. These narratives, which over time get simplified, become the main frames of meaning-making. The narratives outlining geopolitical 'associations' with east or west, imply the alignment of value systems (as well as, economic systems) with that of the European Union or Russia, creating an 'either-or' paradigm, or narratives that are exclusive of another. Such narratives are often utilized by the political parties positioning themselves either as 'pro-European' or 'pro-Russian,' playing on the politics of language and nationalism in Moldova. As Devyatkov (2017) puts it: "One group of politicians threatens that the country will be swallowed up by neighboring Romania. Another alleges that a pro-Russian "fifth column" will hand sovereignty over to Moscow." These narratives of pro-European and pro-Russian political courses, which merge domestic political agendas and foreign policies, are connected to the geopolitical tensions between the European Union and the West (including the United States), and Russia. The competing narratives are also closely linked with the EU integration narrative – the

political and development course that is pursued by the current government. Such contestation and simplification of narratives become even more pronounced during the pre-election period in 2018. At the same time, the dominant narrative of geopolitical divisions helped obscure other stories. Soloviev (2016) lamented in an article about the 2016 presidential elections that the geopolitical discourse between Maia Sandu and Igor Dodon pushed aside the issue of the billion-dollar-theft, which only a few months previously had mobilized thousands of citizens to protest.

Summary

This chapter provided a brief historical overview of Moldova, outlining key historical events or turning points which have been debated as part of the political elite's contestation over notions of statehood and identity. The scholarship on memory and history of Moldova and the Second World War showed that the master narratives and dominant ways of examining the issue of memory in Moldova have remained in the context of identity and nation-building politics. Although multiple competing narratives exist arguing for different interpretations of history, legitimizing, or delegitimizing different identities, historical narratives have been key to constructing the legitimacy of these claims for one or another identity. As a result of the contestations between different ideologies and interpretations of history, no single 'official' historical memory has emerged in Moldova. More than 75 years since the end of World War II, the memory of this period in the region continued to be contested in present-day politics and used as a justification for political action and mobilization. It is through narrating and making

meaning of the past that various political groups tell stories about Moldova today and propose certain futures. Often these narratives draw from global narratives about memory and enter global contestations of narratives about that period of history, which continue as part of today's global struggles for hegemony by state and non-state actors.

This chapter also described the recent political developments which set the stage for commemorations at the time of my research, providing context for the performance of memory narratives during the anniversary period. In spring 2018, with the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in six months, the electoral campaign atmosphere was in full force. In Chisinau, this usually meant that discussion about the upcoming elections and the dynamics between political groups in the context of the elections permeated all conversations. Talk about 'divisive politics' and 'voting on geopolitics' rather than 'real issues' was predominant during conversations with politicians, experts, and members of the international and diplomatic community.

Yet, as I pointed out in this chapter through a review of memory scholarship on Moldova, intensified competition between political groups on May 9 was not unique to 2018 but has been a continuous part of Moldovan politics. Distinctive interpretations of the period of WW II have been elaborated in different narratives about the country's present and future course, and with a special focus on the identity of Moldovans. These contestations also present themselves in the commemorations, memorials, and celebration events held each year on anniversaries related to World War II. These contestations in Moldova are situated within a larger regional context, where the politics of memory have been on the rise both in Western and Eastern Europe during the post-cold war period.

Commemorations provide a unique lens to the performance of competing identities in Moldova. Chapter five that follows shows, through two commemorations organized by the Socialist and Democratic Parties on May 9th, how narratives of history are harnessed by political actors and how they are performed to legitimize their agendas.

CHAPTER FIVE: VICTORY DAY OR EUROPE DAY? COMPETING COMMEMORATIONS

The previous chapter outlined the historical background and the key narratives of the Second World War in Moldova. In Chapter four, I describe commemorations organized by the Socialist and Democratic political parties and show how these events produce narratives that help promote party political agendas. The chapter draws on the participant observations during commemorations of Victory Day, one each organized by Socialist and Democratic parties on May 9, 2018, and social media texts of these parties' leaders. In analyzing the commemorative activities, I use positioning theory and narrative analysis to examine the texts by the party members posted on social media and the language used during commemorative events. I then turn my attention to the commemorations themselves, studying the performative aspect of commemoration through symbolism and language. The analysis reveals that the Socialist Party commemoration as it carries with itself symbols, bodily performances, music, and rituals of the Soviet period establishes continuity with the past. Commemoration by the Democratic Party, on the other hand, is an attempt to revise the story of Victory Day by incorporating Europe Day and promoting a European identity. In this case, remembrance is used to break with the past and advocate for a different future.

The chapter is organized into two sections, where each party's social media texts and commemorations are described and analyzed. Each section starts with the description

and analysis of the social media texts using positioning theory and is followed by the portrayal and analysis of the commemorative activities. Two sets of data, the texts of the party leaders and the ritual of commemorations, allow us to understand how different interpretations of the Second World War period are elaborated in commemorations.

As outlined in Chapter Three, the central premise of positioning theory is that it “views the action as the setting up of positions for oneself and others, through the performance of socially meaningful (often discursive) acts within the ongoing storyline.” (Bartlett 2006, 115). These actions are situated in storylines that connect it back to the social act, which then can be interpreted based on the context given by the storyline. The illocutionary force of a social act determines its place in a storyline, while at the same time, its meaning is determined by the storyline. This makes up the positioning triangle where the three components: position, social act, and the storyline, influence, and mutually determine each other (Bartlett, 2006).

If we take commemoration as a performance of discourse in a particular social episode, positioning theory presents a useful lens to analyze the meaning and the dynamics of the social episode. In exploring the commemoration of Victory Day, I aim to investigate the unfolding episode and apply positioning theory through storylines analysis of the triangle, which I outlined in Chapter 3. Applying positioning theory reveals how commemorations serve as storylines and position various actors such as political parties, leaders, and society in a moral landscape and prescribe the duties and obligations in remembering.

Memory, or remembering from a narrative perspective, is not recalling of past events but an active process of making and negotiating meaning about current social order. In this view, the commemorative activity that unfolded in Chisinau on May 9 becomes a site for meaning-making and memory production. Constructing the meaning of the past involves an active process involving subjectivities and using the existing “cultural interpretive framework” (Bruner 1990, 57). According to this approach, commemorations are a form of narrative performance, constructing a particular past re-enacted in the present. Connerton’s (1989) study of commemorations focuses on commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices by drawing parallels with rituals as an essential element of social memory and as a mechanism of conveying and sustaining the past through performances. Performed commemoration as narrative and as a “story told in the metaphysical present” yields more power as it goes beyond reminding the participants of the event (Connerton 1989, 43). Attention to the form of the commemoration provides us with insights on how particular narratives perform lending more understanding to memory production.

Part 1. Victory in Great Patriotic War: Commemoration by the Socialist Party

One Memory, Two Commemorations

In Chisinau on the morning of May 9, 2018, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament (both from the Democratic Party), and President Igor Dodon jointly attended the capital’s Eternity Memorial dedicated to the Second World War. Moldova’s three highest-level public officials jointly laid flowers at the ‘eternal flame’ monument to

commemorate the victims of the war. However, a joint official commemoration was brief. From this moment on, commemorative activities of Moldova's top official leadership diverged. The Speaker of the Parliament and Prime Minister, both members of the Democratic Party, joined their leader to eat porridge with the soldiers in front of the Nativity Church. The President, a leader of the Socialist Party of Moldova, headed to Chisinau's main square, National Assembly Square, to attend the Victory Day Commemorative events organized by his party. As the day went on, the leadership of the country from two parties – Democrat and Socialist - participated in two parallel sets of activities on May 9 organized by their respective parties. These events featured different slogans, language, and narratives attributing a different meaning to the commemorations.

Commemoration Narratives of Socialist Party Leaders

On the eve and on May 9, President and other Socialist Party members posted on Facebook about the commemorative events. The excerpts below include the public posts of three most prominent and public members of the Socialist Party at the time: the President of Moldova Igor Dodon, the contender for the upcoming Chisinau city mayoral elections, Ion Ciobanu, and the chairwoman of the party, Zinaida Grecianu. Given the political roles of these individuals and the period during which the commemorations took place, the campaign period leading up to the local elections, these Facebook posts were not merely personal but represented a particular narrative of the party about the event and commemoration.

A few days before May 9, several announcements were made on radio and TV channels about commemorative activities. These included a procession in the morning and a concert and fireworks organized by President Dodon of the Socialist Party. President Dodon's Facebook post on May 7, 2018, was an invitation to everyone to a concert on the eve of the 73rd anniversary of the Great Victory "to celebrate the victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War." The language used by the President on his social media posts, referred to the occasion as "Victory Day in Great Patriotic War," sometimes with the addition of "victory over fascism." One post included a professionally made video of the commemorative activity stated: "March of Victory! Immortal Regiment! No one is forgotten, and nothing is forgotten!" Another post by on May 9, 2018, read:

Today together with my family, I took part in the traditional ceremony in memory of those who fought in the Great Patriotic war – the procession of 'Immortal Regiment.' This year the event had participation as never before. Tens of thousands of people with Saint George ribbons and portraits of the soldiers. Live veterans of that horrible war, along with their granddaughters and great-grandsons. All participants of the march have spring, celebratory mood.

We are – the inheritors of Great Victory! We are – descendants of heroes-victors. And no one and never will take this holiday ever from us!

A low bow to all veterans – those alive today and those who left us!

Their heroism will stay in our memory forever!

Happy Victory Day!

In a Facebook post from May 8, President, announcing the concert on the same day, the eve of Victory Day, said: "I am inviting all citizens to take part in this event so that we could together celebrate Victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic war."

Following up with a post after the concert he called to remember:

We must remember each veteran, who fought for Great Victory, to uphold their heroism and transfer to the next generations the truth about the real cost of victory. I remind you that a nation that does not respect its past does not have a future.

In a Facebook status post by Ion Ceban, one of the most visible members of the Socialist Party at the time, as he was at the time due to his candidacy in the mayor elections, states:

Dear friends!

Victory Day – is one of the lightest and joyous days of the year. This holiday unites everyone – not depending on their nationality or political views.

Victory Day – is a holiday of the peaceful sky above our heads.

Only those who know what war can know what a peaceful sky is, as our older generation knew.

A low bow to those veterans who are present here today, who conquered this Victory for us, who gifted us an opportunity to enjoy the sound of leaves, the songs of birds, the sound of rain, and the light of the sun, to peacefully work and raise children.

Many of those whom we owe our lives are not alive anymore. But we will always remember them and their heroism. And today already entire Chisinau, entire Moldova will come out with the portraits of the veterans to the 'Immortal Regiment' march – as a symbol of our most profound respect and gratitude to warriors-heroes. And this event will be held from year to year, from generation to generation.

I sincerely wish you, dear victors, good health, and life strength. And to those who came today to this beautiful concert, I wish that you or your children and grandchildren never experience the horrors of war. I wish you a peaceful sky, joy, warmth, and spring mood!

Happy Holidays!

Facebook posts by other Socialist Party members on the eve and day of May 9 followed similar language when congratulating the public with Victory Day. The main phrases used by Socialist Party members in their posts were: *Victory Day, Great Victory Day, Great Patriotic War.*

In her Facebook post, the Chairwoman of the Socialist Party, Zinaida Grecanii stated:

Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova participated in the march in memory of “Immortal Regiment,” which took place in Chisinau on May 9 in honor of Victory Day on the traditional route from the Square of Great National Assembly to the Eternity memorial complex.

The socialists participated in the march without symbols of the party, in citizens column. At the head of the column President of Moldova Dodon marched with his family. This year, the number of participants made up about 100,000 people, which is a new record.

Victory Day – is a lesson for those alive today, not to forget about the War, millions of lost lives – the price paid for Great Victory.

The narrative that emerged from social media posts by key high-profile Socialist Party members on Facebook about May 9 was of the Great Patriotic War. When writing about Victory Day, Socialist Party members frame it as Victory in the context of the Great Patriotic War or referred to it as Great Victory. Key concepts or words that were used consistently across social media posts when discussing the day are peace, sacrifice, heroism, and victory. The need to remember is framed as an obligation, a responsibility, as a sign of gratitude for the sacrifice made. Remembering, in these texts, is linked to the organized activity of the Immortal Regiment March as a ritual, with citizens invited to join in keeping the memory alive forever. In all three addresses or posts, the number of participants is emphasized – ‘entire Moldova,’ ‘new record of participants,’ ‘thousands,’ ‘unprecedented’ to show that the commemoration and remembrance have widespread participation. In referring to a large number of participants, it is as if speakers are trying to legitimize the significance of the event and the desire of the people who come to remember.

Another theme highlighted in the social media posts is the unending continuity of commemoration going forward. For example, Ceban’s post included a line that asserts

that the remembrance will continue from generation to generation, and the president emphasized that “no one and never will take this memory away from us.” The commemoration takes a function of maintaining memory to pass it to the new generations. The text has a tone of defiance as if the memory is under threat but must be maintained against all the odds. The following message sounds like a warning: “I remind you that a nation that does not respect its past does not have a future....” to underline how crucial it is to remember the past. Also, the texts emphasize joy and celebration, reminding that victory brought freedom and life, and this should be celebrated.

Examining posts on social media by Socialist Party leaders, I distinguished the following storylines expressed by Socialist Party members:

Storyline 1. Great Victory was achieved in the Great Patriotic War as soldiers and heroes sacrificed their lives by fighting in the war to defeat fascism and give the gift of life to the next generations;

Storyline 2. Moldovans are the inheritors of the victory and gift of life as well as the descendants of heroes/victors;

Storyline 3. The memory of those heroes must be remembered by honoring of Victory Day. This memory is sacred, and the current generation has a sacred duty to uphold this memory.

These storylines expressed during commemorations, but are also dominant in Moldova, are emplotted in the master narrative of the “Great Victory that liberated from fascism.” This narrative is embedded in the historical narratives about the Second World War that I outlined in Chapter 4. In the Socialist Party’s master narrative of the Second World War, united Soviet people (of various Republics), which Moldovans were part of, liberated the region and Moldova from the fascism sacrificing their lives in the process. From a positioning theory perspective, the main narrative supported by the storylines, in the public texts of the Socialist Party, is as follows: in the Great Patriotic War, millions of

people laid down their lives to defend freedom and life itself from fascism. Associated positions in these storylines are Soviet Army = heroes who defeated evil; Fascism = evil; The Socialist Party and current citizens of Moldova/commemorating crowd = benefactors of the sacrifice. As such, the Socialist Party texts position Moldovan citizens in this storyline, as the benefactors of the sacrifice with their rights and obligations. Such positioning lends a strong sense of duty or responsibility to those who are here today as a result of the sacrifice by the “heroes/warriors.” In this storyline, a right to live was ‘given’ by the Great Victory and heroes who perished. And by having this right and being here today, one acquires the duty to remember, to uphold the memory.

The speech acts of Socialist party members and participants in the commemoration are to be derived, from their positioning of themselves and the participants of the commemoration (referral to ‘we’) as not forgetting, remembering, paying respects to the memory, doing one’s duty to uphold memory by coming to commemorate. Through such positioning in the storyline, the speech acts of the leadership of the party, expressed through social media posts and invitations to participate, are a call of duty to remember those who laid down their lives as a sacrifice in the Great Patriotic War. The illocutionary force of the speech act ‘to remember through participation’ in this storyline becomes more powerful. The commemorative procession is an opportunity to pay their duty, as they call on citizens to come and join the march. Harre (2003, 106) calls this “the interpretation of how duty is fulfilled.” Positioned as a duty, it becomes mandatory (ibid). In the storyline, the Socialist Party members locate themselves and Moldovans within a moral space, which reminds them of their obligation

to remember. For example, Socialist party leadership positions those participating in the Immortal Regiment march as fulfilling the duty and obligation to remember the victory of the heroes in the storyline of liberation from fascism.

Positioning theory analysis provides an opportunity to see how in storylines, actors can position themselves and others from a moral perspective. In conflict contexts, the assigned moral positions usually give advantageous positions (Harre, page 129). In the speeches and social media posts, the positioning that is done by the Socialist Party assigns moral positions to the Party, the leaders, and the attendees as fulfilling their duty in remembering so that the sacrifice was not in vain. In this case, the position becomes a prescribed set of beliefs, to respond, and to act in a particular way.

Having analyzed the social media posts by the Socialist Party leaders on the eve and day of commemorations, I now turn to the ritual aspect of commemorations. The section below describes the commemorative activity I observed during my research in the capital city of Chisinau, Moldova. I then draw from Connerton's (1989) framework of analysis of commemorations as rituals, discussed in Chapter 3, to show how ritualistic components are used by the Socialist Party when organizing a remembrance activity.

Celebration the night before – the first concert in the Square

The evening of May 8, the night before Moldova commemorates Victory Day, the National Assembly Square hosted a concert organized as it was repeatedly advertised 'under the patronage of' President Dodon with free access for the public followed by fireworks. The concert featured several famous Russian pop stars, popular in Moldova,

and a well-known Moldovan band, among others. The free concert constituted the entertainment, and I often heard in Chisinau, ‘electorate pleasing’ aspect of the commemoration activities. The concert that night culminated in fireworks over the city.

I did not attend the concert; I went to the square earlier in the day to see the setup and observe the use of space and symbols in the central square that would hold the event. A large stage built in front of the government building facing the square was framed with large banners on all sides. The banner on top framing the stage like a roof was red with a five-point red and gold star in the middle against a panel of black and orange colored stripes. The white circle in the center of the star read ‘patriotic war’ in Russian. On two sides of the star, the banner read, “Victory Day! Under the patronage of President of Moldova” in Romanian and Russian languages. Two more wide panels of the red color with black and orange striped ribbon adorned the stage on the left and right sides. The symbols represented on the banners resembled similar symbols from the Soviet period, but re-invented as in Russia and other former Soviet Republics in the last several years and used during World War II commemoration ceremonies. The Saint George Ribbon, which is part of Russian military symbolism and became widely used in commemorations across the region in recent years, is controversial and is discussed in greater detail further in this chapter. Above these Soviet-period symbols, on the roof of the stage, the Moldovan tricolor flag flew, making up the only symbol from the entire stage linked to the present-day Republic of Moldova.

Commemorative procession: Immortal Regiment March

When I arrived in the Great National Assembly Square around 10:00 am the following day, on May 9th, the main roads on two sides of the square were already closed to traffic, and hundreds of people were on the square. The Great National Assembly Square sits in the center of Chisinau, Moldova's capital, between the Government building and city's Cathedral Park. The city's main avenue named after Stefan cel Mare, Moldova's most famous medieval ruler, runs through it.

The mood on the square was positive, and people were standing with mostly red flags flowers and many with large photographs – portraits of family members who died during the Second World War. The orange and black stripes of Saint George ribbon was seen everywhere: small ones pinned on people's chests, in the shape of flags held above heads, as well as several large ribbons, several meters long wide with printed slogans on them held by different groups forming columns in preparation for the march in the square. Although the average age in the crowd was leaning towards middle age and older, there were also many who came with entire families, so children and young people were present. The red flags, there were a lot of them, were the Soviet Victory Banners similar to those raised by the Red Army soldiers on the Reichstag building in Berlin on May 1, 1945. Saint George ribbon flags were seen flying among the Victory Banners with a few Soviet flags present as well. Military march music played adding to the atmosphere of celebration.

The symbolism of the Soviet period was so all-encompassing – the sea of red flags over the crowd, the marching music, and the carnations so ubiquitous during

commemorations in the Soviet Union – that for a moment it felt like a Soviet film. I do not have personal memories of going to May 9 commemorative parades; having grown up in the Soviet Union, these symbols are familiar, yet symbols of a bygone era. Above the square and the red flags, Moldova's tricolor flag and the European Union's flag hung side by side, the only reminders of Moldova's present, in complete contrast with the sea of red below.

The square filled with more people as time passed. I came up to a group of five women, three of them in their late 40s and two in their 20s to talk to them about their reasons for being at the commemoration. All five of them were holding black and white photo portraits of their family members who died in the war. One of them spoke up and answered: "This is about remembering our family members, our grandfathers who died in the war. We don't want to forget. We are grateful for the life and freedom their sacrifice has given us." This story of the gratitude for sacrifice and life draws from the master narrative of the Soviet period and echoes the story from the social media statuses of the party leaders that I described earlier.

On one side of the square, Chisinau's military museum exhibits were displayed featuring weaponry and armored vehicles of the Soviet era. In front of one of the military trucks, a little girl of about seven or eight years of age was posing for her father as he took a picture of her with a smartphone. She was dressed in the khaki-colored skirt army uniform from the Second World War period. Her two braids with large white ribbons were sticking out from under her army side cap, a customary look for Soviet schoolgirls on special holidays. It reminded me of the characters and moments from the black and

white Soviet war movies I watched as a child. The braids with large white ribbons were customary to wear by Soviet schoolgirls. I also had worn them on the first day of school and on special holidays.

Another interesting appearance was the middle school-aged children organized in columns who were dressed in Soviet-era military clothing - khaki-colored shirts and skirts for the girls and trousers for the boys. They wore Soviet military side caps and were standing organized in a column. The leader of the column in the front carried a banner that read the name of Chisinau's Pushkin lyceum – a Russian-language public school. A bit further down the street, I saw a few other columns standing ready to march. High school-aged boys wearing Second World War period military costumes, and girls in white lace dresses stood forming another column getting ready to march. They were holding framed photographic portraits of veterans. Ahead of them was a row of young men in military uniforms and side caps. They each held a mix of flags: red 'Victory Banners,' Moldovan flags, and Saint George ribbon flags. The military vehicles, the flags, and the costumes and organized columns of people in the square gave it a military quality and in Connerton's words (1989) quality of embodied performance.

As the columns organized, each held around two-meter wide long orange and black striped banners at the head of the column. I noted the phrases printed in Russian and Romanian on these ribbons turned banners. One spelled out: "We remember! We are proud" in Russian. The banner in the front of another column read in Russian: "Eternal memory to the fallen in the battlefields." Another large orange and black striped banner

read “May 9 - Victory Day” in Romanian, the other side of the ribbon surrounding the column of people read “No to Fascism!”

Columns of people who had organized themselves into a procession started moving toward the Eternity Memorial complex of Chisinau dedicated to the Second World War. A military march played. At the front of the procession, a group of young men in military uniforms and side caps from the Soviet period walked in a column holding flags for the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova, as well as Victory Banner and Saint George ribbon flags. Like the song that was playing ended, the men raised their flags yelling ‘Hooray, Comrades!’ and started marching. The crowd yelled back with ‘Hooray!’ Following the young men, several vintage cars carried veterans whose chests were covered by medals. The columns of costumed school kids carrying portraits followed the cars. ‘Hoorays’ continued as the procession moved forward.

Hundreds of people gathered in the square joined the procession in columns carrying Victory Banners, portraits of veterans, Saint George ribbon banners, or red flags with a gold hammer crossed with a gold sickle placed beneath a gold-bordered red star. Many in the crowd had small Saint George ribbons pinned to their chests. Following the costumed boys, was the group of people who carried a 5-6-meter-wide orange and black banner spread between them. People held it on the sides and walked in tandem with the banner stretching wide enough to cover the full width of the street. The Immortal Regiment procession then headed to Chisinau’s Memorial Complex ‘Eternity’ to lay flowers at the eternal flame in the act of commemoration.

I watched from the sidelines along with hundreds of others, and then I took a shortcut through other streets to join the beginning of the procession a few streets further. The streets were free from traffic reserved for the planned route, and the procession walked in the middle of the street. The sidewalks were crowded by people headed to the memorial. As the procession continued, the chanting went on with few alternating slogans: “Fascism won’t work!” traded with ‘Victory!’ in Russian and Romanian, followed by “Hooray!” Yet another repeatedly chanted slogan in Russian was “Thank you, Grandpa, for the Victory!”. The crowd also yelled, “Eternal Memory to Heroes!” The chanting went on repeating these phrases as the crowd marched.

Laying Flowers at the ‘Eternity’ Memorial Complex

I arrived at the memorial before the procession, but there were already hundreds of people there who had come in remembrance. The ‘Eternity’ memorial was built in 1975 in memory of fallen soldiers killed from 1941-1945. It was renovated after the independence in the 2000s when the Communist Party of Moldova was in power. It was also the period when the country saw the revival of commemorations of the Second World War. The memorial is large, made of several sections, and multiple monuments. It is quite impressive and has become one of Chisinau’s sites that tourists visit. The central monument in the memorial is the “Eternal Flame” and “Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.” The monument is in the shape of a pyramid made of 25-meter-high red stone columns that sit on a black marble floor. The five columns are stylized in the shape of rifles. At the center base of the pyramid is the ‘Eternal Flame’ exhibit built of black granite, where it is

customary for visitors to place flowers. On May 9, the area around the 'Eternal Flame' becomes covered by thousands of flowers placed by visitors. Along the north-west side of the memorial complex, there are seven flat red stone structures with several sculpted compositions on them, symbolizing various phases of the war.

Leading up to the central monument from the side of the memorial where I entered, there are a cemetery and a large square with large white tiles. In addition, there is a garden and a tower with a bell of remembrance on the territory of the memorial. The years 1941-1945, the period the USSR defined as WWII, are written on one of the large red stone plates, which are part of the memorial complex. These are the years that represent the Second World War, or 'Great Patriotic War' as it was known in the Soviet Union.

In the garden and cemetery side of the memorial, where I entered, the atmosphere was somber. People walked up to graves and placed flowers. A line of people, some with small children, waited to ring the bell of remembrance hanging in the 'Glory Arch' near the cemetery. Further, into the memorial's territory towards the 'Eternal Flame' monument, the atmosphere was more festive. Upbeat music, a military march was playing. Families were taking pictures, walking around with flowers, and lining up to take photographs with the veterans who sat on the benches or chairs that had been placed there. Many children and youth wore khaki-colored military clothing from the war period. On the street, outside of the memorial, there were vendors selling World War II memorabilia, wooden toy rifles, side caps, and other souvenirs.

In one section of the white-tiled square, World War II veterans were standing dressed in their military uniforms with their many medals adorning their chests. Families and individuals came up to them to shake hands and take pictures with them. In a grassy area off the main path to the 'Eternal Flame,' a few people were gathered around an accordion player who played a famous song 'Smuglyanka' (translation: a dark-skinned girl), a song made famous by being included in the famous Soviet film of 1973 "Only Old Men Are Going to Battle." A small crowd surrounded the group singing and began singing along and clapping. Three women broke into a dance holding hands. It was an atmosphere of joy and celebration.

At the 'Eternal Flame,' already thousands of flowers had been placed by the visitors since morning. Even though Immortal Regiment March had not arrived yet, many residents of Chisinau had come for a private commemoration. The words engraved in one of the pillars of the pyramid read: "Nothing is forgotten, no one is forgotten." The organization and use of the memorial before the arrival of the procession felt very unstructured as I watched people walk around, pausing in various parts of the memorial, talking to the friends and family members.

Summary

This section described the details of the commemorative activity organized by the Socialist Party and attended by Chisinau residents. One of the most striking things about the commemorative activity that unfolded in Chisinau in honor of Victory Day on May 9, 2018, was how it was narratively and symbolically situated in the past. The

commemoration was almost entirely performed and narrated in a way that situated the event in the Soviet past and did not incorporate a connection to the present. This was through various means: narrative (spoken and written) of Socialist Party members on social media, slogans prepared in advance, music and military marches of Soviet period which played, the children dressed in military attire of the period, flags and symbolism used were mostly made of either past symbols (Victory banner reprinted) or reinvented symbols and flags which had the style and colors associated with the Soviet period. The language used in the commemorative ceremony – spoken or chanted words and phrases and texts printed on banners - possessed ritualistic quality. Connerton (1989) names ritual speech as composed of “restricted vocabulary, the exclusion of some syntactic forms, a fixity in the sequence of speech acts, fixed patterns in the volume of utterances...” (p. 59) Connerton (1989, 58) argued that:

Curses, blessings and oaths, together with other verbs frequently found in ritual language, as for instance ‘to ask’ or ‘to pray’ or ‘to give thanks,’ presuppose certain attitudes – of trust and veneration, of submission, contrition, and gratitude – which come into effect at the moment when, by virtue of the enunciation of the sentence, the corresponding act takes place. Or better: that act takes place in and through the enunciation. Such verbs do not describe or indicate the existence of attitudes: they effectively bring those attitudes into existence by virtue of the illocutionary act.

In the commemoration in Chisinau, the ritualistic quality was in the use of restricted and repeated language; for example, chanting of phrases in sequence and with a response. The meaning of the phrases and the repeated manner they were used throughout the procession gave it a chant-like quality. For example, ‘Fascism Will Not Work!’ was followed by “Hooray!” Or “Thank you, Grandpa, for the Victory” or “We Remember, We are Proud” took qualities of what ritual language presupposes such as submission, or

gratitude along with oath, blessing, and curse often found in ritual language. (Connerton 1989, 58). The language used during the ceremony also helped 'locate' the event in the past. For example, the chanting of "No to Fascism!" or "Mol-do-va" made it sound like the threat of German fascism was alive and relevant to Moldova. The chanting of "Victory!" and "Hooray!" which sometimes followed each other in sequence, also made it appear as if the victory was accomplished recently and not seventy-three years ago. The slogans, chanting, and the main storylines evoked in the speeches, combined with the atmosphere of celebration, extended it beyond a mere remembrance of a distant war. When performed in this way, remembrance becomes a ritual that gives it a mythic shape while "the mundane time is suspended." (Connerton 1989, 43). Here according to Connerton, the narrative is not merely a told story, but an "a rite fixed and performed." (1989, 43). The story is not told in the past tense, and the event or the rite does not remind the participants of the past. Instead, the narrative is performed in the metaphysical present, and the event, or the myth, is represented by the participants who, by their participation, give it an embodied form (ibid). Such performance allows for the mythicization of the event, making it into unchanging. In social media posts, the party members' call for duty to remember is positioned in the present. It is not a remembrance of the past event. Instead, the action of remembering has relevance for today. Gestures and movements of the body constitute another aspect of performative in rituals and provide through the movements a set of actions filled with meaning. According to Connerton (1989), the power of such movements is in their simplicity, which provides only the essential resource but signals "...degree of subordination, respect, disregard, and

contempt.” One either kneels or it does not, salutes, or not limiting the range of actions for the individual. Performing these actions extend the meaning beyond the basic motion. Kneeling, for example, according to the author, is not just kneeling but also submission displayed “through the visible, present substance of one’s body” (Connerton 1989, 59). On Victory Day, the procession and act of marching in a column to the memorial to place flowers, represent a set of actions which are as gestures of ritual action. Immortal Regiment march, organized in a way that gives opportunities for carrying off the Saint Ribbon flag or portraits of family members of veterans, creates a set of activities through which one joins remembrance as a ritual. If remembrance and paying of respects can be done privately by going through the memorial, marching in the procession is joining the ritual along with the collective.

The elements of formalized language, the embodied performance, and ritualistic set of actions help create a collective community that comes together at that moment of commemoration and also recognizes themselves as being the community of people who hold this memory of Second World War sacred. Similarly, in the use of ‘we’ when the crowd chants ‘We will not forget’ or ‘thank you, grandpa, to the victory’ speakers indicate that they are acting collectively, also represented by the presence of all participants in the place where they are celebrating. Speaking from ‘we’ in the ritual utterance help bind a community together in collective action and performative utterances at that moment establish or define the community in its ideal place as the community “recalls the fact of its own constitution” at the same time (Connerton 1989, 59).

The Immortal Regiment march itself is a ceremony invented recently through the narratives of the party leaders, remembrance of sacred memory is connected to the march. In the commemoration I observed, the new ritual is combined with the decades-old tradition of a visit to the war memorial to place flowers at the eternal flame or the tomb of the unknown soldier. In it, the new – ‘invented’ meets the old, ‘recycled’ (Connerton 1989, 51) and through that creates continuity with the past through the procession, carrying of the portraits and laying the flowers. Commemoration organized by the Socialist Party narrates and embodies through performance, the ‘victory’ or ‘liberation’ narrative. The remembrance ritual became the performance of this narrative that carried with itself symbols, bodily performances, music, and rituals of the Soviet period. Such performance of narrative creates continuity with the Soviet past, simplifying the story of the Second World War and stripping the complexity from the stories that exist in Moldova (Trouillot 2015). As such, the master narrative serves to legitimate some and delegitimize other parts of history, when retelling the story. The story about ‘victory’ is simple, and evil was defeated, and everyone is morally obliged to remember by joining the march. All the other stories are delegitimized, and those who disagree are positioned negatively. This narrative is recycled and reinvented appearance of the one created in the 1960s during Soviet period, in which the complex memory narrative of the war with the hardships, losses, large number of victims, POWs, etc. has been simplified into the memory of ‘victory’ (Torbakov, 2011). Through a connection to the Soviet narrative of the Second World War and its performance through symbols, rituals, and embodiment, the commemoration of Victory Day establishes continuity with

the Soviet past while bringing it to the present. This continuity is embedded in the narrative about Moldova's statehood starting from the middle ages and continued throughout the Soviet period. As I point out in Chapter 4, through examining the scholarship on memory, this interpretation of the Second World War as a crucial period in the narrative has implications not only to the past but also to a particular vision of the statehood for Moldova. From this perspective, the commemoration is not simply about remembering the past but also articulates the vision for the future.

Part 2. Victory Day, Europe Day: Commemoration of the Democratic party

The previous section described the commemoration ceremony organized by Moldova's left, the Socialist Party, which was full of Soviet symbolism and was anchored in the master narrative of Victory and the Great Patriotic War. As I briefly mentioned at the beginning of the section, this was not the only commemoration taking place in Moldova on that day in honor of victory day. Moldova's at the time ruling and right or center-right Democratic Party had organized a parallel set of activities on May 9. However, if the Socialist Party's remembrance practices re-presented the past, the Democratic Party took a different approach connecting the commemoration to the future, and to be precise to Moldova's European future.

Narratives of Democratic Party

In the days preceding May 9, 2018, Chisinau residents were getting a second set of invitations to events to commemorate Victory Day in addition to President Dodon's

invitations. Democratic Party, which held the majority in the Moldovan Parliament at the time of the commemorative events, announced the concert to be organized in Chisinau's Grand National Assembly Square on May 9. The Democratic Party associated media outlet, publika.md reported on the day: "Chisinau is celebrating on May 9 both Victory Day and Europe Day. At 17:00, a concert with local and international artists will be held in the Great National Assembly Square."

On and around May 9, social media posts on Facebook referred to May 9 commemoration with both phrases 'Victory day' and 'Europe day.' The excerpts below include the public posts of (at the time) the most prominent and public members of the Democratic Party, Chairman of the Party Vladimir Plahotniuc, Speaker of the Parliament Andrian Candu, Minister of Culture, Education and Tourism, Monica Babuc and two other party members. I chose these individuals, given their public and visible roles in conveying messages on behalf of the ruling Democratic party. Similarly to the Socialist Party leaders, Facebook posts presented are not merely personal but represent the narrative of the party given the positions of these individuals.

The Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament and member of the Democratic Party, in his Facebook post said that the heroes fallen in World War II made it possible to create democratic Europe. One Facebook post on May 9. which is along with the picture of him shaking hands with veterans stated:

The day we commemorate the heroes who fought in World War II and at the same time we celebrate Europe day, we understand that we have more common things than we think. Things that unite us and make us stronger, even if we have different political visions. The things that define us as people.

In another post on the same day, along with the pictures of the Speaker shaking hands with veterans and talking to people commemorating on the square, Candu's Facebook status read:

Never do the horrors that people went through in World War II have to be repeated. I talked to the veterans. I shook hands and thanked them for the sacrifice. Today we are reminded of the heroes who made the creation of Democratic Europe possible. #EuropeDay and #VictoryDay have reconciled people and united them.

The status of the Chairman of the Party, Vlad Plahotniuc on his Facebook page, touched on various meanings people might give this day, and thanks for the sacrifice that built strong Europe. The photos on his page show him along with other Democratic Party Leaders walking on Chisinau's National Assembly squares with Moldovan, European Union, and blue flag of May 9 waving in the crowd. The Facebook post on May 9, of Vladimir Plahotniuc, Chair of the Democratic Party stated:

From year to year, every day, our people are growing stronger, and finally, May 9 is just a celebration of peace and freedom. With fellow Democrats and friends, we were with people and happy to see them friendly, supportive, and patriotic. This shows us that we are on the right track and that together we will be able to achieve what we have set out for our country.

Monica Babuc, Minister of Culture, Education, and Tourism on May 7, posted a text accompanying a promotional video of May 9 celebration by the Democratic Party:

*May 9th will be beautiful!
Because we are Europeans!
And because we know how to honor the memory of people sacrificed in a terrible war!
Come with us to the NGAS (National Grand Assembly Square author)!*

The video accompanying the post is by Democratic Party shared from their official Facebook page. The video features changing photos of activities that the narrator

lists inviting the public to the celebration of Mai 9 organized by the Democratic Party of Moldova:

May 9! History and youth, tradition, and modernity!

On May 9th: History and youth

Tradition and modernity link hands and dance the biggest Moldovan hora (traditional dance in a circle)

Democratic Party invites you to come together with the whole family, friends, and in good spirits to celebrate Victory's Day and Europe's Day!

We will eat soldiers' porridge, will listen to fanfare music, will admire the demonstration of rescue dogs, and the children will have a competition in drawings on the asphalt.

We will continue with a parade of traditions and folk songs, will dance a big hora of friendship and of peace and the maestro Doga will come with lots of surprises for the hearts of all the music lovers.

In the evening a huge pop concert (including a soloist of Modern talking). Come and join us to say together, "Victory"!

The Minister of Culture's speech at the concert in the evening also makes connections between Victory Day and Europe Day.

Today when I see you here, I realize how right were Moldovan people in choosing the independence and sovereignty 27 years ago, choosing a clear path, the path of joining the big family, of European people; this is why we are celebrating two holidays in the same time.

Victory's day in the Second World War over a big bane, victory over fascism, which gave the possibility to Europe to create a community where people live equally, beautifully, in solidarity and respect!

Europe's day - to which the Republic of Moldova aspires and reaches towards with sure step! Dear compatriots, congratulations on these two holidays!

We, Moldovans, are wise, we are the ones that can bring together beautiful things, and these beautiful things are not rejecting each other, but are attracting each other! Happy Birthday, Europe! Happy Birthday, Moldova! Long Live Victory!

Another member of the Democratic Party, Marian Lupu, said on Facebook post:

May 9th is about two holidays related to each other - #victoriei (Victory) day development has kept us all on the surface. Without them, Europe would not have been

what it is today, a realm of unity and diversity. We are forever grateful to them for their sacrifice and for the society we live in today.

In the video, under the post, she is making a speech at the concert standing next to Moldova's famous composer and a veteran whose chest is decorated with many medals. Monica Babuc, member of the parliament and Minister of Culture, Tourism and Education's Facebook post stated:

A celebration of the past, the present, and the future, the day of #9may show us that together we are strong, together we can fight, we can enjoy, celebrate, hope, and build. Today we say victory and say Europe, and we look forward proud and confident! #Europe day #victory day

Another member of the Parliament, Valentina Buliga, stated: "This is a double connotation day because it is both the day of victory over fascism but also Europe day." In her statement as well, she highlighted the European future of the Moldovan people. The dominant narrative that emerges when examining the posts of the key individuals and also other party members on Facebook on May 9 is one of the double celebrations of Europe Day and Victory Day. The posts acknowledge the tragedy and losses of World War II and congratulate the public and Moldovan people with both the Victory day and Europe day. Here the sentences join the two concepts reminding the readers that today is a double holiday. Across the various social media posts, the narrative emerges that the heroes that are fallen have made it possible to create a democratic Europe in the democratic party narrative throughout hashtags.

When mentioning hardships, they referred to the general hardships suffered people everywhere in World War II, and when referring to victory, the victory over fascism was highlighted. It is also important to note that the references are to the Second

World War, anchoring it more to the narrative of the West, Europe, and not to the Great Patriotic War, which is anchored in the Soviet Union and Russia's narrative of the war. For example, both Speaker of the Parliament and the Chairman of the Party name the war "World War II" in their social media post. Other referrals in the speeches to the war, echo the themes from Socialist Party narrative calling the war 'horrible,' 'terrible' 'horrors people went through' and in which 'heroes who sacrificed their lives' fought.

Double holiday

To explain the 'double' holiday, the speeches and the posts made a connection between the sacrifice and the victory and the creation of Europe. In some, the connection was expressed through phrases such as 'double-holiday' or 'double celebration.' Examples included: "at the same time we celebrate Europe Day," "we say victory, and we say Europe." In other cases, an explicit causal connection was made between the victory of World War II and the creation of the European Union. For example, Candu stated in his post: "Today we are reminded of the heroes who made the creation of democratic Europe possible" following it by two hashtags #victoryday and #europeday. During his speech at the concert, the Chairperson of the Democratic Party also stated:

Today, I express appreciation and gratitude to those who fought and fell in battle during the bloody war, bringing us peace and restoring it for hundreds of millions of people, bringing victory that has built a strong Europe, to which we, the Republic of Moldova, are also a party.

Here too, an explicit connection is made between the victory at war and the sacrifice laid and building a strong Europe. The connection of Moldovans to Europe is

another theme that speeches emphasized. This connection, or in other words, relevance is presented as ‘Moldovans are Europeans’; therefore, we must celebrate both days, and because ‘Moldovans as aspiring to be part of European Union.’

Unity

What also set the Democratic Party apart from the Socialist commemoration was the theme of ‘unification’ that was presented through speeches. In the Socialist Party, as I described earlier, there was a ‘call and duty to remember’ because ‘sacred memory must be honored.’ Socialist Party situated commemoration in the master narrative of ‘Victory’ and positioned everyone with a duty to remember, creating continuity with the shared collective past of Moldovans. In the case of Democratic Party, the posts and speeches positioned the Democratic Party of ‘uniting’ and bringing people together “even if we have different political visions,” as the Speaker stated in the social media post described above. The concept of unity is also present in the speech of the chairman of the party at the concert: “We are gathered today to celebrate the 9th of May as a Victory Day, and as a Europe Day” calling for people to exercise wisdom and come together in unity, “as no matter which significance each of us chooses, the 9th of May should be one that makes us united, strong and determined...” In the same speech, he asks people to put their geopolitical differences aside and come together. Here, there is a reference to the different interpretations of history and meaning of May 9 in Moldova, and this particular speech points to the narrative strategy employed by the Democratic party. The storylines

are linked both to themes of master ‘victory’ narrative but also add ‘Europe day’ to the celebration providing a new meaning that invites others to join in commemorations.

The commemoration of the Democratic party symbolically and narratively creates continuity between World War II and the establishment of the European Union. Moldova, in the narrative, gets connected to it because it is in Europe and is also on a path to joining the EU. The narrative introduces ‘Europe’ and the Soviet Union, and reference to the complexity of the events during that period for Moldova is absent. The storylines try to break from the narratives of ‘the Great Patriotic War,’ and the ‘victory’ is presented and reframed as having caused or led to the establishment of democratic Europe. In addition, victory is often coupled with ‘peace’ and ‘freedom.’

To analyze the narratives further, I applied positioning theory in examining the social media posts and speeches by the Democratic Party leaders; I identified the following storylines:

Storyline 1. Victory/peace/freedom was achieved in World War II as heroes sacrificed their lives by fighting in the horrible, terrible war;

Storyline 2. Victory in World War II led to the establishment of strong, democratic Europe;

Storyline 3. Moldovans (united) as part of Europe (or as aspiring to be part of Europe) and as those who also fought in the war, celebrate both in the double holiday of Victory Day and Europe day, which is Moldova’s future.

Storyline 4: Moldovans are inheritors of Europe they are part of and are on the way to join Europe, united!

Multiple storylines connect attempting the create a new narrative for Moldova, the one that is different from the narrative of ‘victory’ connected to ‘Great patriotic war’ narrative. The first storyline draws from the master narrative of ‘victory,’ while the second narrative sequences a set of events that connect the victory with the founding of

the European Union. In the Democratic Party narrative, the victory is strongly connected to Europe, either has resulted in the emergence of Europe or having caused it. In other words, Storyline 1 is connected to the Storyline 2 in the narrative. The third storyline connects Moldovans as Europeans, commemorating Victory Day, and Europe Day. Remembrance is tied simultaneously to honoring those who sacrificed their lives and celebrating this memory because it led to the establishment of Europe and to be European. Finally, prescribing European identity to Moldovans through the third storyline makes the remembrance and celebration of both holidays important for Moldovans. In these storylines, Moldovans are positioned as benefactors of the victory and, by extension of the argument, benefactors of Europe. This 'right' to live in peace and be able to 'aspire' or already be part of Europe was given by the heroes who died during the horrible war. Duty then is assigned to not only commemorate those who fell achieving Victory but also celebrate Europe, which was the result of their sacrifice.

Associated positions in these storylines are Soldiers, veterans = heroes who defeated evil and helped create Europe, European Union; Moldovans = Europeans and benefactors of victory; Democratic Party = party that unites people who commemorate the victory and Europe day. Past and present simultaneously appear in the narrative of the Democratic Party and is explicit in some of the speeches. Commemorating of the past, of victory, is linked to the present day, Europe, and the future when Moldova becomes part of it.

The speech acts of Democratic party members and participants are derived from their positions, as remembering, expressing gratitude, honoring the memory of heroes,

those who helped build strong Europe. The speech acts often connect the remembrance and celebration of Europe by being put in the storyline of ‘heroes who won victory helped build Europe.’ Other speech acts of the party members are calls for celebration as the focus in the storyline is positive, ending with the European Union that is strong, democratic, and beautiful.

Commemorative activities of Democratic Party

I returned to Chisinau’s National Square around 14:00. The square was still blocked off from traffic, but at 14:00, it was not fully crowded yet. However, preparations for the events in the square had started, and celebrations in the park were already underway. To an outsider arriving in Chisinau’s main square, it looked like a celebration or a street festival was underway.

The stage from the night before still stood on one side of the square. However, today, the stage was framed by large banners from all sides made mostly with blue and white colors. The banner across the top of the stage read, “Victory Day! Europe Day!” in Romanian. The dark blue banners on each side of the stage read “9 Mai” – May 9, in Romanian with a red nine and yellow ‘mai’ (may) letters. Above the sign on the banner party logo was printed. The banners in other parts of the square also had the two phrases printed together “Europe Day! Victory Day!” The back wall of the stage was also in dark blue. Loud folk Moldovan music was playing across the square. A smaller blue banner with ‘Victory Day! Europe Day!’ in Romanian was mounted in the smaller square in

front of Cathedral Park was crowded had a festival feel to it, with few food stalls and families engaged in various activities.

At 2 pm, when I arrived there, the square is only half full, but the preparations are actively underway for the festivities later. Across the square from the stage, the chairs and stands for notes are placed for orchestra, which was to begin at 17:00. In the middle, a group of people was rehearsing a dance to folk music. Groups of people locked hands in several circles dancing to the Moldovan folk dance. Across the square from the stage, behind the orchestra set up, in the Cathedral park, other activities were set up. There was a smaller stage from which I could hear children's singing.

In the article and announcements made by the Democratic party, the activity list included a demonstration of rescue dogs, asphalt paint, and folk dance in addition to the concert. Later in the evening, the square was filled with many more people who came to the free and large concert organized and attended by the Democratic party leader and a few of its prominent members, including the Prime Minister, Minister of Culture and Education, and the Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament. Behind them in the crowd, people were holding flags of the European Union, Moldovan tri-color flag, and the dark blue flags that had the Democratic Party's symbol. Also, there were dark blue flags, similar blue as the party's, flags with May 9 printed on them with the same colors of red and yellow of the signs that adorned the stage. The program followed with the start of the concert as it was announced earlier with a program featuring Baskov, a famous Russian star, local Moldovan popstar, Romanian singer, and two western bands: Thomas Anders of "Modern Talking" and English boyband "Blue." As the chairman of the Democratic

party highlighted during his speech from the stage, the concert included artists from Moldova from Romania and Europe. The concert that lasted into the evenings drew thousands of people and culminated with fireworks, just as the night before, the Socialist Party sponsored concert.

If the Socialist Party organized the Immortal Regiment march as ceremonial procession full of Soviet period Second World War symbolism and language, the activities of the Democratic Party had a feeling of celebration and festival. Procession and ritualistic aspects were absent, and the atmosphere of celebration is set through the activities, such as a concert, dance, and food stalls. If the commemoration of the Socialist Party was set in the past through its performance, the celebration by the Democratic Party was situated in the modern era.

The symbols such as flags and the color of banners used to decorate the stage and carried by the party members during their arrival in the square were symbols tied to Moldova's present. Any items symbolically linking the day's activities with the Second World War symbols during the Soviet period were absent. Moldova's flag and the flag of the European Union situated the event firmly in the present, conveying the importance of its European identity and European future through the presence of the flags of the European Union. This was underlined by the speeches made from the stage during the concert, which called for unity, positioning the day as one that unites people of Moldova no matter how they interpret the meaning of the day.

Another interesting element was in the inclusion of the folk dance 'hora' into the festival. This was especially highlighted in the announcement video of the Democratic

Party that I described earlier in the section. The announcement described the day's celebration as linking of tradition and modernity by announcing the dance as "the big hora of friendships" and "peace dance" in celebration of the day. The words "history and youth" and "tradition and modernity" combine the notions of remembrance of the past with modern-day Moldova and future orientation. The presence of traditional folk costumes worn by some of the dancers on the circle further made the connection to Moldovan traditions. The hora dance and the traditional clothing represent here the performative aspect of the celebration in making this connection.

During her speech at the concert, Minister of Culture and Education, a member of the Democratic Party, emphasized that celebrating Europe day is important because Moldovans chose 27 years earlier independence and sovereignty and "a path of joining the big family of European people." This choice of joining Europe is why she said the day was a celebration of both Victory Day and Europe Day, the victory which gave the possibility for Europeans to create a community where people live prosperously.

In the commemorative activity of the Democratic Party, the commemorative practice of the past parts with its old symbolism of the Soviet era and reinvents itself as also of a celebration of Europe Day. The Socialist Party creates a ritual that refers to a particular event in history, the victory from fascism. Democratic Party commemorations, on the other hand, recalls the past event – the victory in war – but situates the celebrations in the present. The narrative simultaneously holds the past, and by celebrating the establishment of Europe, also the future as European Union is Moldova's future. Engaging with history can have multiple purposes, and remembrance and accompanying

ceremonies can serve the function of not only recalling but also revising history and setting a new meaning. To construct a barrier between the new beginning and an old social order is to recollect the old story, argued Connerton (1989, 9). A historical perspective, according to the author, points out that whenever the old tradition began to crumble as a result of social change, then the inventions of new rituals occurred. These new rituals are designed to both claim continuity with the past but also appropriate the events through organizing ceremonies to create new ritual spaces (Connerton 1989, 51). If Socialist Party commemoration was characterized with the ritualistic elements which repeat the actions performed before (laying of the flowers for example) in reference to the event in the past and by doing so creates continuity with the past, the Democratic Party's event was constructed to be like a celebration or a festival. I choose the term *festival*, to refer to Connerton's (1989) definition of the term, which he describes as: "in many cultures, festivals are represented as a commemoration of myths which are attached to them as recalling an event held to have taken place at some fixed historical date or in some mythical past." (p. 45). The new narrative with its text, symbols, and performative aspects such as in the placing of the folk-dance hora in the activities, the use of traditional costume, are the Democratic Party's efforts to reinterpret the myth of Victory Day. Compared to the Socialist Party's march, which incorporated more bodily performances giving it a ritualistic character, Democratic Party's commemorative activities do not include rites. However, the commemorative practice incorporates performative elements such as dance in traditional clothing. The commemoration by Democrats is an attempt to reinvent the old myth that the Socialist Party uses.

The new commemorative event serves to promote the political narrative of the Democratic Party, which positions the party as 'pro-European' that is working towards EU integration for Moldova. The commemoration is organized like a celebration. Connerton (1989) described collective festival or carnival-like events, referring to Bakhtin's definition, a coming together as a collective which is accomplished through popular festivities such as carnivals, allows for the awareness of bodily unity to emerge providing "the people with a symbolic representation not of present categories but of utopia, the image of a future state in which there occurs the 'victory of all the people's material abundance, freedom, equality, brotherhood'" (Connerton 1989, 50). By organizing the commemorative celebration and combining Victory Day with Europe Day marking, Democratic Party incorporates the memory of the Second World War but attempts to break with the old narrative by proposing united prosperity in the European Union as a way forward for the nation. This reinvention is in the interpretation of the event that incorporates the idea of national unity, inviting citizens with multiple interpretations of history (victory or occupation or another) to join. Such positioning serves both as a strategy for dealing with the threat of competing Socialist Party, by presenting a new interpretation of the past event, but also by assuring Moldovans that the new tradition of 'double celebration' of victory day and Europe day can include people who wish to remember the historical experience of Second World War and uphold the significance of memory and also wish to break away from Soviet past and move towards European Union. Through commemoration, Democratic Party reaches back to before the

Soviet era to connect the past with the European future and erase the Soviet period of history.

Competing Commemorations: Looking Back and Looking Forward

In Moldova, where the Second World War has a complicated history of a region caught between German/Romanian and Soviet Armies, multiple historical narratives and versions of truth exist for different groups. Different narratives that consist of narrative elaborations of various historical events are being used by various actors to legitimate their agendas. Two different commemorations organized by the two parties in Moldova used the anniversary of the end of the Second World War to elaborate two different narratives about the war. Although not directly ‘confronting’ each other, by being organized and implemented on the same day and in the same space, Chisinau’s central National Assembly Square, the commemorations enacted contestation between two narratives of history and different interpretations of the past. Not only do these commemorations performed competing meanings of the past, but they also offer resources for meaning-making of the present and the future.

Constructed narratives about the past, can give communities the opportunity to both give meaning to and interpret the social and political present the community finds itself in, but also helps shape the “structuring social action in the present.” (Malkki 1995, 105). In this view, the narrative is future-oriented, and talking about those experiences does not simply represent the nature of those experiences but rather represents them in a way that constitutes, sustains one or another kind of social order (Shotter 2003, 134).

That narrating and remembering the past serves as a process of maintaining relationships between the group identity and memory (Gillis 1993; Hutton 1993; Schwartz 1982), and their role in constructing national narratives. Historical narratives and “mythico-history” in this meaning of the past event are used in the constituting of social, political, and moral orders (Malkki, 1995).

In Chapter four, I discuss how two diverging interpretations of the Second World War, which have become important in the competing nationalism discourses of Moldovanist and Romanianist. ‘Victory’ or ‘liberation’ narrative of the Second World War period is anchored to the master narrative of the Soviet period of the Great Patriotic War. As I discussed in Chapter 4, this narrative among Moldovan historians and intellectuals elaborates on the victory of the Soviet Army and Soviet people as liberation from fascism. The connection to the notions of Moldovan identity and statehood in the Moldovanist narrative is also essential as the ‘victory’ narrative maintains the story about Moldova’s statehood within the Soviet Union. This narrative is contested by the Romanianist narrative, which sees the Second World War as a period when the Bessarabia region was forcibly annexed from Romania and occupied within the Soviet Union. It is in the broader competing context of these narratives that commemorations need to be situated.

Socialist Party commemorations through the ritual organization embodied the Soviet past using music, costumes, bodily movements, and language. By doing so, commemorations created continuity with the past by not only remembering a past event but also embodying it in the ritual. Socialist Party’s commemoration with its central story

about victory, heroes, and evil and the symbolism that it embodies is anchored in the 'victory' in the Great Patriotic War narrative. Soviet past in the commemoration is utilized as an element of the Socialist party's narrative about Moldova's present, prescribing identity to the participants of the commemoration in which the Soviet period is important. Here remembering sustains the group while what is remembered is defined by the identities of the group (Gillis, 1993). Continuity with the Soviet period that is formed through commemorations is anchored in the narratives about Moldova's statehood as well as its geopolitical alliances. Despite the complexity of events during the Second World War in the territory of Moldova, the Socialist Party's commemoration makes an explicit connection to the Soviet narrative. The event represents an enactment and bodily performance of a past event to honor the memory of those fallen in the war. But precisely this enactment and ritual, when examined in the broader context of Russia's commemorations and the narrative of Socialist Party leadership on foreign policy, connect this commemoration to geopolitical narratives. From this perspective, the commemoration is a narrative that not only advances a particular story of the war but also positions Moldova in a particular relationship with Russia.

Socialist Party leader's rhetoric about Moldovan statehood constitutes another story that 'victory' narrative is interconnected. Since his election as the President in December 2016, President Dodon of Socialist Party used his more visible role to promote the issue of identity and statehood for Moldova. The narrative of identity became an essential part of his speeches and often took center stage during various speeches. For example, at a conference on demographic challenges in Moldova in 2018, a month before

the commemorations, his speech emphasizes the importance of ‘consolidation of identity’ and strengthening Moldova’s statehood, vowing to defend this against those in the society who propagate unification with Romania. I have included the excerpt of the speech here as it describes well, the story of the Socialist Party leader about Moldova’s statehood and how he (and subsequently the party) are positioned in this story. In the conference on Demographics Challenges held in April 2018, he stated:

“The Moldovan political class does not have the vocation to protect the state... We lack a common and consolidated reaction against any unfriendly attempt to undermine the sovereignty and independence of the state. There is no long-term vision of the political class oriented towards Moldova. There is a lack of a national political consensus aimed at protecting and cultivating our Moldovan identity, including by responding, through the policies promoted by the authorities, to the will of the overwhelming majority of the population of the Republic of Moldova in terms of national identity and spoken language.”

This speech reveals the narrative of contestation (included above) in which the president and the Socialist party are located as the defender of Moldova’s statehood, which is under threat from the political forces wishing for unification with Romania. In March 2017, few months after his election, the president organized an international conference titled ‘The Moldovan Statehood: Historic Connection and Development Perspectives’ where he according to Balkan Insight article (2017) “reaffirmed his resolution to consistently struggle for the consolidation of the Moldovan statehood and Moldovan identity.” In the speech during the conference, Dodon argues that Moldova’s own language and its rich history need to be defended, and the state “consolidated.” (ibid). In the same conference, mentioning the new documentary about the history of Moldova that will be issued for the 100th anniversary of Democratic Republic of Moldova

he promises that the copies of the film will be distributed in an effort to cultivate the love for the country, ‘consolidating Moldova’s Statehood and identity.’ (ibid). These efforts in the speeches were positioned as defending the state from the Romanianists efforts, which promote the history and language of another country in Moldova.

To bring another example of the president’s history and statehood focus, at the end of 2018, he declared 2019 the year of Stephen the Great, Moldova’s famous ruler in the 15th and 16th centuries, reported Balkan Insight (Nescutu, 2018). This was the fourth film about history championed and funded by Dodon. In 2018, Dodon and supportive historians released three documentary films about Moldova, which promoted the Moldovanist version of ‘identity.’ The films that caused protests from the pro-European parties in Chisinau were said to be produced in cooperation with Moscow or taking the Moscow line (ibid). These are examples of ‘identity and statehood’ narrative that was often promoted actively by the Socialist party leader since his election in 2016 and at the time of commemorations.

Given the importance of history and memory as linked to the issue of identity in the speeches of the president of that period, the commemorations of Victory Day by the Socialists including the symbolism and the text can be analyzed as part of their broader narrative about Moldova’s history promoting a particular identity of Moldovans. The period of the Great Patriotic War and Soviet period history of Moldova is part of this narrative about the statehood of Moldova as it establishes continuity of Moldova’s statehood. Democratic Party, on the other hand, sought to reinvent the commemoration and retell the old story while creating a new one. In this commemoration, identity and

memory are connected more explicitly. Commemoration 'revises' narrative of Victory Day and expands it to add the victory of Europeans and not just the Soviet Union, which had led to the establishment of the European Union. Such employment of Moldova into European (and not Soviet) history and prescribing Moldovans European identity through speeches at the commemoration is constructed to re-invent May 9, as a unifying date as opposed to times of contestation and conflict in Moldova. Joining of Victory Day and Europe Day in the commemoration, and the sequencing of the events to establish causality between victory and establishment of Europe in speeches offers a new system of meaning for Moldovans on how to understand the past. Soviet past is erased, and the pro-European future helps inform how the past needs to be understood. In the case of the Democratic party, as the speeches I mentioned above also showed, the theme of unity is significant as the party positioned itself as a unifying party for all Moldovans in the context of upcoming elections. The narrative 'moves' of connecting the old narrative of 'victory' in Moldova to 'Europe Day' can be seen as part of the strategy to incorporate multiple interpretations of the day in the commemorations. 'Victory' narrative as the master narrative about the war in Moldova, if ignored or silenced, will lose 'votes' so it gets incorporated in a newly revised form into the commemorations. The Europe Day narrative is tied to their political identity as a 'pro-European' party and is part of the political strategy to maintain this message when commemoration victory day.

Geopolitical Lens

In the previous chapter, I described how narratives about geopolitical divisions are part of Moldovan political discourses. At the time of the study, the geopolitical divisions often narrated as ‘pro-European’ and ‘pro-Russian’ dominated in the political space due to the left Socialist and right Democratic party competition. The study will later reveal through interviews that ‘geopolitics will remain an important lens when making meaning of commemorations. The ‘geopolitical’ narratives come into view from the perspective of master narratives in Moldova, also at the level analysis of commemorations as social episodes with their language, symbolism, and performance. Socialist party’s use of Soviet and the re-invented new symbolism used for the Victory Day commemorations are widely used in and promoted by Russia in near abroad. Secondly, the organization of Immortal regiment march, which has become a state-sanctioned commemorative activity attended by the Russian president himself, symbolically connects the remembrance to Russian remembrance of the war. Finally, the Socialist Party leader’s visit to commemorative events to Moscow with an invitation from president forms another link between Moldova’s commemoration and Russian one. These symbolic and explicit acts on commemoration present as an agreement on shared history and shared interpretation of history with Moscow. In the case of the Democratic Party, erasure of the Soviet in the commemoration and the centrality of ‘Europe’ whether in identity or as a result of the war, create a break from the old narrative of victory even as the concept of ‘victory’ remains in the slogans. The Democratic Party by explicitly

making a connection between Moldova and the European Union in the commemorations, also positioning remembrance in Moldova with one in Europe.

These connections to Russia and the European Union made through commemoration are revealing in how locally produced competing narratives and interpretations of history intersect with the regional and global narratives about history, which circulate both inside Moldova, and at the international level. It was mentioned earlier in the dissertation that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the contestations between Europe and Russian historical narratives have grown. Growing tensions between Russia and the EU have deepened these disagreements. Torbakov (2011) argues that the reasons for ongoing disputes over history in the Eastern European region include both the politics of identity following the collapse of the multi-national Soviet Union and the geopolitical struggle for hegemony related to the expansion of the European Union in the region and “growing rivalry between the EU and Russia over their overlapping neighborhoods.” (Torbakov, 2011; 211). Torbakov (2011) argues that the EU’s eastwards enlargement in the post-Soviet period, and the change in Russia’s position towards Europe have become important factors that have led to geopolitical tensions becoming a driving factor in the politicization of history and memory, in the eastern European countries and in Europe at large. These geopolitical changes have undermined the consensus that used to exist in Western European countries’ narratives about World War II, in addition to postwar experiences (Lebow et al., 2006). The narrative that used to be about a glorified victory over Nazis and successful post-war reconstruction and development has now ‘extended’ to accommodate the Eastern European narrative that is

pushing for integration into the larger European narrative on Second World War (Torbakov, 2011).

As geopolitical tensions have grown and shifted in Eastern Europe in the last decade, newly independent countries have been undergoing parallel processes of nation-building. Torbakov (2011, 213) argues that the new states begin on “nationalizing histories” to develop a history of “a newly born post-Soviet state conceptualized as the history of a titular nation.” These processes brought new sets of challenges for engagement with history creating more conflicts and cleavages. As such, scholars have linked the increased politicization of memory to identity politics. In the context of World War II, Zhurzhenko (2007) argues that in Eastern European countries, such as Moldova and Ukraine, such contestations and national politics of memory need to be analyzed within the broader context of regional changes, the end of the Cold War and EU enlargement. Naming it ‘geopolitics of memory,’ the author argues that in this case, the politics of memory is less about the communist past than about the political and economic hegemony in the European continent (ibid).

Geopolitics has always been part of the narrative of Moldovan politics, but this has intensified over the last three years as the politics became more polarized with President Dodon taking the approach of building strategic partnerships with Russia while the Democratic majority positioned themselves as ‘pro-European’ and pro-West. The global context of tensions between Russia and the West, the conflict in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia by the US and the European Union, contributed to polarized geopolitical discourses in Moldova’s domestic policy. Given Moldova’s signing of the

EU Association Agreement and the continued relations (and dependence) with Russia for gas and trade, the balancing act between the West and Russia became more difficult. The dominance of only one party in the left and right politics since 2016, also made a favorable context for competing narratives about foreign partnerships.

Narratives are both local and global, argues Cobb (2013), stating that: “narratives are local in the sense that narrative conflict is performed in a particular setting, with particular people. However, there are also always global in that they operate as narrative resources that are “downloaded” into particular settings as sense-making devices.” (p. 6). In this view, regional and global narratives about memory and conflict have a potential to become resources for local stories, importing system of meanings which can end up dominating the local conversations about history and memory (Cobb, 2013). In the case of Moldova, the study of Victory Day commemorations reveals how these events become sites of the intersection of local, regional, and global narratives. The organization of Victory Day commemorations by the Socialist Party in Moldova as a re-enactment of Moscow’s policy of commemoration or Europe Day celebrations as an advancement of European Union historical policy are narratives that impart a set of meanings, which dominate the understandings of memory, commemorations, and implications of these for the country.

Conclusion

Chapter five described and analyzed two commemorations organized by the Socialist and Democratic parties in Moldova on May 9, 2018, through examining social media posts of party leaders and observing the organization of commemorations with

attention to bodily performances, texts, and symbols. The analysis revealed that two commemorations anchored in master narratives of history and memory in Moldova provide different interpretations of the past event, which help promote their political agendas and situate them in different regional and global historical narratives. Socialist Party remembrance through embodying Soviet symbolism and ritual of Immortal Regiment March tries to establish continuity with the Soviet past and connection to Russia as it similarly organizes the commemoration. Democratic Party attempts to revise the story of Victory Day and promote Europe as a central idea to embody, celebrate, and a destination for the country. Commemorations of two parties provide insight into how political context and politics shape conditions and the way the interpretation of the past event is constructed and performed at the political level. The centrality of the parties' role in this process of memory production demands our attention to the politics of memory.

CHAPTER SIX: COMMEMORATIONS AND COMPETING IDENTITY NARRATIVES

Having described and analyzed the commemorative events organized by the two main parties in Moldovan politics, this chapter explores the narratives about commemorations and memory of the Second World War in the broader political context in Moldova. With this in mind, this chapter, through narratives about the Second World War collected during the interviews, reveals how commemorations, through their connection to particular historical narratives, become entangled in identity contestations that are on-going in Moldova. To understand the broader context for the production of memory narratives and the role of commemoration in the memory production process, I conducted open-ended and in-depth interviews with a series of individuals who I will qualify as 'elites' in the study. This chapter, therefore, draws from the data of the ethnography and interviews I conducted during field research in Moldova. If the previous chapter is description and analysis based on my observations, the second data set provides us with a broader picture of the processes and conditions of production of memory and history.

The individuals chosen for interview actively participate in Moldova's political and social life but did not have formal party roles and functions, with only a few exceptions, which I specify. One of the criteria in selecting the people was that most of them had been employed or held positions of public office or continued to be politically

active in Moldova's political life. However, here participation in political life is defined more broadly, not strictly limited to the political party activity. This is the community of people who are experts, leaders, or members of non-profit organizations, former and current politicians, academics, scholars, etc. who appear on television, participate in various conferences and other events of the country. They make up the fabric of community who daily engage in and shape political life in narratively constructing the story of present-day Moldova. The narratives presented in this chapter are the stories of Moldova's elites about the process of memory production with a focus on commemoration and its implication for the country.

Various Meanings of "May 9"

Trouillot (1995, 114) argued that the naming of an event is a political process that clears complexities making it ready for consumption by multiple actors, such as politicians, public, and even travel agents. The phrase 'Victory Day,' because of its location, the narrative of the Great Patriotic War, is contentious language to use to describe May 9th, due to the diverging interpretations of history. It is therefore not surprising that naming the date of May 9, whether a commemoration, a celebration, a holiday was a contested question in the interviews. For the people I talked to, naming the day gave it a meaning that carried larger stories and moral judgments. In Moldova, there are multiple names given to the date, but the 'Victory Day' was the dominant narrative during the Soviet period and continues to be so after in public memory. Due to the diversity of the background and perspectives among my interviewees, different phrases

and words were used when discussing the meaning of May 9, expanding beyond the official discourses of the two political parties of Victory Day or Victory Day, Europe Day. *Holiday, remembrance day, commemoration day, day of remembering, liberation day, day of liberation from fascism, the day when good won over evil, a victory of humanity over fascism, unity against evil, unity, occupation, tragedy, loss, holiday with tears in our eyes, Europe day, day of peace* – are the terms which emerged throughout my research.

The interviews showed that there is a multiplicity of meanings around May 9. Although at times related, these meanings tie to the competing narratives of ‘victory’ and ‘occupation’ in Moldova, with Europe day becoming the latest addition to mark this day in the calendar. The next sections explore various narratives that prescribe diverging meaning to Second World War in Moldova.

Meaning of “Victory Day”

In Moldova, as in most former Soviet Republics, the dominant narrative about the period known in the West as World War II has been the narrative of a ‘Victory in the Great Patriotic War,’ anchored in the history and ‘glory’ and victory of the Soviet Union. While the interpretation of the war period is described in Chapter 4, in the broader public memory during the Soviet period, this narrative was promoted as a part of the master narrative about the prospering Soviet Socialist Moldovan nation. The story depicts victory as the triumph of ‘good over evil,’ where good the Soviet Union/Soviet Army with united multi-ethnic peoples, liberated the world from fascism and restored peace.

AJ is a 60-plus-year-old public servant in the government of left politics. He is a Russian speaker and, when discussing May 9, touches on the meaning of the day for Moldovans and the history of its commemoration.

If we touched on this historical mentality consciousness about Victory Day, I am more than convinced that the absolute majority of the citizens commemorate this day as an end of a very tragic horrifying war. They don't have any ideological ideas and drives; it was just such a horrible war that everybody was happy that it was over. Later, in 1950, in 1958 or 1957, maybe, around this year when May 9th was announced Victory Day and Holiday. From 1945 over ten years, this wasn't celebrated. Because everybody understood that it wasn't time for a celebration. The heaviness of it was there, but when there's an attitude about the result of the war as political victory was established, then this idea was consolidated in the 1960s, Moldova went along like all the other Soviet Republics.

At the core of his explanation is the meaning of May 9 as the remembrance day of the war and not a representation of any ideology. He tells how difficult the war was and how much people suffered, with the memory of the war living through their family stories. He also notes that the Victory Day commemoration tradition was established in the 1960s, referring to the invention of Victory Day commemorations through large parades in the Soviet Union. This tradition of commemoration over the past decades was reiterated in other interviews as well, serving partially as an explanation for the on-going commemorations today.

BK is a member of the parliament from the Socialist Party. BK started the conversation with his personal views and family experience. For BK, because of his age, over 60, this event is close to heart. The commemoration was a tradition he grew up with and celebrated in the family. When explaining what meaning he attributes to May 9, he said:

The essence of this holiday is a victory of humanity against evil and fascism. The unity of people of different ethnicities and countries is another important symbol of this holiday as they came together to fight fascism. What I want to pass to my children is not just that their grandfather fought in this war, but when people, notwithstanding their ethnicity, etc. were able to unite and have victory over everything fascism brought.

According to him, people who went to commemorations in Moldova were those who wanted to remember their lost their relatives, and for whom the grieving continues. In the story, he underlines the importance of unity in defeating the enemy and passing the memory to younger generations through commemorations. This importance of ‘not forgetting’ and the duty to pass the memory to the younger generation is also emphasized in the Socialist Party commemoration. Such framing gives added importance to the remembrance activities, as a process which prevents forgetting.

‘Celebration,’ ‘holiday,’ ‘a joyful day’ in addition to remembrance was another framing that came in the stories which are anchored in the master narrative of Victory Day. LB is in his 40s, a Russian speaker, and a public servant. He tells me that as someone who was born and raised in the Soviet Union, he grew up with the tradition of the commemoration of ‘good defeating evil.’ When discussing May 9, he says that this is a day of remembrance, but also accentuates that there is a joyful and celebratory aspect to this day as it marks the end of the war. The story of his family is the reason he highlights the joyful aspect of the day as a moment when fascism was defeated, and the hardships on his family ended. He explained further telling a story told to him by his aunt about the day the Soviet soldiers, Russian soldiers liberated her from a ghetto in bordering Ukraine.

I remember my aunt said with a trembling voice that Soviet soldiers came and opened the gates. She and her friend (she was 15), they took hands, and they walked. And

they just walked with this sense of freedom until they reached the end of the town and they had to go back to find a place to sleep. But it was important to walk.

So, it is a day with a positive connotation, and it is a remembrance, a commemoration, but more a day of joy—the day when my family members became free.

Although he acknowledges that over the years, he learned new information about the war, the high cost of it, and how difficult the victory was to achieve, he “principally did not change his perception of this day, despite the politicization.” The insistence of some in Moldovan society to define it as a tragedy is unclear to him. He commemorates, he explained, without joining any public marches: “When I was a pioneer, this was part of general movement, and everyone went. Now, as an adult, I go by myself. I don’t walk in columns, and I never had the desire to walk with portraits. But in memory of my dead relatives, my aunt and those soldiers who liberated them I go, and I put flowers.” LB is one of the many in Moldova who have a direct connection to the day through family stories, and his story is part of many stories that link to the victory narrative. LB considers this a celebration as the members of his family survived. For him, while the war was tragic, there is a joy in victory as well.

After talking about the meaning of the day, the conversation moves to the way history and commemorations are discussed in Moldova. According to LB, most of the population perceives this as a victory day. However, he is disappointed with the way history is talked about in Moldova. According to him, “the discussion in the press and social media around this day is awful, it is darkness...” referring to the heated arguments on social media around commemoration day between various experts, bloggers, activists, and politicians. He explains: “They start remembering Hitler and Stalin that divided

Europe and took away ‘minor’ Bessarabia.... Pro-European, Russophobe people perceive this as a symbol of the beginning of the occupation, bad guy Stalin won over bad guy Hitler....” LB is referring to the public discussions that take place on social media such as Facebook, and news about the remembrance day. These discussions often turn into hateful arguments when those with opposing views are delegitimized and called names. For him, the history of the region is complicated, but there is no contradiction in acknowledging the victory over fascism along with other events that happened.

These stories and many others told during the interviews about Victory Day drew from master narratives about the Second World War in Moldova and explained commemorations as a remembrance of the Victory, the end of a horrible war through the tradition that was established during Soviet period. The commemorations remained relevant for the majority of Moldovans because the war had affected so many in the region. These stories, similar to the speeches of the Socialist Party members, positioned May 9, as a celebration of the ‘victory of good over evil’ or ‘end of a horrible war’ and the day of remembrance of those who laid their lives during the war. The horrors of the war and its living memory in the families, among the population, was attributed as one of the reasons for the persistence of this memory. The Soviet tradition of commemorating Victory Day was seen as one of the reasons for the persistence of Victory Day commemorations. Although the majority of Moldovans were seen as holding such meaning of May 9, this event in the past was also seen as having competing meaning for different groups in Moldova. Contested nature of the Second World War memory and commemorations as a representation of it, emerged through the stories. If Victory Day

emerged in the narrative as a day of liberation from fascism, the interviews also highlighted existing contestations around this day, which are discussed in the next section.

Victory versus Occupation

‘Identity’ is often explicitly part of the discussions about politics in Moldova and has multiple categories referring to language, ethnicity, political preference, foreign policy, or ‘geopolitical’ preference in some cases. A person or a politician can be described as ‘pro-Romanian,’ ‘Romanian,’ ‘Romanian-speaker,’ ‘Russian-speaker,’ ‘pro-European,’ ‘pro-Russian,’ ‘Moldovan,’ or a ‘unionist’ – that is for unification with Romania. These labels can also sometimes vary in meaning or often combined when describing someone. Given the extensive period of work and research spent in Moldova, I was well aware of the identity politics and master narratives of identity in Moldova. However, wanting to expand the conversation about memory and commemorations beyond the simplified identity categories which memory scholarship in Moldova points to, I deliberately did not bring up ‘identity’ as a question during my interviews asking broader questions about the ‘meanings’ of various events and commemorations. However, identity emerged as an explanatory frame in the interviews. ‘Identity’ was used to trace two different interpretations of history, ‘victory’ and ‘occupation’ and commemorations were situated in this context, causing ‘identity divisions.’

It was already noted in Chapter four that much of the discussion of history in Moldova takes place in the context of identity politics, and Moldovanists and

Romanianists maintain diverging interpretations of history, which are linked to identity narratives. It was not, therefore, surprising that the explanation of the memory and commemorations through the identity frame emerged in the interviews. Although ‘victory day’ commemoration emerged as the dominant narrative from the stories and this meaning was attributed to the ‘majority of Moldovans,’ the contestations existing in Moldovan society over the meaning of the day were also repeatedly highlighted. The competing memory narratives were explained to be held by different identity groups in Moldova. In drawing the distinctions between the competing memory narratives, the interviewees used language and other identity-based labels. Those supporting or attending the commemoration of Victory Day was described as ‘Russian speakers,’ ‘pro-Russian’ and ‘Moldovanists,’ in addition to attributing the commemorations to those Moldovans who came for remembrance. This last qualification was often offered as a disclaimer that this memory was also held by some Romanian/Moldovan-speaking majority. Given that more than half of Moldovans (54,6 % according to the Census of 2014) identify their language as Moldovan/Romanian, qualification was a way of avoiding oversimplification in categorizing groups of people who were located in a ‘victory’ or ‘occupation’ narrative. For example, sometimes ‘pro-Russian Moldovan speaker’ was used, or “many Moldovan speakers who commemorate” was added to distinguish this category. Victory Day commemorations were seen as having more popularity and support among the Russian-speaking community and among those Moldovan speakers, who still carried Soviet nostalgia. On the other hand, those identifying themselves as ‘Romanians’ or ‘Romanian-speakers’ were seen as opposed to

the commemoration of Victory day and considered it occupation and not the liberation of the country. In summary, two narratives about the Second World War emerged with the corresponding meanings about May 9 and 'identity' as an explanatory frame.

'Identity' Reasons

I interviewed AJ, currently a public servant, who years ago was a member of the Communist Party but had been independent last several years. He is a Russian-speaker and supports building Moldova's statehood. AJ first gave me recount of events from the war period as a context and then said that the disputes related to Victory Day have identity-related reasons in Moldova. He explains:

I think the issues related to this Victory has this internal identity reasons. Some people consider themselves Moldova's, and they say this is a clear victory. Not everybody, Not everybody, but some of them who consider themselves Romanian (the majority do consider this a victory over evil), they think that 'this was a humiliation for their nation because part of my territory was taken away.' Because when in 1940, part of people was leaving for Romania, some of them stayed here and adapted it, but when the historical circumstances changed, this memory opened up, yes, it's good that it was a victory, but we don't feel ourselves, Victors. Evil was overcome, and this regime that came didn't give us what we wanted. Instead, they put us into their own rules and parts of which are not okay with us.

This explanation assigns a particular historical narrative – victory versus occupation to a particular identity group. Commemoration of Victory Day is positioned as a celebration of an event that for 'those who consider themselves Romanian' is a moment of humiliation because the territory was taken by the Soviet regime that installed its rule over the territory. While victory on its own is framed as neutral in the narratives of Romanians as AJ describes, or 'Romanianists' as discussed in scholarship, 'victory'

concept is loaded with the additional meaning of Soviet occupation, and the negative consequences of Soviet rule that included famine, deportations, and oppression of Romanian culture and language. Soviet symbolism of commemoration, used in Socialist Party commemorations, in this context is especially problematic and embodies ‘victory’ with a particular meaning, as we see further in this Chapter. The narrative omits alternative meanings and plots producing erasure.

Occupation and Erasure

GZ is a Romanian-speaking activist in her 30s, she has worked in several international organizations and is an active member of society, organizes and participates in the protests, etc. At the time of our meeting, she was active in the organized protests against the demolition of a historical building by the Chisinau City Council. We sat down on a bench in the park near the protest spot, not far from the building under the threat of demolition. Several people were already on the protest site waiting for the meeting to start. A policeman walked around nearby, keeping an eye on the protest.

When I introduced my research topic, she jumped right into it. For the last two years, she has not left her house on May 9 because of the public events in the city, she said, referring to the commemorative events. “It felt like today, this is not my city,” she says, “people are wearing this,” she says with disdain in her voice, referring to the Saint George ribbon, “and people going to concerts.” For her, as she explained, the day represented the time when

You are screwed by different countries in different times and tragic, horrible period of history that ruined people, resulted in so many deaths, and also led to the destruction of Chisinau both by Germans and the Soviets

For me, it was an occupation, but I would not say that now bluntly knowing that it might offend some people who have good reasons to believe that. It is the way they were raised, and this is the narrative they hold, so I cannot assert this as historical truth. For me, it is occupation, but if I want to discuss urban issues, I don't want to get into this argument about history.

...You have to be balanced. This is how they were raised, and these are the values they care about, and you don't present the alternative, and you have a void, you just pick up that is available.

GZ holds the 'occupation' narrative of the Second World War, but as a representative of a younger generation who is active in politics, she is more interested in focusing on pressing issues of today, which at the time of our interview according to her are 'urban issues.' She is attributing the Socialist Party commemorations to another 'truth' that exists in Moldova and is willing to discuss it, she says. She also tells me her position had evolved over time. As an active young blogger, she tells me she used to write emotional texts about these issues on each anniversary of the day, but eventually, she gave up. On commemorations, she says,

At first, when Communists and Socialists raised to power and this Saint George ribbon appeared, it was a bit offensive as a presentation, demonstration of power but now in the last two years. I am thinking, we should coexist, this is a political thing, and we try to ignore it as much as we can, to make life survivable in Moldova.

This story about the need to coexist with various interpretations of history, and not allow for the politics of memory evoked by the politicians to cause conflicts was one of the stories told by younger Moldovans during the interviews. These stories recognized

the existing divisions in interpretations of history in the society between identity and language groups but spoke more about putting those differences aside to work on more pertinent and priority issues. Although the framing of ‘coexistence’ as mentioned by GZ, or ‘putting differences aside’ which was mentioned by others appears positive, there is also danger that history and memory become storied as impossible to talk about. The conditions under which memory is discussed in Moldova restrict mechanisms and space for meaningful engagement with difference and disagreement.

Another Romanian-speaker interviewee, EG, in his late 30s, who served in public positions and at the time of our interview, worked in an international organization, explains the other narrative. “Russian propaganda insists that the war started in 1941. This is not true, of course. The war started in 1939, officially, with both big countries attacking Poland. And this piece of land was also an issue at that moment because they occupied the Baltics, and they occupied Bessarabia.” He explained the contradiction between Soviet and European narratives of the war in the way the duration of the war is determined – 1941-1945 in the Soviet and now Russian historical accounts, which omits the events happening in Bessarabia before 1941. Describing the differences in understanding of history in Moldova, he says that “Moldovans are also split inside the ethnic group: those that see themselves as Romanian, they see that moment in time as an occupation of Romanian lands by Soviet troops.” But he is also critical of the Romanianists and refers to the competing victimhood and silencing of Holocaust topics in their narratives, which have emerged from the two narratives of liberation and occupation. “It is an instinct of sticking with Romanians, but they have an issue with it

because Romania was on the side of German fascists.” referring to silences which emerged in the Romanianist historians’ writings in that period. According to him, “for people who come from that Romanian ideology when told about the Holocaust, they come back raising the issue of Stalinist repressions.” This creates not a meaningful discussion but engages people in competing for victimhood, according to him. According to EG though such polarization is not true for the majority of Moldovans, and those who identity-wise, he says, “consider themselves as Moldovans, separate from Romanians.” Most Moldovans see themselves as victims and “hated Russians and Romanians. They tend to desire to forget that past because we have a lot of traumatic pasts, not get politically involved.”

In this story, the explanation of divisions or ‘split’ in the society in understanding history is offered and explained by people in terms of interpretation of the Second World War period with ‘liberation’ vs. ‘occupation’ narrative. This story also challenges the timeframe of the Victory narrative and the sequencing of events in the story, that excludes 1939 as the start of the war and the 1940 annexation of Bessarabia region from Romania by the Soviet Union. He adds that it is ‘pro-Russians’ who participate in the commemorations of Victory Day, and they are relying on Moscow produced ideas of remembrance and concepts. EG’s concern is also that the current narrative limits or completely obstructs opportunities for discussion.

These examples are illustrative of stories about the two competing memory narratives which emerged in the interviews. Firstly, Victory Day commemorations by the Socialist Party were positioned in ‘victory/liberation’ narrative and prescribed to the

majority of Moldovans who carry the memory of the war from the Soviet period. However, often ‘Russian-speakers,’ ‘pro-Russians’ were highlighted as those groups for whom this memory and commemoration was especially salient. Secondly, those who opposed to the Victory Day commemorations were framed in the stories as ‘Romanianist,’ ‘Romanians’ or ‘pro-Romanians’ and positioned as groups for whom this period of history had a meaning of ‘occupation.’ The stories in ‘occupation narrative’ in addition to the 1940 annexation highlighted the atrocities and horrors committed to the population of Moldova by the Soviet regime, such as famine and deportations following the post-war period. Also, they elaborated that the victory was achieved at a high cost. As EG told me during the interview, referring to the loss of life during the war, “Soviets sent Moldovans to the frontlines. If you were Moldovan, chances of surviving the war were little.”

Soviet Legacy

‘Soviet legacy’ was another frame through which the salience of ‘Victory Day’ as the memory was explained but also often problematized. For example, in one interview, I am told that it is the central role of the Soviet Army, and the Soviet Union in the war is something problematized rather than the meaning of victory itself. HJ is in her late 30s and calls herself a child of a Russian speaking family, who was raised during the Soviet period with the tradition of commemorations. Drawing on differences between the interpretations of history and people’s relations to commemorations, she tells me that at least two communities that exist in Moldova, Russian speakers, and Romanian speakers

hold different views of history and disagree about the narrative of commemoration. She explains the meaning of Victory Day for Russian speakers:

In Moldovan society, we are talking about at least two different communities. One is Romanian speaking, and for them, the split begins with the focus that the Soviets and the Russians are making it is about the Soviet Army and the name of the war Great Patriotic Army. Russian speaking population here and even Ukrainians, which are bigger communities than ethnic Russians, as well as other minorities – they are more driven that this was the victory of the Soviet Army. They are very much heroes, and they won the Second World War.

The contestation around the conjuring of the Soviet period through commemorations was often brought up as problematic for Romanian speakers. Often this was referred to as ‘Soviet legacy,’ which was worsened by the lack of education and meaningful discussion in Moldovan society on the history of the Second World War in Moldova. Continuity of Soviet legacy in memory was explained through sustained historical memory both learned and lived, ‘geopolitical’ positioning of people, influence, and ‘propaganda’ from Moscow as was described earlier or by lack of (new) education. Soviet legacy then served as a way of interpretation of the persistence of victory narrative and the popularity of commemorations in Moldova. In these stories, commemorations were seen as a reproduction of the old stories, which were leftover from the Soviet period. In the following interview excerpt, CG, a former member of Parliament of right party, a Romanian speaker explained:

Those who were born during the Soviet Union and were raised and grew up during that time, during those 50 years they were being told that this is a day of the Soviet Army and the victory of the Great Patriotic War. They were never told of what existed before here and lived well. And at the moment when they established independence, unfortunately, the officials were not focused ideologically on explaining

the history of how things happened. And so, memories mostly based on what was being told to people during the Soviet Union.

In this and other stories, Victory Day commemorations were seen as having support from the ‘Russian speakers’ and those who still felt nostalgic about the Soviet Union. The stories explained that left parties as inheritors of the Soviet Union’s ideology were able to mobilize the population because of the Soviet nostalgia that existed in Moldova. As one informant said to me, people who went to commemorations did not just celebrate the end of the Second World War, but the victory in the Great Patriotic War, which was principally different, he argued. According to him, “Victory Day would always convey the message that, guys, you were part of the Soviet Union, and this is our common holiday.” Connection to the Soviet past and identity as inheritors of the Soviet legacy are key ideas in this story of the commemoration presented in this story.

...the new state hasn’t developed its strategy on explaining these issues to create a shared narrative explanation on what it was for us. And how we should understand this and how we process it as part of our history. Because we cannot throw away history, we need to study them, and we need to understand, to learn lessons, and build our future.

We need to learn lessons from the past, and we need to create a different future through policies that create a united future. If we don't study, then we will not understand anything. This will also lead to diverging movements.

CG points out that the failure to develop unifying official historical policy when Moldova’s independence poses threats of divisions in society. For her, the discussions happening about history is mostly among radical groups with politicized versions of history, and this is worrying because it will lead to diverging movements. CG’s and other stories emphasized that in Moldova, commemorations have become a site that produced and deepened divisions between identity groups. Learning about history and the

complexity that existed, added CG, was the way towards a more unified understanding history.

However, when discussing elite-level contestation, the conversation returned to dichotomous identity divisions. This interview with JA, the member of the Liberal Democratic Party, a right party, who is a Romanian speaker, and of rights politics is illustrative of the way complexity and divisions are discussed. JA is moderate but also active in the right opposition and belongs to the group of Moldovans who consider the Moldova part of Romania historically. According to him, most people in Moldova understand the complexities of the period and commemorate because everyone participated in the war. This group, he argues, also includes those who consider themselves Romanians. He adds, “Of course, there is a small segment of the population that considers that this was occupation by Soviets. Many had relatives who were serving on the other side, then switched to the Soviet side. Then they were deported. But this is a minority.” His story about the ‘Romanians’ highlights the complexities of memory in the ‘Romanian’ group.

According to him, only part of those identifying themselves as Romanians, consider it an occupation. However, JA frames Victory Day commemorations also as an opportunity for some “to make geopolitical statements,” and for those people ideas “come from Russia,” there is no real personal meaning in commemoration. Here JA is framing commemoration of Victory Day (in the way they are conducted) not as a genuine remembrance but a political statement by the Socialist group. In this story and many others, the differentiation was made not only between the various narratives such as

‘victory’ and ‘occupation’ but also commemorations as an opportunity to make political statements versus ‘real memory’ and intention of ‘remembrance.’ Connection of Socialist Party commemoration’s symbolism and practices to those in Russia were explained as a display of ‘pro-Russian’ stance by framing it as ‘geopolitical’ statements. These references to Moscow-based ideas and concepts in commemorations were often highlighted, and the symbolism was problematized in the interviews.

Master Narratives of Memory of Second World War

This section described various narratives of May 9 commemorations in Moldova based on the analysis of the interview data. Findings show, there are multiple interpretations of the day, which are often related particular narratives to ‘identity’ groups in Moldovan society. The commemoration of May 9 as a ‘Victory Day’ and ‘liberation’ or as an ‘occupation’ emerged as one of the core evaluative points in the narratives of history. Although often qualifications were made to account for the ‘majority who just commemorate the end of a horrible war,’ remembrance activity was seen as a process, which exacerbated existing divergences in the society leading to divisions. These divisions were categorized sometimes as ‘ethnic divisions’ within Moldovans and often also discussed using multiple labels, such as ‘Russian speakers,’ ‘Romanian speakers,’ ‘minorities,’ ‘Romanians,’ ‘pro-Romanians,’ ‘Moldovans,’ ‘pro-Russians.’ Two master narratives of history about the Second World War of ‘victory/liberation’ versus ‘occupation’ were positioned as linked to ‘identities’ explained as ‘Moldovans’ and

‘Romanians’ when discussing memory in the context of divisions attributed to interpretation of May 9.

These stories draw upon master narratives of ‘victory’ and ‘occupation,’ which I had described in Chapter four. May 9, with its two competing evaluative points (as ‘occupation’ or ‘liberation’) in the master narratives of memory, appear as judgments that draw from existing narratives circulating in the culture (Cobb 2013, 36). The Victory Day commemorations in the stories that I collected are positioned in the contestation between two different memory narratives as harnessed by two ‘identity groups’ – ‘Moldovans’ and ‘Romanians.’ Victory Day provides a site to perform or resist these competing ‘identities’ and, as such, is an instrument harnessed by the parties around their political agendas. Commemorative practices around May 9th and the history of the World War II period in Moldova emerged through the interviews as narratives, which were based on mobilizing competing in Moldova as promoted by the elites and political parties.

‘Identity’ as an explanatory category emerges here in the interview, and the connection between memory and identities in this narrative is dynamic. In one aspect, it relates to the fact that particular historical meanings get prescribed to a particular group, such as ‘Romanians’ who consider the consequences of the Second World War ‘occupation.’ On the other hand, in the narrative, the commemoration as a performance of memory and by extension of corresponding ‘identity’ is seen as causing ‘identity divisions.’ Having used the interviews to establish the two master competing narratives of memory ‘victory’ and ‘occupation,’ as well as to consider the complexity and multiplicity of stories about memory and identity which circulate in Moldova, the next

section discusses how Europe Day celebrations, as a more recent phenomenon fits in the broader context of memory production and politics in Moldova.

Europe Day Celebration in Moldova

‘Europe’ is encountered frequently in the government and political discourses in Moldova. ‘Pro-European’ is used to characterize a party, a government, politician, or person; European values are ‘promoted’ and recited by the right political parties.

‘European course’ (of development) representing Moldova’s signing of Association Agreement with the EU in 2014. The Republic of Moldova also receives substantial financial assistance from the European Union, the one that makes a difference for the state budget. The EU is the largest donor in Moldova, supporting political and economic reform with the bilateral assistance under the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) increasing from 40 million euros in 2007 to 131 million euros in 2014³.

Europe Day has been celebrated in Moldova over the last few years, but this has not been in the context of the Second World War commemoration. European Union Day is explained on the website of the EU as the day celebrating peace and unity in Europe and refers to the date of May 9, 1950, of Schuman declaration. The EU Day is marked in 140 countries around the world organized by the European Union delegations. In Moldova, the celebration is organized by the EU delegation and usually involves sports and cultural activities, including the film and music festivals⁴. The members of the

³Website of European Union External Action Service, Moldova section. May 12, 2016
https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/moldova/1538/republic-moldova-and-eu_en

⁴ moldova.org 2008

government attend the festivities at the ‘European village,’ usually featuring different EU member state embassy booths, food, and concert in the central park. I had attended these events every year since moving to Moldova in 2015. In 2018, the celebration took place on May 12th, and when I went to the event, I spotted the Speaker of Parliament from the Democratic Party walking around the booths with the EU Ambassador.

From Victory Day to Europe Day

In Moldova and elsewhere, EU day celebrations are not framed as a commemoration of the Second World War and are focused on raising awareness about the European Union in Moldova. I heard from discussion with the staff of EU delegation that the scheduling of Europe Day is usually coordinated with other public activities to avoid competing with Victory Day commemorations on May 9. In this context, Europe Day celebrations, as such, did not present as a competing narrative to Victory Day.

In the context of commemoration, the celebration of Europe Day is a recent phenomenon in Moldova. It was only since 2017, when I was already in Moldova, that Europe Day became part of the discussions in the context of commemorations of the end of the Second World War. Officially and legally speaking, the commemoration of Europe Day, together with Victory Day, was established in Moldova in 2017, when the Democratic Party put forward a legislative proposal in the parliament. The proposal aimed to amend the Labor Code to change the name of the holiday on May 9 from Victory Day to ‘Victory Day and Europe day.’ The proposal became a reason for controversy and resulted in the public exchange between the Socialist and Democratic

Party leaders that was covered by the news I was following at the time. As the State News Agency Moldpres outlined, the argument accompanying the legislative proposal was that Europe is a symbolic day for the European integration aspirations of Moldova, and it needs to be celebrated together with the European Union (Bercu, 2016). Socialist Party, in reaction to the proposal, accused the Democrats of creating alternatives to the commemoration traditionally celebrated as Victory Day. The law was voted in the parliament to add the phrase ‘Europe Day’ to May 9 date in the Labor Code of Moldova, in addition to the existing text that read ‘Day of Victory and memory of heroes who fell for the independence of homeland.’ However, in protest, the president refused to promulgate the legislation voted by the Parliament in 2017, and the law was subsequently returned to the parliament for another vote in 2018.

This episode of conflict around the name of the holiday is demonstrative of the kind of symbolic importance this date carries in Moldova. The timing of this contestation was also telling. In the 2017-2018 time period, both left and right parties were represented in the leadership, creating opportunities for promoting their visions of the country based on historical interpretations. In this context, Victory Day commemorations became more visible organized with the leadership of the Socialist president. At the same time, the majority of votes in the parliament created an opportunity for the Democratic party to propose a legislative change.

Europe Day

Given the controversy between the two parties I described above, I asked about Europe Day in my interviews. His stories about Europe Day, which emerged from the interviews, attributed various meanings to commemorating Europe Day with Victory Day. In some stories, it was seen as politicizing, while others saw the benefits of unifying remembrance. In this context, commemoration as Europe Day served as an answer to counter the simplified narrative about the Second World War, seen as connected to Russian propaganda. For example, in discussion with LS, a former member of parliament from the right, pro-European, Liberal Democratic Party, she reflects on the relevance of Europe Day in Moldova today in the context of commemorating the memory of WWII. According to LS, it is the childhood experiences of commemorations during the Soviet period that formed the memory of people. In her family, as in many families in Moldova, the story of this period is complicated, with her grandfather serving both in Romanian and Soviet Armies during the war. She tells me how in her grandfather's stories about the war, the central idea was not the victory of the Soviet Army but the idea of defending peace. According to LS, May 9 shouldn't be celebrated as a holiday of the Soviet Army, but rather as a victory of European countries over fascism. Explaining why commemorating Europe Day along with Victory Day, makes sense she said:

If it's Day of Victory and its Day of Victory of the European countries over fascism, then it is also a Europe day. But it's interpreted differently. I think it's right that on the day when officially World War II ended, the day of Europe is also celebrated. Because on that day, European countries understood that they need to build a different Europe. And today, we have the EU, and we could live so many years without significant conflicts in the European continent. Because at that time, a foundation for a different

approach was taken, so for me, there is no difference between Victory Day or Europe day. For me, it means the same thing.

May 9th shouldn't be celebrated as a holiday of the Soviet Army, it's a victory of the European countries over fascism, a holy day of peace, and we should remember absolutely everything the good and the bad, to take lessons and be better tomorrow.

In this story, she makes a connection between the end of the war and the establishment of the European Union, as a way of justifying commemorating both. A critical study of history for her is crucial to reveal the complexity of the events of that period. "If we want to study our mistakes, we need to be able to say that Soviet Army played an important role in fighting fascism," she argues for the need to acknowledge the role of the Soviet Army in defeating fascism. "But we cannot idealize, and we also need to recognize what happened in the Soviet Army, and how many people died during that time because of strategic mistakes," she says referring to the stories about the carelessness with which human lives were treated in fighting the war and the magnitude of loss it caused. If the previous generations knew only this narrative of Soviet Victory, then, she says, for the new generation who were born in independent Moldova, this day (May 9) is closer to Europe Day than Victory day as they do not have same connections to the Soviet Union. This story emphasizes the idea that the current commemorations around the Second World War based on the dominant narrative of the Soviet Union simplifies memory and constricts possibilities for a more complex story of the war to be told. Europe Day, in this case, was seen as a way of introducing complexity to the narratives that privileged the role of the Soviet Army and the USSR in the war.

Politicization and Geopolitics

A Russian speaking informant, a civil society representative, told me that she appreciated the ruling party's efforts to celebrate Europe Day and Victory Day at the same time as it is usually politicizing to split the society. "Ruling party politically tried to have balancing approach. Even if we understand that they are doing this for political reasons, I don't care, and I know that for the society to unite, we need some politicians will start balancing for the historical memory." In her story, Europe Day commemoration is framed as a unifying story that can bring together people with different interpretations of this period of history, those who see this as a victory of the Soviet Union and those considering its consequences occupation.

The idea that Europe Day commemorations were a centrist political approach to memory by the Democratic Party in a society where history is usually divisive came up in another interview. In conversation with KP, a former member of the Liberal Democratic Party described the Democratic Party commemorations in 2018 with Europe Day as a centrist. According to him, commemorations such as the one organized by the Socialist Party in 2018 would have caused a stronger reaction from the right parties. Still, in 2018, the parties in the farther right politics were weak, and so they did not play up the issue of protest against victory day. In this case, the lack of usual controversy and arguments between political groups around this day was explained not only by the success of Europe Day – Victory Day combined commemoration but also the current political context when right politics was weak in Moldova. In other words, not only the commemorations were

highly dependent on the given year's configuration of political forces but adding Europe Day was seen as a compromise position in the spectrum of narratives.

Another framing of Europe day which arose from the interviews was resistance to Victory Day narratives. A Romanian speaking interviewee told me that he saw Europe Day as a good distraction from the memory of Victory Day. It allows "stealing the show," he says. Europe Day here serves for some who are not entirely opposed to the commemoration of the war but have a problem with the dominant narrative that is too Soviet-centric. He is not optimistic about the success of 'distraction.' Promotion of the ideas through Russian TV in Moldova and the scale of loss that affected many people will keep the memory alive, according to him.

However, some informants of left politics such as the member of Socialist party BK saw Europe day celebration as 'politicization' of victory day. He explained:

What is happening today in Moldova is politicization, not even of the actual events but the Victory Day. It is an effort to politicize this date by bringing Europe day into this. Some are saying, let's also celebrate Europe day, and others are saying Europe day is more important. And those it says it was only a victory of the Red Army, and it brought occupation to many countries. And when it comes to Bessarabia, they are saying that it brought Bessarabia territory under communist totalitarianism, and it was able to get rid of it only in the 1990s.

I think these people are trying to establish or come to power on the wave of anti-Russian vector.... So those who want to come to power or stay there, are trying to get liked by them to fight against others whom they are calling pro-Russian, talking about bringing Russian tanks here, etc. because there are no other arguments.

This quote brings forward another perspective on the commemorations connected to 'geopolitics' and political parties' foreign policy preferences, another narrative that is important in the political discourse in Moldova. It is also reflective of the dynamics in the

political rhetoric of the Democratic and Socialist Parties, since the election of President Dodon in 2016, with regards to Moldova's foreign policy alliances.

I noted in Chapters four and five that the political context in the spring of 2018 was polarized with both Socialist and Democratic parties increasing their rhetoric on foreign policy issues. Since the elections of Socialist president in 2016, the Democratic Party pursued an active pro-Western position in foreign policy and positioned itself (especially abroad) as the party of defenders of European and American values in Moldova in opposing the 'pro-Russian' President Dodon and Socialist Party. In the meantime, the President's frequent visits to Moscow and public speeches in support of the partnership with Russia publicly positioned the Socialist Party looking towards Russia. These positionings of two parties reinforced the other, allowing to create dynamics of contestation, which was often talked about as being beneficial for both parties.

BK, mentioning the current efforts by Democratic Party to commemorate Europe Day on the same day, calls it 'politicizing.' Moreover, the Democratic Party organized event is connected with the competing narratives of the Second World War globally. According to him, the politicization promoted in Moldova by European Union draws parallels between communism and fascism, highlighting deportations and repressions during the Soviet period and framing the 'victors' (the Soviets) as the other evil for Bessarabia.

Europe Day was also framed as an imposition. "We always had our traditional holiday," says my LB, Russian speaker, and public official, and "suddenly someone came

and started telling us so let's celebrate this," he says referring to the narrative about Moldova's European course, European values, etc. which is part of stories circulating in Moldova's political space. He explains that he finds the positioning of Europe the same as the EU in this framing is problematic. "As if the EU becomes a synonym with Europe. The EU is a political unit and has nothing to do with Europe; he says at least the way it is presented to us. This was not when the EU was created," he says, "creation of EU happened after." "May 9 is not a day of EU and when we talk about anti-corruption projects, or biomass energy projects. That is why people don't understand what they are looking at – aid projects or how it is related to victory day." He argues that Europe day as an effort to counter the current memory and tradition of commemoration but one that does not 'feel real' to public and, as such, does not have similar mobilization power.

This discussion with LB, in addition to raising the issue of 'politicization,' also raises the issue of relevance. The celebration of Europe Day is framed as irrelevant and superficial for Moldova, which is not part of the EU. LB's perspective also refers to the narrative about the European Union, which is promoted by the international and local civil society organizations working in different areas, often funded by the EU or member states aid mechanisms. When he says that "it is not time to talk about anti-corruption" projects, he is referring to the irrelevance promoting of the EU funded projects or EU values on the day is commemorated as Victory Day. From this perspective, Europe Day in the context of commemorations is framed as one of the projects which are being promoted.

I discuss the mobilizing and meaning power of Europe Day celebration with BG, who is a public official but also worked in an international organization. "...Europe Day does not resonate because it is not clear what you are celebrating. May 9th is clear. Very simple myth: there was war, there were good or at least bad guys and allies.", he says, adding that Europe day would be difficult to explain. "Even if you are informed it is hard to talk about some general values," he says referring to frequent referral to the 'European values' such as democracy, freedom of media, etc. that often fills the speeches of the pro-European politicians and civil society members, or international organizations and diplomatic representations in Moldova. "With May 9, it is clear what it is. With Europe day, not so much. To push this because we have European tendencies is not going to work," comparing it to the tradition and long memory of the Second World War and tradition of commemorating it as a victory.

Europe Day celebrations were framed either as politicization, that is, wanting to counter the Victory Day narrative and Soviet legacy in the memory but also described by some as unifying. When seen as potentially unifying or viewed more neutrally, not as contestations, the celebrations as compared to the Victory Day commemorations were not seen as authentic or connecting to the memory of people. Deprived of power of simple myth that commemorations often carry and direct experience and memory with Moldovan society, they were framed as prescribed or organized as celebrations, but which did not generate mobilization or genuine participation. Often, the connection was made by the interviewees between the geopolitical or the foreign policy preferences of the political parties and the inclusion of Europe Day to the commemoration in the way of

promoting the political agenda such as European course of development. In this interpretation, Europe Day was seen as countering the competing Socialist Party and Victory Day commemorations carried out with Soviet symbolism. By this, Europe Day was also tied to a particular group, such as ‘Romanians,’ ‘pro-Romanians,’ ‘Romanian speakers’ and were seen as being promoted by the politicians in support of those groups in Moldova who favored closer relationship with the European Union and Romania. At the same time, consistent with the discussion about memory in Moldova, often these connections between particular historical narrative and a group, were made complicated by additional qualifying factors using various descriptions regarding language, ethnicity, education, political preference, etc.

Finally, by their organization and through the speeches of the Democratic Party leaders, Europe Day celebrations were positioned to suggest Europeanness for Moldovans, as was discussed in Chapter 5. The speeches of the party leaders attempted to bring a unifying theme while acknowledging the various interpretations of history but also prescribing European identity to Moldovans, as a ‘pro-European’ party. As the several accounts in the interviews showed, such positioning elicited multiple effects. In those stories, which told more complicated and thick narratives of the history of the Second World War, the emplotment of Europe to Victory Day took hold. Other stories, drawing from master narratives of geopolitical divisions and contestations among political parties, positioned the commemorations, whether the Socialist ones or Europe, also as politicization.

One hears the term 'external actors' a lot in conversations about domestic and foreign politics in Moldova. There is always a consideration of 'external factors' or the influence of 'externals' which speak about the influences, positions, and policies of the EU, the United States, Romania, and Russia. The stories about 'imported' commemorations emerged and were problematized in discussions. The term 'external' or 'imported' ideas in relation to commemorations referred to the idea that the commemorative practices were reproducing practices in Moscow when it came to Socialist party commemoration or were advancing European narrative when it came to Europe Day. The interpretations of commemorations as 'politicization' of memory through the connection to the narratives of memory Russia and the European Union, situated the remembrance practices as sites where local and global conversations came together.

Memory as a Process of Competing Identities and Political Agendas

During my field research, I often encountered stories that talked about commemorative activity depending on the political context, which party was in power, and who was contesting whom. The context in which commemorations took place was important in making sense of the events. These arguments reinforced the idea that remembrance was 'politicized' and was organized a certain way 'depending on who's in power.' Often it was made clear to me that to understand the meaning of events in 2018, one needed to understand the story of how they have changed over the last 27 years. The variance of commemorative practices connected memory to various political periods and

events in Moldova, making a case for ‘politicization’ of memory through recent history with commemorations reflecting the competition between various political groups promoting one or another identity narrative and political agenda. For example, the revival of the Second World War remembrance was credited to the Communists' time in power in the 2000s when they undertook efforts in the renovation of monuments and creation of alternative writers’ union to counter the right and unionist dominated institutions. However, it is when the Communists were voted out of power in 2009 and became an opposition party that the Victory Day commemorations became more pronounced. The return of the right, pro-European political parties into power in 2009, led to the efforts to implement a historical policy in the 2010-2012 period that was undertaken by then Acting president Mihai Ghimpu, a far-right party and unionist (Cusco, 2012). These examples, which were given marked commemorations as a process of one political group resisting the other. Each time, when one political group advanced historical policies that promoted particular identities, it resulted in the backlash by the other groups and evoked commemorative activity as a protest. A Moldovan memory scholar discussing remembrance activities over time, tells me that through the “simplistic division” over identity issues such as ‘Romanianist’ or ‘Moldovanist’, commemoration presents a way for political groups and parties to oppose each other.

Victory day always had protest potential. If you believe that people in power are against your interpretation of Victory and this is one of the main events in the historical event here, so even going to this memorial complex to celebrate is already kind of a protest. And doing victory march becomes explicit protest.

Commenting on the commemorations of 2018, he elaborates, “Victory Day is a reference to Moldovan history, not Romanian one.” Since the idea of Moldovan statehood is important for Dodon, he adds, he is advancing the idea of Victory Day.

The explanation of the commemoration and memory as anchored in identity and providing an opportunity to promote diverging identities and political agendas framed the commemorations as politically divisive. ‘Divisions,’ geopolitics, politicization are concepts that one frequently encounters when engaged in political space in Moldova. The stories of divisions and politicization circulate in the media, social media, speeches of the politicians as well as in the discussions between the intellectuals, journalists, experts, civil society members, and the members of the diplomatic and international community in Moldova. These narratives are not only local as the international community gets engaged in these stories, which then circulate through stories told, analysis, and reports written to Brussels, Moscow and other capitals through local and international experts, representatives of Embassies, international organizations and so on. The narratives circulating through these networks and communities frame discussions and give meaning to ongoing events. These narratives become institutionalized and demand particular sets of solutions and actions.

Through the interviews, the stories that emerged about memory and the meaning of commemorations of the Second World War in Moldova drew distinctions between ‘real’ and ‘divisive’ memory. This distinguished memory narratives as advanced by the elites for their political agendas as ‘politicized.’ Commemorations as deepening identity divisions and preventing unity, therefore, emerged as the narrative frame through which

informants interpreted the commemorative events, which were happening in Moldova in 2018 but also when referring to the overall process of memory production and remembrance. As was already discussed earlier in this chapter through the elaboration of different meanings attributed to May 9, ‘divisive politicization’ looked different depending on whom you were talking to. For example, in some stories, Europe Day appeared as politicization by the right parties, while in others, the Soviet symbolism used during Victory Day commemoration was highlighted as such.

The utility of the commemorations to the elections was also underlined and seen as essential in explaining the context for the commemorations of 2018. Former Liberal Democratic Party member, now in civil society sector, said commenting on the commemorations of 2018: “this year the technological work, the politicization is so clear. It has stopped being a real holiday,” he said, referring to the two commemorative activities organized by Socialist and Democratic parties. The uncontested dominance of the Socialist Party on the left of Moldovan politics came up as a factor in the way the commemorative events were organized with the symbolism of the Soviet Union. Socialist Party and President Dodon were seen as the only political group that could represent ‘the voice of the East’ to Moldovan public, referring to Russia.

The Politicization of Memory and Contestation by the Political Elites

Contestations and politicization appear as central concepts in my research findings in explaining memory and commemorations, as an instrument for mobilization by competing political elites. At the core of these contestations by the politicians is the

struggle for a definition of Moldovan people and statehood and various meanings of the history that are competing for legitimacy. Commemorations as representations of historical narratives, due to the historical and political context in Moldova, became, since independence, a site for ritualized protest, and this protest had traditionally played out on advancing or resisting a particular understanding of the past. In this frame, commemorations are not only about the past but also about how one based on a particular past understands the present and forecasts a future. In Moldova, the Second World War remains important to understand the kind of country Moldova is today (a separate ethnic group with its history of statehood or a province of Greater Romania) and what kind of future (European or one closely allied with Russia) and with what kind of alliances they should build going forward. Therefore, memory serves as a discursive and symbolic resource to perform these contestations, whether in the forms of commemorations of Victory Day or other historical policies to resist the competing ideology.

In this frame of analysis, Victory Day commemorations are considered being able to mobilize as resistance to Romanian ethnic-based identity for Moldova, the dominance of Romanian language, and the diminishing of Russian language use and as protection against the idea of unionism with Romania and loss of Moldovan statehood. Sometimes, commemorations were also positioned in support of social and economic relations with Russia vis-a-vis pro-European narratives. Conversely, the remembrance activities with Soviet symbols are perceived to be in close alignment with Russia and delegitimizing the historical narratives of 'Romanians.' From this perspective, Soviet symbolism is particularly problematized and seen as divisive between groups. The divisiveness was

explained by framing it as a reproduction of commemorations organized in Russia and drawing strong associations with it. Symbolism visibly located in ‘Victory Day/liberation’ narratives, which delegitimized or erased events that were important in the ‘Romanian’ or ‘Romanianist’ narrative. As one informant told me, “before it was Communists, now it is Socialists who are endlessly exploiting this to gain support from association with Russia.” This statement positions Victory Day as a process by which political parties relied on association with Russia to gain support from the public, among which Soviet legacy continued to hold steady.

In the political context of 2018, the connection with Russia through commemorative activity organized by the Socialist Party was frequently mentioned in the interviews. While a very publicly articulated position about Russia from Socialist Party leader Igor Dodon makes the context for this explanation, a further connection was seen in the various elements of the commemorations in Moldova that are being used in Russia. The organization of procession of Immortal Regiment March and the use of symbolism such as Saint George Ribbon in the commemorations of the last few years was highlighted as part of this linkage. This connection was seen as creating vulnerability for Moldova to be embedded in Russia’s historical policy in the region. By a Romanian speaker intellectual, civil society member, it was described as “you get instructions from Moscow each year on how to do it,” and the symbolism used in the events was seen as part of those instructions. Another way of narrating was to put it as a “replica of Moscow’s ideas, a reflection.” A former politician of the left told me that this is simply automated remembering implying that no new meaning-making process was taking place

during these events. In addition to being a threat from Russia, the replicated commemorations in the stories raised questions about the authenticity of remembrance. Lack of vision and deliberate, meaningful discussion about history and future of Moldova was in some stories linked to the weak intellectual elite around President Dodon as the representatives of this social group in Moldova in general. Because of the lack of ideas, the past becomes a resource for building political visions. For example, in an interview with a Romanian speaker in his late 30s, he told me the intellectual elite in the left, referring to Socialists, does not produce their visions and concepts for Moldova. Referring to the way commemorations are conducted by the Socialists, he argued that “they have the people on the ground, and they use the slogans, but they don’t have a vision for Moldova’s future, so the ideas come from Moscow.”

As I described in Chapter five, the Democratic Party attempted through commemoration to develop a new narrative about the Second World War, one that included Victory Day but altered the meaning through connecting it to the ‘Europe Day.’ In the ‘revised’ narrative of Victory Day, which in Moldova often means victory of the Soviet Army, the meaning of the event is expanded to include the victory of Europeans (and not merely the Soviet Union). Such emplotment of Moldova into European (and not Soviet) history and prescribing Moldovans European identity through speeches at the commemoration is constructed to re-invent May 9, as a unifying date as opposed to times of contestation and conflict in Moldova.

As the stories told by the elites showed, the Democratic Party’s efforts to advance Europe Day storyline and positioning Moldovans as Europeans were interpreted as not

having enough legitimacy limiting their efforts as champions of European identity and Europe Day as a historical narrative. Nelson (2001), who defines personal identity as systems of meaning, argued that in order to be identity-constituting, the stories need to have strong explanatory force, correlation to action, and heft. In other words, to become important to identities, stories need matter and be relevant. The interviews highlighted that because Moldovans did not have a direct connection to Europe, and in a sense, the establishment of Europe did not resonate with Moldovans, the Europe Day commemorations were not authentic and not successful in advancing the storyline of unification. At the same time, narratives in the broader political context, that positioned Democratic Party rule as delegitimate further restricted the possibility of advancing this narrative. In these stories, the Democratic Party was positioned as not being able to advance the Victory Day and Europe Day despite the ‘unifying’ theme that attempted to include different interpretations of the history of the Second World War.

Two master narratives elaborating the history and identity of Moldovans, one with its own distinct Moldovan identity and Soviet legacy as part of it, and the other as Romanian region with Romanian identity forcibly occupied by the Soviet Union were seen as being collided in the performance of May 9 commemorations. It is through this prism that the stories of commemorations as divisive and an obstacle to unity and consolidation of national identity were told.

The Impediment for State and Nation-Building

Stories about ‘divisions,’ ‘competing identities,’ and ‘failing state’ are part of the everyday conversation and discussion among Moldova political elite, intellectuals, and media. The question of whether Moldova will make it as a state and whether it should, in the context of political crisis and poor economic conditions, along with the question of unification with Romania, continue to be part of the discourse. Given these concerns about the country, it is not surprising then that memory of the Second World War and commemorations of Victory Day are contextualized and evaluated in the stories as a danger to the state-building. These assessments in the interviews were based on memory’s connection to identity. The master narrative that emerged in the research project stipulated that memory ‘artificially’ manipulated by the politicians leads to divisions and, through its divisive effect, presents an obstacle to building a state.

In discussion with a Romanian speaking, a right political activist in her 30s underscored that commemorations were often presented geopolitical and identity-based discussions in Moldova, creating divisions and preventing state-building. Speaking of Soviet symbolism used during commemorations, she argued that “symbolism is all that is wrong with how it is done. Not only these symbols, such as Saint George's ribbon, have nothing to do with Moldova, but it is also commemorated as “the day of the Soviet Army.” According to her, this is done because it is a divisive issue, and politicians are trying to manipulate the memories of people. She underscores the negative consequences of such an approach that “does not build a state; it builds a divided society which will bring the conflict in the future. It is impossible to build a state on that”. In her

elaboration, the unification of all is equal to successful state-building, and differences and disagreement are dangerous. As it becomes apparent in the conversation, ‘identity’ is framed as the source or embodiment of disagreement. Speaking further on the divisive politicization, she speaks about how debates on identity in Moldova act as distractions and delay discussion of other pressing problems. To her, such geopolitical and identity-based discussions are efforts to keep people from focusing on real issues and real problems.

I think it is one of the obstacles to moving forward. Everybody in Moldova looks up to Georgia. Georgians know that they're Georgians. They know that the Russians are bad; they know their identity. In Moldova, it is a little bit different because you have Moldovans identifying themselves Romanians, as Moldovans. You still have 10% of the people who believe that Moldova doesn't exist, and Moldova shouldn't exist as a country. So even if they're working in the current project, it's this feeling of hopelessness, someday we will unify was Romania why do we need to do all this work now.

I think once you have this strong identity as a citizen of Moldova, might increase this cohesion and energy in the society. Unfortunately, presidents like the Dodon tried to build this Moldovan modernistic concept, which is very rudimentary. He tries to say that Moldova existed before Romania.

‘Building a state’ also came up in another interview:

This year, I watched the young people marching in Chisinau with St. George's ribbon, and I was scared (and it was strange). I was sure that these young people, maybe 80 percent, do not read about this and do not understand this symbolism. They don't understand the history behind it but rather comprehend this as a struggle between the left and the right. This is a shameful act on the politicians who are trying to get power like this. Tomorrow there will be others who will come and want different symbolism and ideas. But this does not build a state; it develops a divided society which will bring conflicts sooner or later.

In this story, the commemoration and marching are seen as a struggle between left and right, and according to the story lacks understanding of historical complexity and the

symbolism among those marching. Evoking such divisions is the process of bringing about conflicts, which will create an obstacle for state-building. This story is illustrative of other stories I heard in Moldova that narrated memory and divided identities as preventing the consolidation of identity in Moldova. The divisiveness in the society caused by memory as manipulated by the politicians was seen as preventing the unification of the society around one identity and vision for Moldova and preventing the forward movement of Moldova as a state. Memory and commemorations as a site of production of memory emerged as a site where divisions could be evoked, leading to consequences of failure in nation-building.

Commemorations become encumbered in nation-building processes from two perspectives. Firstly, they were seen used by the politicians in identity politics, which continuously deepened various existing cleavages, ethnic, linguistic, and foreign policy, economics oriented. Secondly, the very interpretation of the Second World War period was in the case of Romanianist narrative detriment to nation-building by delegitimizing the existence of Moldova as a state. Last but not the least, for various identities, symbolism and reproduction of commemorations and such ideology from Russia by the Socialist Party (and previously Communist party) were framed as an external threat. This external threat seen in commemorations can be situated in the broader context and narratives of competing for foreign policy preferences such as pro-European (Romania, West) versus pro-Russian.

The Complexity of Memory and Narrative Dynamics

Paradoxically, multiple numbers of labels and explanations which were used during the interviews to describe ‘identities’ revealed the complexity of ‘identity’ when it comes to memory. In other words, the relationship that is established between memory and ‘identity’ within and across these two master narratives, was often made more complicated in the interviews by the discussion of additional elements. The stories revealed that interpretations of history are often complex when it comes to linking them to certain groups. The descriptions used include beyond how people identify themselves as ‘ethnic group’ (Moldovan or Romanian), to include also language (‘Moldovan,’ ‘Romanian’ and ‘Russian’ speakers), direct family experiences in the war or during the Soviet Union, i.e., what kind of hardships or prosperity was experienced under which rule (Romanian, Russian, Soviet), as well as economic and political preferences (Western democracy versus more top-down leadership, economic systems, etc.). These are some of the examples using the labels and descriptions that emerged from the interviews repeatedly and might not capture full complexity. The way often, memory and history are talked about brings into conversations multiple ways of describing groups or individuals, so the descriptions of ‘identity’ often form ‘clusters’ rather than clear categories. Although strong disagreements between different groups with regards to memory were traced, the complexity was also often brought into the conversation through using these descriptions and at times through personal experiences.

Stories often highlighted that war memories of the people, along with their political identities, were complex, and the intentions for remembrance among regular

citizens were of remembrance and not ‘politicization.’ The stories narrated these contradictions between dichotomous competing elite narratives and the complexity of experiences as ‘real’ memory vs. ‘politicized’ memory. The distinction that was made between memory politicized by the elites and ‘real’ and more complex memory and ‘identity’ as the main frame of understanding memory provide insights into how narratives are produced and function in Moldova. This view implies that the memory of regular people was seen as complicated with many different contradictory narratives, while elites politicized history for their short-term interests. Both historical events and the stories from the interviews point to the complexity of people’s experiences during the war. There is also a multiplicity of experiences and meanings around commemorations in Moldova, including among those who participate in party-organized events.

Applying a narrative lens can be illuminating when understanding the contradiction between the emergence of dominant narratives in the context of complex memory landscapes such as in Moldova. It was argued earlier that in conflict settings, narratives tend to remain in patterns, while the evolution of narratives becomes difficult. They lose their complexity and become simplified (Cobb, 2013). The unpredictable process of narrative production contributes to this process, closing off opportunities for the evolution of meaning. Narratives also develop ‘recontextualizing’ capacity in conflict. For example, for those with a favorable view of the Soviet period, it is not uncommon to explain Soviet policies in Moldova, whether with deportations and famines, which led to mass violence, as unintended consequences of the difficult times in the post-war period. From a narrative perspective, the conflict story recontextualizes these events and

maintains the stability of the narrative and meaning, contributing to the intractability of conflict (Cobb 2016, 52). As competing narratives in conflict settings become simplified and stable, this reduces opportunities for alternative meanings to emerge. Although the complex experiences exist, the narrative environment restricts which stories can be told or whether these stories are able to counter the dominant narratives. In Moldova, this plays out in the discussions of history and memory of the Second World War. In the highly contested environment, the discussions about more complex history in various public forums have been difficult, and often those who dared to tell alternative stories would get attacked and criticized (Dumitru, 2008). Over the long-run, this greatly restricts opportunities for dialogue and deliberation on the topic of history and memory in Moldova.

Conclusion

The scholars writing on memory and history in Moldova, as I described in Chapter four, have pointed out the significant role of memory in identity politics. In the politics of independent Moldova, various historical truth became central to legitimating ideologies and policies of different groups. Two competing narratives of memory ‘victory’ and ‘occupation’ are at the core of competing ‘identity’ narratives and function as legitimizing some and delegitimizing other group’s positions. The commemorative practices of the Socialist and Democratic Parties differ in the way they are linked to these master narratives. Socialist Party commemoration advances the ‘victory/liberation’

narrative and embodies the symbolism of the Soviet Union through which it aims to promote a continuity of 'Moldovan' identity.

As positioning theory stipulates, the same individual might locate themselves or be positioned by others in one or multiple storylines that are advanced through their narratives (Harre and Slocum, 2003). The interviews in this chapter illustrated that in the case of Moldova, in the context of conflict or contestation, commemorations advance storylines where one group is legitimized, and the other is deemed illegitimate. Victory Day commemorations locate Moldovans in the master narrative of the Soviet Union, where the Soviet Union and Moldovan people positioned in a moral order as heroes and victors defeating evil. The Victory Day storyline and positioning delegitimize other groups in Moldova who have suffered from the policies of the Soviet Union. In the Victory Day commemoration, 'occupation' narrative does not show, and other events from the Second World War, including deportations and famine or recognition of the crimes of the Communist regime, are erased and as such delegitimized. So, they resist, advancing their storylines, positioning the Victory Day commemorators illegitimate through constructing them as politicized, unauthentic, uneducated, and automatic holders of Soviet legacy and reproducing and copying ideas of Moscow. Cobb (2013, 62) argues that whether we comply when positioned or deny and resist, "we are interpellated" by the narrative. According to her, positioning is political, and as such, discourse can be seen as a place of "production of a given way of being in the world." (ibid).

At any given time, multiple narratives are circulating at any given space, and multiple storylines can be lived in at any given moment. With this understanding in mind,

several narratives about the Second World War are circulating in Moldova. These narratives which are circulating and perform through various institutions, spaces and practices narratives do not only constitute instruments for ‘politicized’ elites which emerged from the interviews but carry in themselves stories and legacies of Moldova’s being subjected to cultural policies and nation-building practices by its neighbors, Romania and Russia throughout its history. Under Soviet rule, ‘Moldovanism’ was constructed and performed, thereby “silencing and erasing any links to its Romanian ethnocultural identity.” (Dimova and Cojocaru, 2013). After independence in 1991, along with other Soviet Republics, Moldova too engaged in nation-building projects while parting with its Soviet past and its elites initially promoting Romanian ethnic identity and reviving Moldovan language as Romanian. Rising of Party of Communists to power in 2001 brought another phase of nation-building, as the Party distanced Moldovans from Romanian ethnic culture, putting ‘Moldovan people’ to the center of Moldova’s history of statehood. Elections in 2009 led yet to another shift in direction when Moldovans chose ‘pro-European’ governance bringing themselves to the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union. Historical policies and remembrance activities such as commemorations have been part of these nation-building processes.

This recent history of using commemorations as a form of resistance between political parties, which are told in this Chapter, further establishes and maintains a commemorative practice as a key meaning-making frame and a site of contestation, through which various groups legitimize their identities and delegitimize others. It is this historical context, and the stories told about these periods of history, which create

conditions and provides for the narrative about commemorations to emerge. The master narrative that emerges from this study is about competing identities and their corresponding historical ‘truth’ that predicates a certain future for the Moldovan nation promoted by the politicians in their political agendas. The historical narratives serve as a resource for politicians but also for various groups in society who interpret, participate, or reject memory and remembrance activities as well as construct current social order based on this narrative. This master narrative of ‘competing identities’ constructs and at the same time marks the boundaries of how identity, memory, and nation are interpreted. (Wodak 2006; Cobb 2013)

Geopolitical Lens

When examining the politics of memory in Moldova, another lens for analysis is illuminating how locally produced competing narratives and interpretations of history intersect with the regional and global narratives about history, which circulate both inside Moldova, and at the international level. Since gaining independence, the narrative of World War II has been increasingly contested by the broad emergence of alternative narratives across Eastern Europe, in the former Soviet space, challenging the narrative of the Great Patriotic War. While the ‘original’ narrative praised the victory of the Soviet Union over fascism, the developed counter-narrative in the post-Soviet period across the region describes World War II and Stalinist repressions as national victimizations.

Torbakov (2011) argues that the reasons for ongoing disputes over history in the Eastern European region include both the politics of identity following the collapse of the

multi-national Soviet Union and the geopolitical struggle for hegemony related to the expansion of the European Union in the region and “growing rivalry between the EU and Russia over their overlapping neighborhoods.” (Torbakov 2011, 211). Torbakov (2011) argues that the EU’s eastwards enlargement in the post-Soviet period, and the change in Russia’s position towards Europe have also become important factors that have led to geopolitical tensions becoming a driving factor in the politicization of history and memory, not just in the eastern European countries but in Europe at large. These geopolitical changes have undermined the consensus that used to exist in Western European countries’ narratives about World War II, in addition to postwar experiences (Lebow et.al. 2006). The narrative that used to be about a glorified victory over Nazis and successful post-war reconstruction and development has now ‘extended’ to accommodate the Eastern European narrative that is pushing for integration into the larger European narrative on Second World War (Torbakov, 2011).

As geopolitical tensions have grown and shifted in Eastern Europe in the last decade, newly independent countries have been undergoing parallel processes of nation-building. As such, scholars have linked the increased politicization of memory to identity politics. In the context of World War II, Zhurzhenko (2007) argues that in Eastern European countries, such as Moldova and Ukraine, such contestations and national politics of memory need to be analyzed within the broader context of regional changes, the end of the Cold War and EU enlargement. Naming it ‘geopolitics of memory,’ the author argues that in this case, the politics of memory is less about the communist past than about the political and economic hegemony in the European continent (ibid).

Alternative narratives that have developed to challenge the Russian/Soviet narrative about World War II, portray the period during the Second World War as one of occupation and oppression by the Soviet government. Zhurzhenko (2007) in *Geopolitics of Memory* argues that since the 1990s, the post-Soviet republics have created new national historical narratives, “combining selective appropriation of Soviet heritage with partial victimization of their nations as former ‘colonies’ of Moscow.” Calling it ‘externalization of communism’, the author argues that in former Soviet Republics such as Georgia and Ukraine, nations portray themselves as victims of Soviet occupation, thus washing themselves of any wrongdoings as *occupied victims* (Zhurzhenko, 2007). These narratives are produced in a way to “reposition themselves in Europe, seeking to strengthen their sense of Europeanness and distinguish themselves from Russia, which is often cast as a non-European, Eurasian power – in a word, as Europe’s constitutive Other” (Torbakov 2011, 211). Using the example of the Republic of Georgia among the former Soviet Republics, the author (2007) claims that these narratives underline the “foreign roots of Stalinism and the Soviet regime and thus positions Georgia in the European (or rather Euro-Atlantic) geopolitical context.” These narratives and contestation of history do not focus on the past but are linked by various groups to the current ‘pro-European’ and ‘pro-Russian’ agendas (political and others) justifying a particular present and making a case for a specific future.

Moldova, which followed a similar path of European integration through the signing of an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, found itself in a broader regional context where the politics of memory has intensified. Local narratives and

contestation that are driven by local processes of meaning-making and competition for legitimacy, therefore, intersect strongly with regional and global narratives of history. In recent years, commemorations of Victory Day have emerged as sites for history contestation as the Moscow-sanctioned commemoration of Victory Day has increased in organization and volume.

Geopolitics has always been part of the narrative of Moldovan politics, but this has intensified over the last three years as the politics became more polarized with President Dodon taking an approach of building a strategic partnership with Russia while the Democratic majority positioned themselves as 'pro-European' and 'pro-West'. The global context of tensions between Russia and the West, the conflict in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia by the US and the European Union, contributed to polarized geopolitical discourses in Moldova's domestic policy. Given the EU Association Agreement and the dependence on Russia for gas and trade of agricultural and wine products, the balancing act between the West and Russia became more difficult. The dominance of only one party in the left and right politics also made a favorable context for competing narratives about foreign partnerships.

The issue of 'external' actors often comes up in discussions of issues of local politics and relates to the competing influences of neighboring countries in Moldova. It is in this context that stories about 'imported' commemorations emerged and were problematized in discussions. The term 'external' or imported ideas concerning commemorations referred to the idea that the commemorative practices were a reflection and conducted in parallel to commemorative practices in Moscow. The interpretations of

commemorations as 'politicization' of memory through the connection to the narratives of memory Russia and the European Union, situated the remembrance practices as sites where local and global conversations came together. As Cobb (2013) argues, narratives are "local in the sense that narrative conflict is performed in a particular setting, with particular people. However, there are also always global in that they operate as narrative resources that are "downloaded" into particular settings as sense-making devices, structuring what Taylor (1985) refers to as "intersubjective web of meaning" on which both consensus and dissensus are constructed." (Cobb 2013, p. 6). This sheds light on the interpretations of Victory Day commemorations by the Socialist Party in Moldova as re-enactment of Moscow's policy of commemoration, or Europe Day celebrations as politicization and advancement of European Union historical policy.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The core chapters of this study focused on exploring how commemorations are used in advancing the agendas of different political groups and what kind of narratives about memory are produced and perform as a result of these processes. The central question has been around how commemorations as the processes of memory in a transitional and diverse society like Moldova contribute to the production of the dominant narrative about memory's role in the present and future of the country. From this perspective, this project is an ethnographic exploration of the commemorations on May 9, 2018 – Victory Day and the memory of the Second World War in Moldova. Particularly, the focus has been on the processes of memory production in Moldova and the narrative dynamics of the historical narratives vis-à-vis present-day politics.

The research project includes the study of commemorations organized by two parties in Moldova in 2018 by the Socialist and Democratic parties. The rest of the study, through the extended period of research in Moldova and the in-depth interviews with the elites, allowed me to trace key narratives and narrative dynamics in Moldova about the Second World War and how commemorative activities interact with the issues facing Moldova society today.

Two commemorations organized by two political parties in Moldova on May 9, 2018, presented distinctly different interpretations of the Victory Day or the end of the

Second World War. The Socialist Party commemoration brought back the Soviet past to create continuity between past, present, and a future where the Soviet legacy is maintained. In the case of the Democratic party, the past was evoked to break with it. In both commemorations and accompanying narratives, there are erasures. In the case of Democratic Party commemorations, the Soviet past is symbolically erased, and the old memory is 'rewritten' that advances Europeanness and a future with Europe. In the Socialist Party commemorations, the oppressive and violent events by the Soviet state are silenced. The narratives which are performed through commemorations and the silences they produce give legitimacy to some and delegitimize other groups while promoting competing political agendas and futures. Because of the legitimizing and delegitimizing power of meaning around May 9, commemorations and corresponding historical narratives have produced opportunities to promote different identities (one linked to the Soviet past and the other to the European Union) and political agendas to advance different futures or even visions of nationhood. From this perspective, a commemoration of May 9 is not merely about remembrance, coming to terms with the past, or addressing the traumas; it is engagement with the past to forecast a particular future.

The study of commemorations of Victory Day in Moldova has led us to the intersection of history/memory and concerns for state/nation-building, which have been debated in Moldova since independence in 1991. The stories collected throughout the research show that commemorations are seen as instruments of mobilization for political interests and therefore leading to divisions in the society. The study reveals that the conditions of the current political context at the intersection of local and 'geopolitical',

international, have led to the domination of a master narrative about nation-building, memory, and identity as the primary way of making sense of the remembrance activities. These conditions under which remembrances take place produces a particular story of Moldova, as a struggling nation because of its divided identities with history and memory as part of this process. The stories about divided elites and identities constitute a master narrative, which various actors draw upon when making meaning of various events, including commemorative practices. 'Identity' emerges as a critical way of explaining various historical narratives in Moldova, an explanatory category, and a master narrative on its own when discussing memory. Commemorative practices around May 9th and the history of the Second World War in Moldova emerge through the interviews as narratives, which are the 'divisive' instruments of mobilizing various 'identities' in Moldova by the elites and political parties.

The production and operation of such a master narrative is a political process and has implications for the way society makes meaning of its present-day struggles and imagines a future. This final chapter traces the connections between memory, identity, and nation-building while using a narrative lens to show how such a master narrative restricts opportunities for more productive engagement with memory. The discussion suggests that the thinking about history and memory and its often-made connection to identity needs to be explored further.

Master Narrative

Master narratives refer to a set of stories in our culture, which provide “summaries of socially shared understandings,” argues Nelson (2001, 6) in her book about narrative identities. These narratives provide us with sets of stocks, plots, and recognizable characters that are then used in making meaning of the experiences we have and in justifying our actions (ibid). Master narratives are often the source of shared norms, and for this reason, they hold moral authority and play a role of informing our “moral intuitions” and moral choices (Nelson 2001, 6). These master narratives make communal life understandable for their members through socially shared understandings (ibid). According to Nelson (2001), identities are constructed using stories that draw from these master narratives. These narratives, through stocks and plots, characterize groups of people in a certain way, cultivating and maintaining rules of behavior. Master narratives also position state, society, and communities in a particular power relation prescribing roles and responsibilities, providing and limiting opportunities for thought and action (Nelson, 2001). The narrative stipulates certain power arrangements with regards to various groups in society, defining ‘victims,’ ‘oppressors,’ ‘good,’ ‘bad,’ and other categories. Through such positioning, master narratives also stipulate specific power arrangements, which might lead to the domination of one group and the oppression of another. Although they do not need to be oppressive, argues Nelson (2001), they can be and often are. Because of their organic nature of development and change, and their worldview constituting character, master narratives are also very resistant to change and have the ability to maintain a stronghold on systems of meaning (Nelson, 2001).

In the case of Moldova, the master narrative of ‘memory as divisive’ and as an impediment to building a collective identity as a basis for nation-building, provides a framework or shared set of meanings in which both the state, political elites, and communities and citizens operate. Practices of commemorations in Moldova in recent years and the ways political elites instrumentalized memory have, over the decades, created conditions and strengthened the master narrative in which the memory is seen as divisive for the society. It is important to note that in the interviews, the concept of ‘divided’ is set distinct from ‘diverse’ or ‘divergent’ interpretations of history and has prescribed negative meaning. The story about memory as being divisive for identity draws from the master narrative that puts responsibility for group identity cohesion in the production of official narratives (by the political elites). Collective memory as an essential constituting factor in developing cohesiveness is an underlying assumption in this narrative, and power for ‘establishing’ and promoting this one collective ‘identity’ is assigned to the ‘state’ or political elites. In such positioning, master narrative normalizes and through that also regulates certain norms of behavior and identities (Nelson 2001, 164). In the master narrative, the focus becomes on stories that regulate behavior or identities in certain conditions (Nelson, 2001). The conditions themselves are ignored. In this case, the narrative stipulates how elites act when it comes to using memory to mobilize and how elites react when the public responds.

‘Common Identity’ for Nation-Building

One of the narratives circulating in Moldova that helps perpetuate the master narrative is the ‘narrative of a failing state/nation’ due to the country’s lack of common, or as it was often referred to during my research, ‘consolidated’ identity. During the time I spent in Moldova, I became aware of these discussions among academic, intellectual, and political circles, and it also emerged in the interviews. In this narrative, Moldova is already characterized as a country that is at a disadvantage or ‘failing’ because a common identity has not emerged. This central notion about the essential element needed for nation-building can be traced to various conditions which have led to the production of this narrative, which has also become the primary lens through which memory is evaluated in Moldova.

Conditions for Narrative Production

The narrative about identity and nationhood is anchored in the recent history of nation-building in Moldova. After establishing independence after the collapse of the Soviet-Union, Moldova, along with other newly emerged republics, began rejecting Soviet constructs of identity, and elites began inventing new traditions as a process of state-building. The emergence of new republics was accompanied by tensions and, at times, violent conflict, such as in the case of Moldova, the Transnistrian conflict in 1992. The contexts in which the divisions across ethnic, religious, language cleavages, which were simultaneously produced and at the same time suppressed by Soviet rule, created additional challenges for nation-building. Chapter four already outlined the cultural

policies and Soviet nationalist policies implemented in Moldova throughout its history. These histories of being subject to one or another country's (Romania or Russia) cultural and identity policies are part of the stories which constitute the master narrative. Also, after independence, the politics of identity became and remained a dominant discourse in party politics. Much of the discussion in the scholarship discussed in Chapter four highlights identity politics and the role of historical narratives in Moldova, and the disagreements which persisted among the elites on the issue of identity following the independence from the Soviet Union (Mitrasca 1994; Tulbure 2003; Dumitru 2008; King 2012; Cusco 2012; Iglesias 2013, 2015; Suveica 2017). Moldova's location at the nexus of and its relationship with Romania, the West, and Russia also contributes to the narrative about the need for a collective identity for a successful state. History and memory have been entangled in these processes, when political parties promote one or another historical policy, and via political, academic, and other connections with Russia and Romania.

Historical experiences and the identity politics prevalent in Moldova's political life created conditions where history and memory are examined through the lens of nation-building. Given the relative youth of Moldovan state and the conditions mentioned above, it is not surprising that state-building or nation-building has been the main focus of interest to scholars, experts, and politicians and that history and memory also have been entangled in these discussions. As Cash (2007, 588) points out, "National identity has been the single most studied aspect of politics in the Republic of Moldova since the country gained independence in 1991. Most analysts and scholars have been compelled to

structure their accounts of recent political life by asking the question—why did Moldova fail to unite with Romania when it seceded from the Soviet Union?”

Additional factors contributed to the development of discourses about divisions. Moldova’s move towards the European Union with the signing of the Association Agreement in 2014, while continuing economic and political relations with Russia in the context of growing global tensions between Russia and the West, put Moldova in a precarious position balancing its foreign policy. The idea of unification with Romania, advanced by certain groups, although supported by a relatively small percentage of the population, was another factor. These conversations supported the master narrative of divisions predominant in the country. Corruption and inefficient governance or the struggle of transition are also part of the stories, which provide alternative frameworks for explaining the present-day situation. However, the narrative about divisions and nation-building among the elites remains one of the ways of discussing the present day context when considering the future of the country from the state-building perspective and in terms of alliances with its neighbors, be it the West, the European Union or Russia.

The discussion of nation-building in Moldova and the process needed to carry it out can be related to the scholarship on post-Soviet nation-building (Isaacs et al. 2017). According to the review of the literature on the topic (Isaacs et al. 2017), nation-building in the post-Soviet context carries out elements of Brubaker’s (2011) ‘nationalizing’ process by which strengthening and empowering of the ‘core nation’ in a bounded community leads to state-building. According to Brubaker (2011, 1788), the strategies of

‘nationalizing’ is the legacy of the Soviet Union’s policy of constructing nations which “distinguished between the core, state-bearing nation or – titular nation as it came to be called in post-Soviet studies, and the total population of the republic. It also fostered and legitimated the sense of titular ‘ownership’ of or primacy within each republic.” In this view, the ruling elites promote the titular national majority through language policy, symbols, and cultural reproduction, at the expense of ethnic minorities (ibid). According to Brubaker (2011, 1808), the concept of nationhood is based on “deeply institutionalized ethnocultural understanding...” and the state is seen as needing to take action to strengthen the core nation which is “in a weak or unhealthy condition, and that its very survival is at stake.”

Other scholars pointed out how the nationalizing idea and focus on ethnocultural is positioned in stark contrast in scholarship with “Western-inspired civic nationalism, where all nationalities are assimilated and develop a common loyalty and identity.” (Isaacs et al. 2017, 7). The idea of a ‘civic’ nation is understood as a “political community constituted by a commitment to civic values whereby citizens possess equal rights and responsibilities.” It presents a more flexible ‘identity,’ allowing for changing of the values, as compared to the difficulties in changing language and collective memory (Isaacs et al. 2017, 4).

With regards to ‘nationalizing,’ which has been used with varying results in other post-Soviet states such as Ukraine or Kazakhstan, there is a consensus among scholars and experts deliberating this issue in the context of Moldova, that the process has not gone smoothly (Cash 2007). The scholarship on the topic, discussed in Chapter 4, agrees

that identity politics and the contestation around the issue of unification with Romania have animated the political life in Moldova since independence. Cash (2007, 594) argues that it is the historical memories of “previous state rule, previous nation-building projects and policies, and “traditional” life, as practiced and experienced in villages,” as well as the diversity of the population, which led to resistance against state rule and creation of the single ethnic-based nation-state.

At the same time, those groups in favor of the titular nation model strongly resisted the emergence of a discussion on the notion of civic identity in Moldova. While there have been attempts by some groups in civil society to champion this idea, it had not been picked up and advanced by the political parties. For example, during my time in the field, one of the Moldovan think-tanks conducted a survey and published a report discussing the possibility of civic identity for Moldova only to come under severe attacks in news and social media. A memory scholar in Moldova discussing the idea of ‘civic’ identity, told me that “this idea does not get a lot of support in the society.” Thus, the debates at the political level have remained primarily at the ‘Moldovanist’ versus ‘Romanianist’ domains.

The scholarship with nationalizing state approach focuses on elite-led processes in the post-Soviet nation-building and examines this process through the lens of consolidation of power (Isaacs et al., 2017). In this view, no matter what kind of nation-building, whether based on titular nationalism or on ‘civic’ multi-ethnic identity that was being advanced, the ‘nationalizing’ efforts are linked to political legitimation by the elites (ibid). In other words, the elites remain central to leading and implementing these

processes. As the competing political parties promoted and debated various interpretations of Moldovan statehood in the last two decades (and its corresponding identities), the master narrative that emerged positioned the state and the political elites central to the process of identity and nation-building. This elite-centered approach has become part of the discussion of identity and nation-building in Moldova.

Narrative Dynamics

When it comes to the case of Moldova, the narrative about memory mirror the discussions of elite-led processes of identity politics. It is through this lens that commemorations and discussions of history are seen as divisive and ‘politicization’ by elites as damaging for the country. In the model of elite-driven identity-building processes, language, culture, and citizenship policies (Isaacs et al., 2017) also include ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm, 1983) and various myths with their various interpretations of history. History and memory emerge in these discussions as one of the instruments in elite-led processes of nation-building and state-building. Commemorations are framed as not only remembrances of the past, but as “legitimization of the politically desired future” (Papadakis 2003, 254). Through such selective remembering or forgetting, which sequence and construct events in a particular order, a particular image of a nation is created (Anderson 1991, 187–206). Forgetting or selective memory as a choice of constructing a few historical events is concerned not just with the past but also with the future. However, in the case of Moldova, the engagement of the political elites

with memory prevents the ‘nationalizing’ as this process of nation-building is not centralized by the state but advanced by competing political parties.

The master narratives which legitimize some actors over others reveal relations of power in a society that are embedded in institutional and social practices that provide conditions for certain behaviors and actions. In this case, the narratives about memory in Moldova reveal the relationships where elites are the ones positioned in a power-relations with a society where they can ‘manipulate’ the society through their actions and commemorations. From a narrative perspective, the stories, characters, plots, and episodes are strung together to create the story, and they position politicians as being able to manipulate the public and divide society. This narrative not only positions identity groups against each other, but it also assigns a dominant role to the political elites in creating cohesiveness and building a country. Their lack of will and desire to do it is what is detrimental to Moldova. In this context, the narrative does not assign moral agency to the citizens or regular people. Even as the public is characterized as not morally responsible for the conflict that is happening in Moldova, they are also not seen as moral agents with more complex identities that could take alternative actions, make different meanings and respond to different policies and solutions. In other words, ‘real memory’ of regular people, which was distinguished in the stories from ‘politicized’ division-causing memory, is positioned in the master narrative as less powerful. Through such positioning, the master narrative becomes oppressive as it constructs a world that limits the moral agency and the actions of the marginalized group, which in this story is Moldovan society. The master narratives which circulate in any given conflict or setting

create conditions where some stories close avenues for development, create and perpetuate a conflict or prevent transformation and the evolution of narratives.

It is important to note here that while the master narrative places citizens in the position of marginalized and powerless, the narrative is not merely an instrument to be used by the political elites to manipulate and dominate (Cobb 2013). While the narratives can be instruments in the hands of powerful, and in the case of Moldova, elites, the political process of narrative erasure, marginalization is not simply a process at the hands of elites. Referring to Bordieu's habitus (1977), Cobb (2013, 9) argues that "the narratives are in and of themselves provide the habitus that affords and constrains what is possible."

In Moldova, if we take contestation between various political groups advocating for one or another political agenda, political parties themselves talk about 'identity conflict narrative' referring how the short-term interests of politicians who politicize history and other issues create divisions in Moldova across identity lines. This leads to Moldova's problems in economic and other terms, with its often struggling institutions, corruption and other problems which are talked about. In studying narratives of elites in making sense of the past, we must pay attention to the narrative itself, and see that the individuals interviewed in this study are themselves telling stories in a conflict context, and they are narrating a conflict. It can be argued that conflict, in this case, is not simply something that is happening between elites and the differences between the groups, but "it is constituted by the very narratives that are mobilized in the description of the conflict – it is created as people work, through narrative, to account for their action, the

actions of others, and the consequences of those actions, over time.” (Cobb 2013, 49).

The conflict here, according to Cobb (2013, 49), can be understood “in terms of narratives told and retold by parties to the conflict.” If memory and history are positioned as dangerous instruments of politicization and division, this narrative closes off any opportunities and openings for a different kind of engagement about historical experiences. Narrative compression, the dynamic that happens in a conflict, is in process simplifying the story and cutting off opportunities, which will allow for the more complicated story to emerge.

The master narrative in this context regulates the stories which are told, leading to institutionalized practices and discourses that restrict new avenues for social change and development. Conflict narrative also restricts how peace and conflict resolution can be explored in particular settings. In the case of state and society relations, narratives can stipulate a power arrangement with regards to the state and the society, positioning communities, citizens versus government in particular ways, prescribing them various roles and responsibilities, or depriving them of moral agency. Through the stories, positions and identities are regulated, and ‘state’ and ‘political elites’ are positioned more legitimate and powerful while ‘society’ is positioned as powerless. Nelson (2001) argues that such positioning of the master narrative of one group as ‘powerless’ is one of the ways master narratives work to create and maintain the oppression of the group. Cobb (2013, 62), drawing on Althusser’s (1971) concept of ‘interpellation,’ argues that discourse operates as the “apparatus,” producing a “given way of being in the world. Narrative constitutes the structure in which and by which they are positioned and “we

embody the narrative that calls us in the way that we comply, fitting ourselves into a role, into a moral landscape, into a line of action and a set of characters.” (Cobb 2013, 62). In the case of Moldova, different actors are interpellated by the master narrative which positions them in a particular relationship between state and community of citizens where the state and the elite have the responsibility and the power over the development of the country which can they do either by dividing or uniting through use of memory. This interpellation deprives other actors, civil society, citizens, a community organization of moral agency to participate in the conversation about memory and collective developing alternative meanings of difference and unity.

Such dynamics of the master narrative linking memory to divided identities obstructs real opportunities for dialogue and different kind of engagement with the public outside of official or party-led commemorations. Memory becomes a topic that is difficult for engagement. It is, therefore, essential to examine the narratives which maintain conditions under which the restricted meanings and simplified discussion are maintained while closing off opportunities for further discussion. Examining notions of collective memory and identity, central concepts emplotted in this master narrative can help us better understand narrative dynamics. Having come to the intersection of memory and collective identity – an explanatory frame that emerged from the interviews, and which is of relevance to the conflict resolution field, the next section briefly touches on key discussions about identity and memory.

Collective Memory and Identity

The narrative lens on the processes of memory production reveals that contestations about memory, which had been playing out in Moldova's political life, are storied in a way that positions difference as unfavorable and produces a category of 'identity' needed for a prosperous country. Here, the master narrative in a conflict setting is at work, creating a binary of 'good' or 'bad' 'identity' when it comes to how society should be. As a result, the story about 'identity' becomes simplified, one-dimensional, and deprived of complexity. In the context of the master narrative, any discussion or difference of opinion voiced about memory that underpins 'identities' is framed as 'bad' and divisive. From this perspective, the master narrative creates a category of identity that is considered 'good' when it is 'consolidated.' This consolidation is necessary for nation-building and the success of the country. Although the complexity of memory and diversity of ethnic and language groups in Moldova are often acknowledged and assessed in a positive light in the interviews, the master narrative recontextualizes it. It assimilates any contradictory meanings into the master narrative of 'common identity.' In this narrative, 'difference' is positioned as 'divisive' and negative, and 'commonality' and 'agreement' are positive.

In the case of Moldova, several factors create conditions that are favorable to maintaining this master narrative. The recent history of identity politics, contestations around foreign policy agendas, the context of struggling social and economic conditions for citizens, creates the conditions under which the master narrative is strengthened and maintained.

A look at the history of commemorative activities in Moldova shows that political elites, throughout its recent history, did try to instrumentalize history and memory in promoting particular identities. This research project also demonstrated through the study of commemorations the interconnectedness between various historical narratives promoted by the parties and their political agendas, which are tied to particular 'identities.' However, the study also demonstrates that the employment of memory and commemorations in 'identity' projects, as the stories describe, does not automatically lead in Moldova to the production of one collective memory and identity. The contestation is not only on the 'elite' level but generates mobilization from the public as the crowds attending commemorations demonstrate. Although this mobilization is present, and certain 'trauma' of the war, to use Volkan (2001), exists, the meaning of history remains different for different groups. The absence of one collective memory and one collective identity with its 'chosen traumas and glories' (Volkan 2001) requires further investigation of historical narratives and meanings in Moldovan society. The narrative of memory in Moldova reveals the discrepancy between elite-level historical narratives and the complexity and contradiction of the population's experiences during the Second World War.

Complexity and Multiplicity of Memory in Moldova

The benefits of the ethnographic approach allow seeing the narrative landscape in all its complexity. Collective memory and 'cohesive and unified identity' narratives emerged through my research as main frames of meaning-making for commemorations in

the interviews. At the same time, an ethnographic approach created opportunities for other stories to emerge as well, revealing the complexity of the narrative landscape in Moldova when it comes to history and memory. My research did not specifically focus on family stories or personal experiences. Still, more often than not, when starting the conversation, people spoke of their family experiences and family stories at the beginning of the interviews.

Personal stories about family experiences told during the interviews, served to describe the complexity of the memory of the war and remembrance traditions in the families. Given that the ages of informants varied from the 20s to 60s, most of them had direct experiences with Soviet period commemorations and personally knew the generation in the family directly affected by the war. The stories about the family experiences were diverse and more often narrated the experiences of a region that became a battlefield during the war between German/Romanian and Soviet armies. Often, these stories described brothers from the same family who served in two different armies, Romanian and Soviet armies because of their age and the timing of mobilization. Others were stories about the same person being conscripted in two different armies (Romanian and Soviet) or grandparents who served in the Soviet army but only narrowly or by chance avoided the other. The generation of those in their 30s and 40s also talked about divergent stories they heard from their own and their spouses' parents and grandparents, which had emerged once they had married. Through telling family stories and speaking of personal experiences, informants drew attention to the complexity of memory in

Moldova. By framing memory as ‘private’ or ‘real’ explicit distinction between ‘elites’ engagement with memory versus memory of ‘regular people’ was made.

These stories also demonstrated the complexity of how people related to various periods of history in Moldova. A Romanian speaker, a civil society expert, told me about his family, which always, even during the Soviet period, had been anti-Soviet. When it comes to memory, he said, “my grandfather, he was in the Russian Army. His older brother was in the Romanian army.” He said the story was not told so clearly in the family in detail, “but we always had this idea that two brothers fought in two different armies, and theoretically, at some point, they were in opposing sides.” Despite his grandfather being mobilized into the Soviet Army, he says, “his family never bought into the Russian narrative about the war, even though his grandmother is Russian.” This story is a perfect example of complexity that is present in many families in Moldova demonstrating that people’s relations to events and politics is determined by multitude of factors.

In another interview, CG, a former member of the parliament from a right-center party in her 40s, who is a Romanian-speaker, argues that the region has a very complicated history. “There are different stories, and every village is different,” she says, “because there are villages when the German army stopped and villages where the Soviet army stopped. As a result, people experienced this period differently. She, too, talked about her grandfather being mobilized into both Romanian and Soviet armies during the war. In her family, the remembrance was not about the Great Patriotic War. When she was younger, she says, “Grandfather didn't talk to me about Soviet holiday. He would

say the Russians fought, and the Germans fought. And we were here, and first, we were taken to the Romanian Army and then to the Russian army.” This story, too, is illustrative of the complexity of the stories in the families that are being passed to the younger generation. Even though these stories represent the complexities within families, a different part of the country also had different experiences. AJ, a public official who is a Russian speaker, when he brought up his family’s memory of the war, told me the implications of such complexity. “My great uncle who was mobilized into Romanian Army and later to the Soviet Army,” notes AJ adding that “this is the history of the region and any efforts to identify it as one clear narrative is not going to work.”

Another informant, when discussing war experiences, also addressed the complexity of history here and a lack of one story. “My grandfather was born in the Romanian kingdom, and his dual identity was well developed,” adding that “he, the grandfather, felt at the same time as Romanian and as Moldovan and would say that ‘I will forever stay the person of this kingdom.’ BK thinks that such complex memory is the reason that “even at the level of persons who experienced this first-hand, there is not one common position.” BK adds, “the experience of the war was different also depending on where they lived and when.”

Often, informants also talked about what came immediately after the Second World War and their families being affected by the deportation, which followed during the Stalin era soon after the war was over. As one informant told me when telling a story of his friend’s uncle who served in both Romanian and Soviet armies, “this is the fundamental story about the region, the effort to put this story into a straight line does not

work.” Continuing, he tells me about that one folk tale in Moldova “about how good it was when the Romanians left, and the Russians have not arrived yet. This phrase may be a folk tale he says, but there is deep meaning here because before and after in history, there are many contradictions.” The suggestion that there is a common understanding among people that different periods and rules brought different types of hardships for the region was also echoed in other interviews.

Other times, the stories about the war experiences were told to explain the commemorative practices in the families. Here too, experiences varied not only from family to family but also within families. In one case, my informant’s grandfather had staunchly opposed to the Soviet Union his entire life and would not ever participate in state-sanctioned commemorations. However, every year on May 9, he would put a nice shirt and a tie on and pay tribute privately at his home. In another story, I heard about the importance of victory day commemoration. For example, a Moldovan memory scholar, I interviewed, told me that a sniper from the Romanian army killed his grandfather, while he was assisting the Soviet army to cross the Dniester river. To his grandmother, the questioning of commemorations of Victory Day is very personal and offensive. But she is Moldovan/Romanian speaker, not a Russian speaker, he added. These stories, too, showed that despite the prevalence of master narrative about victory day, people’s experiences and memory of war are varied and complex. Having served or having family members fight in either side, did not always align with the perceptions about Romania or the Soviet Union, or resulted in a particular ‘identity.’ Instead, the purpose of sharing memories through family stories was to go beyond the simplified narratives of

commemoration today and were told as a way of illustrating the complexity of people's experiences. In most interviews, the family stories were told with the purpose of showing the 'politicization' of commemorations, by showing the diverse and, at times, conflicting experiences in the region.

The complexity of the population's experience and the scale of loss during the war was also positioned as one of the reasons the memory of the Second World War remained relevant. A claim I repeatedly heard about the continuity of the memory of the Second World War was about the significant loss and the impact of the violence on every family in the region. The 'permanence' of the memory was rooted in the direct and complex experience of violence in the region by the population. The tragedy of loss and sanctity of the memories of those who died is what made memory so persistent, was what served as protection from forgetting. This aspect was highlighted in most interviews. The private or sometimes called 'real' memory emerged from the distinction of the politicized memory and commemorative activities organized by the politicians in pursuit of short-term political, electoral interests. In making the distinction of 'real' memory, the intentions of commemorating by the public were placed outside of the political goals of the political elites and parties. The intention of those who turn out to commemorations was seen as 'non-politicized' and genuine efforts to honor memories of lost family members.

Commemoration-as-a-tradition in Moldova from the 1960s was another frame through which mobilization was explained. This tradition was rooted not only in the habit of remembering through May 9 activities but also in need to have joyful, celebratory

calendar days, which were mostly absent in Moldova. In one story related to the older generation, Victory Day also provided continuity with the past in a sense that it remained 'true' even after the immense changes took place with the fall of the Soviet Union and the establishment of a new country. In the new political and social order that emerged, the Soviet ideology rejected and condemned, the commemoration of Victory Day, remained according to this story, the only thing that remained true and 'right' of the past.

The stories also brought forward discussions about the intergenerational transmission of memory. The data from the interviews showed that the stories passed from the older generation to the next helped maintain the diversity and complexity of the narrative of the Second World War. It is only in the public domain in the discussions between elites when the conversations became somewhat simplified. As one informant in her mid-30s, told me commenting on the intersection of memory and identity in Moldova, the choices were presented to her were unacceptable as despite understanding the complexity of the period of Second World War and what followed after through her family's stories. Now she feels that in order to participate in the conversation about history, she needs to choose between 'liberation' or 'occupation' narratives, none of which are acceptable to her. "That is why I choose to be European," she added, expressing concern over passing time and the disappearance of complexity that is found in family stories.

People like me cannot find myself in any of the narratives of memory and identity, so that is why I chose to be European because here I cannot choose. This is my generation that has a living memory. But for my daughter, she will not have it, because she will not learn stories of my grandparents and for her the stories that will be there as reality.

Her words express worries about how the passage of time and the passing of generations that directly experienced the war remains a threat, erasing diverse and more complicated stories about the war, leading to further strengthening of the master narrative about memory and identity in Moldova. These stories about lived experiences of the war that continue to be told in families run in parallel to the master narrative about ‘competing memory and identities’ in Moldova. While the complexity is acknowledged, family stories remain marginalized, and the master narrative about divided identities becomes the main interpretative frame for engagement with memory in Moldova. As a young Moldovan scholar told me in the interview, the stories also get polished or rehearsed over time. “We have to understand, many of the personal stories, they are already polished... They are re-narrated in the context of what has been happening around this issue.”

What About ‘Identity’?

One of the reasons for my choice of Moldova as a case came from my personal and professional experience of living and working there and regularly coming across categories that described people, such as ‘pro-Romanian,’ ‘pro-Russian,’ ‘pro-European’ and so on. While I do not question that these categories might reflect a set of preferences when it comes to finding pragmatic and quick ways of explaining one’s language, ethnicity, and political preferences, as a conflict resolution scholar and practitioner the simplicity of these descriptions in the face of complexities and contradictions I observed both puzzled and frustrated me. It is this questioning of various categories describing

groups and communities that attracted me to study memory through ethnography and a narrative lens as a way to get beyond the simple explanations and uncover the complexity of narratives circulating in Moldova. It is also for this reason that I did not include 'identity' as a frame of analysis in my research, hoping to avoid having to construct these categories myself in my research. Ironically, 'identity' found me anyway because it was the informants, as well as the conversations circulating in the political spaces that used "identity" as a framework for making sense. So rather than "identity" being an analytic framework for my analysis, it was a core discourse used by people to frame their constructions of commemorations, also anchoring their visions of the future. This discourse of 'identity' kept popping up throughout my field research in multiple ways: when prescribing memory to different groups, when referring to the efforts by the parties to politicize memory, in the interviews as well as the scholarship. This finding itself is important because it points to the persistence of master narrative on identity and memory that regulates meaning-making.

'Identity' frame used by the informants in the interviews, presents challenges in capturing the complexity when used as a frame to describe differences in Moldova. I was confronted by this challenge when attempting to describe and categorize informants during my research. As I described in Chapter 6, various categories describing people were presented, ranging from ethnic, to linguistic, to political as in left or right, to European Union versus Russia preferences, described as 'pro-European' and 'pro-Russian.' These categories in Moldova do not consistently overlap. One can be 'Moldovan/Romanian,' 'Russian-speaking' 'pro-European' or 'Russian-speaking'

‘Jewish pro-unification with Romania,’ and so forth. To complicate the picture even further, while competing identities are hotly debated in politics and among the elites, including the intellectuals and the civil society sector, the surveys and polls reveal that the majority of the population on Moldova agree on identification of their nation and language.

For example, in the 2014 national census, 75.1 percent stated that they were Moldovans, 7.0 percent call themselves Romanian, while further identification divided into minorities such as Gagauz, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Russians (National Bureau of Statistics of Republic of Moldova 2014). This is illuminating from two perspectives: one is that the data on such complex categories such as ‘identity’ needs to be taken with its limitations, especially when presenting limited options. As Ciscel (2005) studying language and identity points out, the census asking for only one native language (or ethnicity) is limited in capturing, for example, the large numbers of mixed ethnicity and “complex linguistic repertoires” of citizens especially from those mixed families, especially in the urban areas (Ciscel 2005, 373). The same study demonstrates that despite the contestations and difficulties in policy implementation to accommodate the multi-lingual needs of the society, the younger generation remains ambivalent towards ethnic-based national identities and persistence of multi-ethnic national identity (Ciscel, 2005). Yet others argue that language divisions are not simply about ethnic identity but also about economic well-being and desired ways of living (Chamberlain-Creanga 2011).

The report compiled by the Institute of Public Policy (IPP) called an Etnobaremeter in the Republic of Moldova (2002), is another example that can help

illustrate the way the public sees the state of inter-ethnic relations. This lens presents an interest when examining the conflict between various ‘identity’ groups in Moldova, as well as ‘identity’ categories used. That the narrative of peaceful coexistence is strong among the population is confirmed in the same survey, which described it as ‘peaceful, cordial, and based on mutual understanding.’ For example, in the survey, Moldovans did not see any potential for an interethnic conflict and characterized the Transnistrian conflict as political and not ethnic. However, the survey showed politicians were perceived as having a primarily negative influence on the relations between ethnic communities, putting the origins of this conflict outside of the communities. In fact, in these surveys conducted on a semi-annual basis since 1998, the concerns about ethnic relations have consistently remained at 2-5 percent while the problems of poverty, unemployment, and prices remained between 20 and 60 percent (Protsyk, 2014). While indeed surveys present certain consistencies in self-reported identity and language categories, which tie to ‘geopolitical’ and other preferences, the categories and labels they produce need to be taken with a grain of salt.

Yet another issue presenting ‘divisions’ in Moldova is in the preferences of the population towards a future in the EU versus nostalgia about the past in the Soviet Union and by the association closer relations with Russia. While differences in surveyed attitudes exist, they often are correlated with age and economic prospects. Language and foreign-policy or, as it is customary to say in Moldova, ‘geopolitical’ preferences of Moldovans diverge when age and generational differences are considered. In a survey conducted in 2010 that explored the questions on memory and experience in the Soviet

Union, the results showed that age was the most significant differentiating variable in the responses. 40 percent of respondents preferred the Soviet system to Western-style democracy were middle-aged or older. According to the report, the shared socialist experience ran so deeply that even those who were integrated into Western structures continued being nostalgic for the Soviet Union and support the Communist Party of Moldova. In this analysis, age and material well-being tended to be strongly related, with older people tending to be poorer and younger people richer.

Further analysis in the report revealed that poorer people tend to prefer the Soviet system, while more affluent people, the Western democratic model. These responses make sense when considering how only a few have benefitted economically from the transition from the Soviet system. The economic factors that surface in the examples above cannot be ignored in the case of Moldova that continues to struggle in providing basic social and economic benefits to its population. For example, data on migration can provide another lens when examining the binary categories of ‘pro-Russian’ and ‘pro-European,’ which I often hear in Moldova. Migration is both illustrative of the economic conditions, and it can also help explain the practical consequences and importance of ‘geopolitical’ alliances given the emigration from Moldova goes both to Russia and the European Union. Between two censuses conducted in Moldova in 2004 and 2014, the population decreased from 3.3 million to 2.8 million with emigration from Moldova is the eleventh highest in the world (Liller, 2018). According to the report of the International Labor Organization (2018) conducted based on Moldova’s Bureau of Statistics, the total number of migrant workers constitute 16,5 percent of the working-age

population. In contrast, another 5.6 percent of the population reported intent to leave Moldova for work. Russia, according to the report, was the most popular destination, hosting 69 percent of all migrants. With over million Moldova's being granted Romanian/EU citizenship, the EU labor market presents better income sources than Moldova (Italy is the second popular hosting 14.3 percent). Migration of a sizable number of populations to either Russia and the European Union and the dependence of their family members on the remittances must be considered when examining attitudes towards the EU or Russia.

The purpose of these survey data I outlined in this section is not to empirically explain diversity and difference that exists in Moldova around various issues such as language, or ethnicity but rather highlight and put in context some key defining categories which are polled and inform parties and public opinion on these issues. It is also an attempt to bring forward present-day questions and point to considerations about the future that are facing the citizens of Moldova. As such, they introduce more nuance into the context and raise questions about the simplified narrative about 'identity' or 'geopolitical divisions,' which have become the predominant way of discussing the history, memory, and differences in the society. As Cash (2007, 605) argues based on her ethnographic study of village, rural and regional identities, while collective memory remains central to the social life, social identity in Moldova is embedded in folkloric activities "emblematic of broader patterns of social identity and memory in Moldova." Cash (2007, 606) questions the ethnonational identity as the only lens that is implicated in the political activity and argues that the most dominant feature of political life in

Moldova has been since the 1980s “the principled mistrust of the “state” as a political institution and actor. According to her, the focus of the political parties on ‘national identities’ does not automatically lead to the legitimacy of these issues with the public, which might not be prepared to recognize the legitimacy of any state (ibid). ‘Identity’ frames and the role of the state or the political elites in advancing this notion, therefore, need to be carefully considered by the scholars and researchers engaged in Moldova.

Conclusions and Ways Forward

The narrative lens reveals how the memory of the Second World War becomes implicated in the master narrative of identity and nation-building. This master narrative emerges from the study occupying center stage as a system of meaning that links memory, identity, and nation-building in Moldova. Indeed, Moldova’s case shows that when the dominance of memory, identity, and nation-building narrative create conditions under which certain historical narratives and identities become dominant while other stories and multiplicity of memory are ignored. The research also shows through the ethnographic approach that despite the dominance of master narratives, the narrative landscape is complex, but the stories containing complexities and contradictions are marginalized. The complexity that exists in Moldova in history, memory, and various definitions of identity propels us to further examine the role of memory as identity constituting and instrumental in nation-building processes.

As such, the master narrative about memory in Moldova reveals two important points that I would like to underline here, which has implications for further engagement

with these areas in Moldova and, more broadly, from a conflict resolution perspective. First, even as the political elites' intentions are seen as short-sighted, and in their short-term political interests, the narrative still positions them with legitimacy and power to develop and promote official historical narrative. While stories draw distinctions between 'real' memory of people and 'politicized' memory advanced by the elites, the citizens, the public is positioned as voting based on these politicized memories and identities. This reveals a paradox where on the one hand, the elites are seen as inauthentic in their use of history for political interests but are still in the master narrative positioned with the power and responsibility of conveying history. The stories and the characters are anchored in the power structure that is 'top-down.' Such positioning of power relations vis-à-vis engagement with memory, history, and developing a 'common identity' as narrative posits is problematic as it draws boundaries around who can and cannot participate in these processes. Master narrative acknowledges some actors while obscuring others.

Secondly, the master narrative positions collective or cohesive memory/history and identity essential for Moldova's development and future. In this frame, the formation of such identity is tied to the development of official historical policy that would accommodate and unify groups with different identities and interpretations of history. In this narrative, only through such harmony and removal of difference and debate, such an outcome would be achieved. The memory is seen then not as an on-going and meaning-making process but a process that has closure. It is from this perspective that memory is seen as divisive foreclosing opportunities for further discussion.

Narrative analysis reveals, that while commemorations and remembrances are and will always be utilized by the elites in advancing political agendas or states in advancing official historical policy, the attention to the complexity of memory and narrative dynamics allows us to see that it is not the experience or trauma of the history itself but the ways of thinking about history, society, democracy, and leadership as well as notions of nationhood that is preventing for different discussions and more complex narratives to emerge. Memory tied to identities produce a more simplified understanding of identities and memory in Moldova while hindering alternative meanings. This ensures that master narrative about memory and identities remains intact, preventing a different kind of conversation about history, one involving engagement in relation to the present dilemmas, issues, etc. that are important to the society. This maintains conditions for entrenched and inclusive identities and for the narrative dynamics in a conflict where the reflection and evolution of narratives are not possible. Denoted to the area of causing conflicts, it prevents a different kind of conversations from emerging.

Cobb (2013) argues that a conflict narrative contains judgments, but they are determinative as they produce certainty. As such, conflict narratives “do not support deliberation and dialogue in the public sphere,” relying instead on institutionalized narratives (Cobb 2013, 38). As a result, in conflict dynamics, the narratives lose their complexity and become dense, “the meaning is consolidated and less accessible for change and transformation.” The master narrative about identities and nations only acknowledges one scenario of development in which the differences of memory are seen as destructive for identity consolidations while obscuring other ways memory is engaging

in society. The master narrative requires that communities produce themselves as victims of the elites and their divided identities. Memory and history are demoted to the domain of politics, and this narrative is preventing other engagement with history to emerge. Categories of 'politicizing' instantly frame the discussion as inauthentic, closing the pathways for different engagement with memory. If politicization and identity narrative take hold in this environment, it is impossible to produce the citizens as actors with an agency who are not always being manipulated by the politicians. This produces a society with reduced subjectivities vulnerable to manipulation of the state. Such a structuration process creates conditions in the narrative that the plot is unique in conflict narrative because negative outcomes are always caused by the other. As such, in the narrative about memory and identity in Moldova, the public and citizens do not have moral agency and transformation, and it is meant to be repeated. It is a narrative of conflict and also about conflict.

Looking beyond the master narrative and examining the ways and conditions in which the production of the master narrative takes place and anchors all conversations about history while restricting the construction of alternative meanings and narratives can help understand potential ways into facilitating the creation of more complex and thicker historical narratives. The case of Moldova and this study from this perspective presents a useful case for conflict resolution field through which the role of memory and conflict can be explored.

Limitations

Like many projects, this project only tells us a particular version of the story about Moldova. Consistent with my effort in this chapter to pay attention to complexity, it is important to note that the study mostly focused on the commemorations from the political party perspective and included the group of people who constitute the elites in Moldova. My location in Chisinau, the capital, and interaction through the relationships established over four and a half years of my living, working and conducting research, repeatedly put me in contact and conversation with the elites. It is primarily their perspectives that inform the study. To further explore the complexity of memory of the Second World War and how it interacts with various issues today, more research needs to be conducted with various groups and in various locations in Moldova to trace the narratives of memory.

Secondly, the timing of the research provides us with a glance at that particular time in history. Following my field research, precisely a year later, I witnessed what was named a 'silent' revolution when following the parliamentary elections in 2019, Socialist Party and DA and PAS coalition from two right parties, went into an unlikely alliance to defeat the Democratic party. Moreover, much-discussed 'geopolitical' differences and 'exclusive identities' were put aside both by domestic but also international actors such as the EU, Russia, and the United States to encourage cooperation and bring this unlikely alliance to life. For a while, the master narrative of 'divided identities' and 'geopolitics' revealed itself merely as that, a narrative that holds captive the institutionalized practices, relationships and produces identities, but does not represent the whole story. Therefore,

this research project on memory in Moldova, which captures the dynamics between two competing parties, is representative of the dynamics of that unique time. Considering that attention to context when studying memory in Moldova was repeatedly emphasized by the interviewees, this needs to be taken into account when reading this study.

Implications for Conflict Resolution

The study of the production of master narratives about memory in Moldova suggests implications for the role of history and memory in conflict and conflict transformation. For the conflict resolution field, concerned with conflicts, addressing divergent historical narratives as important factors in forming identities and affecting relationships between groups and societies are central. From the field's perspective, the case can help us see how the production, circulation, and performance of certain narratives of history can give rise to more marginalization and stories about 'divided societies' or 'failing nations' or, instead, contribute to the evolution of the conflict creating a healthier social world where complex and multiple narratives can flourish. The contrast of complexity of memory and identities in Moldova against the simplified coherent narrative about identities and nation-building that this study revealed call us to explore the ways conflict resolution field engages in how memory and identity contribute or help resolve conflicts. The case shows that in addition to looking at history and memory through the notions of collective identities, 'traumas', and collective memories, it may also be illuminating to examine under which conditions particular narratives of memory and identity are produced and can help transform conflicts.

As a field concerned with group identities, and their interaction with conflict, Moldova's case also raises questions for approaches to how collective memories and collective identities are shaped and interact in conflict. Approaches in the conflict resolution field that place identities at the center of group conflicts, as connected to collective memories and shared traumas, are limited in understanding the current memory landscape in Moldova (Burton 1990; Kellman 2001; Volkan 2001; Tint 2010). Following the usual analysis based on collective memory and identities, one would undoubtedly come to conclusions that in Moldova, conflicts persist between different identities because of historical trauma experienced by different groups, whether at the hands of the Soviet Army or Romanian/German Army. However, an ethnographic study and a narrative lens on memory in Moldova, allows us to see memory, not as something 'deposited' and existing in the collective consciousness in the shared simplified narrative but instead remains complex in the communities and is an active meaning-making process conducted in social, political and cultural contexts. Also, the case of Moldova, with a society consisting of various ethnic and language groups, despite having been subjected to cultural policies and nation-building processes under various regimes, still does not produce the intended identities. The case challenges the notion of social identity as a stable and internal part of individual self-concept (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identity theory, although it helps understand the ties of social groups to their groups, is limited to taking account of the narrative structures and the meaning-making systems that hold groups captive. Publicly dominant narratives about identities in Moldova stand in stark contrast with the complexity of historical experiences and the diversity that exists in

Moldova. The case calls our attention to how these complex and diverse historical experiences, which continue to exist, are negotiated by the citizens in light of their ongoing present-day struggles and choices they face.

Another interesting finding from the Moldovan case is how it challenges the automatic transgenerational transmission of memory. In the case of Moldova, it is not the transmission of trauma deposited in the collective consciousness and passed to the next generation. Instead, stories from the families helped maintain the complexity of the memory. In Moldova, one collective memory did not emerge, and one collective ‘trauma’ did not form in the collective consciousness as usually assumed by conflict resolution theories. The case, therefore, urges us to question the notions of memory and identity in dominant approaches of conflict resolution and pay attention to performance and politics in studying memory. The narrative lens on the study of memory in Moldova enhances our understanding of memory not as something recalled ‘from within’ an individual and equally shared by the group but rather a social process of making and negotiating meanings which are influenced or determined by social conceptions of our world – “the constituent beliefs and the larger-scale narratives” (Bruner 1990, 59). A narrative lens with attention to the politics of memory, Moldovan case shows that the simplified dichotomous historical narratives about the Second World War are the result of power through which master narrative operates. Ignoring politics when engaging in research or practice with memory in Moldova risks reinforcing dominant narratives and missing the complexity. This means that studies need to expand beyond the way we engage with commemorations and memory through binaries and simplified narratives but see at other

sites and performances through which people use history to construct their social orders (Malkki, 1995). Narrative approaches allow us to trace the narrative performance and its politics in conflict, and by doing this, 'perform' a new approach to memory and history, leading to new forms of practice in conflict resolution. As Malkki (1995) argues based on the study of the memory of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, remembrance, and construction of the past is an on-going process negotiated in the present with regards to the present needs and concerns. In this view, "nationness and historicity are produced and elaborated as a result of exigencies of everyday practice. In other words, collective histories flourish where they have a meaningful, signifying use in the present...." (Malkki 1995, 241-242). To move towards more nuanced analysis and understanding of the role of memory in conflicts, to continue keeping this lens on memory as negotiated meaning is essential.

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