Over the past decade, vulnerability has become a primary category of analysis for many scholars working in the interdisciplinary fields of ethics, gender, memory and trauma studies, especially thanks to philosopher Judith Butler’s feminist-informed works (2004, 2009, 2013) posing the challenging problem of how to ethically relate to present-day violence and politics via the creation of alternative empowering forms of vulnerability. It is especially in the 2013 book *Vulnerability. New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (Oxford University Press) that Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds propose a welcome taxonomy of different sources of vulnerability (i.e. inherent, situational, pathogenic) and potential/ “dispositional” vs. actual/ “occurent” states of vulnerability, one which allows scholars to identify context-specific forms of vulnerability and to emphasize the complex, multiple facets of vulnerability. This workshop contributes to this direction of scholarly research by making its primary focus the issue of vulnerabilities as sites of action involving modes of historical representation and sustaining a relational approach in which, on the one hand, institutional and individually-internalized discourses of vulnerability might lead to discrimination, stereotyping, paternalistic interventions which keep one even more incapacitated from one generation to another and, on the other hand, there is a potential form of resistance as long as generations manage to transmit to one another the importance of autonomy, ethical responsibilities and capabilities also characterizing vulnerable individuals. We hope to identify some signposts for providing a nuanced definition of vulnerability, by looking (1) at how and what kind of vulnerability informs us about non-normative human and non-human forms of life and (2) at how vulnerabilities can be sites of action subverting or sidestepping the victim/saviour scenarios of many historical accounts of traumatic events in comparing the American and the Romanian contexts.
Abstract: The field of memory studies has seen a trajectory from ‘sites’ to ‘dynamics’ of memory, from national to transnational and ‘multidirectional’, from collective to cultural to transcultural memory. The ‘posthumanist turn’ in the humanities has so far not made a significant impact on the field, however. This is due to the fact that memory studies has been fundamentally committed to a humanist conception of the subject. Emerging as it did in response to the dehumanizing experience of WWII and the Holocaust, the question “if this is a man” (Primo Levi) has been a crucial concern for the field. It was important that this question be answered in the affirmative. But this also meant that the identity and constitution of the human could not at the same time be called into question. In light of poststructuralist and posthumanist critiques of the subject, however, it has become clear that the answer to this question is much more radically indeterminable. How can this indeterminability be made productive for a critical re-evaluation of the field of memory studies? What would a posthumanist memory studies look like?

In our presentation we will explore these questions by bringing memory studies into conversation with two emergent fields within the broader spectrum of posthumanism, disability studies and animal studies. Both of these challenge the conception of the subject as rational, able-bodied, and self-fashioning and instead emphasize the vulnerability and finitude that we share with other beings. A posthumanist turn in memory studies is not only productive but necessary, we argue, if the field is to avoid repeating the exclusionary violence at the heart of the very crimes that it has sought to remember.

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Susanne C. Knittel is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Utrecht University. She holds a Ph.D. in Italian and Comparative Literature from Columbia University. In her research she explores questions of memory, commemoration, and cultural amnesia. She is particularly interested in the interaction of literature and other cultural media as vehicles of both majority and minority memory at the local, national, and transnational level. Her monograph, The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Holocaust Memory (Fordham UP, 2015) is a comparative study of German and Italian postwar memory culture. In it, she stages a dialogue between the fields of memory studies, disability studies, and postcolonial studies. Her current research project, Faces of Evil: The Figure of the Perpetrator in Contemporary Memory Culture, is supported by a grant from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientfic Research (NWO). She is the co-organizer of the Utrecht Forum for Memory Studies and the founder of The Perpetrator Studies Network.
(2) Ana Bărbulescu (University of Bucharest), Vulnerabilities of Post-Communist Romanian Historiography as to Holocaust Representations: Competitive Identities and Dangerous Memories

Abstract: Until August 23, 1944 Romania was a loyal ally of Nazi Germany and an active participant in the process of solving the ‘Jewish problem’. During these years, between 180,000 and 300,000 Jewish men, women and children were killed or died of illness, hunger and/or cold in the territories under Romanian authority. After 1948, the communist regime was established in Romania and for the next 50 years the Holocaust became a taboo topic: nothing happened to the Romanian Jews during the war and we even forget that not so long ago in our past, 800,000 Jews were our neighbors and co-citizens. However, after the regime change, in 2004 the Romanian state acknowledged its responsibility for the Holocaust of the Romanian Jews, assuming the conclusions of the Elie Wiesel international commission for the study of the Holocaust in Romania. However, this official assuming of our not so distant past, is not shared by the majority of the Romanian population as when we turn to a survey conducted on a national representative sample, in the summer of 2015, we find some unexpected results: 73% of the respondents declare that they heard about the Holocaust and among those 78% associate the Holocaust with the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War, 59% with the Nazi concentration camps and 46% with the gas chambers. Only 20% of the Romanians who heard about the Holocaust associate this historical event with the deportations of the Jews to Transnistria, which implicitly would put the responsibility on Romanian shoulders. The discriminatory policies directed against the Roma population are remembered only by 18% of the respondents.

When the questions are formulated in a more explicit manner, the perception of the Holocaust shared by the Romanian population proves to be equally distorted. Thus, when they are asked to indicate the territory they associate with the Holocaust, 73% among the respondents point toward Nazi Germany and only 28% toward the Romanian soil. Even more important, when they are asked to indicate what is the association they make with the Holocaust, from among 28% of those indicating the Romanian territory as ‘hosting’ the Holocaust, 80% associate the latter with the deportation of the Jews to the camps controlled by Nazi Germany, while the reality of Transnistria deportations is acknowledged only by 28% of those localising the Holocaust in Romania. When the questions try to recover the image of those responsible, we get a similar picture: 86% of the respondents identify Nazi Germany as main responsible. Antonescu Government is identified as responsible by 58% of those responding, while 15% point toward the Soviet Union and 5% toward the Jews. According to the same survey, only one third of the respondents accept the reality of Transnistria deportations and the anti-Jewish legislation imposed upon the members of the Jewish community. However, as said, the sorest spot seems to be responsibility as when the question is put in an explicit manner, more than two thirds of those questioned still point toward our German allies. As said, the results are quite surprising, the broad majority of those sharing this distorted manner of remembering the Holocaust, making legitimate, from a methodological perspective, the transferring of the latter within the domain of what Berger calls taken for granted knowledge.

Acknowledging this inconsistency that characterizes the public memory of the Holocaust within the Romanian society, my aim is to identify and reconstruct the social processes that explain how mnemonic myopia operates and the definitions of vulnerabilities they entail. I will therefore try to answer the following core question: Why does the Romanian society have difficulties to acknowledge the Holocaust of the Romanian Jews?

The theoretical model I propose is to approach the topic from two distinctive directions:

1. The theorization developed by Eviatar Zerubavel around the concept of ‘social mindscapes’, social constructions through which communities classify the world. Assuming this approach and also using Baudrillard’s concept of ‘radical alterity’ I aim to demonstrate that within the Romanian symbolic universe, the Jews never had the chance to really become Romanians, the Romanian identity being constructed in terms of ethnicity while the Jew remains the radical other, unable (or unwilling) to truly integrate. More importantly, according to the hypothesis I propose, this exclusion has consequences upon the way the Second World War is remembered within the Romanian historiography where the Jews are not included within the historical narratives describing the Romanian losses during the War. They are not really us so when talking about the Romanian victims of the war we won’t include the Jewish victims on our list. The Holocaust of the Romanian Jews is not part of our history and consequently its memory is conveniently obliterated.

2. Festinger’s classical theorization of cognitive dissonance. Traditionally, Romanian historiography portrays the Romanian people in superlative terms, a position also acknowledged at a social level. As social memory
operates in a structural manner, the great achievements of Romanians from the past and the fate of the Romanian Jews during the Second World War become cognitions relevant to each other. They are equally part of the clusters of mnemonic narratives that legitimate the identity model ascribed to the Romanian people. Therefore, as the need for internal consistency operates between relevant cognitions, I aim to demonstrate that the Holocaust is bound to become a dangerous memory that is either discarded as irrelevant and thus forgotten or reconstructed in a manner that would not disturb the special image ascribed to the Romanian nation.

As a consequence, the Germans are made responsible for the Holocaust of the Romanian Jews and almost half of the respondents of our survey points toward the Nazi camps when asked to identify the main characteristic of the Holocaust of the Romanian Jews.

The analysis will be conducted on two types of sources: history textbooks and historiographical syntheses published in post-communist Romania. The overall methodological approach will be a qualitative one circumscribed to the structuralist paradigm.

**Bio:** Ana Bărbulescu is an Associate Professor in the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Bucharest and a Researcher at the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania in Bucharest, Romania. Ana earned her PhD in sociology at the University of Bucharest in 2009. Since 2007, she has been a researcher at the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, where she is working on the collaborative project, “The Reconstruction of Holocaust Public Memory in Post-Communism.” She is also working on a project on daily life in the ghettos of Transnistria during the Holocaust. Her most recent publications are a co-edited volume, with Alexandru Florian and Alexandru Climescu, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România* (*Forced Labor of the Jews in Romania*, Polirom 2013) and two authored books, *Dynamics of Identity Construction. Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Tritonic, 2016) and *Evreul înainte și după Cristos* (*Curtea Veche*, 2016). She is the recipient of the Felix Posen Doctoral Fellowship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as fellowships from Hebrew University’s Rothberg International School and the Foundation for the Promotion of Jewish and Israeli Culture.

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