

ISSA Proceedings 2006 - 'Status Groups' Or A 'Free Market Of Ideas'? An Analysis Of A Romanian Intellectual Polemic In Pragma-Dialectical And Critical Discourse-Analytical Terms



In 2004 a controversial book appeared in Romania, *Boierii minții: intelectualii români între grupurile de prestigiu și piața liberă a ideilor* (*Boyers of the Mind: Romanian intellectuals between status groups and the free market of ideas*) by Sorin-Adam Matei, a Romanian academic working in the USA. Drawing on Weber's concepts of

'charisma' and 'status', Matei claimed that Romanian public intellectuals are organized in terms of 'status groups', a so-called 'paramodern' type of social organization, combining traditional, 'aristocratic' elements and modern ones. He also used this claim to explain the perceived dysfunctions of the Romanian public sphere after 1989: instead of a democratic 'free market of ideas', a space distorted by power relations linked to the charismatic cultural capital of certain intellectuals, to group loyalties, interests and rivalries, a space where individual prestige is less a matter of the quality and quantity of cultural goods produced, than a matter of belonging to the 'right' intellectual caste.

The predominance of status groups in the cultural world, Matei argued, as well as the way in which they exploit market mechanisms, are 'distorting' the process of 'remodernization' after 1989 and only aggravate what others have called Romania's deficit of modernity. As an illustration of this alleged mechanism, Matei discusses the way in which H.-R. Patapievici (now a well-known writer and director of the Romanian Cultural Institute) was 'launched', some 10 years ago, by philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu, the leader of the most prestigious 'status group' during and after communism, that of the disciples of philosopher Constantin Noica (1909-1987).

The analytical framework of this paper is provided by a combination of Pragma-

Dialectics (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, 2004, van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002) and Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995, 2000, 2003, Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, Wodak et al. 1999). In my work so far (Iețcu 2004, 2006, 2006a), I have focused on the contribution of public intellectuals to the processes of social change after 1989 and I have combined CDA with pragma-dialectical concepts in an attempt to expand CDA's analytical framework. For instance, I have assumed that a concept like *strategic maneuvering* can throw light on the analysis, in CDA terms, of *discursive strategies of legitimation* of certain preferred ideologies in post-communism, or that the logic that has governed the *recontextualization* of certain western discourses in Romania after 1989 can be discussed in terms of certain *fallacious* ways of arguing.

Reconstruction of the argument

I am suggesting below a reconstruction of Matei's argument, which I take to consist mainly of coordinative argumentation in support of the standpoint (1): single arguments such as 1.1. and 1.2. have to be taken together in order to defend the standpoint (i.e. the mere *existence* of status groups would not support the standpoint sufficiently if they did not also *predominate* in Romanian cultural life, virtually to the alleged exclusion of other more democratic forms of organization). Arguments in support of the premise that status groups are a 'paramodern' form of organization, i.e. one which distorts modernization processes (1.1'), are also linked by coordination:

1. *Romanian intellectuals are turning Romania into a 'paramodern society', i.e. distorting the process of (re)modernization after 1989.*

[usage declarative 1: definition of 'intellectuals' as 'public intellectuals', i.e. those who are actively influencing public life]

[usage declarative 2: definition of 'paramodernity' as a system of social organization that combines modern and pre-modern elements, e.g. a belief in the existence of essential differences among social groups or categories, in the social role of elites and exceptional individuals, etc.]

1.1. *Romanian intellectuals are organized in status groups.*

[explanation: in order to obtain power in the cultural, academic, political field]

[usage declarative: definition of 'status group' as an elementary form of social life characterized by its closed character, certain forms of participation and access (initiation, rituals of apprenticeship) , certain forms of relations among members

and identity mechanisms][i]

[explanations for the emergence of status groups: exogenous causes – e.g. poverty of resources creates cultural monopolies; historically, Romania’s modernization was accomplished by the intellectual elites; endogenous causes: individual ‘charisma’ structures the group into leaders and followers]

1.1’. Status groups are a paramodern form of social organization, which distorts modernization.

1.1’.1a.1. In a modern society, the intellectuals are aggregated in a class system, i.e. social position and status are determined by the market; access to social position is not pre-determined but open.

1.1’.1a.1’. In a paramodern society, the intellectuals are aggregated in status groups, i.e. in closed, elitist communities, with non-transparent, undemocratic procedures of access, hierarchical relations, etc.

1.1’.2a.1. The organization of the intellectuals in status groups distorts free market mechanisms.

1.1’.2a.1’ The free market is an element of modernity.

1.1’.2a.1.1. The ‘Păltiniș’ group launched H.-R. Patapievici as a prominent public intellectual and ensured his commercial success.

1.1’.2a.1.1’. H.-R. Patapievici would not have enjoyed such public success if he had not been supported by the Păltiniș group.

1.2. *Romanian intellectuals are predominantly organized in status groups.*

1.2’. The predominance of status groups is characteristic of paramodernity.

As I indicate above, one of the sub-arguments adduced involves an *example* of how the functioning of the ‘Păltiniș’ group justifies the standpoint, in particular of how Patapievici’s reputation was allegedly ‘manufactured’ in the mid-nineties by Liiceanu’s public interventions. In the absence of such support, Matei argues, whether justly or unjustly, it is improbable that Patapievici would have enjoyed such market success.

2. *Critical reactions to Matei’s argument*

Matei’s book sparked off an intense polemic, which the weekly *Dilema* collected under the title ‘Why are the intellectuals quarreling?’ (June-July 2004). Fourteen prominent intellectuals answered the editor’s questions:

- (a) 'In your view, is there a battle for supremacy amongst 'status groups' in Romanian cultural life?'
- (b) 'If yes, can these groups be grouped along the 'left' vs. 'right' political axis?'
- (c) 'Is there a dominant group?'

Responses ranged from rejection of Matei's standpoint as 'aberrant' nonsense, an expression of the 'resentment' of talentless people against those who have succeeded on the cultural market, or a manifestation of 'political correctness' and 'cultural socialism', to views which basically conceded the truth of his claim, and reformulated it in terms of 'clans' and 'clientelist' relations.

I am arguing here that Matei's original standpoint was distorted by his opponents who chose to superimpose it onto a particular dichotomy, actually a false dilemma (between a radical form of liberalism and an extreme left-wing position) that has more generally governed the recontextualization of western political discourses in post-communism (Iețcu 2006). Critics of the political involvement of the Romanian intellectuals have also discussed this in terms of a Manichean obsession with absolute, mutually exclusive dichotomies, which the intellectuals have furthermore dramatized in apocalyptic ways, so that any left-wing concept or movement has been equated with a dangerous enemy, a threat to western culture and civilization, while 'canonical' ultraliberal economic theories have been adopted uncritically as incontrovertible truths and infallible solutions (Iliescu 2005).**[ii]**

I also argue that appeals to the market by Matei and his opponents invoke the 'market' in at least two different senses. In the replies by Patapievici and Liiceanu (which I discuss below), the market seems to be understood, in a self-serving sense, as a *consumer market*. Thus, the preferences of the reading public, as reflected in sales figures, are assumed to provide conclusive proof against 'status group' theory and in support of the intrinsic quality of an author's work. In Matei's original argument, the 'market'(as in the 'free cultural market', or 'the free market of ideas') seems, however, to be used to refer to the public sphere, implicitly conceived as a *critical discursive public space*, a *dialogical* site, where judgments of value can emerge as a consequence of public space debate. It is questionable, in fact, whether the public sphere should be called a 'market' of ideas – the fact that it does, in this cultural polemic, illustrates in my view the power of a certain discourse about the free market, understood in the liberal economic sense, to act as an all-legitimizing discourse in post-communism.**[iii]**

Matei's attempt to explain the social role of the Romanian intellectuals is, of

course, not singular. A variety of analyses have been proposed after 1989, mainly focusing on the intellectuals' perceived failure to have a really strong impact on society. A particularly interesting and disturbing line of criticism (Miroiu 1999, Barbu 1999, Mungiu-Pippidi 2002, Iliescu 2005) raises the possibility that the intellectuals may not have been a genuine factor of modernization in Romanian society, that – in spite of their professed liberalism and their professed commitment to democracy – their public involvement has often been neither truly liberal, nor truly democratic, but conservative, elitist, concerned with personal interest and gain, and at best ambiguous towards the fundamental values of modern liberal-democracies, towards modernity in general. The intellectuals are thus viewed as an 'elite which is incapable of modernizing itself', and is thus unable to contribute to the wider modernization of Romanian society (Mungiu-Pippidi 2002, p.170), as an elite which has proved incapable of transforming Romanian society from a 'status' society, based on 'clientelism' and 'tribalism' into a society ruled by the law, by fair, transparent and impersonal procedures.

2.1. *A refutation in terms of arguments from factual impossibility, self-contradictoriness and from the analogy with 'political correctness'*

According to H.-R. Patapievici (2004), Matei's explanation of Romania's deficit of modernity is false and illegitimate because

- (a) it is factually impossible to manipulate people's economic behaviour to any significant degree;
- (b) it is self-contradictory, and
- (c) it is analogous with 'political correctness', which is a manifestation of 'cultural socialism', a form of 'American communism', etc.

In his answer to the first question, Patapievici begins by subtly reformulating Matei's theory so that status groups are redefined in terms of 'backstage maneuvers' and 'underground conspiracies'. In so doing he violates Rule 3, the *standpoint rule*, as Matei's emphatic point was that status groups are not to be understood in terms of conspiracies but as the natural correlate of a given stage of development, and that relationships that cement them (loyalty, friendship, love, admiration) are openly acknowledged (that they are so is in fact obvious from Liiceanu's own response, see below). He also violates Rule 6, the *starting point rule*, by presenting his own interpretation of status group theory in terms of backstage maneuvers as being allegedly shared with the reader, and by further postulating two possibilities (hypotheses) on its basis, in a would-be critical

rationalist manner. He derives testable consequences from these hypotheses and shows that they are impossible or self-contradictory, which he takes as a conclusive falsification of the original hypotheses, therefore of Matei's standpoint. Here is a relevant fragment from Patapievic's text (my translation):

'... Matei's idea is that there is no genuine cultural market in Romania because the selection of authors through commercial success is replaced by a counter-selection, accomplished through the maneuvers of status groups. When there is market success, this theory claims, what we are dealing with, in fact, is a success of marketing, achieved by status groups. It follows that it is not the market that establishes what is valuable, but backstage maneuvers. The backstage, in this theory, is in the hands of status groups, and the personalities that manage to have public impact, as well as the public's opinion about them, are but the *intentional* consequences of status group maneuvers. In other words, the cultural authorities of the Romanian public sphere are not real, because, instead of being produced publicly and transparently by market mechanisms, they are secretly manufactured behind the scenes, outside public control, by underground conspiring groups.

If this is true, then there are two possibilities. The market does exist, in fact, and status groups have to conspire to be able to manipulate it. In this case, those who take this view have to admit that their theory is nothing but a subspecies of the theory of the 'Protocols of the Priory of Sion', and their task, sociologically speaking, is to demonstrate analytically the mechanisms whereby a conspiratorial group can control the market success of a given author. In the case of H.-R. P., who has prompted the reflection advanced by Sorin Matei as an explanation for all the evils of Romanian culture, the author of the status group conspiracy theory has to analyze the social and institutional mechanisms whereby Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Pleşu, Sorin Vieru, Radu Bercea and Andrei Cornea (i.e. the 'Păltiniş Group') have turned me into a successful writer. In particular, Matei should be able to explain in concrete terms how it was possible for the cultural judgment of a few tens of thousands of people to be manipulated and their normal economic behaviour distorted (as if all of these people were 'forced' to buy the tens of thousands of copies of my books ...). The second possibility is that, in fact, the market does not exist, all there is are relations between status groups, which take up all of public space, without remainder. In this case, it would follow that all published authors are exponents of one status group or another and that, in criticizing and condemning one or another status group, according to the taste of

the moment, the author of this theory himself is only the exponent of a rival status group. But if so, the author of this theory ought to declare honestly that his theory was developed for the benefit of the Compania Publishing House (where his book was published) and of the Muşina status group (to which he admits that he belongs or has belonged) and ought to draw the inevitable conclusion that, according to his theoretical premises, any intellectual dispute is after all nothing but a non-intellectual episode in the Hobbesian battle for supremacy among rival status groups. A poor, *nasty and brutish* hypothesis indeed.’ (Patapievici 2004)

This part of Patapievici’s argumentation can be looked at in terms of irrelevance and false dilemmas: it is doubtful whether the two alternatives he postulates are at all relevant to the argument they are supposed to help dismiss or that they are the only conceivable ones. **[iv]**

What is particularly interesting here is the fact that strategic maneuvering draws on a reductive understanding of the cultural field as a consumer market. This is rhetorically effective, as the neo-liberal concept of the free market possesses an almost unchallengeable legitimacy in post-communist Romania, yet it is dialectically unacceptable. It is, for one thing, questionable that the cultural field is reducible to a market. Secondly, it is questionable that commercial success can be used as proof of the impartial, undistorted functioning of the market. Patapievici seems to be relying here on a partially implicit argument which says:

- (a) My books sell well.
- (b) Sales figures are indicative of the intrinsic quality of a product.
- (c) Therefore, my books possess quality in themselves.

In other words, the theory according to which their value is ‘manufactured’ by a status group is false.

However, the same evidence is used by Matei to support the opposite claim – that the market is being distorted, that Patapievici sells well only because he is *perceived* as an authority thanks to prior symbolic investment with authority by the relevant status group. The fact that Patapievici’s books sell well says nothing about the quality of his work, as all sorts of cultural products of dubious quality often sell better than quality ones. As sales figures do not support claims about the intrinsic quality of a writer’s work, the argumentation is irrelevant here (a violation of rule 4, the relevance rule), and supports at best a claim about the preferences of the public, whatever their source may be.

In his answer to the second of *Dilema’s* questions, Patapievici translates the

polemic into one between a view of culture as a 'republic of letters', in which values can assert themselves freely, independently of power relations, and one of culture as a field in which values are determined by backstage battles between contending groups. He dismisses the latter position by identifying it with an extreme left-wing position, i.e. what he calls 'political correctness', and by equating any criticism along the lines suggested by Matei with the 'fanaticism', 'brutality', 'aggressiveness' and 'primitiveness' allegedly embodied by 'political correctness'. In Romania, Patapievicu argues, the promoters of the 'cultural socialism of the American academic left' are trying to impose 'political correctness' onto the whole of Romanian society. They 'invent' enemies and condemn them through 'Soviet-style' instruments: 'ideological critique' understood as 'unmasking' and 'stigmatizing' the enemy. As the most visible examples of 'politically correct' people, he mentions, in a sequence of *ad hominem* attacks, a list of public intellectuals that have at various points expressed critical views about his work: Ion Bogdan Lefter, chief-editor of *Observator Cultural*, 'the Andreescu family - father and son, equal in fanaticism, differing only in intelligence and knowledge', and 'the Miroiu clan - who are colonizing entire faculties and disciplinary fields'. There are also less visible promoters, issued from the 'left-wing crucible' that dominates American and British universities, former recipients of scholarships or western funds, who are now 'opportunistically sniffing the air for careers' and take it upon themselves to promote 'cultural socialism' in Romania.

Leaving these unfair *ad hominem*s aside, argumentation against Matei's standpoint is mainly by analogy, between the type of cultural critique that Matei develops and 'cultural socialism' or 'political correctness', as extremist manifestations of the western left wing:

'... As the generation of the 60's became institutionalized, a species of 'cultural socialism' appeared in the United States, whose enlightened ideology pursued the unification of all (recent or traditional) left-wing radicalisms under one militant umbrella: the political correctness agenda. Its fundamental claim is that groups know better than individuals what is good to think, what ought to be done, felt, etc. In order to improve society and eliminate all those conflicts which make social life complicated (inequality, xenophobia, discrimination, etc.), the solution proposed by cultural socialism is re-education, for individuals, and affirmative action, for institutions. (...) Cultural socialism sets out to eliminate conflicts in society, by re-educating us all in the politically correct spirit and requiring the

state to abandon its claim to liberal neutrality and intervene openly in favour of the 'progressives' (i.e. of the new ideologues of political correctness). If traditional socialism has failed to destroy the capitalist economy, although it has hated it more than anything else, it has now, by means of cultural socialism, set out to destroy the traditional liberal culture of western civilization.

There are very few intellectuals who defend cultural socialism in Romania. There are some, however, who – by inducing a feeling of guilt within society and stigmatizing adversaries – would brutally and aggressively like to impose the cultural socialism of the American academic left (which, in a 1994 article that was promptly condemned by those who are politically correct, I called the 'American communism'), as the only modern solution to Romania's problems. (...)

On the whole, the conclusion is that the ideology of political correctness, as well as Marxism, for which it acts as a neo-Puritan American cousin, needs enemies, against which it may legitimize itself as necessary and which it may grow parasitically upon. These enemies have to be invented. By means of which instrument? Here the bizarre perverseness of the defenders of political correctness manifests itself fully. The most aggressive among them are attempting to gain public recognition with the help of an ideological instrument that has not been used in this country since the time when Romanian culture was ruled by Soviet power: ideological critique aimed at unmasking and stigmatizing the enemy. (...) Understanding what is wrong with an opponent in the realm of ideas comes down to branding him with the politically correct stigma. You will agree that there can be no question of a debate in these conditions. It is however easy to obtain spectacular summary executions.' (Patapievici 2004)

The way in which Patapievici dismisses Matei's status group theory by equating it with an allegedly extremist position is characteristic for the writer, who has tended to equate any manifestation of the western left with an extreme, totalitarian left. In so doing, he is using a questionable analogy:

- (a) 'political correctness' is illegitimate and dangerous;
- (b) the type of cultural critique developed by Matei is analogous to 'political correctness';
- (c) therefore, it is also illegitimate, dangerous, etc. While rhetorically effective, and drawing on presumed shared consensus on the illegitimacy of the extreme left, this move is highly dubious from a dialectical perspective: it is not at all clear why a theory which is critical of the intellectuals' role has to be dismissed in these

terms, why it is equated with an extremist left-wing ideological position.

As elsewhere in his writings, Patapievici is also using a form of disjunctive syllogism in a situation which cannot be so simply reduced to two mutually exclusive alternatives:

- (a) any manifestation of the left is an extreme and totalitarian embodiment of the left;
- (b) either you reject the left or you have to embrace an extreme form of the left;
- (c) the left has to be rejected.

Like false analogies, false dilemmas are violations of Rule 8, the *argument scheme rule*. On the whole, Patapievici is pursuing the same strategy of delegitimation of the left as in all of his writings (Patapievici 1996, 2001): an extreme, distorted representation is constructed for the left-wing idea that is at issue, then an allegedly valid disjunctive syllogism is postulated between this representation of the left and the corresponding neoliberal or libertarian conception, which leads to the conclusion that only the latter view is legitimate, correct, etc. The novelty here is that a theory which is not necessarily recognizably left-wing, such as Matei's status group explanation, is equated with an extreme left-wing ideological position, and the whole polemic is then projected onto the background of the same Manichean and reductive representation of the political spectrum.

2.2. *A refutation in terms of arguments from empirical evidence, from underlying causes and from the analogy with communism*

Like Patapievici, Gabriel Liiceanu draws an analogy between the theory of status groups and the extreme left, communism in particular. Matei's theory is said to be a 'fiction', in the same way in which communism was an 'enormous fiction', a 'continuous mystification', a case of entire societies allowing themselves to be 'fooled'. The analogy may again seem far-fetched, unless we think of Matei as necessarily a representative of the western academic left, and of the left in general as necessarily extreme and therefore illegitimate and dangerous.

Liiceanu's text draws mainly on ethical appeal. He claims he finds the theory of status groups (which he also interprets in terms of conspiracies and backstage maneuvers) hard to believe. On the other hand, he argues, what he has believed all along was that his world was held together by 'friendship', by 'sentiments that have stood the test of time', by 'loyalty', the 'seduction of intelligence', the 'splendour of talent', by the capacity for 'laughing together', by a 'sincere and inexhaustible power to admire others'. The cultural field itself is viewed as a

democratic space (the 'courtyard of culture', whose gate is never locked), where no power relations operate other than the power of individual talent or genius. Furthermore, Liiceanu places resentment, envy and frustration at the root of any critical reaction against the Romanian public intellectuals (a causal argument against Matei's standpoint). Here is a fragment of his response (my translation)[v]:

'I am therefore symmetrically inclined to view those who bustle about spasmodically under the fences of the courtyard of culture, unable to reach for the latch (which is never locked) and to step inside naturally and decently, as a little noisy crowd of culturally frustrated and impotent individuals, who speak and write bad Romanian. Because they cannot put together anything that is not altogether bad, because, in the absence of genius ['în absența harului'] their products are experimentally juvenile, vulgar and hypocritical, instead of being authentic and tortured by the demons of the thing that *has to be* said, all they can do is to spit over the fence and shout loudly that those who are inside have not accomplished much and that, through intricate maneuvers and unimaginable astuteness, they have, ... , duped people into reading them.

What is hilarious about this bunch of people who feed on resentment (...) is that they keep invoking in this context, which they adorn with liberal economic theories, the one little word which they should keep silent about, if only out of an elementary sense of caution: *the market*, the cultural market. It is in fact the market that gives nightmares to these people, that anonymous and uncontrollable vote which decides (...) , who exactly has anything to offer to others. Neither myself nor any of my friends who sell each title in tens of thousands of copies (...) have the power to do these two things ... : 1) convince people to buy our books against their will; 2) prevent our 'adversaries' from writing wonderfully well, selling their books and becoming famous.' (Liiceanu 2004)

It is noticeable that both Patapievici and Liiceanu are invoking the market in support of their argument, and in a similar way, as a consumer market, as a purely economic mechanism based on the law of supply and demand. I discuss the way in which the market appears in these arguments in the next section.[vi]

3. *Sites of liberal neutrality: the market and the public sphere*

O'Neill (1998) defines the free market in relation to the concept of neutrality. In liberal theory, a liberal polity is one that is neutral between different conceptions of the good, in the sense that it does not attempt to prescribe the good, but

creates the framework within which different conceptions of the good can be pursued. Neutrality is also extended to include economic arrangements: the market is seen as a procedurally neutral device through which people can pursue their own conceptions of the good life (O'Neill 1998, p. 17). Neutrality thus understood is required by the pluralism of modern societies.

Two distinct responses are customarily made to the question of pluralism, each associated with a distinct account of the nature of the site of neutrality. One response is the *dialogical* response: pluralism requires a space for conversation between different conceptions of the good, a space which is itself neutral between those conceptions. A second response is a *non-dialogical* response which rejects the possibility of a rational conversation between different conceptions of the good and argues that pluralism requires a-rational mechanisms which allow individuals with different conceptions to coordinate their activities without conversation (O'Neill 1998, pp. 16-20).

These two responses correlate, O'Neill argues, with two different sites of neutrality. In the dialogical account, the site of neutrality is the political public sphere, the agora or forum, whereas in the non-dialogical account it is the market. The former is a site where individuals are able to discuss competing conceptions of the good, subject norms and values to rational argument, with the purpose of arriving at some consensus or at least at mutual understanding of different views sufficient to allow cooperation on common problems. Ideally, this site of neutrality takes the form of a *critical discursive public space*, as defined for instance by Benhabib (1992, pp. 73-98), following Habermas (1962/1989).

It is, I believe, clear from the way in which the market is invoked in the arguments by H.-R. Patapievici and G. Liiceanu that they have in mind the second, non-dialogical understanding: consumer behaviour and sales figures stand proof that certain cultural products are deemed valuable, worth having. The market, Liiceanu says, is an 'anonymous, uncontrollable' mechanism, which indicates spontaneously what exactly is good or valuable and what is not.

The question I would like to ask at this point is the following: can the cultural market, as a market of ideas, function only or primarily as a non-dialogical site of neutrality? In my view, the cultural market should not be understood primarily by analogy with the market of material commodities, but by analogy with the political public sphere, as an inevitably dialogical site. Of course, the cultural market, as public sphere, should not prescribe or predetermine which cultural products are valuable, desirable, but allow for public debate to determine that.

Although neither Patapievici nor Liiceanu seem to have this latter understanding in mind, it is in this latter sense, of a critical discursive public space, that the 'market' seems to be understood in Alina Mungiu-Pippidi's (2004) reply, which I discuss briefly below.

4. The Romanian cultural market: the absence of a critical discursive space

Mungiu seems to concede the gist of Matei's analysis: the Romanian cultural world is organized in 'clans' and 'cliques', engaged in 'autistic' clashes, and pursuing their own material interests. Their confrontations are not confrontations of ideas but confrontations of interests: there is in fact no ideological element besides self-interest. What the intellectuals are doing, she argues, is trying to prevent the emergence of

'... a large open market, with clear value criteria, such that, if someone produced something exceptionally good, everyone would acknowledge it, and if someone produced something of dubious quality, there would again be a critical mass or people, (...) that would point this out to him. They are instead struggling to form small autarchic enclaves, with their sponsors, their small publics and their small group of friends, ... where they might go on ... praising each other's genius. In other words, (...) we can say that their social organization is in clans, or, more simply, in cliques. And clans often enter into furious competition with one another. Unfortunately, these battles are only at an incipient stage, and so primitive that no common zone can be discerned at the intersection of these groups, no common space that might potentially develop into a public sphere. On the contrary, the intensity of these autistic clashes is without precedent.' (Mungiu-Pippidi 2004)

Unlike Patapievici, who imagines major threats coming from the extreme left-wing, Mungiu sees no ideology at work, certainly not a left-wing ideology, except opportunism, and no public sphere developing, just autistic clashes personal interest:

'I think there is no ideology involved here. Clans do not have ideologies. This assiduous cultivation of one's own interest accompanied by a fabulous self-legitimizing discourse has nothing ideological about it. It would be in fact hard to find ideological differences when nobody is left-wing here. (...) We do not have a left wing because the intellectual's social solidarity with other classes is null. (...) Briefly, what ideology? We are busy people.' (Mungiu-Pippidi 2004)

5. Conclusion

To sum up, in using the market only in the sense of a consumer market, as a site where no dialogue is needed to determine what is valuable, both Liiceanu and Patapievici are maneuvering strategically in support of their own standpoint, which apparently refutes Matei's analysis. Their argumentations are however dialectically unacceptable, to the extent that they reduce the cultural field to the economic field (violation of the *relevance rule*), distort the original standpoint by assimilating it with 'backstage maneuvers' and 'conspiracies' (violation of the *standpoint rule*), and attempt to legitimize a certain cultural *status quo* by appeal to a questionable, though convenient, analogies and Manichean dichotomies, involving extreme, totalitarian versions of the left (violations of the *argument scheme rule*).

As I have argued, to invoke sales figures and commercial success is irrelevant to an argument about cultural values. However, such ways of arguing can be highly effective, rhetorically, as they fit in with the overall emphasis on a maximally deregulated free market as a defining element of transition to liberal democracy in Romania after 1989 and thus seem to possess an inherent legitimacy. These arguments are implicitly viewing the market as a privileged site of liberal neutrality, but do not address at all the question of the democratic public sphere, of the critical discursive public space that the *cultural* market ought to open up, where the norms and values promoted by the public intellectuals ought to be subjected to critical debate.

'The Left as evil', by analogy with 'Communism as evil' has, since 1989, provided the intellectuals with an extraordinarily fertile topical choice, which has conveniently served various strategies of self-legitimation in the political and cultural field. The way in which western discourses were appropriated or recontextualized in Romania has (unfortunately, in my view) been governed by the 'logic' of a practice of radical delegitimation of the left in general, rather than by that of a practice of designing and legitimizing an alternative social project.

The Romanian intellectuals (among whom Liiceanu and, later on, Patapievici were prominent) set out in 1989 as defenders of truth in the public sphere, on the model of the Central-European dissidents. In pragma-dialectical terms, their orientation towards 'dialectical' goals was extremely explicit and gained them considerable moral and political authority. The obsessive reiteration, in their political writings, of the terrible truths about communism succeeded in making almost invisible the extent to which their arguments were in fact often open to the charge of fallaciousness, obscured the fact that the dichotomies they constructed for argumentative purposes were often only false dilemmas, based on Manichean,

reductive representations, their analogies spurious and misleading, and their arguments less oriented towards an impartial consideration of a variety of perspectives than to the legitimation of a set of monological, dogmatic truths. The polemic around Matei's book, including the intellectuals' violent reactions, can be said to reveal a different dimension of their political involvement, having to do more with the goal of legitimizing and reinforcing their own symbolic capital than with the pursuit of 'truth' – a more 'rhetorical' orientation than commonly assumed.

NOTES

[i] Status groups (as power groups) are structured around the prestige of their members. This prestige is not necessarily gained by 'democratic means' or by the neutral play of market forces, but is generated by privileged access to intellectual resources, 'enlightenment', 'recognition' and 'confirmation' by the group. Status groups are not the product of any conspiracy but the reflex of a certain type of society, i.e. a closed society with strong hierarchical relations (Matei 2004, pp. 12-53).

[ii] The aversion for the left (understandable in a post-communist country) has unfortunately bred an aversion for democracy, seen simplistically as the power of the people, therefore as yet another anti-elitist system of government – hence, the ambiguous attitude towards democracy of the Romanian intellectuals, committed to perennial Platonic values, hierarchies, canons, and relatively skeptical towards liberal value pluralism (Barbu 1999, Miroiu 1999, Mungiu-Pippidi 2002, Iliescu 2005).

[iii] Matei's own stand on this is often unclear: it would seem that he himself fails to distinguish properly between the cultural field and the economic field, and fails to see that the former is not reducible to the latter, although it is being increasingly colonized by the latter. He often seems to take for granted that it good that the cultural field is functioning increasingly as a market.

[iv] The first hypothesis is, allegedly, that the market does exist and status groups are conspiring to manipulate it. From this, Patapievici derives the testable consequence that it is indeed possible to force tens of thousands of people to buy certain books against their will. The implicit conclusion is that this hypothesis is false because the testable consequence will most certainly be falsified by experience. The second hypothesis is that the market does not exist because all of public space is confiscated by status groups fighting for supremacy; this hypothesis seems even less probable and it is refuted by showing that it

contradicts Matei's own theory, as his own theory would now be the expression of the interests of a status group, and Matei himself would presumably reject this hypothesis. However, the dilemma 'either there is no market or there is a market' is a false dilemma, and fallaciously oversimplifies the issue. What Matei argues is that the market is dominated by status groups, that there is a predominance of status group which causes distortions: there is a market but its functioning is distorted by these centres of cultural power. So what Matei says cannot be reduced so simplistically to two alternatives.

[v] The word 'har' – literally, 'divine grace' – is noticeable here, and seems to confirm Matei's analysis in terms of 'charisma'.

[vi] For reasons of space I am leaving aside a possible discussion of rhetorical devices of a non-argumentative type (pathos and ethos): notice both the extensive use of ad hominem ('the Miroiu clan') and of metaphor ('those who bustle about spasmodically under the fences of the courtyard of culture') with the purpose of discrediting one's opponents.

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