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Promises and challenges in the discursive study of social representations of history.

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When one considers the issue of how nation-states reckon with former regimes, one has to contemplate, among other things, the issue of how social representations of national history are created, managed, and disseminated. One way to approach this is to focus on how nation-states turn themselves into ‘socially organized biographical objects’ (Plummer, 2001) when engaging with their, often traumatic, past. This is a paper about the contribution of discourse analysis and discursive psychology to researching personal and elite social representations of history in contexts of rapid social change. In this paper I focus on the appraisal of communism in Romanian public consciousness as a case in point. Drawing on themes from discursive psychology, I explore the production of personal and social history in text and talk with relevance to the relationship between history and social memory in constructing communism as Other. Examples used in this paper come from disclosures of collaboration with the former Romanian communist secret police, and from the Tismăneanu report condemning communism in Romania. I place these examples in the context of current discursive psychological work on the social production of national history, and researching transitional justice and collective memory in post-communist countries, more generally. Finally, I highlight some of the most promising avenues of discursive psychological enquiry, as well as some challenges, for addressing key debates around coming to terms with the communist past.