

Post-socialist disclosures: an imperfect translation of personal experience into ethnographic writing

By Madalina Florescu (SOAS)

During the 1980s, disappearance was one of the means that authoritarian regimes used to control the knowledge of the population. State terror structures political subjectivities, for it produces cultures of fear, where speech becomes as diffused and unlocalisable as fear itself: rumours, denunciations, suspicion. The genre of the bodily practice of the commemoration of terror is, in this text, a symbolic exhumation, which allows the living to mirror themselves in the reflections of the dead. Disclosure is the aesthetic category of this post-mortem fissure that seeks to grasp the past that flashes up at moments of danger, to paraphrase Benjamin (1990), and to endow social disjunctures and the disappearance of language with a cultural form.

'The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living'
(Marx 1973:146)

'The inevitability of a dialogue between past and present is universal'
(Bloch 1985:viii)

Post-socialist dream: an evocative description

Deambulating in an alien city. Yet a city I somehow belong to. I dwell on a boat anchored in the harbour. I walk inside a theatre, where I can hear a Hoover, see curtains hanging from the roof, and empty chairs. Then, a corridor, which becomes a street, where people's faces are the shining multicoloured pearls around a dead woman's neck. I look back and see my entire figure reflected in a mirror, and while doing so the ground becomes a mechanical carpet taking me away from the reflection. I later or sooner arrive at a covered market, where food, clothes and airplane tickets are bargained alike. And I can hear the voices of those who can only buy cabbage, but not a ticket to a foreign land. The whole city is being reconstructed. As if there had been a war whose memory existed as a theatrical decor, but not as anybody's life story. As if all those who had lived the war had forgotten about it, or died, and now, the inhabitants are all new, innocent dwellers of a space whose history is being written by the invisible hands of expert gods. It is a labyrinth whose paths I somehow know.

Post-socialist dream: an (auto)biographic context

Born in Bucharest in 1976. Resident of Western European nation-states since 1985. Holder of an Italian passport since 1992. And of a Romanian passport since 1994.

Polyglot with no native tongue. And an uprooted homeless. It is not the incarnation of twenty-first century cosmopolitanism, but the 'disordered personality' of an aphasic post-socialist subject. The incarnation of an excess of extra-linguistic memory, an excess of consciousness. It means to occupy subject positionalities that bring together elements that hegemonic discourses of identity separate as mutually exclusive in their competition over what are 'authentic' post-Cold War 'origins'. As a category of personal experience, 'post-socialism' is the practice of learning to articulate what is disarticulated by categories of discourse.

In 2002, my maternal grandmother died. An event, for it made 20 years of my life collapse into the memory of a very distant 'day' that had no place to unfold in the topography of the post-socialist world. A freezing early December morning of 1984. I hold my mother's hand and embark on a plane from Bucharest to Frankfurt, with our identities written into a passport: FARA CETATENIE—without citizenship.

Last time I had really seen her, it was in 1984. My grandmother was waving her hand from behind the windows of that metallurgic airport. I was following my mother to the stairs of the plane that was going to take us to a place I did not really know how to imagine. And it was going to be forever. 'It is a *place of freedom*,' says my mother.

A place where the peaceful hot summer days of what has already become 'the past' will become a reification to carry 'inside' like a phantom organ, for to experience 'the past' means to exit childhood and enter a timescale that at that age exceeded the possibilities of my language. Freedom is a category of experience that is not accessible without language, and the possibilities for language are limited by the boundaries of the categories of identity one is made to inhabit as the excessive matter to relocate according to the parameters of national order.

Post-socialist dream: ethnographic 'locations'

Upon returning to Romania, relatives and my grandmother's neighbours implicitly accused me of not having been a granddaughter as one ought to be, according to the categories of identity that (re)structured the moral world of their everyday lives. For, in their world, my parents' departure and the failed accomplishment of the obligations inscribed in the role of the granddaughter-in-the-West had killed her. I was an illegitimate heir, for my 'blood ties' had been corrupted by a life where there are no churches 'like ours'. A 'post-socialist' distance that reinforced the 'socialist' ruptures. I had become an authentic foreigner and therefore a fake granddaughter.¹

I had not attended her funeral. Her death, like her life, belonged to a reality made of a voice on the phone speaking of a world that was no longer mine, but to which I had remained connected because of our 'blood tie'. The blood in fact continued to be shared by those who 'left', which has made the diasporic atmosphere into a sense of home, and the enactment of the paradigmatic 'nativism' by 'returning' to the 'authentic roots' into

¹ Giving the example of the Lumbe in exile on the Mozambique-Malawi borderland, Englund maintains that '[t]he complex separations and conflations between space and place [...] show how spatial belonging is itself subject to the dynamic of social relationships, not an unchanging constraint in that dynamic' (2002:97).

the experience of discontinuation. In my imagined ‘origins’, my grandmother had kept for me that ‘before’ in her house. It was ‘there’, in her stead, and I entered my imagined past in search for a ‘self’ that has never been either ‘in’ or ‘out’ of my memory, but that has been my grandmother’s overwhelming hope of my return.

I open the door. It is like entering the memories of someone I met in a previous life. The taxi has just left. Tomorrow I will go to the cemetery and put some flowers on her grave. Hopefully it will be where I imagine it to be. I have the uncanny sensation of inhabiting processes of othering as Other.

To bury my grandmother means to give a body back to her soul in order to feel the meaning of my sense of loss, to understand the meaning of our ‘blood tie’. Sensing loss means to make her absence present. Feeling what her presence might have been.

I lie down on the bed where she slept and sink into the underworld where I hope to meet her. I walk barefoot on the rugs where she walked, against linear time. I pull the curtains she pulled every morning, making a habit into an event. I smell her odour on the clothes she wore, like incense. I inspect the surroundings with a slow, circular movement, the eyes rotating in order to absorb the celestial bolt and put it below my feet and reverse time. I look through all her belongings, read letters she received from her sisters 50 years ago, stare at photographs of when she was a young mother in post-war Bucharest. I sit down where she used to in the kitchen, by the window, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes like we used to do together, remembering the conversations we had and imagining those we might have had. I try to incorporate her ghost and transform her haunting presence into a sense of history.²

Above all, I wanted to understand if her ghost haunted me because she had something to tell me or because it was I who had questions to ask. It meant to transform the silent sense of her presence into a voice. A voice that would extend my language beyond the limits imposed on it by experience.³

Yet, that which the past offers is a formula or a scenario, for it is within the present that the emplotment of the past receives its signature. And because of the radical epistemological rupture that I had experienced upon crossing the Iron Curtain—a radical exit from language—my grandmother’s ghost was doomed to be silenced, for her voice could not provide a formula or a scenario that would translate into language the historical transformation I was struggling to emplot by undergoing another exit from language.

I could not (re)inscribe what I sensed as ‘lost’ in the terms of a past that I would ‘recover’ by imagining my ancestors’ memories in terms of a knowledge acquired precisely

² This sequence is an illustration *a posteriori* of what Ricoeur has defined as the articulation of the imperative of emplotment with the contingency of the ‘natural’ world: ‘c’est cette nécessité narrative qui transmute la contingence physique, adverse de la nécessité physique, en contingence narrative, impliquée dans la nécessité narrative’ (1990:170)—‘it is the narrative imperative that transmutes physical contingency, hostile to physical necessity, into narrative contingency, inherent in the necessary narrative’ (my translation). It is this articulation of necessity with contingency across the divide between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ that allows to negotiate the irrevocable past (one’s own birth) with the inevitable future (one’s death), and transcend the sense of life as the experience of a life sentence that was a necessary event in others’ narrative identities.

³ This is the meaning of the gendered triangulation between the world of the spirits (spiritism), the world of dreams (somniaambulism), and the past (mutism) in Allende’s (1982) novel *La casa de los Espiritus*.

because I had 'lost' those roots that threaten to return as a map of the route to follow *from now on*. Thus, what I wanted to ask the dead was to disclose the sense of radical epistemological rupture so as to transform it into a new epistemological foundation.⁴

Early 1980s, Bucharest. I am at home (in Romanian: *acasă*). I look outside (*afară*) through the window of my room. There are leafy trees and other grey blocks of flats like mine against a bright daylight. It must be a Sunday morning, for I have plenty of time to look *afară*...and ask myself how big *afară* is...how far does *afară* expand, and will I be allowed one day to go as far as *afară* goes? *Afară* was something I could not fully determine, a space that had an aura of mystery.

My parents allow me to buy seeds but not *sugiucuri* (lollipops) from the *țigănci*. Seeds are only sold, whereas lollipops are also made by the *țigănci*, therefore they are 'polluted'. I ask for money pretending it is for seeds, but I will instead buy what the *țigănci* make and that I cannot find anywhere else: pink and turquoise and yellow and bright green sweet lollipops...colours and tastes that in our world are foreign and prohibited.

Afară is a space where kinship ties become negotiable in terms of other ties, such as neighbourhood and friendship. Parents' authority is questionable, for there are other types of authority and knowledge, such as the knowledge of my friends' older sisters and brothers. *Afară* I hide in the bushes near our block of flats with my best friend to learn about each other's nakedness. *Afară* we make sense of the world in which we live by engaging with our own senses and tastes.

Acasă I begin to hear talks about *leaving*, and in the early 1980s Bucharest, my mother and grandmother spend long hours talking in the kitchen, behind closed doors. This closed space has brought *afară* inside *acasă*. I have become suspicious of what is being said behind these closed doors, among those whom until now have been the closest and most transparent in the world of my intimacy. I am suspicious of the power these secret talks can have on me, so I put my ear against the door... I don't know if I'm scared that someone might see me or by what I might hear... I suspect that in this world of secrecy, the kitchen, my own death is at stake. I suspect my mother and grandmother of planning to kill me because of these dollars that are the key to everything in their endless talks about 'leaving forever', 'going there', 'the West', 'the police', 'passports', 'don't know when', 'don't know if'...

⁴ I think the effort has been (and still is) to subvert the hegemony of the colonial production of power relations, the monopoly of the space of death, of that which lies beyond the imaginable. Taussig has been a source of inspiration: 'The colonized space of death has a colonizing function, maintaining the hegemony or cultural stability of norms and desires that facilitate the way the rulers rule the ruled in the land of the living' (1987:374). Terror has a structuring force that requires a counter-terror, which from my experience can only stem out of a radical exit from the language where terror has colonized consciousness by colonizing the process of conscientisation of death, that is, one's very sense of being human. Halbwachs (1992) has already established that remembering does not follow a chronological order, but also that it occurs within a system predicated on the social context in which it occurs. Further, he conflates the 'social' with 'the real', leaving 'outside' the system of remembering the imagined addressees, such as the remembering that occurs within a social framework that gathers the dead and the living into a dialogic relation where the (irrevocable) past is *negotiated* as much as the (inevitable) future (death).

In the terms of the logic that now makes sense of my fear, then, what other than my own death could have been a secret in the midst of those whose bodily warmth signified the most transparent trust, for they were my life-givers? In my childhood, 'the West' as it was represented by 'anti-capitalist' propaganda and by 'anti-anti-capitalist' forms of resistance became the space of death,⁵ and it is this space of death that has returned as a sense of 'displacement' when in post-socialist Romania I was indexed as an 'atheist Westerner'.

The police come for a search. I later hear they were searching for dollars. Having dollars at home is a crime punishable with imprisonment (and, as the rumours go, beatings to death). I have stayed in the kitchen with my grandmother, entering that realm of secrecy that is so powerful to my ears from 'outside', but that has not become any clearer to my eyes once 'inside'. That realm has become nonetheless a 'place' that sometimes overwhelms the geography of my world, and sometimes it haunts my sense of place as being a haunted and haunting soul.

The explanation that has come to be considered the only plausible one is that neighbours who are actually spies for the government have denounced us. My mother repeatedly tells me not to repeat *afară* what I hear *acasă*. It is dangerous not because of what I hear, but because *afară* that which is said *acasă* makes people get arrested, disappear... *Acasă* has become a place of dangerous secrets. Things that *afară* have the power to make people vanish for ever. Secrets I sense belong to a different kind of concealment than the one I use to transgress my parents' authority and the borderland between 'purity' and 'pollution'. In the secrecy of *acasă* I have learnt to see *afară* as a distinct world.

Before this shift, in my world then (and my world now when I think of that time) everything was visible as far as the horizon of *afară* permitted to see or as far as one's imagination permitted to see...a world where sorrow was a valley, and loss a series of forests inhabited by animal-helpers. And death itself reached not into eternity but into other worlds, where life began anew. The shift to audibility meant that *afară* and *acasă* were no longer connected by means of this horizontal sequence of multiple worlds once dollars, passports, police, and the West were secret words of *acasă* that *afară* had the power to make people disappear. Death was no longer continuous with life, for it belonged to a separate realm of power and knowledge that could not be seen but only heard. *Afară* became a space of transactions that would produce the value of death at an exchangeable rate with dollars, the currency of a 'there' that, as I understood it, lay far beyond what I could imagine as being the farthest limit of *afară*.

1985. Bochum, Western Germany. A primary school. I sit at a table. I do not speak any German, I can no longer read what the teacher writes on the blackboard, nor write like everybody else. So, I stare at those around me and fall into a bottomless stream of sounds where words are no longer distinguishable from one another. But I know there are words and sentences flowing around me. What has lain beyond the imaginable farthest is now the closest: an abyss that would haunt me as my own 'otherness'.

One morning, a classmate whose table I share and who sits opposite me, whose name I don't know and with whom I have never exchanged a word, looks at me and with what I

⁵ 'What distinguishes cultures of terror is that the epistemological, ontological, and otherwise philosophical problem of representation [...] [is] thrust into consciousness as the space of death' (Taussig 1987:121).

now remember as being a grin⁶ says: *auslander*—foreigner. The word that would crystallise for me the meaning of the new world which I was in, and which has become a haunting aphasic past. A past to which I would give a voice now by borrowing my dead grandmother's voice. She was a German speaker. For that past has remained inscribed in my consciousness as the power of a secret knowledge. For the way he had said that word, the way he looked at me, and the intonation of his voice made me understand that that word meant something powerful. That word had transformed me into an *auslander*. I re-entered language as Other to myself.

The new thing I have become is a secret, because that word has been meant for me by someone whose language I do not speak, someone I cannot answer back. And a secret with someone whose language one does not speak is terrifying, because its truth does not need to be understood. It has a power of its own, and it transforms one behind and beyond one's understanding. It is an erasure that belongs to a will that transcends any possible order. It is something that must be accepted in order to endure change.

That word made audible within earshot the invisible world that had been living behind closed doors, but within the sphere of intimacy. It created an abyss. An abyss is what lies beyond the performative force of understanding (answering back). My otherness, whose making had begun with the suspicion of what was being said behind the closed doors of the kitchen, found a name and a place that transcended the boundaries of my language in the same way as my mother's utterance, freedom.

Post-socialist dream: an anthropological interpretation

The spectators and actors have left the theatre to animate a market place that is also an airport, running across corridors (of power) that lead onto streets, and streets that become mechanical carpets (circulation of power), prostheses to support bodies undergoing the acceleration induced by the transfer of 'historical time' into 'lifetime', the transfiguration of the 'local' by the penetration of the 'global horizon', a space where airplane tickets are more valuable than food crops. The boat becomes a mirror, the space of confinement to an 'outside' (otherness) is recognized as a dimension of the 'inside' (selfhood), an 'outside' that has been ordered with the aesthetic categories of a post-mortem mirror reflection that is dramatized as abandoned theatre, a crowded market place, and the distant horizon of 'foreign lands', the 'out of body' experience of sensing the 'self' being fashioned by a will anchored in a body that lies 'elsewhere', the pearls of the necklace on the dead woman's neck are the opaque yet shining windows of the airport that have transposed the closed doors of my childhood into the space of 'forgetting' that which is nobody's life story anymore, but whose traces are visible and must be disposed of somehow: relocation of what is forgotten into an 'invisible' realm.

To gain a share in the global processes of narrating post-socialism, I take ground in a disclosure that abolishes the relevance of a distinction between 'real' and 'imagined' by

⁶ The formulation of the 'grin' in the process of conjuration of that scene as a memory of my early years responds to the asymmetric power relations in which our face-to-face became an instance of symbolic violence. As Ricoeur (1990:172) argues, while the dichotomy between agent and patient is a false dichotomy, the asymmetry of their relation produces the violent effects of the distribution of agency.

combining dreams and memories into a narrative genre where ‘identity’ is disclosed as a play with the borders separating the ‘within’ from the ‘without’ language. Halbwachs (1992) has introduced the Enlightenment separation between the imagined and the real into that between the social realm and the internal realm of the ‘individual’: by contrast to dreams and the aphasic experience, which are extra-linguistic events, memory is *already* a plot for it is the recollection of a social event among those who participated in the event and who therefore share the idiom of that event. Memory and event belong to separate orders of reality that are brought together through remembering, which is the narrative representation of a social performance. While abolishing the distinction between reality and fiction in the conceptualisation of remembering, Halbwachs maintains it in his differentiation between dreams, aphasia, and memory. Ricoeur (1990) further abolishes the distinction between the ‘social’ and the ‘non social’, as well as between narrative and event, in favour of a distinction between ‘within’ and ‘without’ narrative, in so far as both character and plot are constructed through a narrative that is also an utterance (*configuration*).

I force an alien architecture to narrate a story that unfolds in the interstices of a biographic geography whose intimacy is architecturally inconceivable. The oneiric spatialisation of the *dramatis personae* suggests the disclosure of the story of a dissociation between the sense of self as that which belongs somewhere and the sense of exile—onto a narrative construction of ‘identity’ by means of a paradigmatic shift from being constructed as other to the appropriation of this construction as narrator, which corresponds to a transfiguration of the sense of ‘exile’ into a sense of ‘liberation’, the emplotment (*mise en intrigue*) of a haunting memory into a narrative identity, the enactment of the dialectical relationship between ‘sameness’ and ‘selfhood’.⁷ The relation between the ‘spatiality’ of narrative and the ‘spatiality’ of the practice which such narrative discloses (Ricoeur 1990) remains ambivalent—as the relationship between here and there, past and present, narrator and characters.

The dream interpretation dramatises the autobiographic genre. It relocates the categories of an experience that exceeded the possibilities of the native tongue into the categories of a foreign language.⁸ It relocates culturally specific forms of power (oracular decisions, labyrinthine corridors) as the architecture of an internalised ‘otherness’ by means of a spatialisation of the body as a site of inscription of an ‘identity’ that is, really, a performance of memory. It provides a qualitative insight into less visible locations of the architectures of post-socialist ‘identities’. Above all, it is what Ricoeur (1990) has termed the emplotment of the subject of the narrative process (*mise en intrigue du personnage*).

⁷ Ricoeur (1990) defines ‘personhood’ as a tense relationship between paradigmatic categories of identity (sameness) and the social sense of the future that is constitutive of the ethical subject (selfhood), and reformulates the question of the relationship between ‘memory’ and ‘identity’ as: how openly can life stories frame a narrative identity?

⁸ As will become clearer, I hope, at the end (like the retrospective illumination of discontinuities that ‘suddenly’ makes sense of them), the English-speaking categories of ‘corridors of power’ and ‘behind closed doors’ have been accommodated by endowing them with the linguistic order of an experience of terror, intensified by its inarticulability. The interesting aspect of ‘post-socialism’ is the hybrid formation of a domain of experience where the ‘real’, ‘imagined’, and ‘remembered’ are reconfigured into a realm of the ‘oneiric’ where reality is refracted in irreconcilable ‘layers’, but which are connected to each other for as long as there are words to capture the surfacing of their coexistence. It is to apply Levi-Strauss’s (1955) theory of correspondences, in *Tristes Tropiques*, to the polyglot articulation of meaning.

Herzfeld (2000) has defined such locations as ‘the intimate realities’ of the experience that state discourses do not represent and that forms the ‘underside of official discourse’, which emerges out of a shift in the analysis of the political—from a focus on institutions to a focus on personal life⁹—as the many sites of disclosure of culturally specific forms of ‘narrative’ that are not a practice of confession but of decentralising the authorship of post-socialist stories (De Soto and Dudwick 2000). ‘Post-socialist fields’ are constructed by the force exercised by people’s wish to respond to questions that give them authority, questions about their ‘subjective experience about real-life situations’ (Herzfeld 2000:223).

Anthropological approaches to ‘traumatic memory’ suggest that radical changes in the life world are (re)emplotted as ‘the everyday’ through narratives that claim full authority also ‘outside’ the intimate sphere where they are practised, where ‘macro’ events are relocated within the ‘micro’ scale of narrative identity (Antze and Lambek 1996). Traumatic memories are Ricoeurian open-ended emplotments, to which psychoanalytical theories supply the concepts with which to articulate continuity and discontinuity. Post-socialism can be an alternative genre of emplotment that relocates ‘socialist’ forms of ‘intimacy’ within an everyday where ‘intimacy’ is shaped by discourses of post-socialist identities, which are projected onto a global scale where ‘old’ state discourses and ‘new’ market forces are not easily distinguishable.

Price (2002) describes a different form of ‘intimacy’: that of the Maroons’ cult of the ancestors, which creates an extraordinary past (discontinuity) within the ordinary present of the everyday (continuity). The combination of the two produces an intimate space of disclosure of a shared practice of narrating a story that blurs the distinction (opening) between what was, what is, and what will be (closure). The shared practice of a collective memory is nobody’s memory, and is neither legend nor myth, for it has no stable form, but is constructed every time it is narrated by the idiosyncratic knowledge of each narrator/character. The remote past of the Maroons is not a ‘traumatic memory’ but a ‘hyper-memory’, for the sense of ‘uprooting’ is an effect not of forgetting but of the ritual remembering of an esoteric knowledge that nobody shares, but that nobody can forget either.

In a similar way, the dream is linked to the autobiographic leap into the Cold War landscape, where ‘the West’ is the name given to the imagined geography of the space of death, where the relationship between memory and history, experience and language, narrative and identity is (re)located in an oneiric dimension, where what lay *en deçà* (on this side) of language is transferred into the *au delà* (on the other side) of language. This post-socialist dimension becomes the ‘multisided field’ of anthropological investigation into the experience of the murky soils of the change that follows the collapse of a regime or the end of a war, the uncanny (dis)appearance of something one did not know was ‘there’, and that is recognized as having always been there, lurking in a world that was deceptively familiar.

⁹ The idea of ‘cultural intimacy’ can help to (re)locate post-socialism not only in terms of a ‘field’ location, but also in terms of the questions raised by current anthropological debates about the ‘locations’ of the connections between history and memory, narrative and experience, past and present.

The loss of citizenship became exile, for its cultural form associated it to the loss of kinship. The body of the nation was anchored in ideas of kinship as a 'good' tie because it was made of 'shared blood', and whose transformation into 'bad' ties meant a geographical distance that made blood become water. Across the Iron Curtain, blood itself could no longer be 'shared'. Socialist 'solidarity' was embedded in ideas of 'good' and 'bad' relationships that linked kinship to race, and that made kinship bonds into borders of inclusion and exclusion, which, on the 'national' territory, had more power than categories of ethnicity or religious identity, and which, in the 'private' sphere, were as powerful as party membership in the 'public' sphere. To exit the body of a nation where citizenship meant shared blood, meant to become a foreign body (Western).

In the 'Western' world, without 'citizenship' or kinship ties, it meant to be in direct contact with the everyday enactment of the logic of national identity as the 'purity' of language, religion, and, ultimately, blood. This new 'contact' with the everyday production of the nation-state created that which from that moment on became 'past' without however exiting the 'present'. Not trauma, but exile. The relentless presence of the traces of that which is no longer, for it has never been, the haunting ghost not of a past event but of an event to be (hope). 'Exile,' wrote Said, 'is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience' (2001:173).

Meaning is a result of the capacity to shape the inhabited world into 'a sense of place' (Basso 1996:54). It stems from a sense of having agency in emplotting the narratives of self-making. There are circumstances, however, such as terror and exile, that turn the landscape not into a gift of moral force (*ibid*) but into a witness to the concealed action of occult forces (West 2005), which produces a sense of paralysing powerlessness. And movement becomes a 'quête incohérente pour un observateur non prévenu' (Levi-Strauss 1955:59)—'an incoherent quest in the eyes of an unprepared observer' (my translation), but 'l'image même de la connaissance'—'the very image of the process of cognition' (my translation) to an informed observer. As Hannah Arendt writes, 'the very idea of history as a process suggests that in their actions men are led by something of which they are not necessarily conscious and which finds no direct expression in the action itself' (2000:305). Exile is also produced by the observers of 'exile', who may classify as inchoate that which to them is unintelligible.

A tense relation: discourse and experience

Polyglossia—in spite of oneself—is not a cumulation of the ability to formulate sentences in the official languages of nation-states, such as they are inscribed in grammar books and taught in language courses, but a category of experience that challenges discursive categorisation. It is the trace of an education received against one's will, which induces a consciousness that is predicated upon inhabiting hybrid subject positionalities and for which there is no 'training' or 'translation'.¹⁰

¹⁰ The way in which the multiple orders of reality that are produced by an education against one's will overlap and intersect with one another in anarchic correspondences is beautifully illustrated in Bohumil Hrabal's (1965) splendid short novel, *Una Solitudine Troppo Rumorosa*, where the anger expressed in the eyes of mice, biblical piles of books, and Schopenhauer's superhuman appearance out of a flash of lightning are emplotted in an ongoing monologue, alongside the leap of faith into the magic workings of the

Categories of experience are always *en deça* of language, for words are constellations of meanings that destabilise the literalness of the discourse paradigm. Each utterance becomes the performance of a metaphorical transfiguration: the liminality of translation where one gets lost in the meanders that re-connect one way of seeing what is heard to another, one way of inscribing existence through experience to ways of erasing experience from ways of inscribing 'experience' as a category of discourse.

The inscription of experience is a continuous construction of meaning through a 'bricolage' of description and evocation. When inhabiting a world made up of as many 'locations' as there are 'sensations', where 'sensations' are vehicles that take you where they belong, when the mode of inhabiting the world is a 'sense of place' derived from the sense of being just about to leave or be moved, when things have names whose synonyms lie 'elsewhere', the metaphorical (not quite that) and the literal (just that) are an irrelevant distinction: the not-quite and the just-that in *whose sense?* Polyglot knowledge is an idiom of re-location through the re-association of what has been dissociated, like the narrative genre of 'post-socialist identities'.

Post-socialism: the schizophrenia of 'authentic nativism'

The landscape of the post-Cold War is inscribed in a literature where 'global flows' and 'indigenous movements' coexist as a new polarisation, which is irreducible to a global/local one, but which is articulated around a new division: authentic heir/impostor.¹¹ National identities—just like personal identities—built within the paradigm of the Cold War (De Soto and Dudwick 2000), have entered a process of surfacing the ruptures between 'within' and 'without' language, which were produced by the subterranean movement of ideas¹² that crossed frontiers erected to separate what state discourses and popular imaginations constructed as incommensurable and inconceivable otherness. The collapse of this paradigm has given way to a process of hybridisation between 'elements' that until 1989 had been imagined as belonging to radically different orders of reality, and whose imagined incommensurability now overwhelms the imagination of the 'globalization of the local' with the terror of 'disorder'.¹³

Anthropologists have become concerned with understanding the outbreak of an epidemic of 'multiple personality disorder' in the 1990s from the perspective of 'cultural idioms' (Antze 1996). What are these idioms of 'trapped plurality' *about* in the broader context of post-1989 globalisation?

capitalist market of a lonely peasant, whose investment capital is a left-foot sandal and a matching purple sock that the narrator has lost on the day of his first date when escaping the shame of a dishonouring accident (stepping with his left foot in a pile of dog's shit).

¹¹ The literature on indigenous movements and globalisation is vast and crosses disciplinary boundaries. What matters is the fact that it has emerged since the 1990s, and that in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 'indigenous' and 'global' are the most frequent categories of analysis of the contemporary world.

¹² Ranger (1969) suggests that identities are formed in and through a circulation of 'ideas' that are indissociable for the practice of trade and which construct belonging as having one's life inscribed in an imagined world made up of various scales that overlap but that never coincide.

¹³ The first volume of a systematic examination of 'the post-socialist field' by means of ethnography was published in 2000 (De Soto and Dudwick's *Fieldwork Dilemmas*).

The search for correspondences between the orders of reality inhabited and the orders of reality I lived by has been mediated by ‘blood’ as a culturally specific metaphor of the negation of an idea of ‘the past’ (post-socialism) that divided the world I experienced—as well as my sense of self—into distinct and incommensurable ‘regions’. ‘Blood’ has provided me with an idiom for power relations and kinship ties, with which I speak of a context where the ‘global’ of the Cold War penetrated the kitchen of my childhood, bringing about a shift in the scale of my world and its gendered paradigm that I could not make sense of. ‘Blood’ has endowed the experience of alienation with a culturally meaningful texture, and the culturally specific idea of the journey into the underworld in search for the lost sense of history has provided me with an alternative topography of the ‘global’. This metaphor has articulated the discontinuity of the 1990s with the discontinuity of my grandmother’s death in 2002 by emplotting them into the narrative event of a post-mortem dialogue where 1984 and 2002 coexisted as the same ‘day’.

Following the topography of this plot, I have journeyed ‘backwards’ in search of a ‘beginning’ into which I could anchor my self, so as to be able to have a sense of meaningful finitude.¹⁴ The journey ‘backwards’ has been the effect of this very search for an anchor in an unstable present where I could not find any recognisable landmarks, where I could not recognise myself in any ‘mirrors’. The quest for meaning has been a confrontation with the production of my corporeality as an excess of matter. And to struggle to create meaning is to struggle to make sense of the history that has produced one’s sense of ‘self’ as ‘other’ outside any narrative practice.

Imagining the dead and the living part of a continuous bundle of relations, abolishing the border between the imagined world of my dead grandmother and mine, has meant to engage with the multiple sites of separation between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ that reconfigure post-socialist worlds as much in ‘the West’ as in ‘the East’. It has meant to abolish the distinction between what is remembered and what is forgotten, and to disclose the effects of the Cold War construction of incommensurable difference between what I had been before crossing the border and what I had become afterwards, once ‘there’. The nature of our separation while she was alive informed me of the power that discourses of othering have over producing a ‘memory’ of alienation that, because of not having any social idiom at its disposition, becomes the practice of inhabiting a ‘dreamworld’.

From the partial and singular perspective of the attempt to translate my personal experience of the production of my own ‘disordered identity’ into anthropological sense, I interpret it as the effect of the collapse of a hegemonic dichotomy (that which the Iron Curtain ‘divided’) that has rendered highly problematic a social construction of a ‘narrative identity’ combining the ‘two blocs’ with multiple ‘origins’ and no ‘native tongue’.

¹⁴ Ricoeur argues that one of the effects of emplotment is to transform contingency into necessity, and that this transformation can be acknowledged only *a posteriori*, once the temporal framework has been ‘closed’: ‘[l’évènement] est simplement l’inattendu, le surprenant, il ne devient partie intégrante de l’histoire que compris après coup, une fois transfiguré par la nécessité en quelque sorte rétrograde qui procède de la totalité temporelle menée à son terme’ (1990:170)—‘the event is simply the unexpected, the surprising, it becomes a component of history after being understood, once transfigured by the necessity that proceeds somehow backwards from the conclusion of a temporal unit’ (my translation).

From the categories of personal experience, 'post-socialism' emerges as the paradoxical ordering of 'global diversity' by means of a paradigmatic 'nativism', understood not as interrupted continuity but as a 'return to the origins' or 'unearthing of the authentic roots'.¹⁵ This paradigm reveals the depth of and extent to which the Cold War has been a powerful matrix of fabrication of embodied and imagined identities, and that the collapse of 'the Berlin Wall' has been made sense of in terms of the psychoanalytic discourse: what to do with the Cold War imagined otherness in a context of 'global encounters'?

Zivkovic (2000) offers an alternative paradigm to the 'authentic native' to which the discourse of 'multiple personality disorder' belongs. While struggling to understand what was going on in Serbia during the early years of the war, 'I decided to give up the ambition of finding out what was *really, really* happening and instead collect as many examples as I could of narrative genres' (*ibid*:52, original emphasis). In a similar fashion, I have attempted to collect various genres of the 'memory practice' as they appeared: dreams, outbursts of nostalgia, trance, sensing the invisible, paranoid attacks... 'the phenomenology of living under conditions of instability, breakdown of established norms, and general lack of moral compass' (*ibid*:53).

Post-socialism is not the consequence of a traumatic event in the past or something that can be located in a specific geographical region or in 'the minds' of specific individuals or groups, but the effect of the encounter with one's own unimagined Otherness in the 'bewildering post-Cold War world where the logic of nation-states is entwined with the logic of globalization' (*ibid*:63). This effect also derives from the 'new' geostrategic reconfigurations of global investment flows that create borders separating what will become a 'memory' from what will be a haunting 'dream', the 'reality' grounding projects from the deceptive 'fantasy' of hope.¹⁶ Post-socialism is produced as the personal traumatic memory of those who claim the right to be an authentic discontinuity.

¹⁵ Besides the broad literature on 'indigenous movements' and the idea of 'indigenous rights', De Soto and Dudwick's (2000) *Fieldwork Dilemmas* is emblematic of how 'post-socialism' has become a category of the dominant paradigm of 'nativism' and of its misconstruction as 'the penetration of capitalism in noncapitalist ways of organizing the world' (Verdery 1996:716, quoted in De Soto and Dudwick 2000:4). This is a misconstruction, because it rules out the penetration of 'capitalism' during the Cold War by means of the circulation of people, investments, goods, and ideas (see Ranger 1969), the subterranean formation of what is now pointed out to be 'visibly' post-socialism. Studies of 'post-socialism' take maps to 'represent' history and conflate 'post-socialism' with 'post-socialist countries' that form a specific geographical area, which is understood as the container of changes specific to that area. The absence of the global scale of the Cold War in anthropological studies of 'post-socialism' (De Soto and Dudwick 2000, Verdery 1996) reproduces the idea that post-socialism is something that takes place only in those countries that on a pre-1989 map would all have been lumped together by the same colour, and whose internal differentiation has, precisely, a long and complicated history with a complicated relationship to World War II that has shaped cultural identities in different ways. The uses of categories of identity within metanarratives (e.g. the post-socialist narrative) has the power to shape categories of experience, by inscribing within specific discourses the life stories of the people whose narrative construction of their identities is trapped within metanarratives that isolate the geographical area—where their inhabited worlds happen to be—from the broader circulation of ideas that inform their narratives (see Ranger 1969). This is a very different procedure from that of 'giving voice to' and 'making space for' the transformative agency of radically alternative historiographies.

¹⁶ The global production of the uncanny is symbolised in the fact that transglobal transactions can be 'located' in London or New York, so that statistics can be made of the number of transactions 'taking place' in London. How is a transaction that is enmeshed in the transglobal financial flow 'located' at all?

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About the author

Madalina Florescu is currently trying to formulate a research project on re-orientation and the ownership of the senses in the contemporary world from the perspective of those whose knowledge is a contestable historical fact. Because global connections and disconnections have rendered distance and closeness unstable measures of the appropriate scale to differentiate between the intimate and the public, she is very interested in developing the notion of disclosure as an instrument for cross-cultural dialogue. She can be contacted at 128108@soas.ac.uk