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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Turcuş, C. (2020). The Haunting Ghost and the Invisible Hand: Film Industry and Book Publishing Between State-Socialism and Market-oriented Cultural Production. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 20(3), 353-363. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-71032-9>

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The Haunting Ghost and the Invisible Hand. **Film Industry and Book Publishing** **Between State-Socialism and Market-Oriented** **Cultural Production***

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Abstract

This article introduces the topic of the transformation of the cultural industries in several former East European communist countries. In the first part it delivers a critical overview of the essential contributions to research in the field and outlines the historical and methodological context in relation to which the four articles in this special-themed issue have taken convergent or polemical stances. The second part offers a descriptive-correlative reading of the articles signed by Jan Hanzlík, Radu Toderici, Balász Varga, and Adriana Stan and Cosmin Borza, focusing on how they investigate the postsocialist transformations of several East European film industries and of the Romanian book industry. The answers that the four case studies try to provide to this wide phenomenon combine (1) an analytical approach to the ideological discourses that have formed the basis of the political agendas specific to the cultural field, and (2) an examination, from a cultural studies perspective, of the mechanisms of reforming the public institutions responsible for financing cultural production in Eastern Europe. The first component engages in a hermeneutic of debates (media, cultural, political) that have built a postsocialist imaginary predicated on synchronization with the socio-economic values of the West. The second part contains elements of political economy and explores, on the one hand, legislative changes in the public financing realm, and on the other hand, the way in which the capitalist reconfiguration of cultural institutions, privatizations, and the myth of the free market have created an impact on the production, promotion and distribution of films and books.

Keywords: East European film and book publishing industry, Europeanisation, transnationalism, anticommunism, capitalist transition, neoliberal policies, cultural elites.

Introduction

The abandonment of the state-socialist mode of production¹ in Eastern Europe and the gradual orientation towards a decentralized model (ideologically

* This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research and Innovation, UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0541, Contract 140/2018.

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¹ See Petr Szczepanik, "The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture," in *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*, eds. Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 113-133.

reinforced by the prospect of privatizing the cultural production infrastructure, albeit by maintaining the public financing schemes) created a series of muddled cultural-economic realities, ineffective public policies, and resounding bankruptcies. Over the past decade, researchers² have made the effort to collect as much socio-economic data as possible on this phenomenon, which triggered a relative paradigm shift when the Iron Curtain collapsed. However, these contributions are largely descriptive and while they often problematize the issues at hand, their major achievement has been the mapping of multiple national development routes and their transnational framework of reference. Continuing this much-needed approach, which shifts the focus from the analysis of artistic representations of the transition to the analysis of institutions and cultural production circuits, the articles that compose this special issue engage in a critique of the way in which the principles of capitalism and, in particular, of neoliberalism have been implemented in the cultural field. This aspect is frequently overlooked in investigations of the institutional failures of postsocialist Eastern European countries. The process of globalisation and the Europeanisation³ of East European cultures after 1989 deserve such an inclusive perspective, which reveals that synchronization with or adherence to the West European values, mechanisms, organizational model and cultural policies has often been a dysfunctional process *also* because of the way in which the East European region has metabolized and implemented the new capitalist paradigm. Therefore, in order to give a more comprehensive picture of how the transition facilitated Europeanization routes after 1989, it is not enough to attribute each and every socio-economic or institutional progress to capitalism or to justify all the shortcomings of the present through the prism of the “communist heritage,”⁴ and the “collectivist consciousness,”⁵ of Eastern Europe. The invisible hand of the free market (with all the experimental mythology of European periphery capitalism)⁶ is at least as responsible for the cultural, social, and economic transformations of Eastern Europe. These short-lived transformations have often had nefarious effects. For instance, the haunting ghost of communism (state planning, monopoly, the centralized economy) which still dominated institutional decisions after 1989 co-existed with a radical anticommunist

² See the researchers cited and commented in the first part of this article.

³ See Constantin Pârvulescu and Claudiu Turcuș, “Devices of Europeanisation,” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 9, no. 1 (2018): 4-21.

⁴ See Ovidiu Tichindeleanu, “Towards a critical theory of postcommunism,” *Radical Philosophy* 159 (2010): 26-32, and Adrian T. Sîrbu and Alexandru Polgár, eds. *Genealogii ale postcomunismului* (Cluj-Napoca: Idea Design & Print, 2009).

⁵ See Daniel David, *Psihologia poporului roman. Profilul psihologic al românilor într-o monografie cognitiv-experimentală* (Iași: Polirom, 2015), and the heated debates the book generated in Romanian journal *Criticatac* (2016).

⁶ See Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits, *Capitalist diversity on Europe's periphery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

discourse of the liberal intellectuals.⁷ This ideological aggregate generated the uncritical adoption of neoliberal⁸ economical and political tenets and the naïve believe that the free market is the most reliable instrument in allocating cultural and symbolic value.

National Institutions, European Money

In the late 1990s, Dina Iordanova observed, from a regional perspective, that cultural institutions in Eastern Europe were the first to suffer financially and logistically after 1989. The shift from the socialist mode of production with systemic consequences for national cinemas to the capitalist and, implicitly, transnational paradigm engendered a sort of European solidarity at the film production level, in response to both the structural drift of national cinemas in the East and the crisis of Western cultural policies:

“The volatility in East European cinema coincided with a clearly articulated period of insecurity in West European cultural policies, driven by a growing anti-American sentiment. The establishment of such pan-European funding bodies as Media and Eurimage came as a reaction to the overwhelming triumph of commercialism in cinema. The share of international subsidies for filmmaking in poverty-stricken Eastern European

⁷ Although widely influential and active in reshaping the cultural and economic institutions after the fall of the communist regime, the topic of anticommunism has long been avoided in the public debate, at least during the 1990s. It wasn't until December 2006 that anticommunism acquired an official confirmation, when The Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania provided a report which enabled president Traian Băsescu to publicly condemn the communist regime as “illegitimate and criminal.” This historical and political milestone marks, however, just the tombstone of a long-active paradigm whose grounds can be traced back to the extremely prestigious phenomenon of 1960 - 1989 dissidence, with its many strands extending in the social, intellectual and artistic fields (from the popular counterculture, to the subversive strategies of literature and film, to the more vocal oppositional discourse of Radio Free Europe). That long history accounts for the perception of anticommunism as a natural, unquestioned attitude, so that, after 1989, it could be taken for granted and reinforced by the new commandments and commitments of Europeanization. See also, especially for the Romanian case – the most radical country in the region in this respect: Florin Poenaru, *Locuri Comune: clasă, anticomunism, stânga [Common Places. Class, Anticommunism, and the Left]* (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2017); Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu, Ciprian Șiulea, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, *Iluzia anticomunismului. Lecturi Critice ale Raportului Tismaneanu [The Illusion of Anticommunism. Critical Readings of the Tismaneanu Report]* (Chisinau: Cartier, 2008).

⁸ Liviu Chelcea and Oana Druță, “Zombie Socialism and the Rise of Neoliberalism in Post-Socialist Central and Eastern Europe,” in *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 4-5 (2016): 521-544; Jan Drahekoupil, “Analysing the Capitalist State in Post-Socialism: Towards the Porterian Workfare Postnational Regime,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 31, no. 2 (2007): 401-424.

studios quickly increased as the concept of ‘national cinema’ gave way to a ‘new European’ one.”⁹

Iordanova points out that one of the substantial changes brought about by the new context of the transition to capitalism concerned the role of the producer, who, unlike in the socialist modes of production context, became a key player in the new regime of financing the film industry. In order to keep up with the pan-European development, the East tried to access a substantial part of its financing through television¹⁰ – especially in Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. In a country like Romania, public financing was in shambles, the process being managed directly by the directors who ran the four film production houses already established from the socialist period. Without management expertise or specialized producers, those production houses went bankrupt in the second half of the 1990s.¹¹ The alternative of private financing or the necessary know-how to attract financing through co-production was impossible to implement until the second half of the 2000s, despite the existence of European networking. Examining local cases of supranational relevance, Dina Iordanova’s article concludes that the financial challenges and the needs to redefine the roles and modes of visual art production in Eastern Europe did not, in any case, dramatically affect the cultural products themselves. Her thesis outlines the enduring national identity of East European cinemas despite the concessions and adjustments that were made with a view to their becoming integrated into the European, transnational circuit.

The pan-European perspective, which served as a financing and distribution framework for East European productions, also entailed an international version, which could be geopolitically justified in terms of an entire cultural biography of East-West relationships throughout the twentieth century. The resilience and reliability of French film culture, underpinned by public policies related to the cultural sector, have benefited both East European and French film industries, co-productions ensuring a kind of reciprocity in terms of funding, promotion or distribution.¹²

⁹ Dina Iordanova, “East Europe’s Cinema Industries Since 1989: Financing Structure and Studios,” *Javnost - The Public: Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture* 6, no. 2 (1999): 46.

¹⁰ Iordanova, “East Europe’s Cinema Industries,” 52.

¹¹ I developed a historical analysis on this topic after *The Screen Industries in East-Central Europe Conference* in Prague, dedicated to *The Long 90s* (November 2016): Claudiu Turcuș, “Restructuring a Cinema That Didn’t Exist. The Romanian Film Industry of the 1990s,” *Illuminace* 29, no. 3 (2017): 9-26.

¹² Anne Jäckel, “Film policy and cooperation between East and West: The case of France and Romania in the nineties,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 7, no. 1 (2013): 131-150. “The results are impressive: when many other cinematographies are struggling to survive or have disappeared, France still produces a wide range of films (between 130 and 180 each year) [...] The international stance of French film policy met no opposition

For example, the impact of the new political, legislative and institutional realities on the Romanian film industry (the fact that cinema is losing ground in favor of television; the decrease in domestic production in favor of imports – a similar phenomenon is happening to the book market) have created a (minimal) emerging market of co-productions, facilitating even the adoption of the French economic model in Romanian cultural policies (see, for instance, the reconstruction of the National Cinematography Center – CNC). Beyond the Romanian directors' Francophone cultural affinity, Jäckel believes that this aspect of institutional convergence was vital for the survival of Romanian cinema after the 1989 change of regime.

Still, despite the adoption of the French model (at the level of the institutionalization of public financing), the story of the Romanian CNC cannot boast the success achieved by the reconstructed PISF (Polish Film Institute). Of course, Poland, like the Czech Republic and Hungary, already had a production infrastructure based on a German model, which was far superior to that of Romania, which had a Soviet model since the socialist period. This is all the more spectacular since after 1989 “the idea of supporting Polish cinema was treated as a relic of communist thinking which had to be removed as quickly as possible.”¹³ After sixteen years of institutional drift, the new legislative context of 2005 made it possible to reconstruct a film industry that had been trapped in a kind of institutional vise between the socialist form of organization and a new one, typical of the democratization period, in which the lack of regulations created protracted synopses and produced, at best, mediocre results. The efforts of providing a regulatory framework, to ensure transparency and a pragmatic relaunch of the Polish national cinema faced the fierce polarization between the parties involved. On the one hand, the television and cable TV companies were in favor of capitalism and the free market, discouraging any public developmental project; on the other hand, the directors and professionals of the film industry claimed there was an imperative need for state intervention, aimed at supporting Polish film production.¹⁴ The structural solution of the “entrepreneurial state”¹⁵ was not exclusively derived from organically decanted public policies, but was also the result of the individual struggles and efforts of

in France because the French film industry also benefited from the ‘Fonds Sud’ and ‘Fonds ECO’ co-production arrangements which specified that French financing would go to the French production company and/or post-production would be done in French studios” (133, 135).

¹³ Elżbieta Durys, “Successful Transformation: What Protected Polish Cinema from Extinction After 1989?,” in *Transformation Processes in Post-Socialist Screen Media*, eds. Jana Dudková and Katarína Mišíková (Bratislava: Academy of Performing Arts and Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2016), 22.

¹⁴ Durys, “Successful Transformation,” 31.

¹⁵ See Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State* (London: Anthem Press, 2011).

specialists such as Agnieszkei Odorowicz, Director of PISF (2005-2015) and former deputy Minister of Culture (2004-2005).

Eastern Europe as a Transnational Cultural Actor

A truly global, decentralized route of the East European film industries became available only two decades after 1989. The new cultural and economic function of East European cities such as Budapest¹⁶ and Prague, which can attract world-class production houses and host Hollywood films, marks a stage of transnationalization. Even though Bucharest is a less interesting regional hub for large-scale global production than the Central European capitals mentioned above, in the case of Romania there has been a multifocal route of dialogue between the national cinema and global networks in what concerns sources of funding, festival circuits, and audiences. Since the early 2000s, there has been an interest in co-productions with American film companies, as Romania offers attractive production costs and cheap specialized human resources, but there has also been no national cultural policy to support this trend. On the other hand, a transnational circuit was formed through the production of the films of the New Romanian Cinema, whose global success has led to mainly European collaborations. The exceptionality of Romanian cinema in the twenty-first century is due to its ability to adapt to globalist financial challenges¹⁷ despite a national infrastructure or predictable regional mechanisms that can barely ensure the survival of the industry.

The fact remains that certain national cultural segments are undergoing a sufficiently substantial geo-economic transformation to relativize the very notion of the “East European space”, legitimized and described as a homogeneous area exclusively through the lens of its common socialist past. This stepping outside the national paradigm also implies a methodological transformation of approaches to national cultural products. Whether we talk about film, theater, visual arts or literature, they have undergone a recontextualization, from the study of the ideology and aesthetics of East

¹⁶ Anikó Imre, “Introduction: Eastern European Cinema from No End to the End (As We Know It),” in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Anikó Imre (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1-22: “In the post-Cold War media world, global consumer sensibilities crystallize around brand preferences and economic class. From the ruins of state-run film industries, cash-strapped Eastern Europe has emerged as an indispensable site for this transnational rearrangement: a cheap resource for production and a new consumer market, which offers to the cosmopolitan consumer eye an affordable, generic template for virtual historical tourism.” (2).

¹⁷ Ana Bento-Ribeiro, “The Underdog Outside Becomes an Inside Player: Evolutions of Contemporary Romanian Film Industry in the European Context,” *Finnish Journal of Romanian Studies* 2 (2016): 25-26.

European authors to an institutional and structural analysis of cultural industries. The way “movies have been made, disseminated, exhibited, and consumed”¹⁸ offers a new revisionist perspective on the cultural and economic transition to capitalism (a) deconspiring, in a synchronous perspective, the intersections, collaborations and transnational arrangements in which East European countries have become involved, and (b) denouncing, in a diachronic perspective, the conceptual Cold War framework of the East-West relationship.

In this respect, deconstructing the stereotype of allegedly homogeneous East European cultural industries becomes a priority. For example, a comparative analysis between contemporary film production in Romania and the Czech Republic¹⁹ shows that the East is not a compact, post-socialist block of institutional cultural production practices and circuits. On the contrary, as Pârvulescu and Hanzlík notice, the treatment of the two film industries as small cinemas²⁰ shows that forms of financing play the main role in directing national production. While the Czech mechanism works through budget formulas and solid national programs to support the film industry, as anticipated above, the Romanian one finds its main resources along transnational channels. This implies a relatively low presence of Czech films on the international market. By contrast, the Romanian phenomenon is driven by these transnational policies precisely because of the shaky national funding infrastructure. The modes of production shape the modes of distribution and drastically influence the types of audience. This explains why Czech films are more oriented towards the national public, while Romanian film-production is self-sustaining through relative international recognition,²¹ practicing a policy of auteur films after 1989 (in close connection with the legacy of the socialist period). This policy was jammed, in the 2000s, by practices of reactive emancipation from the 1990s. The institutional auteurism of New Romanian Cinema – a fundamental trend to which I will return further when introducing Radu Toderici’s article as part of this special issue – has also allowed the shaping of export formulas for the national cultural products, despite the relatively precarious development of the infrastructure and of the internal production and distribution mechanisms.

The dynamics of distribution policies in the orientation of the East European film market – in terms of both domestic production and imports – is

¹⁸ Anikó Imre, “Introduction,” 16.

¹⁹ Constantin Pârvulescu and Jan Hanzlík, “Beyond Postsocialist and Small: Recent Film Production Practices and State Support for Cinema in Czechia and Romania,” *Studies in European Cinema* (2020), doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2020.1736794.

²⁰ See Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie, *The Cinema of Small Nations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

²¹ Pârvulescu and Hanzlík argue “Romanian practices stand in contrast to Czech cinema’s strong mainstream-oriented filmmaking, and to its ambitions to emulate the bigger industries of Europe. Romanian cinema can be seen as radicalizing a global low-budget arthouse niche-audience filmmaking and betting more on international exploitation.” Pârvulescu and Hanzlík, “Beyond Postsocialist and Small,” 6.

fundamental. Traditionally, cultural products have been understood according to a *soft power*²² logic, but the culture of the film and book industries works, from multiple points of view, in keeping with a *hard power* logic. As Marcin Adamczak notes in a study on the Polish post-1989 film industry,

“culture, at least from the perspective of film distribution and exhibition, significantly mobilizes certain components of hard power. It includes capital dominance, players’ interests and negotiating leverage, pressuring partners to achieve desired actions on their part, and it is closely tied to the game of influence and the need to control physical space.”²³

The demand of the East European public for international cultural consumer products should spark a rethinking and restructuring of cultural institutions, publishing houses, and cinemas. For example, in Poland, the first trend identified by Adamczak in the 1990s stems from the domination of Hollywood, which was built on a poor distribution infrastructure and developed on the ruins and on the managerial and professional networks of the socialist mode of production. The effects of this import are linked to the creation of an unstable and unequal environment, difficult to manage due to an incompatibility between imported products and domestic resources in Poland. In light of this evolution, it is no accident that the 2000s became an era of the multiplex, engendering a shift at the level of the entire East European enclave, with colossal effects on the regional film market. A new type of audience emerged in the new digital era after 2010 as distribution became cheaper, and this led to significant changes in the cultural consumption practices of the Polish spectator.²⁴ All of these paradigm changes, which created a specialised impact (apparently strictly related to film distribution and to the configuration of a particular type of consumer culture), are nothing but forms of *hard power* which operates within society, not only shaping its values or structuring its expectations, but drastically influencing its economic relations.

(Proto)capitalism, Anticommunism, Neoliberalism: The Rhetoric and the Business of East European Cultural Elites

The articles in this special issue argue through domain-specific explorations that, in matters of post-socialist cultural institutions, 1989 did not mark an epochal change, but rather enabled the intellectual elites established

²² For further details on the *soft-hard power* binom see Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

²³ Marcin Adamczak, “Hard power and film distribution: transformation of distribution practices in Poland in the era of digital revolution,” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* (2019): 3-4, doi.org/10.1080/2040350X.2019.1648230.

²⁴ Adamczak, “Hard power and film distribution,” 10.

during communism to convert their (mainly) immaterial prestige into material power, by assuming control of the post-1989 institutions that monopolized cultural production and worked as mass channels for disseminating ideological content.

In his analysis of the post-socialist Czech film industry, *Czech Film Policy After 1989: Between Neoliberal and National Mercantilist Discourse*, Jan Hanzlík²⁵ delimits the ideological stages that legitimized the funding mechanisms. He observes that although the switch from state monopoly to privatized institutions was rushed after 1989, in line with the triumphant neoliberal discourse, a national mercantilist agenda asserted itself in the late 1990s, resuming the necessity of state support for the national cinema, in order to help it reinforce identity values and acquire prestige within international markets. A telling comparison between British and Czech film policies enables Hanzlík to point out the conspicuous absence of center-left agendas within the latter, as within most post-socialist industries of the kind. As such, the renewed state support for post-socialist Czech cinema was enacted from conservative-right ideological positions that put little emphasis on inclusivity or the reinforcement of social cohesion. As a matter of fact, what became evident throughout the 2000s was how the conservative-right agenda that legitimized state funding in terms of the national mercantilist discourse coexisted perfectly with the neoliberal principles of the labor market which was oriented towards enhanced competitiveness and discouraged unionizing efforts from workers.

In his article, *The Decade of the Auteurs: The Institutional Reorganization of the Romanian Film Industry in the 1990s*, Radu Toderici explores the similar conservative-right ideologies that shaped Romanian cinema in the 1990s, but focuses on the views of leading cinema agents (directors and critics, mainly), rather than on the state funding mechanisms. The author brings forth a strong argument against the idea that 1989 changed the cultural systems in countries of the former Soviet bloc. On the contrary, he aptly shows how Romanian directors with cultural capital accumulated during communism monopolized the main institutions of the local film industry in the 1990s and anchored their conservative, anticommunist rhetoric²⁶ in a cinema infrastructure that was developed during the communist period and whose organization patterns actually dated from 1972. The anticommunist credentials explain the institutional power and the ideological monopoly of auteurs in the Romanian

²⁵ *Czech Film Policy After 1989: Between Neoliberal and National Mercantilist Discourse*.

²⁶ Even though he does not go into every detail of this influential public rhetoric, Radu Toderici indirectly approaches the complex nature of anticommunism: an aggregate-concept which entails a creative method, a reception grid, a cultural policy strategy, but also a politically informed ideological platform. The stance of anticommunism remains deeply embedded within the local cultural establishment, mainstream historiography, and political discourse. As such, it functions as an unquestionable assumption, rather than as a topic of debate, an interpretive monopoly exemplified in books or public interventions signed by supporters of conservative and neoliberal ideologies.

cinema of the 1990s, capitalizing on the aesthetic implications and the pragmatic and political role of that notion developed during communism. The idea of the auteur favored art cinema against all forms of genre films, posited the director as the sole or total author of the film (thus encouraging interpretation in terms of author stylistics), and tended to envision the masses as driven by the irrational violence associated with the communist working class. This aesthetic conservatism together with staunch anti-communism was backed (ironically) by the still centralized, state-financed system which had been established during the 1970s but survived throughout the 1990s in Romanian cinema.

In his article *From Proto Capitalism to Post-Socialism: The Case of the Hungarian Film Industry*, Balász Varga also discusses the features that connect the late socialist period and the early post-socialist period in the Hungarian film industry. The author shares with Hanzlík an interest in analyzing how the system of cinema funding can directly influence not only the dynamics and power relations of the production field, but also the filmmaking trends of an era. However, the Hungarian case is an interesting, rather upside-down one in what concerns the state of the film industry in the 1980s and 1990s. If the local film industry witnessed marketization and 'proto-capitalization' in the late 1980s, the post-socialist system was less market-oriented, as the state socialist studio system survived, and its corresponding status quo was reinforced during the 1990s. Just like in the Romanian case analyzed by Toderici, the Hungarian film industry of the 1990s favored established directors (regarded as auteurs) and inhibited the development of young, independent, or alternative filmmakers who worked outside the system. Varga explains how this monopoly was exerted by the distribution of funds through package plans that were confined to pre-existing studios, thus limiting the growth and possibilities of new production companies or individual projects. Besides the studio organization, the legacy of the second half of the 1980s was preserved in the 1990s with an almost unchanged creative team, attitude, way of thinking, and values, which was obvious in the influential trend of politically engaged filmmaking and the habitus of the filmmaker as a leading social-political actor. As such, the filmmaking elites of the socialist period were the real beneficiaries of the political change which did not, on the whole, bring a change of the film system as well.

Adriana Stan and Cosmin Borza's *Deetatization of Culture, Privatization of Politics. The Case of the Publishing Houses in Postcommunist Romania* article acknowledges, in similar terms, the importance of the communist institutional legacy for the postcommunist culture in the specific case of the Romanian book industry. Like in the post-socialist Czech film industry analyzed by Hanzlík, Stan and Borza observe the absence of left ideologies in the Romanian book policies of the first two decades after 1989 but define it in stronger terms of the anticommunist conservatism that was also detected by Toderici in contemporary Romanian cinema. The authors bring case-specific

evidence to show how the Romanian book industry was dominated right after 1989 by the neoliberal²⁷ framework of economic reforms that was nurtured by most local intellectuals in the spirit of their Manichean anticommunism. Idealized neoliberalism legitimized the straightforward initiatives to privatize cultural institutions (book companies, in this case) and posited the named intellectuals as main agents of neoliberal principles, but their actual implementation in other sectors of the Romanian industry was delayed for a while by the social-democrat governments.²⁸ The study traces the spectacular collapse of the Romanian book companies that were privatized according to a neoliberal discourse that was understood by its cultural practitioners in ethical and idealized rather than in economic terms.

²⁷ For a critical reading of the influence of neoliberal ideas on Romanian economic policy of post 1989 see Cornel Ban, *Ruling ideas: How global neoliberalism goes local* (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁸ Especially the Nicolae Văcăroiu cabinet (1992-1996). For a comprehensive analysis of this topic see Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc [Dependence and Development. The Political Economy of Romanian Capitalism]* (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014).