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DIFFERENT MODERNITIES, HUMBOLDTIAN TRADITIONS,
EAST EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX INTELLECTUALS
AND THEIR PEASANTS

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Abstract: The connections between “the Humboldtian tradition” and very important cultural layers of the European anti-Enlightenment movement can provide a powerful alternative to the mainstream(s) in today’s social sciences. This tradition should be seen, though, in its concrete historicity and the political and theoretical blind spots which are part of this tradition ought to be carefully reconsidered. This anthropological tradition can be “unpacked” by bringing it closer to other theoretical trends which try to address modernity’s inconsistencies and lack of unity (such as the one entailed by the thesis of the “different modernities”) - in order to deconstruct its national closure and its administrative and state oriented background. One of the geographical, historical and social areas where alternative modernities (especially in their radical, “Christian Orthodox” guise), and Humboldtian traditions seem to intersect each other is the East European peasantry.

Key Words: multiple modernities, Humboldtian tradition, alterity, Orthodoxy, peasants, reactionary modernism

Introduction

A quite thriving academic market of various, different, alternative and multiple modernities has emerged lately. The appearance of a plethora of “modernities” bears testimony to a certain feeling of uneasiness, but also to the resilience of some basic tenets of the modernization theory. More generally, the implicit assumption that modernity is a historically well- circumscribed process and, at the same time, a universal value and model, is less likely to go unchallenged nowadays.

In the context of recurrent crises, occurring both in sociology and anthropology, alternative traditions of doing science and understanding human and social reality become important, but tend to be essentialized as “the alternative”, and to lose the very things they were due to bring in: fresh perspectives and concrete historical and theoretical outlooks. Thus, the multiplication of modernity in sociology and the critique of the field and of the Malinowskian tradition in anthropology, through a return to Boas’ (as well as to Humboldt’s) theory represent robust “alternatives”. In this work, I to argue that by bringing them together in an attempt to apply them to the down to earth, but also phantasmatic existence of Christian Orthodox peasantry in Eastern Europe, a historically grounded re-assessment of these alternatives becomes possible.

Bunzl’s attempt to lay, theoretically, the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a neo-Boasian (counter-Enlightenment) anthropology represented, for example, by Foucauldian anthropology, is one of the most interesting attempts to disrupt the implicit “alterity paradigm” in social sciences. Another similar attempt is a religiously-centred one which could, tentatively, be labelled as the “different/religious modernity”. The rest of this paper is concerned with criticizing and discussing these two main examples, in an attempt to politically and historically situate the general tenor of these discourses.

The sciences of modernity. The sciences of alterity

The advent of social sciences, of the “third culture” - situated between the natural sciences and the humanistic ones in the XIXth and XXth centuries¹- was, seemingly, based on a new, self-conscious modern model of alterity, replacing the old, religious one². In Nisbet’s view, sociology “above any other scholarly discipline, has taken the conflicts between traditionalism and modernism in European culture and converted them into a set of analytical and interpretative concepts”³. This huge fracture created two opposite and asymmetric ways of seeing: traditional versus modern, *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*⁴ and religious

versus secular, where the “modern” determines and creates the “traditional”.

Even though, in the XIXth century scientific social division of labour, sociology was oriented towards the modern European or North American societies, while anthropology aimed at researching the “primitive” ones, their scientific discourse was generated, in both cases, by a paradigm of alterity:

“[...] sociology, at its very inception, needs the establishment and development of what I would like to call ‘a primitivist ideology’. This primitivist ideology is more the work of ethnologists than that of sociologists, given the disciplinary cleavage operated at the beginning of the XIXth century, when the ‘primitives’ and not only the ‘savages’ became the object of a discipline in itself, that is, ethnology, replacing the debates over the state of society with an array of issues linked to the hierarchical classification of societies, based on a position related to the moment and the state of the origin and defined with respect to that particular moment or state”⁵.

Social sciences began by separating themselves from “traditional” religion, by drawing a line between themselves and other modes of cognition that they hold to be defective. This is “a paradoxical beginning [...] for this beginning could *not* have been grounded in the very method of ‘observation’ that positivism’s program proclaimed as the basis of its own authority”. The separation of positivist social sciences was, thus, “a philosophical act, not a scientific one”⁶. Gouldner’s explanation of the success of the newly emerged social sciences is that they enjoyed a certain “credit”; they were considered “true” in advance of being validated through demonstration.

The problem with the social credit of various discourses is that it can run out. Therefore, after a while, the ideological underpinnings of social science might become visible.

Alterity models or the Humboldtian tradition?

The field, as the site where legitimate anthropologic knowledge is produced, has become, in the last years, a largely debated bone of contention. George Stocking, talking about the Malinowskian enterprise, calls it a “myth-making process”⁷. Through his analysis of *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Stocking unveils the traces of a „euhemeristic foundational myth” where “the divinized heroes are not the Trobriand natives, but „the European Jason that brings back the Golden Fleece of

ethnographic knowledge”⁸. For more than four decades “Malinowski’s mythical charter functioned to sustain the ethnographic enterprise, helping several generations of aspiring ethnographers.” By the time his diaries were published, however, changing colonial circumstances had fundamentally altered the ethnographer’s condition⁹.

Nevertheless, in roughly the same time Malinowskian paradigm emerged, in the very core of cultural anthropology a potential contra-paradigm was evolving. In 1887, Franz Boas, at that time a relatively young and unknown anthropologist, launched a full-scale attack on American museums of Anthropology. The father-to-be of American cultural anthropology insisted that one must first place the artefacts in the context of the underlying culture, and, by extension, of those of its neighbours, before its true meaning can be revealed. In Ira Jacknis’ terms, he “shifted the goal of ethnography from the study of discrete objects, in a universal perspective, to a focus on their cultural context, in a local setting”¹⁰.

In the long run, Boas’ critique was due to disentangle the work of anthropology from its original „primitivist”¹¹ settings. Transposed to anthropology, the tension between *Natur-* und *Geisteswissenschaften*, or, in Boas’ own terms, between the “aesthetic” method of the physicist and the “affective” one of the cosmographer/ historian¹², dissolved the old evolutionist paradigm. Nevertheless, a tension endured. The shift from the *part* (seen on an evolutionist-universalist canvas) to the *whole* (seen as a dense but local cultural entity) was never complete. There was, in Boas’ works, a characteristic “delaying of closure”, an adversity towards formulating general laws and drawing early syntheses¹³.

If the closure of the evolutionist anthropological discourse was made possible by the general idea of unilineal or multilinear evolution, the Boasian model was articulated on the idea of the wholeness of culture. The problem lies in the fact that „culture”, as a discrete whole, is not a given element, but rather, it is constituted inside ever-disappearing boundaries, as the openness of early Boasian anthropology clearly demonstrates.

I do not intend to present here the enormous debate concerning ethnographic fieldwork, indigenous anthropology and the no less problematic “ethnographic present”. Instead, I concentrate, within the framework of these debates, on a critique of the mechanisms of reproduction of the ‘alterity paradigm’, which seems to remain present even in the postmodern anthropological discourses. The possible emergence of an anthropology which transcends this division, thus becoming what Matti Bunzl calls a “neo-boasian anthropology” or a “historical ethnography of secondary explanations¹⁴”, could offer a possible way out of the methodological and theoretical deadlock which binds modern/secular research tools, when they are applied either to study (religiously) „different modernities”, or to historically ground the inherent instability of all “alternative modernity” discourses.

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have been quite radical in uncovering the ideology of the “Malinowskian field tradition”. In *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, they have articulated a strong critique of the normative construction of fieldwork. This normative construction, that creates a “hierarchy of purity of field sites” by a clear cut separation between “home” and “field”¹⁵, has been challenged most effectively by those threatened by it, by “native anthropologists”¹⁶.

Discussing Gupta and Ferguson’s critiques of the concept of “native anthropologist”, Bunzl considers that “the program they enunciate fails to deconstruct the category of ‘native anthropology’ itself”¹⁷. In his view, even the most radical attempts to reconsider indigenous anthropology have not been able to deconstruct the foundational Self/Other divide “that organizes classical fieldwork and produces the native anthropologist as a virtual member of the discipline”¹⁸. Even James Clifford, one of the most lucid critics of contemporary anthropology, proposes a “roots and routes” or a “travelling cultures” perspective¹⁹. Commenting on James Clifford’s essay to emphasize the role of travelling – understood mainly as “a detour (made by the native anthropologist) through a university or other site that provides analytic or comparative perspective on the place of dwelling/research”²⁰, Bunzl considers that, in this way, Clifford is “reinscribing cultural alterity as the privileged generator of ethnographic authority”²¹.

The solution proposed by Matti Bunzl is quite an ingenious one, as it strives to combine Boasian anthropology with Foucauldian genealogy. Grounding part of his demonstration on some “early” Boasian texts like *The Study of Geography* (1887) or *On Alternating Sounds* (1889)²², Bunzl is trying to re-legitimize an “ethnographic research program that derived from such German counter-Enlightenment figures as Johann Gottfried Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt”. By the emphasis put on the uniqueness of values transmitted through history, jointed in the cosmopolitan framework of a *Humanitätsideal* (ideal of humanity), this tradition could help, in Bunzl’s view, in articulating a different understanding of the epistemology of fieldwork. As this understanding does not rest on a distinction between ethnographic self and native other it can draw “its analytic leverage from a rigorous historicity that refigures the question of Otherness in terms of temporal rather than cultural alterity”²³.

Having recourse to Foucault brings into the analysis a non-panoptical representation of fieldwork, and a focusing on the moment - and power context - of the invention of cultural differences. For Bunzl, a neo-Boasian anthropology is to be constituted as the ethnographic dimension of a Foucauldian project aiming at a “history of the present”. This present is constructed out of layers of “secondary explanations”, where the anthropologist and the informant are united in a common epistemic

position towards the real Other. This “Other” ultimately represents the history which has generated the present condition²⁴.

Multiple religious modernities

The ambiguities of the “tradition/ modern” dichotomy, which represents the organizing core of social sciences discourse, become apparent when modernity turns “multiple”, “alternative”, “entangled” or “different”, as it happens within the theoretical models inspired mostly by Eisenstadt²⁵. The model of “multiple modernities” has a different genealogy than anthropology, as it ranges from a critique of the paradigms of modernization – and partially of the structural-functionalist, Parsonian version of the classics (Marx, Durkheim and Weber) to an understanding of the world as “a multiplicity of cultural programs”²⁶.

Both the so-called neo-boasian attempt and the “multiple modernities” try, starting from different theoretical, disciplinary and historical grounds, to come to terms with the imbedded alterity register which governs both sociology and anthropology. The result is that whatever one considers as “modern” –whichever form this modern character may take - has to confront not only its traditional or archaic origins, but also different, sometimes reactive, sometimes original non-Western modernities. As a consequence, one cannot easily argue anymore that Westernization overlaps modernization.

One of the main problems of the multiple or different modernities model is that it usually uses an implicit dualist model, which entails a core Western modernity²⁷ versus *alternative*, or even defective ways of being modern, at the periphery of that Western core. It is a particularly fuzzy and instable paradigm, which tends to develop in unaccountable ways, by entering an academic market of inventing and circulating variously suitable “modernities”. The interpretative strength of these “modernities” does not rest in the epistemic nucleus of the paradigm, but rather in the richness and intelligence of the historical descriptions²⁸.

When an interpretation which is radical enough is brought to bear on the “multiple modernities” model, some interestingly flawed interpretations of local history usually tend to crop up. They are strangely similar to the attempts to refashion an anthropological tradition based on the German, Boasian tradition.

A particularly interesting attempt to think over a “different modernity” developed especially in theological, sociological and historical milieus from Greece, spreading some of its offshoots also in other Orthodox East-European countries. A Romanian sociologist of religion has emphasized the fact that “the secularization thesis developed from empirical material collected in investigations carried out in Western Europe (Great Britain and, to a lesser extent, in the Northern countries

was incomplete). The religious landscape of South-Eastern Europe was omitted from the initial debate”²⁹.

The 1992 census indicates that in Romania 99% of the people declared themselves Christians, 86.7% of the population declared itself Christian orthodox and only 0.1% atheists. A similar situation was registered in 2002, when 99% were Christians, 86.81% Christian orthodox, and 0.1% atheists. In 2012, out of a population of more than 20 millions, 20,743 declared themselves atheists and 18,917 as having no religion³⁰. Of course, the census data can be interpreted differently, but its continuity and massiveness over a decade shows that, at least with respect to counting and making sense out of religions, there is a major difference between Orthodox Eastern Europe and Western Europe.

Following the theories of the philosopher and theologian Christos Yannaras³¹, and those of the sociologist and anthropologist Kokosalakis³², who offers a different perspective from Yannaras, these kinds of data seem to indicate the existence of a specific “Orthodox culture”. The coalescence between “Orthodoxy”, as a multitudinous religious and theological practice, and “culture”, which is a modern and disciplinary term, borrowed from classical anthropology, has interesting effects.

In Kokosalakis’ terms “orthodoxy is a pre-modern culture in the sense that it was not directly disrupted by the major movements which constitute the foundations of modernity, namely the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment”³³. Paragons of modernity - like the industrial revolution or the capitalist patterning of social life - “were born and grew outside countries where Orthodoxy has been the dominant religion”³⁴. This means that “the Orthodox Church has not been part of the process of modernization - it has been *involved* in it but not *part* of it” and “the inner spirituality of the Orthodox peoples can still be expressed in traditional forms, because it is still there available, not disenchanted. In this respect, the Orthodox religion could be called a post-modern religion”³⁵.

This hypothesis of orthodoxy as an alternative modernity, a post-modernity, or a specific “culture” is central in Yannaras’ philosophy. The Greek philosopher speaks about the “cultural schizophrenia” of orthodox communities, caught between a heterogeneous culture of “Western modernity” in their social, institutional and economic lives, and an endogenous religious, liturgical - orthodox, and “Eastern” culture. Yannaras stresses the existence of an orthodox total “way of life” different from the modern, protestant engendered Western one.

This theoretical stance is radical in the unveiling of a “different modernity” in Orthodox Eastern Europe and in warning against a major theoretical risk which might be encountered and, consequently, must be confronted by any sociological and anthropological inquiry conducted in this domain. The risk resides in the fact that anthropological and sociological studies are distorted by a sort of methodological or theoretical

lens, through which scholars observe and consequently depict a reality – such as the East European Orthodox area – that has, basically, nothing to do with the construction of the theory as such. On the other side, these approaches, which interpret Orthodoxy as a form of post-modernity or as an alternative modernity tend to use, in their very core of argumentation, historically formed and contested notions like “culture”, “way of life”, “people” or even “schizophrenia”. Therefore, these approaches seem to be caught in the same double bind they accuse the modernist theory of. They cannot make sense or represent in a scientific, statistical or cultural discourse a reality they want to see as essentially different from the reality that engendered those scientific discourses.

The existence of an integrated Orthodox “culture” is questionable and it might hide quite important divisions between rural and urban, between elites (political, economic, cultural etc.) and various populations or amongst different elites. Regional varieties, cross-cultural fertilizations and differentiations tend to be forgotten in such a theoretical approach. The Eastern European area is far from being homogeneously Christian Orthodox and confessional identities, symbolic geography and historical traditions tend to diverge and weave in various ways.

The most important and problematic issue of this kind of religiously-based “multiple modernity” perspective rests in the existence of a large rural population. The massive presence of peasantry is the main social fact that substantiates the difference between “Eastern” and “Western” Europe. Most of the theories which attempted to codify the national specificities, the “ethnic ontologies”³⁶ in the interwar period tried to give a body to their more or less fantastic theories, by using the peasants as demographic and social carrier groups. The Eastern Europe religious “multiple modernity” theory continues, in a way, the ethnic ontologies of the interwar period. The alterity is not anymore focused on the *ethnos* – as it has been replaced by religion, way of life or “Orthodox culture”.

Theologically codified Orthodoxy coexists – in the rural but also urban zones – with an array of rituals, practices and traditions that form (folk) ways of life and cultures that can be dubbed as non-modern³⁷. Many times, the largest elements of the ritual and cultural practices which can be, statistically, interpreted as “Orthodox”, are part of a very different, but obviously not “Western” modernity.

The existence of a strong peasant stratum in Eastern Europe is one of the main reasons for the emergence of discourses on a local, different modernity. Paradoxically enough, the very same existence runs counter to almost all the conclusions that are being drawn from this “difference”. In the case of the interwar “ethnic ontologies”, local and regional historicity was transcended through the form of the nation – consolidated by the nation-state – that was seen both as instrumental and final goal in the life of the society. In the “different modernity” paradigm, the historicity of the hybrid and non-canonical ritual and religious practices of the

peasantry is transcended by a well-codified and intellectually sophisticated “Orthodox culture”. This culture is coherent enough in order to be conversant with Western modern philosophical traditions (especially with the Heideggerian one, which, for Yannaras, is the most representative one) but it also has to be able to present itself as speaking on behalf of a population that is only nominally part of the would-be-intellectual counter-part of “the West”. In a paradoxical way, the “Orthodox culture” strives to gain a position of (different) modernity, in order to be recognized as a “real” partner by the core, “Western”³⁸ modernity, even though, within this process of making use of the “non-modern” peasantry, it has to use some very modernist representational and inscribing technology.

The topic of a religiously modelled modernity and of the ambiguous position, in which the social sciences are caught in their attempts to explain this peculiar type of modernity, is a real and importantly enough one. More or less, the theory of multiple/ different modernities, while seemingly contradicting the Western modern, “orientalising”³⁹ discourse, contrives only to displace the alterity paradigm, without being able to deconstruct it. In order to resist a possibly reversed „orientalism”, or to propose an anthropologically unpalatable essentialized „religious culture”, an ethnography of the producers of knowledge could provide an important alternative⁴⁰.

In Eastern Europe, there used to be and still exists an important meta-discourse on different modernities, that usually took the form of debates regarding “normative modernity”. These debates cannot alter the peripheral character of the Romanian cultural elites and, even unwillingly, they reflect the several paths followed, in principle, by modernity, in late XIXth and XXth century Europe.

The knowledge producers who are involved in this multiple/different modernity meta-discourse are usually members of what James Clifford called a network of “travelling cultures”. Foreign themes, cultural and political concerns are transferred and transformed by East European scholars. All the new intellectual experts in national culture are academic travellers deeply enmeshed in the ambiguous dialectic of “roots and routes”, brokers of different cultures.

What is peculiar in the approach “from the margins” is that this type of thinking consciously tries to offer perspectives, which resemble the “core” theories enough to legitimize the Central and East-European scholars as scholars, while trying to use the same perspectives for creating theories which assume purposes different from the original ones. The “different modernity” discourse is an example of the complex and ambiguous relationship wrought between the “centre” and the “periphery”. A continuous adjustment and transformation of western scientific languages is taking place in the sphere of East-European social sciences, and a perpetual double game between changing the discourses

and the corresponding scientific instruments and preserving the criteria through which these peripheral perspectives can be accepted and recognized by the “central” Western canon is being played as well.

By playing the card of an intellectually based religious different modernity, today’s local intellectuals often enter this seemingly inevitable double game. The signifiers, which are used to define the neatly carved reality of an Orthodox culture, cannot be consolidated by a theology or social theory with a Heideggerian flavour. The duality attempting to reproduce itself as the other way of making sense of the same “different modernity” is the “reactionary modernism” model⁴¹.

This understanding of radical conservatism or of what Jeffrey Herf calls “reactionary modernism”, implies, more or less, also the questioning of the idea that modernity offers itself as a package deal. Is there just one single brand of modernity? Are there alternate ways of spelling modernity? Even if the package-theory was, and still is, very widely sustained, having its quite important theoretical and pragmatical insights, it has been attacked from different view points, starting with Hugo von Hofmannstahl, Thomas Mann and the Weimarian conservative revolutionaries and continuing with Karl Mannheim to the more recent analyses of Jeffrey Herf, Stefan Breuer and Fritz Stern⁴².

These types of intellectual movements, which embrace technological and economic modernization, political activism and state power in the name of a particularistic cultural idea, are usually turning towards state power in order to reach their goals. These goals consist mainly in the reassertion of collective particularity against a twofold threat. The internal threat is the one entailed by the functioning of free markets, parliamentary democracy, internationalist socialism, liberalism etc. The external threat is usually conceived as the influence of politically, militarily, economically and culturally powerful foreign states⁴³.

A religiously defined different modernity emerges as the direct consequence of the need of intellectual elites, of knowledge producers, to be recognized as equal partners by their “Western” counterparts. This strife after recognition uses, inevitably, very modernist ways of inscribing, disciplining and erasing the very social strata they have to use in order to substantiate their claims: the peasantry or the rural underclasses. Out of these internal contradictions, there comes the ever-renewed temptation of the reactionary modernism solution: to get back to tradition through a modernist revolution.

Peasants and the Humboldtian tradition

Matti Bunzl traces back the Boasian anthropological tradition through Bastian and Ritter, Steinthal and Waitz, to the brothers Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt. The critique of evolutionism and racism, linguistic relativism and cultural historicism all stem from this tradition

and are prone to be re-discovered and transformed in conjunction to a “history of the present” inspired from Foucault’s theory. On a more balanced note, Bunzl considers that, in the background of the Humboldtian tradition, one finds the “Herderian ideal of *Volksgeist*” that is “not without a paradoxical and portentous residue of conceptual and ideological ambiguity”⁴⁴.

That so-called “residue” calls for a more thorough and historically contextualized analysis, as the tradition which should offer an alternative to the problematic anthropological and sociological theories and descriptions of modernity and archaic world comes with questionable issues, as well as with a (symbolic) geography of its own, which cannot be so easily excised and articulated with the help of the Foucauldian genealogy⁴⁵.

George Stocking introduced an important distinction between two different ways of “doing anthropology”: “nation-building anthropology” and “empire-building anthropology”⁴⁶. Although Stocking’s differentiation enjoys the advantage of explicitly introducing the element of politics into any understanding of academic and social field development, still, it is probably not sensitive enough to the ambiguities of “nation-building anthropology” in an area dominated by German, Austro-Hungarian or Russian empires⁴⁷.

The study of folklore (*Volkskunde*) can be linked to two distinct political trends: *romantic nationalism* and *administrative particularism*⁴⁸. There is a Central European tradition which complements and counters the romantic one. If the romantics used folklore as an ideological discourse in their quest for national unification, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, for example, saw a political application of folklore to the administration and management of populations:

„Political folklore is...the guarantee for our political future ... [because] a liberal and popular administrative policy is unthinkable without regard for all the natural characteristics of folk life. ...I would like to show...that a social policy, that is, the art of state administration...is based on the scientific study of the population through all its groups and estates“⁴⁹

The emergence of the population as a target of folklore research finds its early beginnings rather in the pragmatic concern of the German states (and also partially of East European ones) and not, as it is generally assumed, in the ideological concerns of the German romantics. In fact, neither Herder, nor the Grimms ever used the term *Volkskunde*⁵⁰. *Volkskunde* even remained „the verbal emblem of the administrative tradition until the second half of the nineteenth century, when the name

acquired romantic connotations by association with the English term *folklore*, newly coined at that time⁵¹.

In both variants - romantic and administrative - of the *Volkskunde*, the place occupied, in the “empire-building anthropology”, by the “primitive”, was taken by an even more ambiguous figure: the peasant. The trope of the peasant sustained apparently adverse discourses. Between the hard-core archaicity of non-European, „primitive” populations and the modern, urban euro-Atlantic society, the peasant stands as an intermediary link, which is too contaminated by primitivism, in order to have a real chance of surviving, as a viable social strata, yet European enough to represent an important identity resource in most modern nostalgias.

The discourses of modernity and modernization were thus not necessarily opposed to the ones talking about the “archaism” and “authenticity” of peasantry. At the same time with its dissolution and radical exploitation in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, the Central and Eastern European peasantry suffered a symbolic transubstantiation. Its “authenticity” was removed - sometimes by following scientific methods, sometimes by using purely political tools - from the real, living population which was working the fields, in order to be used in the process of legitimizing social strata and political constructions totally different from the peasant ones. The nation was the idea, discourse and political setting that kept these processes in check, the power which created a unifying background.

The fate of anthropology and sociology in Central and Eastern Europe can be read through this bifurcation, but also through its special way of reaching a closure of discourse. Even if this closure is sometimes evolutionary backed or culturally tainted, the specific element is the national-organic one. The XIXth and XXth centuries Central and East European ethnographical and sociological discourse had a national closure, was constructed on a national background and, also, helped in the construction of the nation.

In East European XIXth century ethnography and sociology, a different model of “popular culture” was used than in other parts of Europe. In Austria, popular culture was thought to be rather close to the elite culture: as a simplified and vulgarized variant, based on a constant flow of culture between cities and villages and constructed around Catholic religiosity. A model of an ancient, autochthonous peasant culture was deployed in the East of Vienna. Peasantry was seen as the depository of the ancestral culture of the whole nation, and the elites as bodies that have broken away from the old ways and estranged themselves from the “roots of the nation”. In Hofer’s view, both models – “popular culture” and “peasant culture”- can be explained by the center-periphery relations in early modern and modern times⁵². On the periphery, the ruling elites embraced cultural forms and idioms from the centers, but the peasants

were pretty much spared these kinds of influences⁵³. The gap between the elites and the rural segment widened tremendously in the periphery; it also created a mirror image of deep peasant archaicity and, in the process of nation-building, it gave to the ambiguous connection between backwardness and authenticity an important place.

The task of the ethnographers was to connect with and document this original culture, which they considered to be also, their own. They were to purify it from foreign influences and to restore it for the nation. The fact that the actual bearers of this culture were backward people who were part of the governable, submissive classes actually helped this active creation of primordialness.

The East European peasant, as a disappearing real social character could be the theoretical place of a re-encounter of the “nation-building” and “empire-building” anthropology. This historical process of a social discipline’s building and development, with its difficulties and huge misunderstandings, is, I believe, the real stumbling rock for creating a non-alterity, “neo-Boasian” anthropology, as “the Humboldtian tradition” is intimately mixed with the Central and East European historical and political programmes for studying and approaching the peasantry.

Conclusions

The dichotomy sustained by Isaiah Berlin, in the *Introduction* to his book on Vico and Herder, between an Enlightenment and a Counter-Enlightenment tradition of thought⁵⁴, even if it is very important and useful in our understanding of the different lines of interpreting society and history, should not obscure the many influences, overlappings, the more or less faithful translations and the blending of different brands of positivism and romanticism in Western and Eastern-European modernities.

The connections between what Matti Bunzl calls “the Humboldtian tradition” and very important cultural sediments of the European anti-Enlightenment movement can provide a powerful alternative to the mainstream(s) in today’s social sciences – or, at least, a historically coherent and prestigious mirror for their recurrent crises. This tradition should be seen, though, in its concrete historicity and the political and theoretical blind spots, which are part of this tradition, carefully reconsidered.

This anthropological tradition can be “unpacked” by bringing it closer to other theoretical trends which try to address modernity’s inconsistencies and lack of unity (such as the one entailed by the thesis of the “different modernities”) - in order to deconstruct its national closure and its administrative and state-oriented background.

One of the geographical, historical and social areas, where alternative modernities (especially in their radical, “Christian Orthodox” guise), and

Humboldtian traditions (closely intertwined to Herderian and Riehl's ones) seem to intersect each other, is the East European peasantry - which is a historical and conceptual objectification of local ways of life, and of romantic and administrative programmes for regulating and transforming them. By illuminating the relationships wrought between imagined peasants and intellectual (peripheral) elites in their attempt to be recognized as interlocutors for the "canonical" European sciences, cultural and political discourses, the general topic of the "alternatives" to the main developments in social and humanistic sciences emerges in a new historical and genealogical perspective.

Notes:

¹ Wolf Lepenies, *Les trois cultures. Entre science et littérature l'avènement de la sociologie*, (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1990 [1985]).

² Raymond Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

³ Robert Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), viii.

⁴ Ferdinand Toennies, *Community and Civil Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [1887]).

⁵ Francoise Paul-Lévy, "A la fondation de la sociologie: l'idéologie primitiviste", *L'Homme*, vol. 97-98, (1986): 302-303.

⁶ Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology. The Origins, Grammar and Future of Ideology*, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1976), 5.

⁷ George W. Stocking, Jr. "The Ethnographer's Magoc: Fieldwork in British Anthropology from Tylor to Malinowski", in *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr., (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 108.

⁸ Stocking, 109.

⁹ Stocking, 112.

¹⁰ Ira Jacknis, "The Ethnographic Object and the Object of Ethnography in the Early Career of Franz Boas", in *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr., (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 187.

¹¹ Paul-Lévy.

¹² Franz Boas, "The Study of Geography", in *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr., (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 9-16.

¹³ Lately, this boundary resistance of Boasian anthropology has been decoded as a precursory manifestation of postmodernism. For a detailed discussion see Jacknis, 1996.

¹⁴ Matti Bunzl. "Boas, Foucault, and the 'Native Anthropologist': Notes Toward a Neo-Boasian Anthropology", *American Anthropologist*, 106 (3), (2004): 435-442.

¹⁵ Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Discipline and Practice: 'The Field' as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology", in *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, eds. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 12.

¹⁶ An important moment in the debate is represented by *Anthropology at Home*, ed. Anthony Jackson (London: Tavistock, 1987) and *Anthropologists at Home in North America. Methods and Issues in the Study of One's Own Society*, ed. Donald A. Messerschmidt, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁷ Bunzl, 436.

¹⁸ Bunzl, 436.

¹⁹ James Clifford, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Clifford, 206.

²¹ Matti Bunzl, "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: from *Volksgeist* and *Nationalcharakter* to an Anthropological Concept of Culture", in *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic. Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George W. Stocking, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 437.

²² Franz Boas, "On Alternating Sounds", *American Anthropologist*, A2, 1, (1889), 47-54.

²³ Bunzl, 437.

²⁴ Bunzl, 438.

²⁵ Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", in *Multiple Modernities*, ed. Shmuel Eisenstadt, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

²⁶ Eisenstadt, 2. Paradoxically, the critique of modernization and the "multiple modernities" research programme, gets to epistemological and theoretical positions that anthropology is striving to depart from or, at least, to critically reassess.

²⁷ By "Western modernity" I understand, throughout this paper, the image and the political and cultural discursive theme that is created in areas (self) perceived as "defective" when compared with North Atlantic societies, economies and cultures. I do not presage in any way on the existence of a monolithic "Western modernity" that appears as such only through a historical process of reversed "orientalism" (Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books, 1977).

²⁸ "Reactionary modernism" is theoretically and epistemologically still situated in the "multiple modernities" paradigm but its interpretative power resides less in its "paradigmatic" position. What the "reactionary modernism" brings forth is a possible fruitful comparison between the rather analytically well trodden area of the Weimar Republic and the interwar East European cultural, scientific and political arenas.

²⁹ Dan Dungaciu, "Alternative Modernities in Europe. Modernity, Religion and Secularization in South-Eastern Europe. The Romanian Case", *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Paper*, 68. (2004), 3.

³⁰ The results of the 2012 census are problematic as for 1,259,739 persons there is no information on their religion or lack of.

³¹ Christos Yannaras, *Ortodoxia și Occidentul*, (București: Editura Bizantină, 1995). Christos Yannaras *The Freedom of Morality*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

³² Nikos Kokosalakis "Church and State in the Orthodox Context with Special Reference to Greece", in *Identità Europea e diversità religiosa nel mutamento contemporaneo*, eds. Peter Antes, Pietro del Marco, Arnaldo Nesti, (Firenze: Angelo Pontecorvoli, 1995).

³³ Kokosalakis, 234.

³⁴ Kokosalakis, 234.

³⁵ Dungaciu, 8.

³⁶ Sorin Antohi, "Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology", *Tr@nsit online*, 21, (2002).

http://archiv.iwm.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=411.

³⁷ Or, at least, as not part of the industrial and urban modernity that is usually linked with "Western modernity".

³⁸ Clifford, 1997.

³⁹ Maria Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness", *Slavic Review*, 69, 1, (2005).

⁴⁰ Johan Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

⁴¹ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁴² Fritz Stern, the analyst of the "politics of cultural despair", considered that "we must accept the fact that this kind of rebellion against modernity lies latent in Western society and that its confused, fantastic program, its irrational and unpolitical rhetoric, embodies aspirations just as genuine, though not as generous or tangible, as the aspirations embodied in other or more familiar movements of reform" (Fritz Stern, xxii).

⁴³ James Muller, *The Other God that Failed. Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁴⁴ Bunzl, 73.

⁴⁵ The foucauldian approach has been criticized for its euro-centrism. See Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity", in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) and Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

⁴⁶ George W. Stocking, Jr., "Afterword: A View from the Center", *Ethnos*, 47, 1-2 (1982), 172-186.

⁴⁷ Han Vermeulen, "Origins and Institutionalization of Ethnography and Ethnology in Europe and the USA, 1771-1845", in *Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the History of European Anthropology*, eds. Han Vermeulen and Arturo Alvarez Roldán, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁴⁸ Uli Linke, "Colonizing the National Imaginary: Folklore, Anthropology, and the Making of the Modern State", in *Cultures of Scholarship*, ed. S.C. Humphreys, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Riehl 1851 apud Linke, 103.

⁵⁰ Gerhard Lütz, "Die Entstehung der Ethnologie und das spätere Nebeneinander der Fächer Volkskunde und Völkerkunde in Deutschland", in *Europäische Ethnologie*, eds. H. Nixdorff and T. Hautschild, (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1982).

⁵¹ Linke, 108.

⁵² Tamás Hofer, "The Hungarian 'Soul' and the Historical Layers of 'National Heritage': Conceptualization of Hungarian Folk Culture 1880-1944", in *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, eds. Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery, (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995), 67.

⁵³ Hofer, 68.

⁵⁴ Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1977).

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