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## **Transitional Justice and the Political 'Work' of Domestic Tourism**

Duncan Light, Remus Crețan and Andreea-Mihaela Dunca

### **Abstract**

The relationship between tourism and transitional justice is little-researched. This paper explores the importance of domestic tourism for enabling citizens to encounter and engage with wider transitional justice projects. This issue is explored with reference to a memorial museum in Romania which interprets political violence and state repression. Semi-structured interviews with 52 domestic tourists were undertaken (using purposive sampling to select participants) and the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Most visitors reported general sightseeing motives for visiting the museum and may not have anticipated engaging with transitional justice messages. However, their engagement went beyond sightseeing in a range of ways. Visitors participated in acts of memory-work, acknowledged the victims of repression, and recognized the core message of transitional justice – “never again”. They also reflected on the relationship between the recent past and the present, and recognized the role of the museum as a resource for future generations. These experiences were shared by those who had lived through state repression and those who had not. The findings indicate that domestic tourism is a meaningful but overlooked context through which citizens can engage with broader transitional justice projects.

**Keywords:** Transitional justice, domestic tourism, memorial museum, Romania

## Introduction

This paper seeks to develop a new perspective on the relationship between tourism and politics by examining the role of domestic tourism within transitional justice projects. Transitional justice (TJ) has its origins in the exit from authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2009) although TJ now embraces political and social change in many other parts of the world. TJ involves a suite of normative processes for rebuilding societies following conflict, repression or large-scale human rights abuses. These are intended to promote peace and reconciliation; provide recognition and reparation for victims of human rights violations; and build democratic societies founded on the rule of law (*ibid*). The ultimate aim of TJ is to ensure accountability for past abuses and prevent their repetition (Lykes & van der Merwe, 2017).

While TJ is now a rapidly-growing interdisciplinary field (*ibid*), academic debate about TJ has largely overlooked tourism. The few studies to consider tourism largely focus on its contribution to economic development in post-conflict situations, particularly the potential to create employment opportunities for local populations, thereby contributing to longer-term peacebuilding (Alluri, 2009; McClanahan, et al., 2019). Similarly, within tourism research there has been scant attention to TJ. One exception (Novelli et al., 2012) examines the role of tourism within post-conflict “fragile” states. With reference to Burundi, they argue that tourism can be a vector for social and economic development after a period of conflict. The promotion of collaborative tourism projects can potentially bring former enemies together with a common business goal, in a way that contributes to reconciliation and healing, and strengthens the resilience of the state.

More broadly, tourism researchers have examined the contribution of tourism to reconciliation in post-conflict settings (Causevic & Lynch, 2011; Kelly & Nkabahona, 2010) reflecting a long-established interest in the relationship between tourism and peace (see Farmaki, 2017; Pratt & Liu, 2016). While these issues are relevant to TJ, these studies have not specifically framed their analysis with reference to TJ. A related research strand has focused on memorial sites that interpret violence or human rights abuses, often (although not always) using the lens of dark tourism (for example, Dalton, 2014; Friedrich & Johnston, 2013; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016; Weaver et al., 2018). However, while some studies have briefly considered issues of

healing or reconciliation at such memorials, they have rarely embraced the broader social and political processes of TJ.

This paper seeks to advance debate by examining domestic tourism as a practice within which citizens encounter and engage with the ideological messages of TJ. In particular, it examines the political “work” which takes place during visits to a memorial site. It does so in a post-authoritarian context with reference to Romania. Like its neighbours in East-Central Europe, Romania experienced a period of communist dictatorship (1947-1989) characterized by systematic repression and numerous human rights abuses. One component of Romania’s post-communist TJ project has been the establishment of a memorial museum in a former prison which has become one of the country’s leading attractions. This paper examines the encounters of domestic tourists within the museum. Our aim is not to determine the “effectiveness” of the museum as an instrument of TJ but rather to understand *how* the museum works (see Duggan, 2012) in contributing to TJ in post-communist Romania. The analysis focuses on a number of key issues pertinent to TJ: acts of remembering; drawing lessons from the past to understand the present and future; and personal transformation.

### **Transitional Justice, Memorialization, and Tourism**

Transitional Justice takes many forms, but common mechanisms can be identified (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2009; Stan, 2013). These include courts and tribunals; truth commissions, intended to compel perpetrators to account for their actions; lustration (removal of officials associated with the previous regime); compensation and reparation, to provide material and symbolic redress for victims of political violence; and reform of the police, army, security services and judiciary. Other measures include opening state archives (Jelin, 2007); educational reform (Stan, 2013); and memorialization projects (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; Brown, 2013). Such measures strive to institutionalize and consolidate a change in political order, creating circumstances which will prevent a return to conflict or authoritarianism.

Initially dominated by legal and judicial initiatives (Mégret, 2010) the scope of TJ has broadened to include non-judicial or symbolic measures. Foremost among these is memorialization. Memory is a contested and divisive issue in societies which have recently experienced political violence (Jelin, 2007; Clark, 2013). The tension about what to remember

and what to forget both shapes (and is shaped by) wider TJ measures (Jones, 2015). A wide range of actors (both internal and external) seek to reconstitute the politics of memory in the aftermath of violence (Jelin, 2007) and a recurring strategy for achieving this is memorialization. This is sometimes initiated by local activism, but is frequently directed by elites (whether within the state authorities, or civil society) who attempt to shape how the recent past is remembered and commemorated.

Memorialization can achieve various goals within social reconstruction projects (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; Mégret, 2010). It represents public acknowledgement of a violent past and a tribute to those who suffered. Memorial sites implicitly act as condemnations of the abuses of a past regime and a reminder for future generations of the need to avoid repeating such violence (Mégret, 2010). In this way they embody the message of “never again”, a tenet of TJ which holds that encountering and remembering past violence is a key way to prevent its repetition (Hamber, 2012; Sodaro, 2018). Memorials can contribute to reconciliation and become focal points for rebuilding social cohesion and civic engagement (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; Brown, 2013). They are also a tangible manifestation of new political values. Furthermore, memorial sites underpin educational initiatives intended to enable young people to understand the recent past (Cole 2017; Light et al., 2019).

Memorialization takes diverse forms (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007) but among the most common is the establishment of permanent museums, frequently located at sites of suffering or atrocity (Violi, 2012). Museums dedicated to mass suffering among civilians multiplied during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century so that the memorial museum has been identified as a distinct new form of commemorative practice (Sodaro, 2018; Williams, 2007). The dramatic growth of such museums reflects the emphasis on memorialization within TJ projects but also a growing willingness among museum professionals to engage with issues of social justice and human rights violations (Simon, 2011), a development termed “human rights museology” (Orange & Carter, 2012, p.260).

Sodaro (2018) argues that memorial museums are underpinned by two assumptions, each central to TJ. The first is a moral obligation to memorialize past suffering. Such museums are intended as a tribute to those who perished, and a source of reparation and empowerment among those who survive (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; Jones, 2015). Accordingly, memorial museums are firmly centred on the victims of violence (Sodaro, 2018). The second assumption

is that such museums have an explicitly pedagogical mission in educating their visitors about past violence (see Williams, 2007). They seek to challenge visitors to “internalize the moral imperative of “never again”” (Sodaro, 2018, p.173) so that they become participants in preventing violence in the future (Hamber, 2012). Memorial museums can also promote civic dialogue, consolidate support for democratic values, and promote greater awareness of the duties of citizenship and the importance of human rights (Bickford, 2009). However, these assumptions are rarely tested and some commentators (Hamber, 2012; Sodaro, 2018) question the contribution of memorial museums in consolidating peace and preventing future violence.

One notable characteristic of memorial museums is that they tend to eschew objectivity and instead directly confront political violence and its implications. While the aftermath of violence and repression is characterized by a struggle about the nature of remembering and forgetting (Jelin, 2007), memorial museums rarely encourage their visitors to engage in open dialogue or debate about the recent past: there is an avoidance of “narratives whose conclusions remain complicated and uncertain” (Simon, 2011, p.433). Instead, the imperative to highlight recent violence and its victims means that such museums tend to present a deliberately one-sided interpretation of the recent past which condemns the former regime and those responsible for violence (Sodaro, 2018). In this sense, memorial museums reflect both the political agendas of their creators, and the needs of the present (Hamber et al, 2010; Jelin, 2007; Jones, 2015; Sodaro, 2018).

Yet, such interpretations of recent events may not enjoy universal acceptance. The stance of a particular museum may alienate some sections of society such as those who were supportive of the former regime, or whose livelihoods depended on it. Similarly, a memorial museum may be silent on the experiences of particular ethnic groups (Clark, 2013). In this context, museums and other memorial sites can become sites for controversy and contestation (Brown, 2013). Consequently, rather than fostering reconciliation, museums (and other memorial sites) can lead to social polarization (Balcells et al., 2018; Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; Clark, 2013). Instead of bringing about social healing, memorial museums may inadvertently keep past divisions alive.

For all the debate about the role of memorial museums within TJ what is often overlooked is that such institutions “work” through tourism. The existence of a memorial museum cannot, of itself, achieve reconciliation, or prevent future violence (Hamber et al., 2010). It is only through

being viewed and experienced that they achieve their objectives (Wilke, 2013). Consequently, many states encourage both their own citizens and international visitors to visit museums dedicated to recent political violence. Furthermore, many TJ educational projects involve school/university groups visiting memorial museums: such educational tourists constitute a significant proportion of visitors at some museums.

Consequently, it is in the context of tourism that many people encounter the key messages of TJ projects. Memorial sites are, therefore, strategic settings for explaining and claiming legitimacy for contemporary initiatives to reckon with the recent past (Balcells et al., 2018). They create opportunities for visitors to explore, negotiate and validate (or, in some cases, contest) these strategies (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; Williams, 2007). However domestic and international tourists will engage with memorial museums in different ways. Domestic tourists may have first-hand experience of violence but may also have had limited exposure to wider elite-led TJ initiatives. Visiting a memorial museum can enable direct contact with the fundamental values of the post-conflict regime and its efforts to address past violence. In this sense such museums contribute to the political socialization of citizens (Brown, 2013). On an individual and societal level, visits to memorial museums can contribute to personal and social catharsis, or broader reconciliation and healing (Causevic & Lynch, 2011). Furthermore, among young people, an educational visit to a memorial museum can contextualize and reinforce the messages about TJ encountered within formal education (Light et al., 2019).

However, many states dealing with past conflict or authoritarian rule also encourage international tourists to visit memorial sites. TJ projects are often partly intended for external audiences (see White, 2015): they are a form of public diplomacy intended to demonstrate adherence to international norms, declare to the international community that violence is confined to the past, and affirm a commitment to democratic norms. Tourism is a key mechanism for exposing international visitors to TJ messages. Indeed, such visits may be the only occasion when tourists directly encounter a state's TJ polity. While international tourists may have little understanding of past violence, visiting a museum potentially equips them to appreciate the causes and extent of violence, and develop empathy for victims. More broadly, such visits can generate sympathy, support and respect for a state's TJ polity and its efforts to deal with a traumatic past. Tourism, therefore, has an importance for TJ beyond its contribution to post-conflict economic development. It is additionally a mechanism to realize some of the political and ideological objectives of TJ projects, legitimating and winning wider support for

efforts to deal with recent political violence. Furthermore, tourism can perform this role for both internal and external audiences.

While TJ has attracted considerable attention from politicians, policy-makers and academics, the way in which it works is poorly understood. Duggan (2012) argues that much of what is claimed for TJ is underpinned by implicit or untested assumptions which are rarely subject to detailed investigation. This also applies to memorialization projects: the impact of memorial museums in post-conflict or post-authoritarian societies is frequently assumed but has attracted limited detailed attention (Balcells et al., 2018; Hamber, et al., 2010; Williams, 2007). Indeed, while there has been considerable debate about the role of museums within TJ projects (e.g. Brown, 2013; Hamber, 2012; Violi, 2012; Sodaro, 2018; Stan, 2013; Williams, 2007) there has been limited attention to the perspectives and experiences of their visitors. Furthermore, the limited research into this issue has largely focused on the experience of international tourists (Bickford 2009) or school/university groups (Balcells, et al., 2018; Hamber, et al., 2010; Light et al. 2019) while domestic tourists have been largely overlooked.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study uses a particular memorial site to explore the relationship between domestic tourism and TJ: a museum entitled “The Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance” located in the town of Sighetu Marmăției in the Maramureș region of northern Romania (hereafter called Sighet Museum). Opened in 1997, the museum is housed in a former prison used by the communist regime to incarcerate much of Romania’s political, military and intellectual elite in the late 1940s and 1950s. It has adopted a common practice within TJ projects of turning a former site of repression into a memorial museum (Williams, 2007). Sighet Museum features displays in over 80 of the former prison cells which focus on the nature of life in the prison (particularly the harsh conditions experienced by inmates); the broader communist system of incarceration; the communist takeover of power in the 1940s and 1950s; the nature of life in a communist state with a particular emphasis on repression; and internal resistance to the communist regime.

Sighet Museum was established in a specific context. Romania’s communist regime collapsed in December 1989 but the new political elite was dominated by former members of the communist hierarchy who, whilst professing an adherence to democracy and radical change,

were deeply rooted in the values of the former order. Consequently, their commitment to post-communist TJ was half-hearted (Stan, 2013). The post-communist regime was notably unwilling to confront the authoritarianism and political violence of the recent past, or acknowledge those who had suffered. In this context, civil society led on memorialization projects. A non-governmental organization entitled The Civic Academy Foundation (led by two communist-era dissidents) purchased the prison building in 1993 and secured funding to convert it into a museum. The museum is intended as an educational resource to explain to visitors (particularly young Romanians who did not live through communism) about the repression and suffering caused by the communist regime. Today Sighet Museum is one of the best-known tourist attractions in Romania. In 2018 it attracted 141,703 visitors, of whom 96% were Romanians. Given its remote location most Romanians who visit do so in the context of domestic tourism.

A qualitative approach to data collection was adopted, to enable a detailed exploration of how visitors responded to the museum. Semi-structured interviews were employed with questions focused on the context of the visit (place of permanent residence, reason for visiting); responses to the presentations in the museum; views on the role of the museum in post-communist Romania (including its importance as a site of memory and its contribution to consolidating democracy in Romania); family connections with the museum; and views about the communist period (and the influence of their visit on these views). A purposive sampling strategy was adopted in that only Romanian visitors (aged 16 and over) were invited to participate. The interviews were undertaken by the third author inside the museum as visitors were leaving. An initial question was intended to identify only those Romanians who were on holiday staying in the Maramureş region. Before each interview, participants were given an information sheet explaining the role and purpose of the study, and were asked to initial a consent form. Interviews were audio recorded with the permission of participants. Interviewing took place between January and September 2018. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Bryman, 2015), the second and third authors met regularly during the interviewing stage, to discuss the issues arising in the interviews. In total 52 completed interviews were obtained after which it was judged that data saturation had been obtained.

The characteristics of the interviewees are presented in Table 1 below. They ranged in age from 17 to 80, with over half being aged 31-50. Just over a third were aged under 35, meaning

that they were born after the communist era (or were too young to remember much about it). All but 6 participants were visiting the museum for the first time.

Table 1: Characteristics of the interviewees

Sex	Male	23
	Female	29
Age	16-20	3
	21-30	11
	31-40	14
	41-50	15
	51-60	5
	61-70	2
	71-80	2
Personal memories/experience of the communist era	Aged under 35 (few or no personal memories of the communist regime)	18
	Aged 35 and over (personal memories of the communist regime)	34
Visited Previously?	Yes	6
	No	46

The interviews were analysed (in Romanian) by the first and second author (the third author was on maternity leave at this stage). Thematic analysis was adopted (Bryman, 2015), following the procedure detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Nowell et al., (2017). The first stage involved repeated reading of the transcripts enabling familiarization with the data. This was followed by coding of the key issues. At this stage a “theoretical” (or “top-down”) approach to thematic analysis was adopted (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84): the analysis did not seek to identify every issue within the interviews but focused specifically on topics related to TJ previously identified in the review of literature. The third phase was the grouping of initial codes into “candidate” themes (*ibid*, p.90). To ensure inter-coder reliability and enhance credibility (Nowell et al., 2017) the analysis was undertaken independently by the two researchers. Through a process of reviewing and comparing the candidate themes, a final set of themes (and sub-themes) was produced. The analysts then returned to the original transcripts to ensure that these themes accurately reflected the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following discussion presents interview quotations translated from Romanian into English. The issue of translation in qualitative research raises various issues (van Nes et al., 2010). In this case, translation of the Romanian quotations was a collaborative process (as recommended by van Nes et al. (2010)). The quotations were translated by the first author with an emphasis not on a word-for-word translation of the original but with the aim of conveying the meaning of the Romanian. Each quotation was individually checked by the second author (a Romanian speaker), a process which sometimes went through several stages until an agreed translation was produced.

## **Research Findings**

### ***Context of the Visit***

Among the interviewees, motives for visiting the museum were diverse but it was clear that general leisure motives were dominant. For most interviewees the museum was one among a number of attractions to visit in the Maramureş region (the phrase “it was on the list” was mentioned frequently). As such, most visitors conform to the category of “sightseeing cultural tourist” identified by McKercher (2020, p.127). A number were visiting as part of a coach tour, while others were visiting due to poor weather. However, almost all participants had known about the museum before they arrived in Maramureş and most had planned to visit at some stage. None of those interviewed had any familial connection with the former prison.

Such a context means that the visit to the museum is an opportunity for ‘ordinary’ domestic tourists (who may not previously have visited a memorial museum) to develop a better understanding of a period of history about which they may have limited knowledge and awareness. On the other hand, since most interviewees regarded the museum as just another sight to see when in the area, there may be limitations to what the museum can achieve in communicating key TJ messages (see Hamber, 2012), particularly as many visits were short in duration.

## *Negotiating Past and Present*

The relationship between past and present underpins TJ. While TJ projects are concerned with making known what happened in the past and why (Seils, 2017) they also unfold in the present. It was apparent that the majority of the domestic tourists interviewed had engaged in a range of reflection and memory work relating to the recent past. They recognized the role of the museum as a site of memory, and the importance of remembering. In this they were engaged in making meaning about the present (Smith & Campbell, 2016) even if this was not something they had intended or anticipated before visiting.

Visitors recognized the imperative of remembering (and its corollary, not forgetting) recent human rights abuses. One stated: “This should remain in memory, we should remember the pain there was under the communist regime” (I25, female, aged 44). Another contended: “Simply so that it is not lost. How would it be to lose everything that is here and to not have any idea about it? It’s that simple – to preserve the memory” (I6, male, aged 33). Others highlighted that remembering was for a contemporary purpose: for people in the present to better know and understand what happened. In this, they understood the educational role of the museum in keeping alive the memory of human rights abuses. One interviewee contended that the museum was established “in memory of those who died here, and not only them, and for us who are here to be able to see, to learn, and complete our knowledge” (I17, female, aged 49). A younger visitor similarly argued: “to know those things, and to not forget them. Firstly, to make people aware who don’t know what happened here and, at the same time, to not forget those things” (I13, female, aged 29).

These responses indicate a recognition of the role of remembering as a form of truth-telling, itself a core component of TJ (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; Sodaro, 2018). Visitors understood that, in a context where many may want to forget the recent past, deliberate memorialization projects ensure that such forgetting does not take place. They recognized the museum as a “site of conscience” (Mégret, 2010, p.6) intended to ensure that recent political violence remains (at least to some extent) within collective memory. They also identified the role of tourism in enabling Romanians to engage with the authoritarian past. There was little variation in visitors’ responses: none disputed the importance of remembering and none spoke against the importance of learning about the communist era.

A related form of memory work was giving recognition to those who had suffered in the prison. Acknowledging victims of human rights abuses is central to TJ projects (Seils, 2017) and to the work of memorial museums in particular (Sodaro, 2018; Williams, 2007). The interviewees frequently spoke of their encounter with the people who suffered at Sighet prison. For example:

It's a form of respect for what happened here, a form of respect for certain people who, I don't know what motive they had or what they wanted to do. Yes, I think that it's a form of respect and a matter of the soul (I38, male, aged 43).

To pay a sort of homage to the people who were here...yes, in honour of those who gave their lives for their convictions, they had backbone, they didn't give in to anyone, they are true heroes (I7, male, aged 32).

Memorial sites invite visitors to establish a relationship with those people memorialized (Wilke, 2013). The interviews revealed that developing a degree of connection or empathy with the victims of suffering was a common response (see Crețan et al., 2018). While the majority had visited the museum out of general interest or curiosity, they had been challenged to confront the suffering of the recent past. Such responses spanned all age groups. In developing such a humanitarian concern, visitors were engaging with the broader moral agenda which underpins TJ.

However, the visit was not only about remembering: interviewees had used the encounter with the recent past to reflect upon the present and future. One form was an appreciation of the present when compared with the hardships of the past. In the words of one visitor: "I can't say that everything is rosy now, but it's much better than it was" (I33, female, aged 38). Younger visitors in particular were particularly sensitive to the differences between present and past. One contended:

Life today isn't easy, but compared to the torments which happened in the past, we have various privileges in comparison...ok, you know how it is, we were born with everything we need, we can get on. Those others died – those earlier times were something else entirely (I2, male, aged 30).

Visitors made other connections between past and present. For example, the communist period was identified as a “reference point” against which to judge the present. One interviewee stated: “seeing it, and being a point of reference, you can make parallels, a comparison between how it was before and how it is now” (I5, male aged 52). Others went further, drawing explicit comparisons between the authoritarian past and Romania’s contemporary (if sometimes flawed) democracy: “it can be a reference point can’t it, so that we can move forward to the idea of democracy” (I29, male, aged 40). Another said: “it can give an alarm signal, it can – whoever comes here and understands or tries to live what was here will appreciate democracy much more” (I7, male, aged 32). Again, the encounter with the past had stimulated reflection about the present and future. In particular visitors were directly engaging with a tenet of TJ: the strengthening and consolidation of democracy after a period of political violence (Seils, 2017). Remembering is closely linked with post-violence democratization (Brown, 2013; Sodaro, 2018) in that memorial sites highlight the political Other: values that are the antithesis of democratic rule and respect for human rights. Accordingly, visiting the museum can throw post-authoritarian democracy into sharper focus.

Another issue that arose repeatedly was the importance of learning from the past in order to avoid similar violence in the future. This view was shared by younger and older visitors. The euphemism “mistakes” was often used to refer to the violence of the communist era. For example, one younger visitor stated:

So that we don’t forget what happened in the past, the most important thing is to not forget the past, otherwise we make the same mistakes, we mustn’t repeat those mistakes in the future... We definitely need to remember, it’s that simple, to remember the mistakes that others made so that you don’t make those mistakes, don’t repeat them (I40, female, aged 27).

An older visitor made a similar argument:

The historical side, you stop to understand it and if you don’t understand it you repeat it... I would say that, if you know and respect history, in theory there should be no need to repeat the mistakes of the past, and we should go ahead with this idea (I39, male, aged 50).

Such responses indicate that these tourists had recognized and engaged with the core moral message of TJ: “never again” (Hamber, 2012). They understood that encountering past violence was the first step towards ensuring that it was not repeated. Although most visitors were motivated by general sightseeing (and consequently may not have been anticipating a particularly meaningful encounter) they had, nonetheless, identified and understood the core moral imperative of TJ. As such, these tourists were undertaking important political and cultural work (Smith & Campbell, 2016) in negotiating the significance of the recent past and its relationship with the present and future.

### *The Importance of the Museum for Future Generations*

Transitional justice is “a future-orientated approach to the past” (Gready & Robins, 2014, p.250). It seeks simultaneously to deal with a difficult past, and to shape a different future. As such, TJ is not intended only for those people who have lived through conflict or repression but also embraces those without such experiences. Consequently, young people are key stakeholders and “ideological entrepreneurs” within TJ with an important role to play in preventing future violence (Ladisch, 2018, p.3). Therefore, educating young people about past political violence is a crucial non-judicial component of TJ (Cole, 2017).

The importance of Sighet Museum for young people was raised repeatedly in the interviews. Part of the broader context is that many schools in post-communist Romania have shied away from addressing the communist period (Stan, 2013) so that young people form knowledge of the recent past in the home largely based on what they hear from parents and grandparents (Văran & Crețan, 2018). The interviewees were aware that young people have a poor understanding of the communist period. For example, one stated:

There are these children now which don't really understand what happened. It's all a story for them. They don't make sense of it. And my children don't realize when I tell them about it that something like that was possible (I41, male, aged 43).

Younger participants also recognized their limited understanding of the past: “They don't understand because nobody tells them, even if their parents lived through communism, they

were born in 1995, 1996, 1997 it's something... as if I would tell you now about what happened in 1800 or earlier" (I13, female, aged 29).

Consequently, there was agreement on the need for young people to visit the museum to better understand the suffering caused by the communist regime. The museum was recognized as place of an "extracurricular learning" (Cole, 2017, p.22) that is, a strategic site which can compensate for the reluctance of school education to engage with Romania's TJ project. For example:

... young people can see what it was in the past, the terrible torments that those people passed through. That is, to see for themselves how much sacrifice was made to be where we are now... to see what those people went through...it's relevant for young people today (I33, female, aged 38).

it's important because they – my children – I think that it is more important for them than for us, because these things must be recorded somewhere so that they can see them somewhere. The things that we tell them about (and not only me because I'm young but also parents and grandparents), children don't perceive them and they don't understand them. Only if they see for themselves will they be more convinced, they become more real (I51, female aged 44)

Younger visitors also recognized that the museum was a place to engage with the communist past:

We didn't live through those times but we know the stories of our parents. It [the museum] is a very important history lesson for someone's general education, at least for me it was an important lesson and I had no idea that something like this existed here (I2, male aged 30)

Visitors also highlighted that the role of the museum embraced future post-communist generations (see Violi, 2012). One said: "They must know their history, even if they didn't live through it...it's a part of us, ultimately new generations must also know what we were in the past" (I43, female, aged 49). Another argued "those generations concerned will know what our ancestors lived through, so that they can also see how they lived" (I50, female, aged 29). Here

TJ in general (and remembering in particular) is conceived as an intergenerational project, implying an obligation for future generations to know and understand the suffering of the recent past. This view was shared by visitors with and without direct experience of the communist period.

Visiting the museum was, therefore, an occasion where these tourists could appreciate the temporal scope of TJ. Many understood that, while TJ is about the past, it has a role for young people born after the communist era, and also embraces those not yet born. The museum was recognized as a “pedagogical force” that can shape conceptions of post-communist civic life (particularly the nature of democracy) into the future (Simon, 2006, p.115). What was equally significant was that interviewees recognized the importance of tourism in allowing the museum to operate as a pedagogical instrument of TJ. A few identified the museum as a site for educational tourism and had consequently brought their children to the site (while others spoke of intending to return with their children).

### ***Personal Transformation***

With their focus on “conscience and responsibility” (Williams, 2007, p.143) memorial museums are intended to produce some form of personal transformation among visitors (Sodaro, 2018). In particular they aim to morally transform visitors so that they leave with a heightened awareness of past political violence and a commitment to preventing its repetition (*ibid*). As such, memorial museums encourage their audience (predominantly tourists) to make connections between past and present, with a view to shaping the future (Williams, 2007).

However, evidence of such personal transformation was not widespread among the interviewees. Among younger visitors a re-evaluation of attitudes towards the recent past was apparent. One stated: “clearly it’s changed certain things. Before visiting this museum I didn’t consider that it [the communist period] was so...how to say it...so black, but now I see it with different eyes” (I7, male aged 32). Another reflected “It seems it was more sinful. I didn’t imagine that it could be so bad” (I44, female, aged 17). However, negative views of the communist era were already widespread among visitors and the museum did little to change these views (although in some cases it reinforced existing opinions). This means that visitors already held attitudes which were aligned with the museum’s core messages.

Another form of personal change was a professed commitment to do something differently in the future. Again, this was not a widespread response (mentioned by less than one-third of interviewees). A few visitors declared an intention to better inform themselves about communist-era repression. For example: “for me it’s made me want to understand this, to try to find out more information about what happened here” (I13, female, aged 29). Others intended to bring their children to the museum to educate them about the communist past. Another response was a sense of duty to tell friends and other people about the museum and encourage them to visit for themselves (similar findings are reported by Weaver et al., 2018). One stated: “the message, I don’t want to keep it just for me, I want to tell people, I want to spread the word further” (I42, female, aged 19). Two visitors made a connection between the museum’s message and personal and collective values in the post-communist period. For example: “Seeing what is here, we should be more active, more united ...to learn something from this” (I26, woman, aged 80). Another claimed: “we must be more tolerant. What happened here, it was weird. That’s what I understand here... respect and tolerance - and look at what could happen” (I38, male, aged 43).

Memorial museums seek to confront their visitors with uncomfortable issues in order to reinforce broader TJ messages. However, visitors can respond to such messages in diverse ways (Wilke, 2013). In particular there were different “registers of engagement” (Smith & Campbell, 2016, p.444) among those interviewed. Some (particularly those with little time) appeared to have been little affected by their visit. However, others had engaged more deeply with the messages of the museum and had been provoked to change their attitudes towards the communist era or commit to particular forms of action (even if such change was only temporary).

## **Conclusions**

This paper has developed a new perspective on the relationship between tourism and politics by focusing on transitional justice. In particular our analysis has explored *how* TJ works (Duggan, 2012) in the context of visits by domestic tourists to a memorial museum. Many visitors could be described as sightseers, and regarded the museum as just another attraction to visit when on holiday. Nevertheless, many were willing to take the museum (and broader issues of TJ) seriously (see Williams, 2007). Their visit was about more than sightseeing (even if such

responses may have been unanticipated or unintended). Many visitors engaged in reflection and memory work: they also recognized the importance of social remembering as a form of truth-telling, bringing to light what was previously hidden, or which society might prefer to forget. Many demonstrated compassion and empathy for prisoners, thereby giving recognition to the victims of Romania's communist regime. Furthermore, many recognized that TJ is not only about the past but also embraces the present and future (Gready & Robins, 2014). Some reflected upon the advantages they enjoyed living in a post-communist democracy. Others recognized that remembering implied obligations towards the future, particularly the importance of educating those without first-hand experience of communist repression. Finally, a majority of interviewees had recognized and engaged with the core message of TJ: "never again". These moral positions were shared by both those who had lived through the communist era and those who had not.

There are at least 70 states in the world with a recent history of conflict, authoritarian rule, or other human rights abuses. Therefore, the findings of this study have a broader relevance for societies engaged in TJ. Memorial museums create opportunities for domestic visitors to engage with recent political violence, and to participate in the remembrance of that violence. In this way they can contribute to broader processes of TJ and consolidate respect for human rights by underlining the core message of "never again". Furthermore, museums can perform this role for a considerable time after the end of the historical period that they interpret. However, it is important to recognize the limits to what memorial museums can achieve as instruments of TJ. While they can clearly have an impact on domestic visitors this is not to say that they can bring about the moral transformation sometimes claimed for memorial museums (Sodaro, 2018). Furthermore, even if visitors show deeper engagement with issues of TJ it cannot be certain that this brings about long-term moral change (see Hamber, 2012).

This study has made an original contribution to debate but nevertheless a number of limitations can be identified. First, this research was based on a single museum and these findings may not be replicated at other memorial museums. Second, in Romania the state has eschewed widespread TJ initiatives so that the memorial museum considered reflects the agenda of civil society actors, rather than the position of the state. Different findings may be apparent in contexts where the state has taken a leading role in driving TJ projects. Third, some visitors (such as those on coach tours) were in a hurry and may have had limited time to fully engage with the museum's messages. Fourth, interviews conducted in a tourism context are relatively

uncommon in Romania so that some visitors were unfamiliar with being asked for their opinions in such a context and may have struggled to articulate their views.

The findings of this study highlight several directions for future research. First, there is scope to examine the longer-term impacts of visits to memorial museums which could be achieved through follow-up studies with visitors (see Weaver et al., 2018). This would indicate if the strong impressions created by a memorial museum lead to longer-term moral change and commitment. It would also elucidate the relationship between memorial museums and the broader impact of TJ projects (Brown, 2013; Hamber et al., 2010). Put another way, there is a need to clarify the relationship between individual experiences in memorial museums and wider societal process of coming to terms with a traumatic past. This, in turn, would give a clearer understanding of the impact of memorial museums and their longer-term contribution to TJ.

Second, there is scope to examine the encounters of international tourists within memorial museums. Such tourists will have less background knowledge of the political violence that is interpreted, and may have less awareness of a state's broader TJ polity. Such research could elucidate whether a museum (such as Sighet) primarily intended for domestic tourists can effectively meet the needs of international visitors. This may point to the need for different interpretive strategies for domestic and international visitors. Third, future research might explore the experiences of young people who visit memorial museums within formal educational curricula. If a society is to remember and reconcile with past suffering the involvement of young people and future generations is crucial. However, it is unclear if memorial museums are an effective means to reach such groups. This issue is particularly important as the time interval between the present and a traumatic past increases. The challenge for TJ actors in general (and memorial sites in particular) is to show the relevance of TJ projects to generations for whom a traumatic past can seem like distant history.

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