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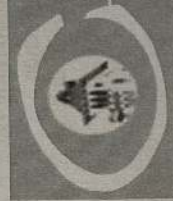
Europa im Dialog mit seiner Diversität
Europa en diálogo con su diversidad
Europe in dialogue with its own diversity

Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Hrsg. / Ed.)

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Europa en diàlogo con su diversidad
Europe in dialogue with its own diversity**



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Vorwort / Prólogo
Raúl Fornet-Betancourt 7

I

Miša Đurković 11
Searching for a common Ground:
Philosophy and the Identity Problem in Serbia

Ugo Vlaisavljević 27
Bosnian domestic foreigners: the alien compatriots living in the
neighborhood

Zhidas Daskalovsk 39
Liberal Neutrality and Multicultural Justice
Liberalism and the principle of liberal neutrality

II

Bianca Boteva-Richter 55
From Broken History to Narrative Identity – Bulgarian Identity and the
Question of Belonging.

Aleksandr Rybas 69
Phantom of Freedom:
The Problem of modern Russian Identity

Iwona Krupecka 79
La identidad nacional desde la perspectiva polaca

III

Carla Canullo

La Europa de las identidades traducedas

93

Fred Poché

La question identitaire en France

103

IV

Inigo Bocken

Philosophy in The Netherlands and Belgium

119

Beat Dietschy

Unheimliche Heimat
Rechtspopulismus nach Schweizer Art

133

Hans Schelkshorn

„Nationale Identität“?

Einige Splitter über die Identitätsdebatten in Deutschland und Österreich

145

V

Miša Đurković

Populismo en los Balcanes: La era de la estabilidad

161

Aleksandr Rybas

Metamorphoses of Russian nihilism

173

Alfredo Gómez-Muller

Nihilismo y política

185

Verzeichnis der Autorinnen und Autoren / Lista de autores / List of authors

199

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PHANTOM OF FREEDOM:
THE PROBLEM OF MODERN RUSSIAN IDENTITY

The modern Russian identity is the question open to discussion. There are no definite answers to the questions about what it means to be Russian or what are the essential distinctive features of Russian culture. Or rather, there are many answers, each of which is claimed to be true and the only one, but because of the specific cultural-historical and socio-political situation in modern Russia, none of these answers is generally accepted.

The variety of Russian identity versions stems from the *four* fundamental definitions that were formulated in the course of the historical and cultural development of Russia. Each of these definitions served as a generator of national, cultural and religious identities in the relevant periods of Russian history.

An interesting feature of the Russian culture is the fact that those fundamental definitions that influenced the formation and development of Russian identity had resulted from the borrowings of other cultures values. Moreover, these borrowings were mostly compulsory, they were not determined by the national culture development. Each time it was the state that decided what values should be borrowed and what direction the Russian culture should develop in. Due to this fact some researchers consider the Russian culture to be *ideocratic*, which means, first, that the Russian culture has always depended upon the state power and, second, that culture values were recognized only in case they were able to justify the legitimacy of a particular form of the government.

The four fundamental concepts that determine both the essence of Russian culture at the relevant periods of its historical development and the Russian identity are *holiness, knowledge, creativity and work*.

Holiness was used as a system-forming concept in the era of Holy Russia (10–17 centuries). This is the most ancient and therefore often considered the most important attribute of being Russian. For a long time the concepts of 'Russian' and 'Orthodox' were considered identical.

Knowledge became a fundamental value because of the Europeanization of Russia (18–19 centuries). This historical period was characterized by the paradigmatic changes in Russian culture, when a sharp line was drawn to distinguish the past, or archaic, from the present and future. The more Russia became westernized, the more often a rationalistic interpretation of man prevailed and determined the understanding of national identity. Russianness was defined at this time by using the values of European culture.

Creativity played the key role in determining the Russian identity in the Silver Age (1881–1922). It was regarded as dealt with creation ex nihilo to contrast with the ideals of Philistinism, especially that of happiness implying the possibility of being satisfied with one's own existence. As the basic concept, creativity gave rise to the total rejection of generally accepted norms and cultural institutions which resulted in a special phenomenon – decadence.

Work was assumed as a basis for the national identity in the Soviet period (1922–1991). The concept of work was interpreted to highlight the difference between its two meanings. On the one hand, work implies industrial activity aimed at the satisfaction of man's primary needs. On the other hand, work means creative activity which is much more important as it is necessary to satisfy man's secondary, or social, needs. It was believed that only through work is the integrity of human nature restored, his alienation from his social essence is overcome. A working man was claimed to be a 'new' man, or man in the proper sense of the word.

When justifying each of these identities, Russian philosophers always used the concept of *freedom*. Moreover, freedom was not only an element of social and philosophical rhetoric, but also fulfilled the function of the most important factor of cultural transformation. Appealing to freedom, Russian thinkers, on the one hand, criticized the current state of affairs, and on the other hand, depicted the future as the Kingdom of Justice and Truth. As there was no freedom in real life, they drew up social projects demanding freedom at any cost. However, in case their projects got carried out, there turned out to be no real freedom again. Thus, the development of Russian culture has always been stimulated by the seek for freedom, and every time this goal was achieved, freedom was eliminated. As a result, freedom turned into a phantom.

The first Russian religious writers, mostly hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, proceeded from the idea that the adaptation of Russia to Christianity was an act of the liberation of Russian people from the 'darkness' of paganism. According to Hilarion, Metropolitan of Kiev (11 century), Russian people, having become Christian, could be considered free; therefore, it is freedom that was the result of the salutary Christian influence on Russia. Then, since Russia had become free, it could participate on an equal footing in electing the church hierarchy etc. [4]

However, in reality the adaptation of Russia to Christianity led to the establishment of a state system of serfdom. As Pyotr Chaadaev put it, "Russian people were thrust into slavery only after they had become Christian" [3, p. 347]. In Europe, initially slaveholding, the spread of Christianity was accompanied by the process of abolishing slavery – and this was fully consistent with the Christian religion as a religion of freedom; in Russia – Chaadaev concluded – the Orthodox

Church sanctified and legitimated the institution of serfdom. Thus, the proclamation of freedom actually turned into its elimination.

The Europeanization of Russia was also dealt with the demand for freedom. 'darkness' and ignorance of the pre-Petrine times. However, when Catherine II, 'philosopher' on the throne, proclaimed the right of every person to freely express their own opinion and Russia was claimed to be enlightened [7], there began cruel repressions of dissent and slavery became a natural fact of public life having lost even its formal justification. Among the Russian intelligentsia there appeared a reaction to the elimination of freedom, and the struggle for freedom both at the level of philosophical discussions and at the level of practical actions became the core of Russian history. There were formed the two opposing ideological camps – Slavophiles and Westernizers, who, despite the significant differences in their philosophical positions, were united in their attitude to freedom: recognizing in theory the unconditional value of freedom, they denied it in practice.

In the era of Silver Age, reflections on freedom took the form of extensive philosophical treatises. At that time, almost everyone was talking about freedom, everyone was trying to gain freedom. However, in fact, the attitude to freedom did not change. Against the background of the general desire for freedom in Russia in the early 20th century there appeared a special type of intelligentsia, which can be called 'Bolshevism'. One of the essential features of Bolshevism, according to Jury Klyuchnikov, was to deny the freedom of anyone who does not share the position of your own party. In this sense, almost all the representatives of Russian intelligentsia were Bolsheviks, that is why there existed two relative phenomena – 'red' and 'white' Bolshevism [6].

In the Soviet times, freedom was also proclaimed the purpose and meaning of the historical development, it was believed to have been realized in the real life, and the Soviet man was treated as a free man indeed. However, in reality, there continued the consistent elimination of freedom from all spheres of life which resulted into Stalin's restoration of the traditional Russian autocracy.

One of the reasons why freedom, acting as a powerful stimulus for the cultural development of Russia, never became a real element of the Russian culture, is the identification of the concept of freedom with freedom as such. As a concept, freedom is part of a philosophical theory and is determined according to that theory; as an element of reality, freedom is unique, indeterminable and unpredictable. It is obvious that the identification of freedom by necessity and, as freedom-reality inevitably lead to the substitution of freedom by necessity and, as a consequence, to its elimination from the real life. The ideocratic character of Russian culture created favourable conditions for such a substitution.

There can be distinguished the two main ways of philosophical discourse in Russia: first, through the content of freedom, as a result of which freedom turns into a philosophical system or doctrine; second, through the philosophical system or doctrine, resulting in the identification of freedom, with *self-will*.

It was Vladimir Solovyov, the author of 'all-unity' philosophy, who provided a well-grounded method of eliminating freedom from philosophical discourse by identifying it with necessity. Later his arguments, albeit in some variations, were used by all Russian religious thinkers of the 19-20th centuries. The two extreme positions were the views of Ivan Ilyin, who logically developed the religiously interpreted idea of freedom to legitimate the theory and practice of fascism, and the views of Nikolai Berdyaev, the well-known 'philosopher of freedom', who, on the one hand, insisted on closely guarding the "irrational mystery of freedom", and on the other hand, did his best to clear up this mystery. Therefore, freedom proved again to be nothing but a phantom.

Obviously, when speaking about freedom and representing it as something rationally conceived and defined, philosophers imply first of all *knowledge of freedom*, as if knowledge of freedom and actual freedom were the same. However, this assumption is nothing but a specious sophism enabling to simplify the consideration of freedom, or even to exclude it from the sphere of a research. We could say that our knowledge of freedom, since we have it formulated and defined, is already not free—at least as far as it is determined by the existing philosophical vocabulary, or by the fact that this understanding of freedom is generally acknowledged as a value in the context of the existing culture. Indeed, knowledge always is dealt with what *is* or *was*, rather than what *might be* because assertive judgments concerning future events are inadmissible. Thus, as an assertive judgment, the definition of freedom refers to the way freedom has been already interpreted, no matter in what form—religious, metaphysical, or scientific. What matters is that freedom becomes a *notion*, or a concept, and that the content of this notion is determined theoretically. No wonder that such a freedom can be cognized and then identified with necessity.

As soon as freedom can be cognized, they believe there is *true* freedom which is *the only* one. What does it mean when philosophers insist that they managed to conceive the essence of true freedom? Most likely it means that they are sure that their own views on freedom are true. To prove it, they present their philosophical position as supported by the highest or even divine authority. Moreover, the phrase "there is true freedom" is used to prevent other people from understanding freedom differently. Since there is only one truth, there cannot be many equally true views on freedom. For characterizing these views, they usually

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I will focus on analyzing the positions of V. Solovyov, I. Ilyin and N. Berdyaev, who represent the religious tradition in Russian philosophy. All these philosophers considered freedom to be very important for human life and insisted that the 'Russian idea' – or, as we could say now, Russian identity – should be based on freedom. However, as soon as they provided a philosophical justification for the Russian idea, it proved to have been based on necessity rather than on freedom.

Thus, Solovyov, justifying his doctrine of "free theosophy" as a system of true knowledge and his idea of "free theocracy" as a true society, constantly emphasized that the realization of the divine principle in a human society should be free and conscious and should not be based on external authority or blind faith. Indeed, Solovyov's statement that real freedom is "unconditional" made his "philosophy of all-unity" topical at the end of the 19th century as it logically led to recognize the "truth of socialism": the "truth of positivism" and even the relative truth of all religions. It would seem that by doing so he really tried to ground such a system of thought in which the "equal right" of everyone to existence and development could be realized without any "exclusivity or violence".

However, this is not the case. The unconditional freedom according to Solovyov stems from the thesis about the unconditional principle, or God, the only one who can be considered truly free. As for the "private sides of life and individual forces", including man, then here freedom only seems to be unconditional because it is originally conditioned by the absolute divine will. Therefore, for a person his freedom completely coincides with the fulfillment of God's will, so it is predetermined and subject to necessity. In this regard, Solovyov wrote: "The concept of necessity... does not in any way exclude freedom. Freedom is only one type of necessity. When they oppose freedom to necessity, they usually mean the internal and external types of necessity. For God, for example, it is necessary to love everyone and to realize the eternal idea of good in his creation. God cannot feud, there can be no hatred in God because love, reason, freedom are necessary for God. We must say that freedom is necessary for God – this already shows that freedom cannot be what absolutely, logically excludes the notion of necessity" [8, p. 52].

As one can see from here, for Solovyov freedom is, first, a concept (and, as a concept, freedom is identified with the concept of necessity), second, it is knowledge (which enables Solovyov even to cognize what God "cannot do"), third, it is knowledge rationally defined, or "positive", "true". As a result, freedom, in spite of the fact it had been claimed to be unconditional, was annihilated, and

kind of freedom there appeared the two kinds of necessity: internal and external.

Ilyin proceeds from the distinction between the concepts of "external", or negative, and "internal", or positive, freedom. External freedom is defined by him as the absence of any compulsion from the state, other authorities, as well as from those people who try to impose their will on others teaching them how to "love and pray". External freedom is called negative because it is only a means to the real, internal freedom. Ilyin insists that it is the internal, or spiritual, freedom that is the goal and meaning of life. A person can find his internal freedom only if he "voluntarily and lovingly fills himself with the best, chosen and beloved life contents". These contents, Ilyin explains, are the "freely and correctly chosen divine contents, which are acquired by spiritual love and religious faith" [5, p. 79].

Therefore, spiritual freedom is considered by the Russian religious thinker as something that depends on the correct choice of what is already given. Obviously, it is not man who decides what his freedom is because he is initially not free in his attitude towards freedom. A person confronts with the fact of freedom and has to take it into account the same way he does when he confronts with other facts of objective reality. Thus, his spiritual freedom is external for him though he calls it "internal". According to Ilyin, a person can react to the fact of freedom only in two ways: he has either to yield to the dictation of freedom voluntarily, or he has to become a victim of freedom, both literally and figuratively. Ilyin writes: "Internal freedom is by no means a denial of law or authority, it is not lawlessness or self-conceit. Rather, internal freedom is the ability of the spirit to see the true law, to recognize its authoritative power and to realize it in life" [5, p. 79]. True freedom, therefore, does not contradict necessity at all; moreover, it is its expression, for, as Ilyin puts it, "both duty and discipline in case they are correctly and deeply understood are only modifications of internal freedom, which voluntarily accepts these inner features and freely determines itself by both inner and external necessity" [5, p. 89].

From here follow, as one would expect, some practical conclusions. First of all, it is the restriction of freedom for those people (and they are always the majority) who "are not up" to understand freedom correctly or who are not at all capable of such an understanding because of their "moral corruption". Ilyin stresses that "external freedom is necessary only for internal self-liberation; it is sacred only as a sure guarantee of internal freedom, but to provide freedom to a person who will use it for other purposes is a crime" [5, p. 86]. Since "there might be abuse of spiritual autonomy and therefore it might become a source of endless harm and catastrophic disasters", this autonomy must be eliminated. This is all the more necessary to do because in fact there is no autonomy since every person has to "stand under the face of God and to serve God on earth" [5, p. 87-88].

This is how Ilyin defines spiritual freedom. It is not a freedom from external compulsion, but a freedom to overcome internal spiritual obstacles.

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of internal and external. Freedom is defined by authorities, as well as by them how to spiritual, freedom and beloved life directly chosen "faith" [5, p. 79]. Religious thinker already given. Objective is initially not fact of freedom confronts with external for him to the fact of freedom of freedom ly and figuratively or authority, the ability of the to realize it in necessity at all; discipline in ons of internal ly determines sions. First of rays the major at all capacity Ilyin stresses; it is sacred n to a person ere might be ce of endless d. This is all every person 87-88].

Thus, how Ilyin puts this idea in his philosophy of "law": "...if the use of political freedom stimulates the internal self-development of people, if people learn to observe mutual spiritual freedom, and if the level of morals and spiritual culture rises, then political freedom has been given on time and can be fixed; but if the use of political freedom leads to the decline of morals and spiritual culture, if it causes electoral, parliamentary and newspaper corruption, if there is no internal self-development of people... then political freedom should be temporarily canceled or curtailed" [5, p. 92-93]. In other words, political freedom is acceptable only if it exactly coincides with the freedom described by Ilyin as genuine, spiritual freedom; otherwise political freedom must be eliminated. Or, more precisely: it is necessary by all means to force people to be free the way Ilyin understands freedom, and all is fair to achieve this goal. Later in his protecting spiritual freedom Ilyin turned to fascism. Having become an ideologist of the "Russian fascism" and openly supporting Nazi propaganda, the Russian religious thinker sincerely believed that he served the cause of God on earth.

Berdyaev took the opposite position, although he shared with Ilyin a number of initial premises. He insisted that freedom cannot be interpreted as a concept because it is irrational, incomprehensible, and this led him to some "dangerous" conclusions that undermined the foundations of traditional Christian discourse.

First, Berdyaev formulated a thesis about the incompleteness of God's creation. In addition, he presented the creation in the context of its "failure", as a world tragedy.

Second, Berdyaev used the concept of Jacob Boehme *Ungrund* to regard freedom as a mystery. Thus he had to conclude that freedom was not created by God and had existed before the creation. Freedom, from this point of view, is not deducible from being, it is "rooted in nothing, in non-being". Freedom is primordial, uncreated, and given to God, who created the world from nothingness, that is, from freedom. To be precise, freedom is nothingness that opposes being as equal to it. On the one hand, freedom allows being to remain what it is, and on the other hand, freedom constantly threatens it with destruction or returning to the original chaos.

Third, Berdyaev concluded that since freedom is absolute, then God is not perfect or almighty. The absolute freedom, as Berdyaev described it, is terrible and invincible, and even God is not able to cope with it. That is why God created man in his image and likeness: man gets access to the absolute freedom and in this regard can be called equal to God. According to Berdyaev, anthropodicy is the key to theodicy, which means that man as a free creature should help God to complete his creation. "For not only man needs God, it is God who needs man" [2, p. 260-261].

Fourth, Berdyaev recognized the value of negative freedom, or, to put it in religious terms, the value of the Fall. It is this statement that makes his philosophy of freedom the most interesting. Indeed, since freedom is irrational, it should be recognized as such in all its forms, including self-will which provokes sins.

In this regard Berdyaev wrote: "Freedom of sin, indeed, is the greatest mystery, rationally incomprehensible, but familiar to every human being, deeply experienced by everyone. It is clear that man being deprived of the freedom of choice, the freedom of falling from grace would not be a personality." [1, p. 138-139]. Thus, the Fall, being a violation of the divine will, is nevertheless an act of real freedom. On the one hand, freedom is the source of evil and suffering for man, but on the other, it helps him to become the "existential center", perfect personality and God's "helper", his co-creator. To put it in another way, the world harmony would be impossible without the world tragedy, and God's creation would not be completed without man's falling away from his creator.

According to Berdyaev, man has a "gift" of freedom, and his freedom is absolute. But does he have the opportunity to use this gift? Obviously he doesn't. The matter is that "the abyss of primary freedom" for man is only a "source of evil". Unlike God, whose freedom is demonstrated by the act of creation, man is unable to create being, therefore his freedom cannot be realized in real life. Finally it turns out that man can only be conscious of his absolute freedom but he can never act freely and has to be held captive by necessity. In other words, this means that man has no freedom at all.

It is interesting that Berdyaev denied even the freedom of salvation: "But the discord between Creator and his creation cannot be finished by the freedom of creation, because this freedom was lost in the Fall... Freedom must be given back to mankind and to the world by an act of divine grace, when God himself will meddle in the fate of world history. The providence of God and the revelation of God in the world are not violence against humanity, but the liberation of humanity from slavery by evil, the return of lost freedom, not formal freedom from perfect being (freedom of non-being), but material freedom for perfect being (free being)" [1, p. 142-143].

In the tradition of scientific-materialistic and later Marxist-Soviet philosophy in Russia there was the same tendency to remove freedom from the sphere of thought. Here, too, freedom was regarded as a concept rather than reality. Soviet philosophers also proceeded from the belief that freedom and knowledge of freedom are the same, this made them interpret freedom through necessity the way religious thinkers did. So, this widespread desire for freedom elimination from the sphere of philosophical discourse acknowledged by both religious and non-religious philosophers in Russia might be regarded as one of the integrating mechanisms of Russian culture.

Considering both religious and philosophical views. That would be nothing more than a denial of freedom. To influence the world, it is necessary to exert all the forces that exist, but not to deny them. It is always necessary to have a clear understanding of the value of freedom, and also to be able to use it. The hidden in Russian freedom is not a freedom in the sense of a totalitarian regime, but a freedom to fulfill the mission of the Russian people. The side of the Russian freedom is not as the logic of development of Russia.

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Considering freedom as a concept and thus eliminating it from the field of view, both religious and Soviet philosophers resorted to a kind of proof by contradiction. That is, they argued that if freedom should differ from necessity, it would be nothing but self-will, or the root of all evil. Thus, another form of concealing freedom in the philosophical culture of Russia was developed.

To conclude, freedom has always been a phantom in Russia and this way exerted influence upon the Russian identity. However, being a phantom, freedom *did* exist, albeit in a hidden form, in the Russian culture. The fact that freedom has always been concealed can be understood negatively—as a result of the prevalence of generalization discourses in Russian philosophy. And this fact can also be understood positively—as an indication that freedom *should* stay in a hidden form to be able to influence on culture. In this sense, the concealment of freedom in Russia will not prove the absence of it in the conditions of 'totalitarian' regimes; rather, it will make it clear that being hidden is a natural way for freedom to function in culture. This explains, among other things, the 'dark' side of the Russian identity, the well-known 'secret of the Russian soul', as well as the logic of unpredictability, which is characteristic of both the historical development of Russia and its current state.

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Iwona Krup
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