

VAMPIRES IN THE LIVING ROOM.
A VIEW OF WHAT HAPPENED TO EASTERN EUROPE AFTER 1989,
AND WHY REAL SOCIALISM STILL MATTERS

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1989

It was a dry winter in Transylvania, without much snow but very cold. We didn't play as much as usual but still, all the kids went home well after dark, tired but excited after yet another evening of great fun, some time after their parent's repeated calls to come home. As the evenings were setting in, the windows of the blocs were coming alive with voices one after another, as parents were shouting out loud their children's name. We listened, but rarely obeyed. Not immediately. We used to get home well after dark, but nobody worried or made a big fuss about it. Our social games were much too important and enjoyable.

That Friday morning of December 22 1989, an eerie silence cloyed the motionless air between the gray apartment blocks of my neighborhood and the glassy sky. My father and elder brother were both somewhere downtown. I was not worried though. My mother connected with everybody through the grapevine and telephone. Around 11:30AM I went out with my friend Nicu, with the pretext of buying bread, and a secret plan to go downtown. I was thirteen, he was eleven years old. We took a longer route than needed to the bread shop, sharing rumors and impressions but mostly sounding and sensing the air of our 40,000 people hood, cartierul Mărăști. We had moved there when most of it was still a huge construction site. We had seen every ditch becoming a front, we explored and left signs on the inside and on the roofs of about every bloc of apartments, and we knew just about every angle and a fair number of faces. We even explored the underground canals, and, while they were open, the huge tubes of concrete for water pipes which were later buried under the alleys. This jungle of concrete was our playground and site of formation, the place of a thousand friendships and social games running for days and nights over a sizeable area. We also knew very well its limits: our cartier had its own

identity within the city, and there were seven other districts which had distinct points of interest, heroes, histories, and networks. It was a big world. Not all of them were worker's districts. Not everybody had friends and relations in each one of them. Not everybody set foot in all of them. We knew ours inside out, and we also knew and felt like owning the center of the city, as well as the industrial area with all its factories. But that Friday something altogether new was in the air over the whole city, and we had no good gut feelings about it.

The previous evening we hadn't played, although we were on vacation. Our night sky had been set on fire by tracer bullets. We stayed in with the lights out, watching from our silent windows, from behind curtains, the sky above lacerated, listening to the shootings. They didn't sound at all like in the movies. We could locate them in the main square of our neighborhood, about a five minute walk, as well as downtown. Somebody also kept shooting with a small gun from our very own four story apartment block, every half hour or so, probably in the air. That was more annoying than unnerving. We had our ideas of who that person might be. That evening we also listened, yet again, to news shows in Romanian at the Western radio stations Free Europe and Voice of America. We heard reports of a huge massacre in the city of Timișoara, with the blood of tens of thousands of victims practically flooding the streets. We couldn't know these reports were false. But we also had a source of miraculous relief: untouched by the evil unleashed around, somebody was loudly beating their carpets outside. Bam! Bam! Bullets or not, Christmas was coming in a couple of days, which meant it was the time of general cleaning. The rhythmic sound of that carpet beater, resonating off the walls of concrete for a long, long time into the dark, was that night the most comforting music for our ears. I never saw that magic carpet, but I know very well its powers. I can still hear it. Amidst sights and sounds and rumors of destruction, this was the pulse of our neighborhood. I fell asleep. The next morning I was ready to witness anything, as we got out to buy bread.

The bread shop was within a five-minute walk, on one of the main streets of the neighborhood, called Fabricii (Factory Street). Flanked from both sides by two street-long twelve-story apartment blocks, this long avenue that looked like a corridor had been conceived by a team of North-Korean architects. At one end were all the factories, in the valley, at the other end the high-rise apartment blocks shaping the horizon and opening

to a major intersection and the main public square of the neighborhood. It was all very, very silent that morning, and there was nobody out there, just us two kids. I could almost sense physically the reach of silent gazes following our street movement from above, from behind curtains. We expected to see signs of bloodshed, bullet traces, but there was just this heavy silence and emptiness. It was all very clean and somehow theatrical. Our hearts jumped when we suddenly spotted three men walking hastily towards downtown with a flag, on a side street. They were in the middle of the street, not on the sidewalk. Even they were silent - scary silent anger. We only heard for a while their footsteps hitting the asphalt. Then we got there and bought the bread. It wasn't freshly baked. We didn't talk words to the vendor, only exchanged glances, tensed, a few coins for bread. And just as we were getting out the store, it happened.

I felt rather than heard the rumbling of the concrete. As I looked to my right, I saw at that end of Fabricii Street the whole horizon filling and filled to the black with a mass of people. And they were all running towards me. It looked as if the whole street had been hoisted up and now falling down on me. Suddenly the windows of all the apartments from above came to life at once, turning into loudspeakers for voices. By the time I started grasping the shouts I was far away through the side alleys, bolting home. Then I understood what they were saying:

-The (National) Television has been occupied! HE (CEAUȘESCU) FLED! Come home! They are broadcasting live the Revolution from Bucharest! Turn on your TV's!

It was a bit past midday. The people were running desperately from the manifestation, towards their private homes, to watch the Revolution live. From the strike in the public square, they ran downhill in the direction of the factories, but only in order to stop at their home apartments, in front of the TV. As we got home, we also started watching the live broadcast at our black-and-white TV. We couldn't know the live broadcast was actually a recording made some minutes ago, in those dilated moments. We were glued to the screen, watching the events unfold out there. We ate in the living room while watching TV, not at the kitchen table. Then it all got dark again, very quickly, and the

tracer bullets started ripping the sky apart once more. I remember well that feeling, and that sight. This time I was both more scared, and excited. No more sleeping. The image of the right end of that street, the square-shaped horizon suddenly filled with people rushing towards me, has stuck in my mind ever since. It all happened in a moment, but I knew right then and there that the world as we knew it changed. Just like we learned from our communist school textbooks, we could really make the impossible possible, it was within our power to shape the future. This December was future opening.

The memories become a flood. The next dialectical images I remember vividly are broadcasted images: seen much later, Ceaușescu's helicopter leaving the roof of the Central Committee building above the jubilant crowd, with a few people already rushing towards them on the roof, and, seen earlier, the first frame of the live Revolution, a motley crowd of revolutionaries occupying and filling Studio 4 of the National Television. They were all men. That image somehow gave me a palpable idea of something incredible, infinitely more interesting than our Fabricii Street: an unknown world was also radically changing, and somehow we were a central part of it. But we had to watch and listen to the words of those men to find about it, and thus feel we were a part of it.

Then followed more days of unknown but radical transformations, of watching TV, struggles in the dark and adventures outside, the days of most of the dead of the Revolution, until Christmas, when we saw that most disorienting and persistent of images, forever in my head, the dead body of Ceaușescu, filling the screen horizontally. It was supposed to be a sign that nobody had to bow from now on, but we all tilted our heads to the right to see his familiar face forever estranged. I'm sure that December the whole TV-watching humanity tilted their heads to the right.

Some time later, in February or March, other men brought a tall standing cross, hand carved in wood, in the main square of my neighborhood, to commemorate the dead of the revolution. I heard about it almost simultaneously through the rumor grapevine and by seeing it on the news on TV. By that time we were all watching English, French, German, Italian and US television programs. The TV buzzed non-stop in all apartments, we were all cabled up. And so we got to see our own neighborhood on national television. We saw the news about the cross and our neighborhood on Nicu's new color television. Seen through it, our apartment blocks looked ugly and aloof. They seemed all the same, gray,

and suddenly very, very old. Now everybody said they were gray and ugly. Nobody remembered they had a personality and were called "silverly" in the old hit Macarale: "Zeci de blocuri, râd în soare argintii" (Tens of blocs / Are laughing silverly in the sun").

Thus begun the great postcommunist transition and immigration, at home, where we sensed that the borders have moved through us, moving us in a different place. Sight can be one of the trickiest senses, just like the feeling of the body and territories one thinks inhabits.

It was only much later that I realized nobody was beating their carpets anymore.

THE POSTCOMMUNIST TRANSITION: FLYING WITHOUT THE MAGIC CARPET

More than twenty years have passed since the fall of the East European socialist bloc, which means about half the time of the existence of "real socialism" in Romania (1948-1989). This historical time has been dubbed the "post-communist transition." However, "transition" has been also the fundamental concept of East-European regimes before 1989, then defined as the gradual "development" from feudal agrarian societies to socialism, on the way to the just world of global communism.¹ As opposed to this vision, but reinforcing the shared presupposition of an abstract linear temporality, the dominant meaning of the postcommunist transition has been the "integration" of the former socialist bloc into "Europe" and the Western order, government after government, in the anticommunist and Eurocentric sense of a "return to normalcy" after the "totalitarian" deviation of "communism." According to this narrative, the "communist experiment" had failed, it proved to be an "irrational" or at least "inefficient" art of governing which caused arrested development and totalitarianism; consequently, after 1989, the East European states had to embark on a transition towards the rational model of development of the Western countries. The transition stretched historical time through a double-movement: instilling distance from the bad ways of communism, and learning the good

¹ See Ovidiu Tichindeleanu, "Towards A Critical theory of Postcommunism?", *Radical Philosophy*, issue 159, January-February 2010.

ways of the advanced Western world. This process expanded at the level of governments, but also at the level of subjectivity, reinventing the ways of becoming knowledgeable, successful, or socially respected; refashioning the models of becoming national citizens, adults, men, women, and white.

The return to normalcy, reason and democracy involved in real life exclusively top-to-bottom reforms conceived and implemented by political and technocratic elites, assisted by Western experts, as well as the carefully controlled restriction of the political involvement of people, to only the electoral process. The first economical effect of the reforms was the radical destruction of the former socialist economies in the first decade of transition, which plunged Eastern Europe directly from one recession (in the late 1980s), to a catastrophic recession (in the early 1990s), without any period of recovery.² This time, the plunge was quick and, given the accompanying political changes, forced a general transformation or conversion of the specific universe of values and alternative forms of economy which proliferated in the official networks as well in the deep society under state socialism. This process of devaluation and redistribution was justified with words of order such as "bankruptcy of communism," "dead industries," "corruption," and on the other side "strategic investors," "restitution of property," "privatization," and especially "shock therapy."³ According to the very conservative measurements of the World Bank, poverty rose from an estimated 6% of the population in 1987-1988 to 39% in 1993-1995.⁴ In Romania, at the end of the first decade of transition, in 1999, industrial

² For a contextual view of the transition of Eastern Europe in the world-system, See Hannes Hofbauer "Crisis in Eastern Europe: Economic Background, Social Outcome," presentation at the Conference "Actual Crisis in Central and Eastern Europe" in Prague (13-14 June 2009). See also Mihaly Simai, „The sources and consequences of poverty and inequality in Eastern Europe and the CIS countries at the beginning of the 21st Century”, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Report for prepared for the UN by former President of the Council of the UN's University, 2005. For a socio-economical evaluation of the transition in Romania, see "Dupa 20 de ani: optiuni pentru România," The National Institute for Economic Research, Bucharest: Romanian Academy 2010. See also Florea Dumitrescu, Ion Păcurar, "Jaful din avuția națională și degradarea vieții oamenilor", in Florea Dumitrescu, *Tranziția 1990-2004. Experiența românească*, Bucharest, Editura AGER Economistul, 2005, pp 317-327.

³ For an introductory foray in the use of words of order on the specific historical vocabulary of the postcommunist transition see Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, "Myth and Complicity. The Mysticism of Post-Communist 'Freedom' and its Denials," *IDEA arts + society*, #20, 2005.

⁴ Victor Axenciuc, *Introducere în istoria economică a României. Epoca modernă și contemporană*, Bucharest, Editura Fundația România de Măine, 2000. See also World Bank reports on Romania from 1995-1996 retrieved from <http://www-wds.worldbank.org> .

production was at 40% of the levels of 1989.⁵ The industrial production outputs have not reached yet, in our present, the levels of 1989, but the ecological situation has deteriorated, not in the least due to the radical decline of local agriculture in the context of land reforms, and the widespread deforestations. Paradoxically, this debacle was generally blamed on the "legacy of communism." The fall of internal production was compensated through massive imports, in a situation of a galloping devaluation of the local currency and wages. Drastic effects ensued: if between 1951-1989 aprox. 3 million apartments had been built, in which some 12 million people moved in (half the population), the extremely rapid deterioration of industry after 1989, and with it the ruin of industrial cities, created a mass of disposable labor force, now alienated from its own existential territory, of which a significant part took to Western Europe in search of the vital hard currency, willing to sacrifice their education, qualification and social status for the sake of their close ones.⁶ If in 1989, the official population of Romania was 22.810.035, the national census of 2011 counted 19.042.936, recording thus a virtual disappearance of more than 3 million people, situated according to demographic projections mostly from the young-and-middle-age sector of the social pyramid.

Minds, bodies and ways of seeing the world have changed in this transition. The staying power of local epistemologies and productive forces was with certainty deeply affected. Much hope was invested in the rationality of the "invisible hand" of the "free market", which turned out to be a sort of non-discursive type of rationality modeled after the concept of the "laws of nature". As opposed to the forced impositions of the planned economy, the invisible hand of the free market was to balance things out, create "real values" (as opposed to the "leveling down" perpetrated by egalitarian communism) and bring prosperity. The state administrations largely subordinated to the invisible hand: the invisible hand thus occupied the symbolic role of the state, like a communism of goals without the communism of means, and ultimately without goals. The magic carpet was to be replaced with a technocratic autopilot. As the accumulation of capital advanced with

⁵ Ioan Scurtu, *Revoluția Română din Decembrie 1989 în context internațional*, Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, Editura Institutului Revoluției Române, 2006, p.323seq. For a detailed economic analysis, see Iulian Văcărel, *Politici fiscale și bugetare în România. 1990 – 2000*, Bucharest, Editura Expert, 2001.

⁶ Cornel Ban, "Mapping Out Spaces and Relations of Transnationality: The Case of Romanian Migration in Italy", in Luisa Chiodi (ed.), *The Borders of the Polity Migrations and Security Across the EU and the Balkans*, Europe and the Balkans International Network, Luigi Longo Editore, 2005.

unprecedented speed,⁷ new forms of poverty, commodity fetishism and alienation emerged, creating enormous riches in the time span of a few years, but also bringing misery, fraud and crime to the deep society. There was an enthusiastic explosion of small business; some of the most common forms of private small businesses were the import of clothes (from Turkey), the tin-table corner shop (“butic”), cable television enterprises, drinking bars, currency exchange offices (formal or informal) and especially pawnshops and credit banks, which mushroomed at every corner. In the 1990s, Ponzi schemes and financial pyramids have appeared in every and each country of Eastern Europe, from Caritas in Romania to MMM in Russia, racking up the savings in money that people manifestly had, and bringing to ruins many people.⁸ In the meantime, the East European governments sold for hard currency the now devalued productive enterprises – collective farms, factories, industrial complexes.⁹ This was the material reality of the free market. The new forms of generalized misery, poverty and insecurity were explicitly presented by both left and right governing forces as "necessary sacrifices" of the transition, in order to catch up "quicker" with the Western world. Primitive accumulation may be a permanence in the capitalist world rather than a mysterious origin, but in the 1990s, primitive accumulation and extraction of value by all means was at the forefront of social transformations in Eastern Europe.

The advent of such drastic and otherwise senseless changes was justified through a series of opposing terms which defined the postcommunist transition as an exceptional

⁷ Axenciuc, id. Already in 2003, the Romanian journal "Capital" announced that the fortune of the richest 300 people of Romania accounted to the equivalent of 26% of the national income. *Capital*, Bucharest 2003.

⁸ By way of a quick survey: in the Russian Federation: MMM was the most important Ponzi-scheme company, running between 1989-1994; at least two million people made deposits summing an estimated \$1.5 billion before the collapse of the company. In Romania: the company Caritas emerged between 1991-1994 in Cluj-Napoca, promising eight times the money invested after six months. With help from the National Television it attracted over 400,000 depositors from all over the country of 23 million people, who invested an estimated \$1 billion before Caritas collapsed 14 August 1994, with a recorded debt of \$ 450 million. In Albania, many pyramid schemes emerged in the mid-1990s, and with the opensupport of certain members of the government an estimated two-thirds of the population invested andlost about \$1.2 billion. The collapse in 1997 resulted in riots, military interventions, and toppling the government. In Slovakia, more than 300.000 people invested an estimated \$1 billion in more than thirty pyramid schemes.

⁹ See Cornel Ban, "Policies and Institutions in the Neoliberal Moment", in *Transnational Governance and Development Paradigms: Economic Liberalization in Postauthoritarian Spain and Romania*, doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 2010. For a succinct review of the privatization policies from 1991-2000 see David Turnock, *The East European Economy in Context. Communism and Transition*, Routledge: London and New York 2005, pp. 230-233.

historical time: the transition was to unfold from Past to Present, from behind the Iron Curtain to the Free World, from communism to capitalism, from poverty to prosperity, from utopism to pragmatism, from totalitarianism to democracy, from tyranny to freedom, from irrationality to normalcy, from backwardness to civilization, from balkanism to order, and from East to West.¹⁰ The historical time of transition was imagined thus as a linear temporality in which it was vital to institute quickly distance from the retrograde past, in order to bring an end to the transition and catch up with the developed Western world. The only thing holding back Eastern Europe was its past. The path from one point to another was drawn in real life through neoliberal reforms such as shock therapy, massive lay offs, privatization of all productive industries, radical cuts in health and education, the flat tax, and country loans. In this process, the geographical space of Eastern Europe was converted in the 1990s A.D. into a mythical prehistoric time, a dinosaur which was now finally about to enter Modernity. Thus, in the global postcommunist reality, the present of Eastern Europe was projected into the remote past of the developed world, and the only way forward seemed to be a commitment to "catch up" with the Western models. This allochronism arguably reinforced in the West the Eurocentric assumption that all non-European people are pre-European; in Eastern Europe, the allochronism was locally articulated through anticommunism, which emerged in the cultural history of transition as a dominant cultural ideology, establishing a specific and incessant way of taking distance from one's own past and reality. Anticommunism took shape after 1989 more as a selection of the new intellectual and political elites, middle and upper classes which were closer in spirit to the Western world, and who knew how to get rid of the "legacy of communism," rather than as an impetus for social justice.¹¹

As for the process of catching up, the meaning of the end of the history of transition can be grasped from a short survey of the most visible "integrations" of East European states. Firstly, one can point to the integration into Western political structures: into the *Council of Europe* (membership accorded to all East European states from Hungary to Romania during 1990-1993) and into *European Union* (integration granted to the region from

¹⁰ See Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, "The Modernity of Postcommunism", IDEA arts + society #24, Cluj 2006. Republished in Adrian T. Sirbu, Al.Polgar (eds.), *Genealogies of Postcommunism*, Cluj, IDEA, 2009.

¹¹ See V.Ernú, C.Rogozanu, C.Șiulea, O.Țichindeleanu, *Iluzia anticomunismului*, Chișinău, Cartier, 2008.

Poland to Romania during 2004-2007). The foreign policy of East European states after 1989 was predominantly Western-oriented and especially obedient to the "Washington consensus", prompting Donald Rumsfeld's famous distinction between "Old" and "New" Europe¹². Furthermore, the governing political ideologies from Eastern Europe, especially in the past five years, have arguably been local variants of North-American liberalism, neoliberalism and neoconservatism, which were adopted also by social-democrats. The general governmental worldview from Eastern Europe has been thus severely limited as relations to the East and the traditional ties with the developing world have all but disappeared after 1989. Long gone is the worldview or autonomous sense of the world from 1976-1981, when Romania's foreign policy, for instance, was focused as much on relations with Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, with Amilcar Cabral and Luis Cabral, than with England or the Soviet Union. Long gone is also the membership of East European states into the UN *Group of 77*.

Secondly, one can point to the integration into Western military and police structures: after NATO's direct military involvement in the territory of the former socialist bloc in the wars in former Yugoslavia, NATO membership was granted in a slow and "peaceful" process for the whole region from Czech Republic to Romania during 1997-2004. Consequently, all East European states have become regional advocates for the US war initiatives in Iraq and Afghanistan, members of the "Coalition of the Willing". Furthermore, the disappearance of borders after the integration of parts of the former Eastern bloc into the European Union actually meant the unprecedented rise of a powerful continental policing force, FRONTEX, covering the whole continent of Europe as well as the Western shores of North Africa, and whose imposing headquarters are dominating the skyline of Warsaw, Poland. As it was showed in the events surrounding the NATO summit convened in Bucharest in 2008, the postcommunist policing apparatus has developed efficient methods designed to crash democratic protests: making unjustified temporary arrests, denying the entry of solidarity protesters at the border, as well as making cynical visits of intimidation at the domicile and workplace of identified

¹² Significantly, the East European group of "New Europe" was enlisted for the international support for US's war in Iraq by Donald Rumsfeld against the reserves still expressed at the time by "Old Europe". US Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld Briefs at the Foreign Press Center. U.S. Department of Defense. January 22, 2003.

anti-NATO activists. At the time, almost in unanimity, the pro-Western intellectuals and civil society, including a number of former anticommunist dissidents, saw merely a "correction of hooliganism" in these glaring abuses, making it one of the most unethical moments of the transition. Throughout the transition, all the "anti-globalist" or anti-capitalist protests and movements have been treated by officials and mainstream press with silence, when not demonized and caricatured by Romanian liberal as well as conservative figures, and one had to wait until the nation-wide social protests of January 2012 and the national solidarity movement around Roșia Montana in 2013 for a change of face in the culture industry (if not at the level of the government).

Thirdly, one can point to the financial integration of the former socialist bloc into the World Bank, WTO (memberships accorded in 1995), and IMF (reinstitution of relations and/or loans as early as 1991 for Poland).¹³ In relation to the latter, in October 1989 Ceaușescu was publicly announcing that Romania had become the first state of the former socialist bloc which was debt-free (though at a great cost), thus finalizing the reversion of the process started when Romania signed for the first time an agreement with IMF in 1972, and thus becoming ready to start the work for a financial center alternative to both New York/London and Moscow. Only two decades later, in November 2009 reports were confirmed that Romania was about to "succeed" in negotiating the biggest ever loan taken by Romania, from IMF.¹⁴ As of August 2010, the foreign debt of Romania reached USD 110 billion (EUR 87 billion).¹⁵ Also regarding the financial integration into the world-system, the Big Six of global financial accounting have set up branches in all East European capitals as soon as 1991 and assumed the position of managing all the donor funds directed towards Eastern Europe. Between 1989-1992, the G-24 and G-7 countries have donated USD 129.5 billion to countries in the former Socialist Bloc, of which only 10% went to aid grants (the post-WWII Marshall Plan for Western Europe was composed of 90% aid grants), while 85% was directed to the further financial dependentization through export credits, loans, and debt relief. Furthermore,

¹³ For Romania's relations to the IMF see "Romania: Transactions with the Fund from May 01, 1984 to September 30, 2009", *IMF Survey Magazine*.

¹⁴ "IMF Outlines Plan to Lend \$17.5 Billion to Romania", *IMF Survey Magazine*, March 25, 2009.

¹⁵ According to a report of the Central Bank of Romania from October 2010, the total foreign debt of Romania reached at the end of August 2010 EUR 87,762 billion. See http://www.realitatea.net/romania-are-datorii-externe-de-peste-87-de-miliarde-de-euro_743779.html, accessed on September 10, 2010.

65% of the 10% for aid grants were directed to the technical assistance of Western consultants offering training and expert reports.¹⁶ Furthermore, as it has been the case in numerous examples of the much trumpeted examples of neoliberal "growth," the most profitable company from Romania in the "booming" year 2009, American European Marketing & Enterprises, which contributed alone with 3% in the calculations of the Romanian GDP for 2009 by reporting a profit of no less than EUR 3.7 billion, proved to be only a scam. Upon closer scrutiny, the company had no employee, no declared costs of operations, paid no tax, had no known activity, and paid no rent for the office of the company, which was located in a remote village.¹⁷ In 2010, according to Forbes estimations, the fortune of the richest 500 Romanians cumulated an estimated EUR 29 billion (in regression from EUR 36 billion in 2009), which would mean that 0.002% of the population owns the equivalent of about 23% or almost a fourth of the national wealth of a 22-million-people country.¹⁸

It is quite reasonable thus *to define the meaning of the postcommunist transition, learning from local analysis and decolonial thought, as as the top-to-bottom assimilation of East European governmentality into the political, military and economic order of Western governmentality, and of local knowledges into the global geopolitics of knowledge¹⁹, at the cost of the general population, and with the open support of the Eurocentric intellectuality and civil society, including most of the former anticommunist dissidents.*

For the governing political right and the imposed grand narrative, the defining positive symbols of transition have been called "free market", "democracy," "modernization" and "civilization." However, the historical meaning of such symbols should not be confused with their dictionary entry. *The darker side of the history of postcommunist transition,*²⁰

¹⁶ See Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and Collusion. The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe 1989-1998*, New York, St. Martin's Press 1998.

¹⁷ Stefania Enache, "O fantomă pe locul 5 în topul firmelor românești", *Săptămîna financiară*, 13 Septembrie 2009; "Cea mai profitabilă firmă din România are zero angajați", *Financiarul*, August 26, 2010.

¹⁸ "Forbes România 500 miliardari 2009", 400 pages, Bucharest, Adevarul, October 2010.

¹⁹ Walter D. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference", *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2002) 101 (1), pp. 57–96.

²⁰ I borrow the trope of the "darker side" from Walter Mignolo, in the same sense of achieving a narrative of modernity from a non-Eurocentric perspective: thus, the voices of Eastern Europe are opening a pluritopic hermeneutics in relation with voices from Latin America as well as other non-Western locations

by no means less essential, shows what stands in the shadow of such luminous symbols with global reach: the reinstatement of arbitrary privilege, plutocracy, class divide, fraud, violence, racism, and the production of poverty; deindustrialization, devaluation, depopulation - all modern ways of reorganizing and producing power, which cannot be pegged back to "communism." Although "Eastern Europe" has practically disappeared as a unit of analysis as it was "integrated" into Europe (by which it was meant the "European Union"), narrating this darker side of the history of transition evidences the need for democratic de-westernization and de-capitalization in the former socialist bloc, for critical resistance and regional solidarity against social injustice. It is necessary to set the bases of a new epistemic field of critical theory to address the general transformations of the political, social, cultural and economic spheres of Eastern Europe after 1989. I proposed calling this general transformation the "postcommunist colonization," in order to raise attention to the dominant frameworks of power and their local articulation, and to shift the debate towards a decolonial option, and thus beyond an internal critique of either "totalitarianism" or capitalism. "Colonization" is not a metaphor here, but points to the systemic change of reality with a clear redistribution of the power relations, and to the continuation of traditional colonialism in different geocultural forms of coloniality. The darker history of transition also justifies the need to articulate from alternative perspectives the transformations suffered by other geopolitical locations in the aftermath of the fall of the socialist bloc; in this framework, at the intersection of epistemic materialism and decolonial thought one can elaborate on the meaning of expressions such as "postcommunist United States," and "postcommunist Western Europe."

The dominant phenomena of the postcommunist transition within the former socialist bloc have arguably been the regional reintegration of the former socialist bloc into the semi-periphery of global capitalism and the local colonization of North-Atlantic universals. At a global scale, one can also talk about a redefinition of regionalities and of the reach and meaning of North-Atlantic universals. Two old ideas entered in fusion in this process: the superiority of the West (epistemic hegemony), and the superiority of

of enunciating knowledge. See Walter D. Mignolo, "La colonialidad: el lado más oscuro de la modernidad", in Walter D. Mignolo, *Desobediencia epistémica: Retórica de la modernidad, lógica de la colonialidad y gramática de la descolonialidad*, Ediciones del signo, Buenos Aires, Argentina 2010.

capital (economic hegemony), which informed and oriented the political nature of the emergent dominant cultural ideologies of transition.

Firstly, the dominant cultural ideology of *institutionalized anticommunism* worked as the local vehicle for cultural colonization, giving birth to such phenomena as the denial of the epistemic relevance of the past; a generalized prosecutorial stance which precludes empathy and solidarity; the projection of the past into a homogeneous totality that forbids the remembering of goodness and happiness; the rejection of local ideals and desires in political practice ("dangerous utopias"), the curtailing of any local philosophies of the good life; and a concrete way of thematizing the inferiority of local people. Today, the former socialist bloc is filled with discourses, projects, institutions and monuments of anticommunism; the parks with assembled "dead statues" of Lenin and other symbolic figures of communism, such as Memento Park in Budapest and Grutas Park in Lithuania (which doubles also as a zoo), as well as museums of communism such as Terror Háza in Budapest or the Museum of Communism in Prague, the sadistic enactments of "authentic soviet life" in the Soviet Bunker in Lithuania and the "Trabi Safari" in Berlin – all these belong to a regional phenomenon which is staging the colonial act of watching an incredibly distant reality, an incredibly distant past, with curiously antiquated (but "authentic") objects, contemplated from the standpoint of "freedom," "modernity" and "civilization."²¹ The establishment of anticommunism created a specific type of gaze, a framework for vision, and articulated the coloniality of power in the specific context of postcommunist Eastern Europe, now reintegrated into the colonial-modern world after a brief tentative of escape.

Secondly, *Eurocentrism* is another dominant cultural ideology of transition, which can be linked with the emergence of an East European middle-class and the inseparable quasi-universal phenomenon of *postcommunist racism*. That is to say: long-durée forms of organizing modern-colonial power such as racism and patriarchy have also been reactivated in the postcommunist context, being shaped up in specific cognitive and material forms. As Eastern Europe opened itself for Western capital and cultural commodities, local identities entered in crisis. In the *ethno-nationalist* fury of the early 1990s one can recognize the reactivation of a form of ethnocentrism which filtered

²¹ See the brilliant documentary *Red Tours* (2010), by Joanne Richardson and David Rych.

questions of collective identity through the form and symbols of the nation-state, situated suddenly on the same panoply with the Western states. 1990s nationalism took the shape of retrospective or regressive identity quests, especially by claiming or hanging on to the official cultural canon of the national state, rather than unfolding towards the creation of a community of aspirations and goals. Most importantly, nationalism introduced the “incipient capitalist democracies” of Eastern Europe to an active process of violent othering and produced the systemic breaking of existent trans-ethnic and trans-national solidarity within the former Socialist Bloc, in the context of the general monocultural turn towards the West. Furthermore, while trying to fill the local transitional identity with "European" substance, the civil society, intellectuals and political elites produced more than an attitude or conceptual category: the postcommunist Eurocentrism has created a new epistemic field of manifold forms of racism which constitutes a veritable framework of expression for the postcommunist culture industries. I am not saying that there was no racism in Eastern Europe before 1989; rather, that the local explosion of racism and racist violence after 1989 is a specific phenomenon linked with the cultural and material domination of Eurocentrism, capitalocentrism and anticommunism, with the emergence of a Western-minded local middle class, and the long-durée workings of the coloniality of power. In the postcommunist process of the production of whiteness of Eastern Europe (which included the internal delimitation of "Central Europe" – a "more Westernized" part of the territory formerly behind the Iron Curtain), local elites differentiated themselves from the local masses by pretending to more Western and “civilized”, while the Western world was able at its turn to raise colorblind racism to a new level of generality, further refining its own forms of institutionalized and epistemic racism. One can point not only to the rise, during the postcommunist transition, of populist right-wing politicians in the West, united in their hatred for immigrants (Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, Jörg Haider in Austria, Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, Filip Dewinter in Belgium, Nick Griffin in Britain), but also to liberal policies instituting the "official disappearance of immigrants in Europe from its cultural institutions" (Okwui Enwezor), as well as the emergence of the racial category of East Europeans in the Western world, which was applied not to the converted elites, but to the migrant worker masses.

As for the third dominant cultural ideology of *capitalocentrism*, without going into detail here, there are serious reasons to argue that before the postcommunist transition, never was there a time in the history of capitalism in which the TINA doctrine (there-is-no-alternative) was more generalized at global scale,²² and in which capitalism was identified to a such extent with democracy (!). The domination of TINA is particularly glaring in Eastern Europe, although within state-socialist economies, economic relations based on money and profit had been just a small fraction of all the daily and yearly economic transactions of a person. In a profound sense, the transformations of the postcommunist transition show us the crushing power of money beyond economy: in the consumer's paradise, where everything can be exchanged for everything, nothing matters anymore. The force of money, the general equivalent, is to create the imponderability of really important things, while bringing with relative ease access to futility.

In other words, power was produced in specific forms after the fall of the socialist bloc, at regional and global scales, and the critique of political ideologies such as neoliberalism and neoconservatism is insufficient to address these profound transformations of postcommunism, which had effects upon the whole world. The postcommunist experience, just like the historical experiences of Eastern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century (with the emergence of the phenomenon of second serfdom) and in between the World Wars (the radicalization of social inequity and state violence), prove the need for a politics of regional solidarity within Eastern Europe and with non-Westernized and non-Western struggles against the pains of Western modernity.

In this sense, I would like to invite you to reflect on the historical experience of Eastern Europe in the global struggle for radical politics and social justice. Before 1989, the difference between East and West Europe was defined as a complex issue separating radically different epistemologies; after 1989, the only difference between East and West Europe is a mode of colonial difference. In the process, a world of different historical experiences and non-capitalist knowledges has been actively reduced to forms of non-

²² Ellen Meiskins Wood, a reputed Marxist theoretician, published in 1999 as a theoretical reaction to the fall of the socialist bloc (which she herself terms, albeit reluctantly: the "collapse of communism"), a reflection on the origin of capitalism, meant to address precisely the philosophical credo of TINA: "that capitalism is the natural condition of humanity, that it conforms to the laws of nature and basic human inclinations." Ellen Meiskins Wood, *The Origin Of Capitalism. A Longer View*, New York, Verso 2002.

existence, to use the formula coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos.²³ Or, there is much to be learned, in the slowly unfolding global crisis, from a historical experience encompassing over a very short period of time a transition from capitalism to socialism, a "revolution," and a transition from socialism to capitalism. Given the success of popular resistance against the ethnocentric Eurocentrism of late socialist regimes, promising political practices could emerge in the present at the intersection of historical materialism with the decolonial option. The movements of decolonization of the South, after World War Two, and the experience of real socialism in Eastern Europe come together even in certain progressive Eurocentric critiques of Western modernity: according to this interpretation, since the revolution in the peripheries of Europe and of the world system "failed," the revolution-to-be (the one which will defeat capitalism) must be carried by subjects situated in the very centers of capitalism.²⁴ According to this latter story, the burden of the transformation of the world would fall yet again on the Western subject; other localities of thinking and acting matter only secondarily. However, the fall of the socialist bloc has already affected the meaning of global Europe and capitalism in multiple ways. We are already part of this collective change, and just twenty years after the fall of the socialist bloc, world-capitalism entered a crisis which may signal the end of a 500-years cycle. The "void" left in the critical left by the cultural erasure of the historical experience of the socialist bloc is yet another proof of the dire need for non-Western options in a world in crisis.

The oppressive but innovative workings of the dominant cultural ideologies of the postcommunist transition, at the intersection of anticommunism, eurocentrism and capitalocentrism, have made possible a novel articulation of the global matrix of colonial, imperialist and capitalist power, with particular forms of producing and reproducing the colonality of power, racism, imperial difference, and exploitation in the geographical space of the former socialist bloc. A critical theory of postcommunism is important for a vision of a decolonized and deoccidentalized plural Europe. Seen from the locality of Eastern Europe (and refusing to abandon it as a unit of analysis) it is important to

²³ Boaventura De Sousa Santos, "A Critique Of Lazy Reason: Against The Waste Of Experience", in Immanuel Wallerstein (ed.), *The Modern World-System in the Longue Durée*, Paradigm Publishers, 2005.

²⁴ Such a perspective is envisioned by Claude Karnoouh, an important theoretician of the Romanian experience of transition. For his anthropological take on the relations between modernity and real socialism, see Claude Karnoouh, *Adio diferitei. Eseu asupra modernitatii tirzii*, Cluj, Idea 2001.

connect, in the global struggle for social justice, the anticapitalist struggles with the decolonization of Eurocentrism and a commitment for plural and alternative epistemologies. Given the postcommunist experience of Eastern Europe in the collective change of world-capitalism, new hope emerges at the intersection of anti-capitalism with anti-imperialism and democratic de-occidentalization. Furthermore, the vagaries of postcommunist political parties point to the need for a commitment to political resistance premised on epistemic resistance, and for placing cultural memory at the center of political practice.

As opposed to the governing ideologies of state socialism, the historical experience of Eastern Europe offers a wealth of other-knowledges, alternative economies and cosmologies, of “forms of resistance without infrastructure” (Spivak) and visions of an other-modernity. This wealth has been ransacked and repressed during the postcommunist colonization, but constitutes a recent cultural memory which could flourish through relations of solidarity with non-Western practices of resistance, epistemologies, and philosophies of liberation.

In this sense, a positive epistemic conception of the historical experience of Eastern Europe under real socialism may be important for the renewal of leftist thought beyond internal criticism and for a vision of a de-occidentalized Europe, which in turn is badly needed in the struggle for global justice.

COSMOLOGIES OF REAL SOCIALISM

I agree with Boaventura de Sousa Santos when he argues that the type of universalism characteristic of Western modernity is abyssal, in the sense that Western science, law and even humanities are inseparable from a systemic way of making invisible different knowledges while raising "distinctions."²⁵ Another way of putting this is that colonial difference operates by producing forms of non-existence. The invisibility and active elimination of other epistemologies are at the root of Eurocentric fundamentalism. Today there are important voices arguing for the need of a new theoretical synthesis, an

²⁵ Sousa-Santos 2005.

integration of Western and non-Western knowledges that would also take into account both materialist and spiritual contents. However, there are many great thinkers and activists from the leftist tradition who relate to indigenous political thought as a resistance to capitalism and neoliberalism, but have difficulties relating to indigenous "cosmovisions" and "cosmologies" in the epistemic analysis of the world that shapes their beliefs. This conundrum proves that abyssal epistemology cannot become the site of pluritopic hermeneutics without radically transforming itself; the transformation has to take place on different ground, hosted by a different "house of knowledge." Cosmologies, which are never just true, ancient and complete, are such a type of theoretical practices, which offers a place for the open encounter of collective subjectivities. In Western epistemology, a paradigm of truth replaces another through a scientific revolution, and the past often becomes a commodified museum; such is the power of the colonality of thinking that, although the encounter of different people is the most common reality, the encounter of different truths on common ground often seems unimaginable. The way I see it, cosmologies are precisely the site of encounter of different epistemologies; cosmologies are never fixed and always reinvented, yet they succeed in preserving and enacting trans-generational cultural memory. Furthermore, a cosmology never belongs to just one people: they provide common grounds for different foundational narratives and different truths. Last but not least, cosmologies are operating with a functional type of truth which inspires, as opposed to the truth understood as the absolute end of a problem. Moving further to another common misconception, there would be an abyssal gap between cosmological narratives and secular thought. However, real socialism offers precisely the example of a secular world that kept on producing cosmologies and what I call for lack of better names "discourses of popular authorship" as a practice of orientation in the world, against or beyond forms of state power. The power of rumors and anecdotes in the former socialist bloc is known and significant in this sense. The history of the five-year plans is also very instructive, since it provided the framework of a greater year, running with-and-against the Copernican vision of time; the five-year plans created both a perception of linear temporality and a contradictory idea of reversible movement. The situation of poverty is also a particularly striking example. There has been an undeniable perversity of the state-socialist system that kept pushing people to the

limits, or sacrificing people for the sake of certain goals and interests. Real socialism literally created subjective wealth from poverty. However, the fact of having no money in one's pockets was also accompanied by the far-reaching vision of having the "proletarian" power to prevail in spite of the hardest difficulties. One's mind and hands are enough to deal with any situation – this is a generic subjective attitude of people in real socialism, beyond good or evil, and this vision was in tune with popular traditions in which the hero prevails in spite of all odds. The difference is drawn precisely between a cosmological way of preserving knowledge and a normative epistemic mode: the deep knowledge of nature (virtues of plants, talking animals, and spirits), overtaken by secular modern education. Furthermore, a specific way of enabling a vision of the world can be grasped in the generic character of the do-it-yourself culture of real socialism. Namely, the do-it-yourself culture was not marginal, but pervaded all domains of material culture, and especially technology; real socialism opposed braggart universal talents or jacks-of-all-trades to the silent Western expert and the commodified specialization of skills. Seen from the other side, what appears to the Western eye as systemic "inefficiency" (and unreliable loud-mouthing), constituted an act of preserving through this universal ability a direct relation of the individual to the whole world; and indeed, every individual, at any level of the society, was expected to have the power of sustaining a generalist vision: the-world-and-me. Such vision continued to provide power for positive resistance during the transition, and is often associated with a nostalgic remembrance of real socialism. This probably was also one of the reasons why most East European intellectuals turned their backs to the workers and allied with pro-capital forces in the edification of capitalist culture industries after 1989: at stake in the postcommunist transition was also the authority and power over the cultural field, and the redrawing of disciplinary boundaries. However, from my own experience as an immigrant, many an East European immigrant shared stories of their adventures in the Western world which started with the generic resistant attitude of "put me in any situation and I will succeed," more often than not connected with the ethics of "doing anything" for the loved ones.²⁶ Of course, bad things happen when such power is captured and fetishized by patriarchy in the enclosure of the

²⁶ See also the collection of interviews with Romanian immigrant workers put together by the team coordinated by Zoltán Rostás and Sorin Stoica, in *Tur-retur. Convorbiri despre munca în străinătate*, București, Curtea Veche, 2006.

nuclear family; there, instead of being valorized as a profound power of social connection, genericity is squandered in an egocentric know-it-all attitude, becoming an instrument for the appropriation of speech at close quarters. However, as opposed to the new East European middle class, dominated by the intimate and future-oriented desire of conversion to a "Western" model, one can say that the politics of the immigrant's life are traversed by the belief in the power of resistance, the past-inspired desire to become a good ancestor (even if it's overcoded by the nuclear family), and a radical ontology of co-existence, based on the historical experience of community economies and subsistence economies, familiar under real socialism. If the postcommunist transition can be understood as a time of mass migration, in which East Europeans took to the West with their minds and bodies, then one has to take into consideration the fact that from the vantage point of certain localities one cannot see and feel the world, people's ultimate material common ground of co-existence. Cosmologies require an earthly sense of the world and a material configuration of meaning: an embodied knowledge of what is a place (as opposed to space) in the world (or world-system).²⁷ While it is true that migration to the centers of capital accumulation uprooted people from their communal and existential territories and plunged them into the narrow universe of reference of the nuclear family, migration also allowed people to reconnect to the world, and to remain open to cosmological knowledge.

Thus, what occurs often in stories of Eastern European migrants in the West is the return to non-modern memories as well as to memories of real socialism, in direct reference to material objects and bodily memory: an old object, a particular taste, an afterimage, a conjecture. One can argue that the dominant ideologies of the postcommunist transition did not attack as much the "ideology of communism," but its material culture and embodied knowledge, and the accompanying historical experiences and perspective on the world. What actually disappeared in the material history of transition is not "the idea of communism", but precisely an earthly civilization, the production of a specific material culture and forms of social networks, economies, games and experiences of collectivity.

²⁷ See Ivan Illich, *Highways*.

In order to counter this systemic repression and overcoding of cultural memory, I propose the elaboration of a new epistemic materialism, for which the people's historical experience of state socialism and postcommunism, as opposed to governmental ideology, constitutes the prime field of critical analysis. I find it remarkable and significant that the difference between *historical experience* and *governmental ideology* (whether state capitalism, etc) has simply not been given conceptual attention in critical post-socialist studies, that the need to differentiate between their respective horizons did not appear as an evidence neither to Western leftist thinkers, nor to liberal or right-field scholars after 1989 – not even to anthropologists.

An entire epistemic field emerges as soon as one considers historical experience the relevant frame of research. For instance, one can envision the transition from state socialism to capitalism as a small change occurred in the millions of apartments - which are the most visible trace of the specific modernist transformations suffered by the former socialist bloc: thus, *the great postcommunist transition can be envisioned simply as a move from the kitchen to the living room*. The apartment kitchen had been the material foundation of the public space under real socialism, the central place of the apartment and of the public society - the place where most social encounters took place. The public space of the kitchen did not divorce culture from materiality, inherited and preserved communal knowledge of the land, and allowed the creation of *a special type of material-cultural genre*, with no individual "author," and which could not be pinned down and captured by power apparatuses: recipes, rumors, anecdotes, songs, shared stories, confidences, territorial tips. The space of the kitchen also ensured that women's speech mattered; the kitchen was also a space of intrusion into the nuclear family, situating it in the larger frames of social networks.

Now, as the statistics of the cable television industry show clearly, during the postcommunist transition most East Europeans have become television junkies, watching at least four hours of television every day.²⁸ Millions of bodies have become more sedentary, and less social. As their physical mobility to the Western world was immediately the subject of severe restrictions after the "fall of the Iron Curtain," East

²⁸ See Konrad Petrovsky, Ovidiu Iichindeleanu, *Romanian Revolution Televised. Contributions to the Cultural History of Media*, Cluj, Idea 2009. English edition, 2011.

Europeans became “middle class” and were westernized firstly at home, through images, by watching television. Television has become by far the most important sector of the postcommunist culture industries of the 1990s, and, as a commodity, new TV was both a symbol of the transition and a real driving force of the economy. The living room was redesigned in many apartments with the television as the focal center, and in the process, the grand table for guests, the wall-decorating (and noise-absorbing) carpet and the library shelves for books have disappeared from the living room, and even from the interior design and furniture shops.

Consequently, from the loud communal scene at the kitchen table, where everybody talks at the same time, yet one addresses directly what the other just said, one can imagine the postcommunist transition as the passage to a silent living room filled with noise from the TV. Here, discourse emerges by referencing the broadcast images; social discourse is sucked in and mediated by television. Western critics have already observed this strange phenomenon: the members of the Western nuclear family are talking to each other through television, without looking at each other. However, the same critics have failed to observe what was made to disappear in this magical act of intimate colonization: a communal world that produced autonomous power and forms of value, and which valued discourse as a mode of resistance. From a pluridirectional site, one's expressions have been moved into the framework of the monodirectional address of the spectator-television situation, while the nuclear family was moved into more efficient enclosure, behind a symbolic wall.

In contradistinction, during real socialism, value existed primarily in social networks: Western brands had a different value, depending on whether they were known and talked about within a social circle; shared memories and geographical sites had great value for specific groups of friends; certain types of foodstuffs associated with a region or land were not commodities but gateways to a cultural world. Social networks determined if something was precious or not, and even how precious. In the production of such values, a decisive role was given to discursivity, to voicing out, and discourse was at its turn validated through social intercourse. Directly undermining all these forms of valuation, during the postcommunist transition, it was money (or more precisely: foreign currency, the US dollar, the Deutsch Mark and then the Euro) who assumed the function of the

general equivalent. Foreign currency devaluated drastically not only the local currency, but all the local forms of producing value. In the process, the re-establishment of money as the center of the world, as the general equivalent, also destroyed the social production of immanent values and non-monetary economies: where money matters, stories don't. In other words, hard currency broke apart the connection between value and discourse. In real socialism, people were encouraged and tried to develop generic abilities, to be able to do anything, and maintained their general views even in during the most difficult times. Women did become authors and workers did become poets. Genericity had its ridiculous offshoots, but nobody can deny its wide existence. This process was arguably displaced with the "opportunities" emerged simply by accumulating and having money, the general equivalent of everything. Suddenly, people who had money became figures and voices of the public sphere. Furthermore, the transition from the kitchen table to the living room sofa broke apart the connection between discourse and social intercourse, leaving the validation of discourse pray to mechanisms of the emerging capitalist culture industry, and in particular to appeals to authority and property. By placing each individual and nuclear family in direct and monodirectional relation with the anchors of television and figures with media capital, genericity was profoundly undermined. *The screen covered the sky, becoming the gatekeeper of imagination. The hand was glued to the remote control.*

However, as long as it survives, the cultural memory of real socialism keeps opening towards a different sense of the world and provides thus power of resistance, not in the least thanks to *knowledge related to existential territories, sensorial memories, and conduits in social situations*. A lot of work remains to be done to connect these historical experiences and visions as political principles in the third transition, beyond capitalism. As Linton Kwesi Johnson once said: "the answer lies at your own gate, and in the answer lies your fate."

* * *

In the ending decades of the British empire, the figure of the vampire emerged as a nightmare of reversed colonialism: an East European prince invading England, a

creature from the past invading the modern present. Beginning with Bram Stoker, Western culture industries used to find the vampire through stories of long journeys to the East. However, in contemporary cultural products, vampires and humans co-exist; vampires can be found within the Western world and its white suburbs, one could say just like migrants, minorities and other "exception-types." The vampire keeps on invading Western culture industries, where it has become among other things a symbol for accumulative reason, for the rationalization of greed and the discipline of docile bodies: if vampires are to be integrated in the world of humans, they need to anticipate their needs and stockpile blood, for if they not, they will lose control of themselves and prey on humans. In other words, with some sort of regulation and discipline one can even obtain a reasonable vampire. One can even have a cast teenager relationship with a vampire. The vampires have also gone through a transition.

It might be useful to know that in Romanian popular culture, one always knows who the vampire is: that's how most stories with vampires usually begin - with the actual sighting and recognition of a vampire. It would be harder not to know who the vampire is in a village. The vampire is not a mystery. (This also means, in the spiraling logic of popular stories, that by the moral end one does not really know who the vampire is). The vampire undermines the life of a community by sucking its goods - a vampire is clearly against collectivization. From the point of view of the people affected by the vampire, it's always clear who the vampire is. In some stories, a sudden counter-action is indeed prompted by an abrupt event, such as a disastrous rain, a natural calamity or sudden loss of riches, fertility or energies. However, in most stories, as opposed to what goes on usually in the Western movies, the vampire is not defeated by killing it with one strike through the heart. The killing is mostly a Western dramatization. In the village, the vampire is defeated by knowing its weakness, and by preparing accordingly the inevitable daily encounters with the vampire. The struggle against the vampire is not as much a one-off fight as a slow revolution taking place moment by moment. The difference is given by cosmologies. As opposed to the traditional Christian idea of a lofty spirit of unfathomable might, with an immaterial and intangible transcendent power, other-traditional supernatural creatures like the vampire have great but finite powers: this means that any earthling has the power of defeating such a mighty force, as long as the knowledge of its

kind is kept alive in the practices of imagination of the community. Thus, the popular beliefs in vampires are evidencing a popular politics which was arguably raised to a generic level in the secular historical experience of real socialism: any power can be out-powered.

Finally, there is a secret reason why the vampire is not killed in many popular stories: the vampire knows what the goods are and what good is within a community - whether blood, water, milk; life, beauty, smarts; gold and riches... The vampire makes people remember the importance of what they have come to take for granted, which means that a vampire rises only when people forget about their actual wealth and power.