THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM IN POST-COMMUNISM: A PROPOSAL FOR RECONSIDERING EASTERN EUROPEAN THINKING IN CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL RESEARCH IN ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT

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This article analyzes the concept of freedom and its ontology in post-communist Romania and questions the opportunity of using, without filtering through Eastern European philosophy, the major Western philosophical ideas on freedom. While there is a need to use verified and up to date theories when discussing post-communism, there is also a danger of using terms which locally have other meanings than those with which they are employed in the Western academic world. Thus, this article argues, research done without filtering Western-based theories and without debating them by using the local school of thought, can fail to reach its purpose.

The methodology used for this article is mainly critical. Literature on both Western and Eastern schools of thought was reviewed and compared with data obtained from newspaper analyses. In order to validate empirical observations on the notion of freedom (including philosophical freedom, political freedom etc.) qualitative interviews were conducted with people whom the "train of life" (Şora) brought my way.

Keywords: freedom, philosophical freedom, political freedom, economic freedom, modernity, neoliberalism.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe was not predicted or foreseen by any scholars in the Western World (Tismăneanu: 1998, Splichal: 1999). However, after it had happened (Taleb: 2009–2010), it is explained in terms that suggest it was the only logical step in a social development that closed the markets

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and public spheres and made them subject to control by the state. The issue of post-communism was, as a consequence, discussed in ways that tried to fit, what scholars call "transition", into the "grand narratives" of market economy and the public sphere (Gross: 1996). A return to capitalism was pushed by political and intellectual elites, in the form of shock therapies that gripped the whole of Eastern Europe for several years (Przeworski: 1991; Harvey: 2005). Markets were formed and protected, flat taxes introduced, state interventions in the economy were diminished and owners made sure that unions would disappear from the political scene (Harvey: 2005).

At the same time freedom of speech, denied to East Europeans for more than 50 years, was re-established so that newspapers flourished; TV stations and radio stations boomed. ICT based public spheres emerged in unison with those in Western countries (Tismăneanu: 1998).

This article tries, while examining the concept of freedom in post-communism, to analyze and then to reject the opportunity of using with priority Western academic literature when doing social research in Romania. The hypothesis from which this paper starts is that discussing the Eastern European realities without filtering the Western based theories through native philosophies and local real world experience will hide for scholars and not just, the nature of what "real" is in Eastern Europe and will point them to fake conclusions.

The motivation behind writing this paper was provided by the author's increasing frustration of observing that people in Eastern Europe in general and in Romania in particular, are troubled by not being able to fully understand/apply the concept of freedom. This frustration added to the observation that scholars, when they research issues linked with the notion of "freedom" are biased with the huge background of Western based literature and do not even try to see if "freedom" in Romania has the same meaning as "freedom" in Germany, for example. They just assume it is the same word, has the same connotations and denotations so they apply similar "German" grammar when they discuss Romania's case. Thus, in their reached conclusions, the observed Romanian realities are expected to mirror the realities of the West. When they do not, alarms are triggered and reasons are given.

Following a suggestion made by Edward de Bono (1970), I regarded the main stream approach on analyzing the social realities of Eastern Europe with tools provided by the Western based school of thought, as a choice that is forcing scholars in the social field to organize the information they gather in a certain way. The problem is that I do not believe that this way, which is proved to be objective when applied to the western world societies, can be used for Eastern Europe with the same degree of objectivity.

The information that we gather during field work can be considered in too many cases "off the charts" so that our choice to analyze it with pattern theories shaped in the West is poor.

Therefore, this article suggests while following de Bono's proposal, that we need other reliable pattern theories so the social information we gather could be

evaluated more objectively than it is nowadays. We need to rearrange the information with the power of insight, even if this re-arrangement will go against the common practices provided by the tools of western based theories.

It is just a sharp observation the fact that scholars and citizens alike are troubled by the historical impossibility to properly define and discern among the various forms of "freedom" in Eastern Europe.

Although in post-communism freedom is perceived as being only political, the same word designates in the western academism the philosophical concept of it, the economical freedoms and the liberties citizens enjoy in the public and private spaces. The philosophical idea of freedom can be separated in an interior one and an exterior one, while the political freedom is negative, "freedom from", and positive, "freedom to" (Berlin: 2002). Even political freedom is balancing dangerously between the positive and negative shapes that it takes, in very confusing ways. For example it is not unusual for policemen to address citizens with "Where do you think you are, in an American movie?", a signal for the understanding that what "freedom" is in one context can vary from person to person, or from authority to normal citizens.

This problem is, this article suggests, related with the fact that in Eastern European "modernity" started much later than in the Western world. For example, freedom as philosophical, political and even economical notions entered in the western vocabulary along with the creation of the Cromwell state. The Tudor national liberalism was full of it. Hundreds of years of social and political developments shaped it and transformed it into something that is almost material in existence. However, in Eastern Europe's 2009, thousands of vulnerable people are still kidnapped, sold and bought as slaves. They have "owners" despite being considered "free", constitutionally speaking. As a matter of fact, all Eastern Europeans are "free", but some of them are "freer" than others. That is because "freedom" is perceived here to be not from the state, as stated in the main stream Marxist theory, not as a shared responsibility, but as being a total freedom: some people think they are "free" to do anything they like, and, this paper argues, this is an enormous problem. "We are free to say everything we want to, but it seems that nobody listens, nobody cares about what one is saying", said A.H., a respondent. Another interviewee said that "usually people think of themselves being free until the state through its institutions shows them that they are not" (L.C).

This article thus stresses that in post-communist society, freedom becomes an ambiguous concept that refers more to the economical aspects of our lives than to our nature as social beings. We cannot develop a viable participative democracy just by liberating the economic initiatives and public realms, as Neoliberalism proposes, without taking action for a disambiguation inside the concept of freedom.

Thus, when we analyze concepts such as the "freedom of speech" we have to start first with what "freedom" is, second, we have to see how this "freedom" is interpreted by both those who are claiming this freedom and those who analyze "the freedom of speech".

In the qualitative interviews conducted with Romanian journalists and newspaper readers we learned that nobody thought that freedom of speech can be defined as a "freedom from the state", but, at the same time, as a "freedom to". Therefore, this paper suggests, a more suitable approach in such studies is to define first, the very "tools" scholars operate with and only than to move into collecting and analyzing data.

As a result we have to reconsider the current academic approach on post-communism and capitalism. This current approach is tributary to the Western thinking so we have to prioritize the Eastern European philosophy. This philosophy was born in an environment totally different than the social realities that the West experiences, so it deals with concepts which, despite being mainly borrowed from the West, have meanings which are constructed locally. Thus, this eastern philosophy could be, this paper proposes, a more appropriate tool in doing research in Eastern European areas of social sciences.

Employing with priority Eastern philosophical currents in our work, we would have the possibility to explore the "gray" shades of Romania, those institutions and processes that cannot fit in the "black and white" of Western based theories. Thus we will be more able to understand simple facts such as the fact that capitalism produces just money, not freedom (Șora; Crăiuțu; Harvey), understand that there are other tools to use in social research and also other conclusions to be reached and proposals to be made.

1. "FREE" WITHOUT CHOICES?

Freedom in general and freedom of speech in particular are not a by-product of capitalism and never were (Șora). They were believed to be. This is the only reason why all intellectuals that expected a change before 1989 got disappointed with the "quality" of local democracies.

Romania was no different. Its intellectuals that are disappointed right now should have foreseen the fact that freedom is not a natural resource. They should have expected that freedom could not be understood or could be used in less appropriate ways – like the freedom to read and buy pornography instead of the freedom of reading and buying quality journals – and they should have worked more intensively in understanding what freedom is, especially in a country like Romania, where the separation of powers in state are weak, and people are not usually aware of their basic rights.

Freedom has many forms and we have to be able to produce meaningful discourse when we claim that "we are free". This is why we should start to investigate what is different, what is troublesome with the "freedom" in Romania and Eastern Europe.

Jean-Paul Sartre coined the famous "people are condemned to be free" while strongly believing in their humanity. According to him, we always have choices, like the soldier who can always take the option to kill in the war, the option to defect or the option of suicide. Being able to choose was, for Sartre, similar with being free. For Sartre people living in communism were obviously free. They made their choice to obey, not to kill one self or defect.

In the same note, not few scholars in Eastern Europe promoted liberation through spirit, and proclaimed that once the exterior reality is cut out, the people are free within themselves. Obviously, this inner freedom was available only for a few intellectuals. However, in the aftermath of the 1989 revolutions, these intellectuals too, along with the whole society, were faced with experiencing, for the first time in their lives, an exterior freedom.

As intellectuals they were obviously aware that German philosophers defined freedom as inner and exterior, and some were also aware about the Isaiah Berlin's classification of freedom into positive and negative categories, so they could try to redefine their free status along these theoretical lines.

How about the rest of the population? The people who never experienced external freedom? The people that could not tell by intuition what freedom was? Were they able to understand their freedom and define their free status quo into a coherent way?

The answer is, must be, no. Nobody after 1989 took freedom lessons because everybody considered, after seeing the TV images with the slain dictatorial couple, that they were free. Free only from Ceauşescu, this paper argues.

The close observers of post-communist societies were quick to indicate, during the early 90's, the lost humanity of the citizens of the former communist block. The widely present individualism and lack of sympathy for others were cornered as results of those 50 years of communist regime: the positive and negative freedoms were not understood by the population. The "freedom to destroy a bus" invoked by youngsters caught while destroying public and private property was blamed also on communism: people do not understand external freedom.

We do not want to go back to the Marxist theory to finger the historical differences between East and West, but at least we can observe as being true, the fact that even before the communist regime was installed, large masses of Romanians were obedient due to the pre WWII social structure that placed them in inferior classes.

Therefore, during communism, defecting abroad or committing suicide were no options for the vast majority of Romanians because it was in their nature to obey, not only Ceauşescu, but the paternalist state that gave them houses and jobs, and, before the early 80's, food.

This obedience that I am invoking here cannot be analyzed with instruments offered by Kierkegaard, Berlin or Arendt, because it lacks in humanity, a resource indispensable to modern humans. Therefore, we have to look for other instruments to deal with it.

2. CALLING GRAPES "BANANAS"

Almost all scholars that are extensively writing on European Union enlargement seem to downplay Giddens' warning that "modernity is a western project" (Giddens). Moreover they use western concepts and western models to analyze and understand Eastern "facts" (Habermas) that, in reality, are impermeable to a Western mind. Sociology is no different.

Students are academically trained in Eastern European universities to use Hegelian, Kantian, Marxist and Habermasian theories in the same way first graders are trained in basic arithmetic. In Romania, for example, the communist period was a black period for sociology and philosophy and Romanian scholars stayed outside the grand debates that followed the WWII. After 1989 they tried to fill in the gaps and along with the rest of society imported western notions and theoretical tools without any reflection and debate.

However, while "1+1" is "2" in all languages and in all places, hundreds of years of different histories that shape our current social beings, make it impossible for us to understand what we see because we are using just the "math" of Western thinking.

Sociology, in the same way as philosophy, must deal with what reality is (Crăiuțu), not with everything that exists under the sun. The problem is, for those who are looking at East European societies, that we filter reality through concepts that are foreign and we train our brain to discuss this reality using theories that are, by nature – for us – artificial. They are "forms", but empty forms that scholars try to fill with content, mostly in the same way that all modern institutions were adopted in Romania in the late 19th Century.

As a consequence of this "filling" we use in our utterances words that have a clear scientific meaning only when they discuss other cultures/societies. Although it is our choice to use them to designate things and delimitate our social space, we cannot possibly claim that it is in our interest to call "bananas" a bunch of grapes. Of course we can discuss "bananas" with Western-born sociologists, but since the object of our debates will be different, the outcome of our pathos will be corrupt. Continuing in the same direction, we will just build on quicksand theories that will stand neither time nor attentive examinations.

Zeletin argued that Romanians, while trying to copy the "humanity" of the Western World started to deny their true nature. Zeletin's view was only an extrapolation to the social sphere of Maiorescu's theory of forms without base, coined for literary criticism. However, his remarks are important for it points towards some historical handicaps that are still disadvantaging East Europeans as a whole.

Thus, this paper argues that adopting western based theories for Romanian society without radically rethinking the way that these theories should be used is just another way for us to dissimulate and hide our true nature of people that are free but without much knowledge about what this freedom is. It would be more

constructive therefore, while trying to adopt a western based theory or philosophy, to transform those theories through a process of dialogue with local based theories and philosophies and only then to fill them with content.

Consequently, when using these adopted theories, we should be able to discern between different connotations and denotations, and use only philosophies and theories which could be translated for the local reality. However, before reaching that point, we should be able to see and understand why Western literature and data cannot be used directly in Romania and why they cannot measure the Romanian reality. For this, we just have to ask a simple question:

Are Romanian citizens able to understand freedom the same way a people born and raised in the West, as people for which freedom is a palpable tradition?

To answer this question we have to take a look at Taleb's turkey and see that while Thanksgiving approaches, the turkey is measuring its rising satisfaction level. Is the turkey free? The bird thinks it is. Free to eat, free to sleep, free to feel good. The bird does not have any idea it has an owner or that Thanksgiving is coming soon (See Taleb: 2010).

Now, let us just assume that Obama decides to "free" this turkey and save it in the traditional presidential gesture. What changes for the turkey? Is the turkey freer? Obviously it is not. The bird is still an edible one and cannot choose its own destiny. Its feeling of "freedom" is a fake one, because the turkey, unable to choose, does not know what freedom really is. Therefore we can conclude at this point that, when asking "Where do you think you are, in an American movie?" the policemen are right: at least they understand the limitations of the Romanian reality.

3. MINIMUM TWO SETS OF MODERNITY

To explain why it is difficult for Romanian and other Eastern Europeans to be free, we have to go back to the early 19th Century with our explanations.

National states, together with a constellation of "isms" in which journalism is included appeared at the down of modern times (Habermas, Hanada). Freedom, as a concept, although as old as Sumerian cities, resurfaced as a central feature of these modern times. It was the individual who could use his natural intellect to understand the surrounding world and to act accordingly using his free will. The "free will" changed from the religious concept of "to sin or not to sin" into a secular one of "to be independent".

We indiscriminately call this event "modernity" and we use it in the same way as chefs use moulds to make "Madeleine" cakes. Easter Europe is stuffed inside the mould, the oven is turned on, and… surprise! It looks like a "Madeleine" but doesn't taste like one. Freedoms, individuality, private space, public space, are all foreign and almost impossible to translate concepts.

Blokker, influenced by Eastern thinkers, was one of the few Western scholars to recognize this problem, but his ideas, although acknowledged, are not part of mainstream of sociology. What he did for Eastern Europe was (1) to acknowledge the plurality of modernizing agency and its creativity; (2) to acknowledge the multi-interpretability and difference as primary elements of modernity; and (3) to propose sensitivity to the resulting institutional variety in societal constellations (Blokker: 2005).

Caius Dobrescu was in his turn brilliant to reject the western academia claim that Eastern European nationalisms are "homogenous". He called as "sterile" the path opened by Eduard Said in analyzing the development handicaps of non-western cultures, while he explained this academic failure by means of the sociology of cognition (Dobrescu: 2003). It is the empirical delusion – that the sociology of cognition is analyzing – that is pushing us to call our bunch of grapes "bananas" and to discuss concepts such as modernity and freedom with the universal logic of Western scholarship.

We have to observe that in Luhmann's sociology, society is just communication (Luhmann: 1996). We are systems coupled to the society in which we pour information and from which we get information. Communication is possible but we cannot communicate with the system we are coupled to. An "A" released in society can be retrieved only as an "A*". Following Luhmann, we can reject as false the proposal made by social scholars that an "A" launched in the political system in Germany and read as an "A*" will be read as an "A*" in the Romanian political system too. Doesn't matter what information that "A" should be, we have to acknowledge that we, as systems, are different systems when compared with German citizens and, nevertheless, the two political systems are quite different too. We would have no choice but to accept that our understanding of "A" would be something like an "A#", and from here we can deduce the idea that we are in need of different sets of observation instruments than those that are part of the German scholars' tool kits.

After we showed that while we cannot discuss the impact for our democratic construction of concepts such as 'freedom' and 'modernity' using only western theories, the next step would be to follow Blokker, by identifying a cause in our misreading of 'freedom' in the historical diverse and competing sources of this concept.

There are, as Dobrescu described, at least two major sources of "modern" awakening in Romania. One, in Transylvania, was the result of the Habsburg influence and had at its center developments from feudal law and natural rights. The other awakening happened in Wallachia and Moldova, the other two Romanian historical provinces, and started as a process influenced by the French Revolution (Dobrescu: 2003).

In Transylvania, the "modernity" was fueled straight from the Enlightenment. "The type of nationalism developed in Transylvania bears the mark of the Hapsburg enlightened bureaucratic culture. The attachment toward juridical

procedures was constant in the Transylvanian-Romanian national movement" (Dobrescu: 2003). This tradition started, as the Romanian scholar explains, in 1791, with the Greek Catholic bishop Inochentie Micu-Klein, who argued for the political emancipation of Romanians using concepts borrowed from both feudal law and natural right theories "in a manner typical of the Hapsburg juridical culture" (Dobrescu, op. cit.). Until the beginning of the 19th century, the Romanian population of Transylvania, although a majority, did not enjoy civil and political rights because of its Greek Orthodox faith. Under the Habsburg pressures, these rights were to be distributed to those recognizing the authority of the Pope. We see that although Romanians enjoyed economical rights, their status was similar with that of Catholics and Anglicans in Cromwell's republic.

Mitu remarked in his turn that "Transylvanian Romanian elite was in a subordinate position in its own political-cultural setting, and it encountered the dominant 'others' at home, thus producing a nationalist discourse based on a constant confrontation with the privileged ethnic groups, such as Hungarians and Germans" but he is not stressing the importance of the Habsburg juridical culture and bureaucracy in this process. This point however was raised by Verdery in her attempt to define ethnicity in Transylvania: in regard to the Habsburg Empire, she stressed the absence of an overwhelmingly dominant class or ethnic community, situation relevant for "the competition between rival social-political groups, a process 'particularly apt for agrarian societies embarking on bureaucratic modernization'" (in Iordachi & Trencsenyi: 2003). I call this an "action based modernity".

The "action based modernity" must be concealed to the space of Transylvania. Catherine Durandin – familiar with a Romania influenced less by Transylvanians and more by Wallachian elites – proposed that the Romanian political elite adopted the ideology of nationhood from French sources, especially from Jules Michelet (Durandin: 1989). Similarly, Iordachi and Trencsenyi observed that the "urban, middle-class basis of the Wallachians made them more receptive to the French romantic ideology of *citoyenneté* (citizenship), encompassed by the framework of a homogenizing nation-state" (Iordachi & Trencsenyi: 2003). The two scholars observed that some components of the Transylvanian awakening were incorporated in the Wallachia and Moldova based national construction process, but did not alter it because it was already a process in line with the European ideas of political modernity such as the integration of masses (Iordachi & Trencsenyi: 2003).

Dobrescu stresses in his turn that the awakening in Wallachia and Moldova was not generated by Enlightenment values. "The ideology around which these two provinces became politically united in 1859 was an expression of Romantic spiritualism and voluntarism. This variety of nationalism was intimately nurtured by the discovery of social utopianism" (Dobrescu: 2003; Antohi: 1994). "If Romanian national ideology in Transylvania was confined to the philosophy of the natural right, Moldavian and Wallachian nationalism was rather connected to the 'natural supernaturalism'" (Dobrescu: 2003) shaped by the modern discourse of memory and fantasy (Zamfir: 1989).

I call this a "contemplation based modernity". Although from French sources, this "contemplation based modernity" lacked the French social developments around the notions of individuality and freedom. Until early 19th century, Romanians in Moldova and Wallachia did not enjoy rights to freedoms. They were treated more as cattle, tax payers who were often tortured in order to make them pay their part. Historical sources show that even pregnant women were lashed while face-down on the ground with their pregnant stomachs inside a special hole in the ground!

We have thus at least two different sets for a Romanian modernity. Both of them mirroring the Western world, and both of them were pushed top-down by the Romanian elite. I have argued elsewhere that this is a "two step modernization process". In this two step modernization process, a western model is observed by the elite (1) which secondly creates institutions and explains the model to the citizens (2) (Grancea: 2006) However, we have to acknowledge now the fact that the western influences were not unique. The "otherness" was perceived differently in Transylvania than in Wallachia and Moldova. So were the means of copying it: juridical for the former and utopian for the latter.

This mixture of modernity projects made Romanian post WWII governments to favor a self powered policy of modernization. Only a modernization based on both action and contemplation could have a lasting life in the Romanian social space. However, the communist closure of the economic and public realm and the blunt intrusion into the private realm of state subjects did not help Romanians to fully understand and live what "modernity" was. Moreover they failed to understand the central part of the modernity project, the creation of the independent man. Thus, "freedom" became for them, and also for almost all Romanian scholars a concept yet to be clarified.

Until 1989, "freedom" was an almost taboo concept. Constitutionally, the "freedom to" was transformed in "duty to": the freedom to work became the "duty to work" and we can go on.

Those hoping for a western style capitalism and society in Romania had hoped that after 1989 Romanians would build their capitalist paradise right away. However, their hopes were in vain. The post 1989 "transition" period did not start with the needed clarification of the concept of freedom, and while almost all Romanians shouted the word "Libertate", during the bloody Revolution of December 1989, almost nobody understood what it meant.

3.1. MODERNITY AS A SETTING FOR THE PROBLEMS OF POST-COMMUNISM

There is more than one post-communism problem, but, the most important one is the wide spread tendency to oversimplify the solutions for those perceived problems. Blokker observed that modernist approaches on post-communism perceive a singular answer to major social problems such as underdevelopment and

poverty. "The countries concerned need to adopt Western political, economic, legal and financial institutions and to rearrange their state structures and budgets according to Western norms. In short, they have to transform their communist societies into Western-type capitalist and democratic ones" (Blokker: 2005). Once again the western model is becoming a mirror in which Eastern Europe is supposed to do its hair. However, it is almost impossible for academicians of both worlds to imagine a western model with multiple and interchanging faces as a mirror for an Eastern Europe even more complicated and diverse. The "Madeleine" cake project becomes utopian, but academicians, fooled by the processes of cognition are proposing solutions and running diagnoses. Thus, "on the level of the individual, (implicit) assumptions are made of an atomized, apathetic, state-dependent individual under communism (homo sovieticus) as opposed to a participative, socially active, rationally calculating, and autonomously acting individual (homo economicus) in modern societies." (Blokker: 2005).

From this first rough guess, to "the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market," a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking (Harvey: 2005), there is just a single step. Accordingly, in post-communism the public realm and the economic realm are, by definition, one. How then can we discern where economic freedom starts and ends? And political freedom, civil liberties or philosophical freedom?

Şora, a philosopher that defended the freedom of enterprise from moments after 1989, also stressed that "the market society is not the final answer to the deepest problems and questions of human existence". For him "the mechanisms of the market and the institutions of democracy play a fundamental role in protecting liberty, but they cannot create the cultural and spiritual reserves and resources that they need to function properly. The latter come from outside the market and are never produced by it. Much like the indispensable things in life, the highest interests of the community have no exchange value and are likely to be neglected if supply and demand are allowed to entirely dominate the world" (in Craiutiu: 2007).

However, in the classical theory of the public sphere, the bourgeois society which enjoyed a certain degree of economic freedom from the aristocratic states – freedoms derived from feudal laws and natural rights – created private realms of discussion from which developed public realms, i.e. public spheres (Habermas: 1989; 1991). The modern states recognized these public spheres and their social importance by including freedom of speech and other negative freedoms (Berlin: 2002) in the fundamental laws. Thus, the Marxist cliché that "the freedom of speech is a freedom from the state" was born, but this cliché was not understood in Romania, before and not even after 1989!

4. HOW TO USE THAN, HABERMAS?

The theory of modernity offered by the German philosopher Habermas was applauded world-wide, including in Romania. The main criticism that his theory received was that he deals with an ideal type of society. We know from Marga (2006) that Habermas developed his theory while scrutinizing closely German society which he wanted to improve. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves if using Habermas to discuss Romania is wise, because Romanian society cannot be compared with German society. We sometimes use the same words. We translate them and we think that we use them with the same meaning, but we are wrong.

Sadly, the same processes of cognition are causing us to err.

When we discuss states, including our own states – regardless our nationalities – we can never surpass the nationalist barriers of the 19th century. States are the ultimate pride and the ultimate goal. They are discussed as natural emanations, as results of different and genuine cultural evolutions. We tend thus to forget what Șora reminded us, the fact that "states are nothing but emanations of civil societies" (Șora: 1991) with which a constant dialogue must be maintained. It makes sense now why the freedom of speech, emphasized in our constitutions and in all public discourse in the post-communist period, has a meaning only in such a context of dialogue between civil society and the state that creates and protects the freedom of speech.

The philosophy of Habermas exists not only because of Habermas himself, but because of a larger and complicated socio-political context of Germany in which and for which Habermas developed his philosophy.

The Romanian context and the German context are as different as they can be. When we translate Habermas into Romanian, involuntarily we bring into the Romanian text a background which is alien to us. As a result, we participate in debates using primarily tools which fail us.

A better approach would be to start a process of dialogue using both Western and Eastern philosophies and, while identifying the differences between the Western social space and the Eastern one, between Western individuals and Eastern ones, we should work towards modifying the meaning of the main concepts we are trying to operate with. Only in this way would we have flawless results in our research.

The public sphere proposed by Șora offers to us what the public sphere of Habermas cannot: a tool to construct the modern environment and develop the scarce humanity of the citizens. The public sphere for Șora is not the place created between the political and economical realms by the citizens by putting together their private spheres and it is not a network of opinion forming institutions. It is instead a place where I must discover Thou, and must see that Thou is I. The Șora's public sphere is a sphere where the dialogue must start from recognizing the humanity of those involved in dialogue. This humanity is not a requisite for Habermas, however. For him, the modern man is human, is rational, so the public

sphere could be perceived as a system, as a mechanism built in the heart of the democratic states. It is usless to make the same assumption for Romania. In 1989 when democracy was proclaimed a Romanian democratic state was a goal, not a reality, thus, a Habermasian public sphere was a goal, too. The problem is that the last 20 years taught us that it was an unreachable one. The dialogue could not start because something that never crossed Habermas's mind: "I" could not meet and recognize Thou, "I" did not love Thou.

5. FREEDOM FOR THE "YES-MEN" TO SAY "YES"

It is an historical fact that participative democracies flourished only during historical periods when different opinions clashed not in wars but in cozy saloons through discussion. A dialogue in which people of different opinions, faiths and backgrounds participated altogether was the spark that pushed the western world into the first class of our human history express. It is thus unfortunate that, while we try to copy the western world in minute details in our economic realms, we cannot copy it in its respect for diversity. Blokker remarked in this sense that "The post-communist transitions in Eastern Europe immediately experienced a closure of the discursive space, circumscribed by, on the one hand, the widespread perception of endogenous political elites that the imitation of 'tested' Western political and economic models as well as a 'return to Europe' was the only viable form of emancipation, and, on the other, the shape this 'return to Europe' took in the conditionality of the accession process" (Blokker: 2005).

Thus, I suggest here that post-communist states should not prioritize economic freedom over other kinds of freedom and assure that a balance between economic freedom political freedom and civil liberties is maintained.

We have to ask ourselves now, how it is possible to have a "closure of the discursive space" when the two democratic prerequisites a) freedom of speech is a freedom from the state and b) public spheres were liberated form the state' control in post-communism, are palpable realities?

The answer is not an easy one. For those who discuss freedom as if it was a universal standard like the kilogram – a block of gold kept in a French safe in Paris – freedom might be from the state or institutions, but for Eastern Europeans, as we stated before, it is an ambiguous notion. It cannot be otherwise since all who dared to question the opportunity of adopting Western model and western economical patterns were labeled as communists, criminals and shuttled out of our public space.

The newspapers were flooded with Europe's yes-men, with America's yes-men and we can not claim anymore that our public sphere is free: everybody else had and still have to keep their mouths shut. Freedom from the state seems thus to be insufficient. Institutional freedom is insufficient, too. To be free in the public sphere, politically and philosophically, we need to take our freedom from somewhere else indeed.

"I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it" is a quote from 1906 by S.G. Tallentyre, in "Friends of Voltaire" which sounds, no doubt, alien in the Romanian agora.

The last 20 years showed without any doubt that in all spheres of dialogue the respect for different opinions is scarce. Politics is a jungle where dialogue is rendered useless by the spread of invectives and other verbal attacks. Moreover, it is even more troublesome that the refusal of dialogue is present in the highly rarefied strata of intellectual elite, where even waging wars against dead people, like Marino, is an everyday practice of shutting down opinions, of killing some ideas for the sake of others.

Why can't we accept that we cannot expel colors from the rainbow? Why can't we accept that two ideas or two opinions, as different as they may be, could coexist in the same public sphere without their proponents attacking each other? One hint to the answer comes from the Romanian philosopher Mihail Șora. He believes that to be free in the society first we need to be free within ourselves. "It is the task of the inner dialogue to keep us awake and vigilant in our existential choices, so that we can remain authentic in what we do and who we are. As such, *le dialogue intérieur* is the expression of our freedom, since our identity, far from being fixed once and for all, is the unpredictable outcome of our free choices" (Crăiuțu: 2007). Thus, it may be true that many of us are not yet free within ourselves. We might have nightmares that are keeping us down and blind us against the rainbow society of modernity.

Șora's ideas are congruent with the ones of Pleșu. This Romanian philosopher too attacked inner freedom, but not for the benefit of oneself but for the benefit of the whole society.

Șora's and Pleșu's ideas might seem similar with those of Sachs, but they are not. Sachs, like Havel, Gandhi or Mandela promoted the self-mastery idea as the only way to reach interior freedom. But self-mastery is something that is forbidden by nature to the masses. This is the reason why Șora never fully endorsed Noica's model of salvation through culture that sought to transcend the limitations of history by focusing on the private rather than the public sphere. With the benefit of hindsight, Șora argued that the public sphere should have never been overlooked. Any project for the future should have aimed precisely at an adequate reconstruction of this space. The intense self-educating strategy adopted by few highly cultivated individuals who shied away from the public sphere … inevitably created a certain moral and intellectual detachment vis-à-vis the horrible and systematic homogenization enforced by the regime in the public sphere … But very few people could benefit in practice from this [elitist] strategy" (Șora: 1991; Crăiuțu: 2007).

Thus, inner freedom has to be used in a way that we can become aware of the existence of others, and this awareness has to become a mechanism of limitation of our freedom in the same way as individual violence delegated to the state has

become a mechanism of limitation of "freedom" in West. As a result of this artifice, the freedom of speech in Romania could be understood not as a "freedom from the state", because after 50 years of communism everyone feels odd that the state should impose limits freedom of speech, but a freedom from others that we meet in the social space.

This definition of freedom does more than solving a problem of using this concept, but becomes a needed tool in defining the public sphere, the social space as a place of dialogue from which violence is to be excluded.

6. BACK TO THE MODERNITY PROJECT

Blokker stressed that an important "characteristic of modernity is the emphasis on human autonomy, i.e. the idea of the human being as a subject who is able to understand the world and act on these understandings". Thus, he proposes that the "post-communist emancipation can thus primarily be understood as the liberation of the subject from the heteronomy of a centrally administered and totally controlled order" (Blokker: 2005). Empirically and otherwise, we can establish that democratic freedom after 1989 was perceived as a negative freedom (Berlin: 2002) as the absence of coercion from the public space, absence that gave the citizens the power to do what they liked, including anti-social actions. Youngsters justified their actions when destroying a city bus, saying that "we are free to do it because we live in a democracy". Unfortunately, democracy is not designed to support and protect such anti-social behavior. It is designed for those who make use of *le dialogue intérieur* proposed by Şora, because if such dialogue existed, those talking to themselves would discover that destroying a public bus is not the best expression of their freedom, but just a mere utterance of an individual unable to live in and understand society.

We are obliged to observe that although this example might seem trivial, it is an important observation regarding the post-communist human condition of Eastern Europeans. The death of the communist state obliterated from our mind not only the presence of an omniscient and omnipotent state, but also the idea of a shared social space. Together with the death of the two Ceauşescu the whole idea of people as social beings was gone. Blokker warned that an unequivocal attachment to liberal individualism did not follow from the liberation of human subjects from state control. "The emancipation of Eastern Europe also meant the re-articulation of collectivisms of various kinds" (Blokker: 2005) but, in my opinion, this re-articulation was rather weak in Romania, if we imagine the whole society.

Dobrescu pointed out scholarly that "different understandings of concepts such as the state, individual autonomy, social contract, political freedom, social development, and so on translate into different ways of conceptualizing and institutionalizing the nation" (Dobrescu: 2003). I can add that different ways of

understanding our positions as individuals in a society can shape our understanding of democracy and political freedom. We can see how post-communism developments concentrated on replacing the communist ideology and communist constructed nationalism with a liberal vision of nationalism in Romania and Eastern Europe becomes utopian. The problem resides with the very definition of liberal nationalism. "The liberal vision on nationalism was predominantly institutional. It was also patterned, at least in the works of the most radical representatives of this trend, on the idea of the body politic consisting of free and equal citizens" (Dobrescu: 2003). While this vision raises no specific concerns in a Western setting, in Romania it is hard to imagine a "body" of "free and equal citizens". In an atomized society, the individuals might act as free beings. They are more or less like lions liberated from the zoos and circuses straight into the savanna: they take their first kill and repeat successful actions. But they are not equal. The whole idea of equality died with the communist regime in 1989.

This statement must be nonsense for those social researchers specialized in studying public opinion. Year after year since 1990 they find that Romanians are the ones with the most egalitarian views in the whole of Europe. However, this egalitarian oratory that shows up not just in peoples' opinions but also in the mass media, finds no correspondence in people's actions. This nostalgia cannot recreate in a savanna environment the pampering atmosphere of a zoo, not even the punishment/reward mechanism of a circus.

The "citizens" of Romania are ready to fight at any time for a bigger piece of cake or for the entire *gateau*. When something is for grabs, nobody seems to give a thought to the "others". Society disappears. It is just the savanna and the prey. One can have it all or have nothing at all.

It is no wonder then those Eastern European societies swallowed the neoliberal ideology with no remorse. "The freedoms the neoliberal state embodies reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital" (Harvey: 2005). They absolve "the citizens" from the painful action of sharing a social space or the painful action of seeing and thinking of others.

The neoliberal ideology articulated perfectly on a public discourse that had deep historical roots in mirroring the Western modernity project. In the first 10 years after the 1989 Revolution the cultural press – and others – grew steadily polarized, with a trend that supported the program of postmodern liberalism and a trend that promoted different forms of more or less liberal conservatism" (Dobrescu: 2003). However, in the absence of social values and capital that are making the backbone of the European liberal or liberal orientated societies, only neoliberal ideas had a future in Romania.

Harvey is clear: "Neoliberalism confers rights and freedoms on those 'whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing', leaving a pittance for the rest of us" (Harvey: 2005). "The free market tends to favor activities that are a source of

material gain and does not always give scope to reasons and interests which are not a direct source of such profit" (Șora: 1991; Craiutiu: 2007). However, this is not an essential point anymore since we are all freed lions in a savanna. Free to starve, indeed.

7. A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

It is now time to look at China. Although criticized widely for its policies and human right record, China was at least honest with itself when it opened its economy to the neoliberal ideas without opening the public sphere at the same time. The Chinese government might have realized that opening the public sphere, too, was not a choice with a near term happy ending. Freedom might not be a gift from the state, but something for which generation after generation has to fight for so when granted it won't be discarded as it is discarded in Romania when citizens sell their ballots to the highest bidders, where parties race to voters' houses with envelopes of money and not with proposals for dialogue.

It is only logical to assume that when governments of Eastern Europe proclaimed the establishment of free and democratic regimes, they overestimated the capacities of their citizens to live freely in participative democratic environments. The resulted freedom was never explained. Nobody, including the academic milieu tried to analyze it to see that freedom can be negative and positive, good or bad.

Romanians were just free and that was sufficient, so why ask more questions? Thus, the result of copy and pasting Western norms is grotesque.

When I say grotesque I do not try to reinvent hot water. These kinds of problems were recognized before. Winston Churchill was quoted as saying that "the main argument against democracy is a 5-minute discussion with the average voter". What would he say if told that in the 21st century Romanians would usually not read journals and some of them even sell their votes. We can just imagine.

There are other examples of confusing terms. During WWII, Polanyi remarked that the meaning of freedom became contradictory in complex societies. There are, he wrote, "two kinds of freedom, one good and the other bad. Among the latter he listed 'the freedom to exploit one's fellows, or the freedom to make inordinate gains without commensurable service to the community, the freedom to keep technological inventions from being used for public benefit, or the freedom to profit from public calamities secretly engineered for private advantage' " (in Harvey: 2005).

All the "bad" freedoms are freedoms that we enjoy in the savanna environment we live in. We know the good freedoms as well, but how can we use them to protect the less fit? To create a savanna "society" where all lions can take equal share of prey?

The answer cannot come from Western based philosophy. Nothing that western thinkers could imagine will ever work for Eastern Europeans. The only

solution for the Eastern European illness must come, as I said before, from within. From Eastern European thought, precisely.

We have thus to go back to those ideas that never reached the mainstream or to those authors who used to dare to propose "models" that were not copied from outside. First we have to remember (again) Andrei Pleşu who proposed a moral of the interval for those then living in the atomized condition of the communist built public realm. Pleşu analyzed Robinson Crusoe as the prototype of all human beings that belong to a society first with their minds, and only after with their bodies. It is our desire to live close to others and to recognize others within ourselves that caused Robinson to keep on dressing in a place in which clothes were not required anymore by the realities of the existent physical space. Robinson had society within himself so his desire to return to England was nurtured only form his need to paste the reality he had inside onto the reality outside (Pleşu: 1988). Thus, the encounter between Robinson and Friday is not only a chance of acquiring a servant, but a chance for both of them to become free human beings. They both have the chance to say "thou" to the other.

In the same note, "the beginning," Mihail Şora writes, "is to say thou to whomever life and the train of things bring in front of you. Everything follows from there." Worth underscoring are the implications of this view for rethinking the nature of the public sphere, a theme that lies at the core of Şora's political philosophy. The I that meets and speaks to a Thou does not regard the latter as a transcendental object constituted by its own intentional acts. On the contrary, the meeting between I and Thou allows the other to freely manifest and realize his or her own otherness and difference. As such, the I-Thou relation belongs to a qualitatively different level than the gravitational field of the I-It, in which the external subjects remain mere projections of the I. Thus, a genuinely intersubjective world arises in which the I does not represent or constitute the Thou as a mere own replica, but meets the other in a living relation and appeal. This is a world in which individuals take responsibility for their alter egos and respect their equality, freedom, and difference. Last but not least, it is their reciprocal opening to each other that reconstitutes the social sphere each time that an I meets a Thou in a living relation. This "public" sphere between individuals is redefined and kept alive by each encounter between an I and a Thou" (in Craiutiu: 2007).

8. CONCLUSION

There are two conclusions this paper proposes. One is concerning the notion of "freedom" which was the starting point of our demonstration on prioritizing Eastern European philosophy in social science, and the other one is concerning the attitude scholars should have towards the Western based theories when discussing the realities of the East.

To start with the first one, we have to remark the fact that it is nevertheless a question of social pathology the fact that citizens of countries labeled democratic and free can not say what their freedom is. However it becomes even more distressful when this is coming not only from ordinary citizens but also from scholars. Political and economical freedoms are too much intermingled to be used separately in the public space. Thus, the materialism is menacing our ethics and guilt. Freedom is battling from low ground and hopelessly the scientific determinism embedded in the neo-liberal ideology. Tamás's observation that "capitalism tends to silence through indifference, mockery, or marginalization all anticapitalist or antidemocratic theories and ideas while also fostering an increasing commercialization of the entire world". "The life of the mind in the emerging democracies is forced to adjust more and more to the logic of the market that seeks to extend its standards and profit-driven criteria to all spheres of life" (Crăiuţu: 2007).

We have to awake and look closely at the freedom we are making use of after 1989. We have to discern between our economic freedoms and political ones, between the positive freedoms and negative ones, between the philosophical freedom and the civic liberties we enjoy, between the inner freedom and the external one. Thus, as Şora suggested, "each person should work with others to build together, step by step, a genuine political community, in which "being" is honored and placed above 'having' " (Şora:1991).

Thus, we can help building, as Şora suggested, a form of "convergent anarchy" and relative justice allowing people to live decently and freely. This space where an I will meet a Thou, both of them being free and authentic (Şora), and both of them having the society inside (Pleşu: 1988).

Now, we can proceed with our second conclusion, regarding a state that for those of us who are studying the Eastern Europe, a very important task will be to readjust all social concepts that we apply in our research to the native Eastern European philosophies. We have to start from re-imagining our modernity and identify where concepts like freedom developed on separate paths than those identified in Western societies. In this process, developments such as the communist approach on transforming "freedom to" into "duty to" must not be rejected entirely. To become a participative democracy and to build social capital we have to evolve from our current atomized society and to recognize our status of individuals that share a public space with other individuals with whom they are not in a competing relationship – as lions in savanna – but in a cooperative one.

For all others involved in studying sociology and media in the Western world and wondering about the currently unstoppable wave of neoliberal thinking, an important task is to reanalyze their own modern developments and to see where their, until now, common sense is not so common anymore. They have to analyze whether for westerners the multitude of meanings of various concepts are still making sense or not. They have to see what can be preserved and what is lost.

Failing to complete our tasks will prove Patapievici was right. We are, he warned, as modern human beings, "recent". We are not new, but like canned food, we have an expiry date on us. We cannot improve, we cannot create new culture. We can only expire (Patapievici: 2008). Asking ourselves about what (for example) freedom is, is just a first step on a very long returning into human beings that are both free and equal, and a postponement of the prediction about our expiration day.

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