

# Romania – layers of collective identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: An outline until the interwar period

**Radu Baltasiu**

*University of Bucharest*

**Manuela Boatcă**

*University of Goettingen*

**Ovidiana Bulumac**

*University of Bucharest*

**Abstract :** *There is no simple answer to the question of the development of the Romanian modernity. The paradigm of multiple modernities is a good starting point in understanding the issue since it “acknowledges” “the right” of the East “to appropriate modernity and the global system on their own” (Eisenstadt, Transformation and Transposition of the Thematic Multiple Modernities in the Era of Globalization, 2005, 43), i.e. considering its own development as “normal”.*

*But, there is more at stake than multiple realities. The 19<sup>th</sup> century is for Romania the locus of the beginning to regain access to its own normality. For reality is not only a multiplicity of rightful paths of evolution. Reality can also be filled with people and societies with no access to their own history, i.e. abnormal developments, something which the Western approach has somehow understood as “development of under-development”, “reversal of industrial revolution” etc.*

*We will outline some of the most important steps towards Romania’s “regained self”, i.e. taking into account also the “mishaps” – the pseudodevelopmental issues as well some of the successful paths toward Romania’s collective identity. There were three major cleavages between 1711 and 1944, to which we have identified three answers (“renaissance” periods). Romania’s take off towards modernity started with a sudden interruption (the Phanariot regime), it was overstrained with multiple options and unsound divagations after 1821, to be severely hampered again under the Soviet occupation after 1944. The present paper highlights some aspects of the collective identity until the breakout of the Second World War. It was presented in Istanbul, February 2009, during the Europeanization, multiple modernities, and collective identities – Religion, nation, and ethnicity in an enlarged Europe seminar of VW Foundation at the Kadir Has University.*

**Keywords :** collective identity, europeanization, modernity, statehood, ethnicity, Christendom, multiple modernities

**Cuvinte-cheie :** identitatea colectivă, europeanizare, modernitate, statalitate, etnicitate, creștinătate, multiplă modernitate

## Some historical fundamentals

The primordial stratum of Romanian collective identity was well established at the dawn of modernity (from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century). This is revealed in one of the first documented Romanian medieval writings with a clear stance: "... the Moldavians have the same language, the same customs and the same religion as the people in Wallachia... except some minor aspects related to clothing. (...) Their language was at the beginning the Roman language, as their ancestors were the Roman colonizers. (...) [In Transylvania] are four different peoples: the Hungarians, the Szekely, the Sachsen and the Romanians ... The Romanians are convinced of originating from the Roman colonizers. The proof is that their language shares a lot with the Roman language and the many Roman coins found..." ([Nicolaus Olahus, *Hungaria sive de originibus gentis, regionis, situ, divisione, habitu atque opportunitatibus*, 1536, in C.C. Giurescu, D.C. Giurescu).

Since the earliest political medieval Romanian writings, **collective identity, ethnicity and statehood were linked with Christendom**. At the same time, the local political discourse was fully aware of the general European civilization of which the Romanian state(s) was (were) a part as successors of the Roman people and as Christians. It is interesting to note that the Roman tradition was understood in ethnical and historical terms as a matter of pride and legitimacy of the state, whose aim, ever since the emergence of the Romanian states, was to *belong*, not to *conquer*: Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania had no political ambitions except their own survival as states.

The link between Christendom, statehood and *being European* was not merely determined by the "logic of discourse" – in our case by a paradigm of governance dominated by the Orthodox Church. **It was a fact related to the survival of the nationhood and of the European civilization**. That is, although

the Romanian medieval writers and most of its rulers did not have the modern discourse of nationhood and the postmodern concept of the stateless, borderless links and interdependence, they were fully aware about the link between "the context" – "Europe" and their role within, thinking of their *locus* as an integrated entity – as a *Christian State pertaining to the European order*. For instance, Vlad the Impaler clearly stated that: "If our small country will perish, *God forbid*, neither you, Sir, will have a gain, since the damage will be for the whole of Christendom". (Letter of Vlad the Impaler to Matei Corvin, the voievod of Transylvania, February 11, 1462, in Giurescu, 1975, 382-383).

**The programmatic link between the civil society and politics was fully established by 1521** when Neagoe Basarab edited *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosie*. Considered the masterpiece of the Romanian literature written in Slavonic, *The Teachings* reveal in full the organic link between the faith, the institution of the Church, the State, the politics and the people:

"To Love our God from all our hearts"

In order to govern, you, as a leader "should profess the truth, should not acquire things and behave well with those who are serving you".

That means "to keep your mind clean through praying and humility".

"We do not choose to live like in an army [giving orders to one another and moving from place to place and conquering], we live in a fortress, in peace."

(Basarab N., 1996).

We should note that Machiavelli had edited his *Prince* a few years before, establishing the link between the people and the politics as a manipulable instrument of governing and legitimacy as pure calculus, legitimizing the need to *conquer*: "Nothing is more important than *seeming* to have faith."

The most successful of the princes were those "who knew to how deceive the people's mind."

“The need to conquer is a natural drive...”

“The people has no other need than to be dominated” (Machiavelli, 1998).

Machiavelli entrenched the Western politics in reason, more exactly in the reason of the *prince*. For Neagoe Basarab, politics was about serving the people, anchoring it in the *fear of God*.

Even if those two events are pretty far away from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the object of our study is located, they were to be mentioned in order to understand the *organic* Romanian paradigm of making politics. *The integrated paradigm of statehood (governance)-Church-people of Neagoe Basarab remained dominant till the Phanariot regime at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Romanian society was forcefully enrolled in the periphery of the Ottoman Empire.*

***Briefly on the first historical cleavage: The Phanariot regime. In the periphery of the Empire***

Situated at the periphery of the emerging modern world-system in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the three Romanian Principalities, Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia, were surrounded and beleaguered by three powerful empires – the Ottoman, the Habsburg and the Tsarist ones. The Romanian lands had successfully resisted both Habsburg and Ottoman conquest until 1699, when Transylvania was subordinated to the Austrian emperor, thus worsening Wallachia’s and Moldavia’s military and political situations.

The emergence of the “Eastern question” constituted by the Ottoman Empire’s beginning decline turned the Romanian lands into prey for the proximate powers, Austria and Russia. Both were interested in the commercial and strategic position offered by the Romanian lands, but neither was willing to share them, so the Romanian provinces ended up not belonging to any of them, nor to the Ottoman Empire. However, after the Porte succeeded in establishing the “Phanariot rule” in both Romanian provinces as of 1711,

Wallachia’s and Moldavia’s boundaries were Lands. Subjected to a series of redrawing of boundaries to the (territorial) benefit of Austria and Russia. The so-called “Phanariot century”, lasting from 1711 until 1821, represented the period of fiercest Turkish exploitation of the Romanian during this time, Romanian boyars (members of the privileged class, *Rom.* “boieri”) had been denied the right to elect their own ruler, and voivodes (native princes) of both Wallachia and Moldavia had been appointed by the Porte from among the Greeks of Phanar, a quarter of Constantinople – which earned them the name “Phanariots”. Fiscal exploitation, the Sublime Porte’s intervention in the Principalities’ internal affairs and its monopoly over their foreign policy, the deterioration of the two countries’ armies, and the drastic decline in the political autonomy of the Romanian provinces were the main characteristics of the Phanariot regime (see Giurescu, 1972, 133f.).

“More than half of the Principalities incomes, most of the times, were taken over for the sole purpose of buying an extension to the throne. [...] Nearly all population is driven into credit accounts [and far-gone to extortioniers with interest rates up to 300%]. [...] The annual interest [of the usury] represents more than the budgetary incomes of both Romanian states at the beginning of the Unification epoch”. (G. Zane, 1980). They led to the formation of what Daniel Chirot has termed the “protocolonial system” (Chirot 1976, 10), a weakly developed colonial society whose economic surplus was produced by an unfree labor force and to a large extent siphoned off to an economically and politically dominant society.

According to Chirot, during the Phanariot century “Wallachia was becoming more detached from the Western economic sphere. Wallachia was becoming virtually an Ottoman colony, and it was Ottoman power – not Western – that was forcing changes strikingly analogous to those that were occurring in the more northerly parts of Europe at that time” (Chirot, 1976, 47). However, the already

declining Ottoman Empire, much like Spain, but unlike England or Holland, behaved more like a traditional “world empire” than like the new “capitalist system”, in that it exploited its colonies to “finance luxuries, wars, and the maintenance of overextended imperial structures, but not in order to develop core economies” (Chirot, 1976, 61). Consequently, this form of exploitation did not lead to the emergence of modern nation-states in the colonies, nor to the industrialization of the empires’ economies. Eventually, this caused both Spain and Turkey to lose their core status and become peripheral areas of the expanding capitalist world-system. The dissolution of the three empires Habsburg, Ottoman and Tsarist was, however, a long process, which covered about 200 years of Eastern European history, and did not automatically lead to the liberation of the nations living in that area (cf. Bădescu, 2003, Sincronism). As far as the Romanian Principalities were concerned, if the “Phanariot century” had meant a shift of their power and economic structure into the Ottoman sphere of influence, thereby turning Wallachia and Moldavia into the Ottoman Empire’s periphery, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly the period following 1821, meant their reintegration into the Western historical cycle.

Despite the fact that the Phanariot Regime was the hardest, the Romanian Principalities remained autonomous against the Sublime Porte. Wallachia and Moldavia remained under the regime of *tributal protection* (‘ahd ad-dhimma) and not *provinces of the Empire* (‘dar al-Islâm). Between 1711/1716 and 1774 the autonomy was solely under the Ottoman Empire and, in the 1774-1821 interval, it was shared with the Russian Empire (*Istoria Românilor*, VI, 591).

## The struggle for Renaissance before 1821

Romanian Renaissance is less centered on reason and more on rediscovering collective identity. It is about regaining elementary

rights: the right to be Romanian (in Transylvania) and social, political and economical rights (in all three of the Romanian states: Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia). *The Romanian movements were ideologically connected with those in Europe*. Once the problem of national identity were to be solved, *liberty meant at the same time reinventing the social space, redeeming it civil* – free people, with economic, social and political rights. The “Peasant Uprising” of Horea, Cloșca and Crișan in 1784, for instance, was even 5 years ahead of the French Revolution in 1789 in claiming the disposal of the nobility rights and equality for all. The general background of the Romanian struggle for Renaissance was, at the same time, *a struggle for modernity*. There was no evidence of a superimposed ideology from abroad yet. The Romanian society had the power to discover by itself the “natural” imperatives of modernity: the right to national identity, to property, equality in front of the law, as fully stated at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Uprising of Horea. The problem with this more-than-secular movement was that the historical forces which put pressure over the national identity were much stronger than the local ones and the movement towards modernity was only partially successful. *Regaining the right to nationality was not a Romanian ideological, it was a sheer necessity towards normalizing the social space and together with the newly claimed civil liberties it defined modernity*.

**The general context of the First Renaissance** was given by the mounting pressure of the Hungarian domination over Transylvania and the one of the Phanariot regime in the other two of the Romanian Principalities – Moldavia and Wallachia. Most of the First Renaissance is located in Transylvania. Historically, this period ends with the 1821 Revolution of Tudor Vladimirescu, when the southern Principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia) free themselves from the Phanariot domination and the Turkish dependency begins to subside. *It should be noted that there is a dual drive fuelling those liberation*

*movements: the peasants and the clerical body together with the intellectuals, many of them united with Rome around the Transylvanian School.*

The first to synthesize the modern urgencies for the Romanian society was Inochentie Micu, the *Greek-Catholic bishop* of Făgăraș, who supplicated the Hapsburg Court for almost forty years on behalf of the Romanians and their request to be recognized as an *equal nation* in its own right. The pinnacle of his efforts was his *Supplex Libellus* enacted in 1743 and addressed to the Hapsburg emperor – a document to become a manifesto for the following movements.

The main points of Inochentie Micu were the following :

- The Romanians are to be recognized as equals not *tolerated* alongside the Magyars, the Szekely and the Sachsen, i.e., “The Romanians should become a fully political nation” [in 1790, in the Parliament of Transylvania, of 417 seats, only one was occupied by a Romanian] (Giurescu & Giurescu, 1975, 542) ;
- The right to receive education in equal terms with the other “three political nations”, since education is the main instrument for social and individual progress ;
- The right to full access to military service and the administrative body for all Romanians, including the nobility ;
- The right to education, free profession and private property, according to everyone’s abilities ;
- Full access into the cities for the Romanians ;
- Equal treatment for the Romanian peasants ;

(Cernovodeanu P., N. Edroiu (coord.), 2002).

Vexed by the bishop’s requests, Vienna exiles him to Rome in 1744.

Herein lies an important observation that we have to make on the “limits of modernity” concerning almost all liberation movements of Romanians in Transylvania: these movements were somehow looking to Vienna for support, thinking of the emperor as being a

“good ruler”, no matter how advanced, i.e. potentially antimonarchic were their social, political and economic requests. Until the formation of the Great Romania – which ended the Renaissance process in 1918 – there were some prominent voices in Transylvania advocating for national liberation and social modernization *within* the framework of the Austrian Empire as a federation (one of the first federalist doctrine to be “invented” by A.C. Popovici in 1893). The most important priority was the cessation of Hungarian domination. This served very well the Hapsburgs. There was no real support from the Emperor for the Romanian ideals and no real gain to be derived from it. They were increasingly oppressed, until the final dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918. Why has the Monarchy chosen “to work” with the Hungarian minority in order to oppress half of the Empire and why have the Hapsburgs chosen to “modernize” the Empire making the dualist agreement (1867) that directly violated the rights of most of its citizens? These are subsequent questions to be addressed by further researches on the role of political and cultural ideas.

**A second *Supplex*, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum***, was issued in 1791 by the Transylvanian School, *addressing the same national and social problems again* :

“The Transylvanian School summarized in the *Supplex* its political program as follows: 1. [There is] to be revoked and removed publicly as undignified and unjust, any spiteful denominations to Romanians as tolerated, admitted, uncounted among the privileged nations [Stări], and the Romanian nation is to be reconsidered reborn and with all the civil and religious rights [...] 4. In the Diet, in the counties and in the seats, districts and cities, the Romanian nation is to be represented in proportion to her number, and so proceed to the appointment and advancement in the new job [...] 5. The administrative units which have Romanian majorities is to have Romanian denominations... [The Monarchy and the Diet] shall declare all the inhabitants of the Principality of Transylvania

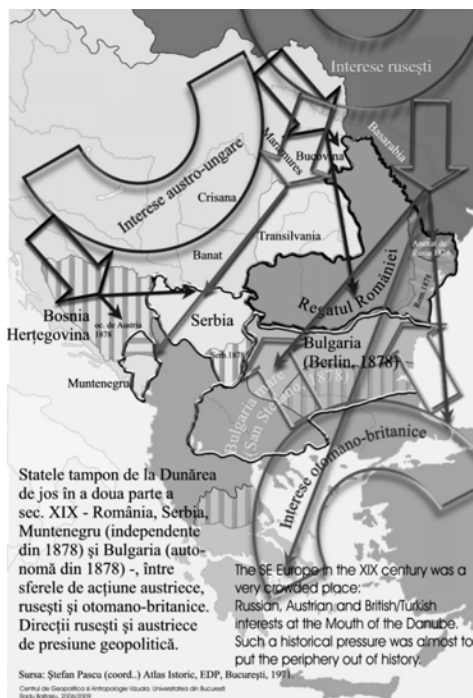
equals, irrespective to their national or religious membership, according to their own condition and capacities[only], regarding their liberties and benefices and to bear the same duties”.

This time, the Transylvanian School added another principle to its argument: “Romanians were the first to be Christianized [on the Romanian soil]”. The intellectual strata fought for social rights using religious arguments. *The religious argument was not to be separated from the Romanian Renaissance until the 1848 Revolution.*

(Istoria Românilor, 2002, VI, 570, 575)

The second Renaissance owe much of its discourse to the programme of the Transylvanian School. The shape of the civil society, as well as the political conscience of the political class after 1821/1848 were to be very influenced by this paradigm.

## On the constitutive dimensions of modernity: The 19<sup>th</sup> century



## *The second historical cleavage: From the periphery of the Ottoman Empire to the periphery of the world system*

### *The general logic of the new system (of the new modernity)*

1821 was the year of a revolutionary national and social movement in Moldavia and Wallachia against the Ottoman Empire's domination in the two principalities. It mainly sought the re-establishment of native reigns and the natives' exclusive right to hold public office. The modernizing process was also directed towards reforming the institution of the Church, dominated by foreign interests: “Regarding the beasts which are eating us alive, our political and religious leaders, for how long should we endure them? For how long should we be their servants?” (*The Pades Manifesto* given in April 1821, in Giurescu & Giurescu, 1975, 555). It is interesting that some of the Romanian Orthodox officials gave Tudor Vladimirescu the agreement to fulfill his general modernizing goals. This was the starting point of rationalizing and modernizing the relationship between the state and society, fully accomplished 40 years later through the *Law of secularizing the Monasteries' holdings* in 1863 made by the modern state of Romania. Although eventually repressed by the Turkish army, its aims not to be fully achieved at that time, the 1821 Revolution led by the Romanian boyar Tudor Vladimirescu marked the end of Ottoman domination and thus the shift to a neocolonial model – a strongly developed colonial society more akin to the one engendered by classical colonialism in other parts of the world-system's periphery –, that is to an indirectly controlled state in which there was no single metropolis, but rather a consortium of overseers. Further, the proximate great powers, Austria, Russia, and Turkey, were not exactly the most advanced industrial powers in Europe. They had relatively little need for an added agrarian province to serve as an extra supplier of primary products and as a market for their own industrial goods.

“It was Western Europe that was the more logical metropole for colonial Wallachia, and Wallachia developed in the nineteenth century as a colonial outpost of the more advanced Western economies” (Chirot, 1976, 89).

Chirot’s conceptualization of these developments as a shift from a protocolonial to a neocolonial system has been captured in Romanian sociology by Ilie Bădescu’s enlightening phrase “the shift of peripheral axis” (Bădescu, forthcoming). Consequently, according to Bădescu, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Romanian lands moved over from the periphery of the Empire to the periphery of the Western metropolis, thereby experiencing not emancipation, but rather a new form of dependency. It is in this context that the use of the term “neocolonial” needs to be further specified.

In this context, the term “neocolonialism” helps to highlight an instance of peripheralization in 19<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Europe, which took place in the absence of colonial administration, but which had as a result the creation of “a blatantly colonial society” (Chirot, 1976, 162) nevertheless. The economic peripheralization in Romania and the cultural reaction on the part of the Romanian intellectuals that this colonial situation stimulated must therefore be understood against this background.

*The history of the new peripheralization starts with the signing of the Russian-Turkish Peace Treaty at Adrianople in September 1829* which warranted the abolishment of Turkish monopoly on Romanian trade and allowed Romanian vessels use of the Danube harbors for trade, at the same time restricting Turkey’s right to interfere in Romanian internal affairs (Giurescu, 1972, 158). Although still under Turkish suzerainty and Russian occupation, Wallachia and Moldavia’s newly gained right to free export meant that the wheat surpluses were no longer destined for the Ottoman Empire, but could be increasingly directed toward the Western markets, thus allowing for the purchase of previously unaffordable Western goods. This opening toward the West and increasing restriction of

the Ottoman economic domination represents the culmination of a development already begun in 1774 by the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji, when Russia first gained access to the seas and harbors of the Ottoman Empire and the latter’s commercial privilege over Wallachia and Moldavia’s trade extended to Russia as well. This opening toward the West and increasing restriction of the Ottoman economic domination represents the culmination of a development already begun in 1774 by the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji, when Russia first gained access to the seas and harbors of the Ottoman Empire and the latter’s commercial privilege over Wallachia and Moldavia’s trade extended to Russia as well.

### ***Two main actors of the new peripheral modernity: The intermediate class and dependent thinking***

It was not the middle class who brought to bear the onset of capitalism in Romania, but the middlemen, the *intermediate class*, highly specialized in moving the economic values from the periphery to the core of the world system. What had been lacking in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was still absent after 1848, was a local Romanian middle class, whose formation was being stunted by the presence of foreigners in key positions. The ruling liberals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century strongly believed that the only way to modernize Romania was to fully import the Western superstructures and to place them over the local realities no matter the cost. This development from *top to bottom* was to become the “development by imitation” theorized by Eugen Lovinescu in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and criticized by the Junimea School at the time of its application as *a form without substance*. The problem was that trying to superimpose foreign forms over the local realities generated a wholly new reality with huge social costs which conservatives in the 19<sup>th</sup> century named the *semibarbarian society*. Deconstructing the traditional realities by this top to bottom approach generated a long lasting conflict

with severe consequences known in the epoch as the conflict between the *Legal Country* and the *Real Country*, i.e. between the rulers and the ruled. The main beneficiaries of this cleavage and important vectors of it were the intermediate class of the core interests in the periphery of the world system. The interesting fact is that when theoretizing on this matter, almost half a century later, (Lovinescu, E. [1924-1925], *Istoria civilizației române moderne*) was still convinced that the huge costs were “natural”, given the “primitivism” of the traditional society to be civilized. His paradigm of local development by imitation of the center of the world system is still active today under the name of “Europeanization” of the postcommunist society. In terms of the world system theory, the synchronization approach is related to the dependent form of thinking in the periphery.

Lovinescu stated that: “Delayed as we were in our spiritual, economic and political structure, still medieval in the midst of contemporary history, our contribution to the organism of European life, i.e., interdependency, was out of the question, as is today the ‘determination’ in the sense of an imposition of differentiated and even inferior forms of social life, according to the narrow interest of advanced peoples [...]; but both ‘determination’ and ‘interdependency’, that is, both moments in the formation of modern Romanian civilization, dominated by a single spirit, can be subsumed under one law: the law of the *synchronism of modern life*, which operates in a leveling, not a differentiatory manner” (Lovinescu, 1972, 394).

Theoretically, Lovinescu substantiated his approach on the basis of a modified version of the “laws of social imitation” by French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (Tarde, 1895). Yet while Tarde had defined imitation as a manifestation of the universal law of repetition of social behaviors and had restricted it to mental individual interaction, Lovinescu extrapolated from it the essential element in the formation of social institutions and the main mechanism of the “contemporaneity of our material and moral life” (Lovinescu, 1972, 404).

According to Lovinescu’s law of synchronism/contemporaneity, European societies assumed the configuration determined by the “spirit of our age” (the equivalent of Tacitus’ *saeculum*, or of the more common *Zeitgeist*) to the extent that they adopted its characteristic structures by means of imitation. Consequently, in the modern age, characterized by leveling, generalizing tendencies additionally enhanced by the impact of the means of communication facilitating the diffusion of imitation, synchronism ensured that “the direction of peoples’ development [...] is the same” (Lovinescu, 1972, 397).

The history of modern Romanian civilization therefore exemplified, in Lovinescu’s view, the evolutionary course of every other European society. His account of this “natural” development translates as a reinterpretation of Romania’s modern history along the lines of his own law of synchronism achieved by imitation: In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Romania had been included in the larger network of cultural and economic interdependency of contemporary life through the large numbers of Romanian youths pursuing their studies in Paris on the one hand, and through the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople on the other. The 1848 revolution, an instance of “imitative contagion” (Lovinescu, 1972, 478) similar to most 1848 European revolutionary movements, had thus been the result of Romania’s exposure to the ideology underlying the French revolution of 1789. While the former’s character had of necessity been purely ideological – in the absence of a middle class to which the proclaimed social desiderata could correspond – it imprinted a revolutionary course to the entire subsequent development of Romanian society: “Meagre in its immediate results [...], the revolutionary movement produced a current of opinion which could no longer be overlooked [...]. Through revolution, our life axis shifted from the East to the West” (Lovinescu, 1972, 228). From then on, the agent of change acting as “the necessary instrument of synchronism” (Lovinescu, 1972, 387) by promoting the liberal ideology of the French Revolution

would be the National Liberal Party, whose growth Lovinescu viewed as a historical series paralleling the process of state formation.. In this case, Lovinescu adapted Tarde's theory to the extent of turning it upside down, since, in the French sociologist's model, imitation proceeded *ab interioribus ad exteriora*, i.e., the imitation of mental processes triggering specific social behavior preceded the imitation of the social behavior as such. Transferred to the level of macrosociological analysis after this reversal of sequence, the passage from simulation to stimulation (cf. Lovinescu, 1972, 296), the equivalent of an evolution from forms to substance, was considered "the young civilizations' only possibility of development", while the "traditionalism" associated with the Romanian critical culture and the organic evolution it postulated was "a sociological impossibility : [...] it was precisely the lack of a strong tradition, coupled with the lack of an organized authority, that enabled such a sudden transformation of our civilization in a revolutionary sense" (Lovinescu, 1972, 480).

*It becomes increasingly clear that this ideological and political conflict had deeper epistemological roots – that is, it reproduced within Romania the very process of subalternization of knowledge through the imposition of global designs in reaction to which the critical culture had arisen in the first place.*

Accordingly, liberal policy in Romania was a form without substance not simply because the country lacked the economic foundation capable of reflecting its institutional superstructure, but chiefly because the very basis of Western liberalism, the aforementioned "middle class that produces something", fulfilled the opposite function in Romanian society, where it produced nothing, thus becoming a form of pseudo-liberalism and promoting an *underdevelopment policy*.

The so-called *intermediate class* is a minority playing a crucial role in the pursuit of the core's economic interests. It is made up of two overlapping categories, *the landowners*, whose main function is the extraction of surplus from the peasants, and *the town merchants and administrators*, acting both

in support of the core's interests and of their own. Considering the centuries-old tradition that made it essential for a noble to supplement his income by getting appointed to a court or local administrative position (cf. Chirot, 1976, 85), the administrative elite itself is either made up of or controlled by the landowning segment of the intermediate class. Both the landowners and the town merchants and administrators become "acculturated to the dominant ways of the metropole" (Chirot, 1976, 58), and adopt its speech patterns, ways of dress and religious attitudes. Very much unlike the Western societies, where the bourgeoisie had developed in opposition to the old landed aristocracy, in neocolonial societies and therefore in Romania as well, the former was included in the latter.

### *The Second Renaissance :*

#### *Two social types.*

#### *Two modernities*

The Second Renaissance took place in two stages, that could be called "heroic" and "critical" (Bădescu, 2003). At a certain moment both were coming to exist in parallel and to become two major organizing paradigms: the *synchronist* and the *critical* or *conservative thought*.

The "heroic culture" is the answer of Romanian society to the urgency/provocation of "reentering" its history: recovering the social space, the national territory, the right to engage in trade, to have a state – as well as to its own European identity. The effort was started by the Revolution of Tudor Vladimirescu in 1821 in Wallachia, to be continued by the *Transylvanian School* and at its peak by the 1848 revolutionaries. The ideal type of the "heroic" intellectual is Ion Heliade Rădulescu.

Heliade Rădulescu is convinced that the Romanian people has a "messianic role" (Bădescu, 2003), but at the same time he employs a very technical approach regarding the process of social development through education and through promoting a local (national) bourgeoisie.

What the nation needed was not an indoctrinated, but an educated youth, i.e., independent, self-sustaining individuals, that would in turn be able to liberate the country from its economic dependency on scientific rather than doctrinaire bases: "See to it that every youth leaving school, the academies, the university, should have a training that allows them to sustain themselves and be independent. Create more technical schools in every district, for it is they alone that bring forth the national bourgeoisie; and the nation which has no workers, artists, merchants from among its own, that nation perishes" (Heliade, 1916, 267).

The existence of a national bourgeoisie thus became a necessary condition for the nation's survival. Once autonomous, the decisions the country would make on its way to modernization were its own responsibility, and this made thorough knowledge of Romania's history and of its social traditions imperative: "In stepping forward we must remember our starting point; progress cannot be accomplished without safeguarding the wealth already gathered, be it material, spiritual, or moral. [...] Again, with the laws and changes the foreigners started imposing on us, and which the demagogues and anarchists keep praising, the Romanian will lose his very name of Romanian" (Heliade, 1916, 11).

**The Second Renaissance brings two new social types:** the ideologue and the specialist (Badescu 2003). Both are somehow different of the ordinary people. They are to introduce the Romanian people on the path of development. The ideologue is a revolutionary, keen to *synchronize* the Romanian space with the *new ideological teachings from Paris* on reason, politics and society from upside down. Important enough, there was not always a clear-cut distinction between these social types. Some of the revolutionaries were pretty far away from the *ideologue* model of the French Revolution whenever not *reason* as such was the main referential, but the ordinary people and the protection of the nationality: even if Nicolae Bălcescu, one of the leaders of the 1848 movement in Romania, was highly influenced by the French Revolution, he was far

from the utopian *communal* order of the French Revolution. He, and other revolutionaries professed the need for *national unity* as the most important ingredient of civil liberty: "without nationality the republic will be another form of despotism" (Al. Papiu Ilarian [1943] *Istoria românilor din Dacia superioară. Schița tomului III*, ed. Ștefan Pascu, Sibiu, 157, *apud* G.D. Iscru, 1988, 250).

**In Transylvania** the 1848 Revolution took a dramatic turn for it had to have a strong national defensive stance against the annexation of Transylvania by the Hungarian Revolutionary Government. The social ideal of the Hungarian revolution was almost entirely subordinated to this matter. Between 1848 and 1849, the huzsars killed 30 000 civilians of Romanian ethnicity and destroyed about 240 villages. During the fights with the army of Avram Iancu which was defending the Apuseni Mountains other 10 000 Romanians were killed. This compulsive subordination of Revolution to an unrealistic objective (Hungarians were 1/3 of the total population of Transylvania at most) made the task of the Russian and Austrian Empires to liquidate both movements much easier (data from the speech of the historian Petre Țurlea in the Parliament of Romania, on March 16, 1999, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?id=2961&idm=1,12&id1=1>, consulted on February 2009).

Further on, Transylvania saw the unfolding of the last major national movement in 1892-1894, known under the name of the Transylvanian Memorandum. Almost all the Romanian elite of the province, as well from Hungary was involved. And when the Hungarian authorities took an unusual hard stance, closing the Romanian schools and arresting or harassing the petitioners, the Romanian Government – under the hard pressure of its own public opinion – had to intervene in Vienna in order to alleviate the situation. The Memorandum marked the fully maturation of the Romanian political movement, united since 1881 under the National Romanian Party. Interestingly enough, the Memorandum Movement did not question

the opportunity of Dualism of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, except the problem of the elementary civil rights for the Romanians under the concept of an extended autonomy inside the Austrian Monarchy.

In the meantime, in what had become the Kingdom of Romania (since 1881) there emerged the cultural paradigm of *critical thought* (Junimea) delivered one of the first world class theories on development, highly resourceful to this day.

### ***Critical thought and the theory of “form without substance” (Titu Maiorescu)***

It was in his 1868 article “Against the Present-Day Direction in Romanian Culture”, published in Junimea’s magazine *Convorbiri Literare* (“Literary Conversations”), that Maiorescu for the first time undertook a severe analysis of Romanian society and of its hasty modernization: “Judging by the statistics of outer forms, today Romanians seem to possess almost the entire Western civilization. We have politics and science, we have journals and academies, we have schools and literature, we have museums, conservatories, we have a theater, we even have a constitution. But in reality all these are dead productions, pretenses without foundation, ghosts without bodies, illusions without truth, and thus the culture of the Romanian’s upper classes is null and void, and the abyss separating us from the people below grows deeper every day” (Maiorescu, [1868], 1973, 168).

With remarkable precision, Maiorescu detected the intention behind this excess of forms in the intellectuals’ “vanity of showing foreign peoples at any cost, even by disregarding the truth, that we are their equals in terms of civilization. This is the only explanation for the vice that seeped into our public life, and that is the lack of any solid foundation for the outer forms that we keep receiving” (Maiorescu, 1868, 164). Moreover, the society which all these outer forms of civilization entered had simply not been prepared by anything in its history to receive

them, Maiorescu argued. This, then, constituted the basis for the enunciation of his theory of *form without substance* :

„Steeped in Oriental barbarianism until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Romanian society started to awake from its lethargy around 1820, perhaps seized only then by the contagious movement by which the ideas of the French Revolution had reached even the outer geographic extremities of Europe. Attracted to the light, the Romanian youth undertook this extraordinary emigration towards the fountains of French and German science, which has kept growing to this very day and which has brought part of the luster of foreign societies to free Romania. Unfortunately, only the outer luster! For, unprepared as our youths were and still are, dazzled by the great phenomena of modern culture, they only assimilated the effects, but did not grasp the causes, they only saw civilization’s shallower forms, but did not see through to the deeper historical foundations which with necessity produced those forms and without the prior existence of which they could not even have lived. And thus, limited by a fatal superficiality, their hearts and minds inflamed by too light a fire, the young Romanians did and do come back to their homeland with the decision to emulate and reproduce the appearances of Western culture, in the belief that they would thereby also at once attain the literature, the culture, the arts, and above all, liberty in a modern state” (Maiorescu, [1868], 1973, 163).

“A people’s powers, be they material or moral, have a limited quantity at any given time. The Romanians’ national wealth has a fixed figure today ; their intellectual energy is also of a certain amount. You cannot get away with gambling this sum of powers, the capital of a people’s cultural enterprise. The time, the wealth, the moral strength and the intellectual swiftness you use for a futile creation, and all the more for a bad creation, are forever lost for the necessary and the true one. They cannot both succeed, precisely because the source of a nation’s powers

is not unlimited, but is limited by its very nature. But if you lack a thousand modest, diligent students, national industrialists and workers, good poets and writers, and real scientists, the reason is because the limited powers your people possesses for them are used up by ignorant teachers, no-good clerks, academics, secretaries, honorific members, cultural associates, journalists, athenians, conservatorists, pseudo-poets, canvas-hangers at the 'living artists exhibition', and so on and so forth. You have one marble block only: if you use it for a caricature, what else is left for sculpting a Minerva?" (Maioreescu, [1874], 1973, 5).

The verdict that Maioreescu ultimately gave was a radical one: "Form without substance is not only of no use, but it is downright pernicious, because it destroys a powerful cultural means" (Maioreescu, [1968], 1973, 170).

### ***Critical thought and the positive classes (Mihai Eminescu)***

Using the criterion of productive work, which had at an earlier point led Titu Maioreescu to characterize the large peasant mass as the only "real class" in Romanian society, Eminescu in his turn spoke of a "positive class", therefore a productive one, making up the "real country". This particular social group and the "parasitical elements" out of which the superimposed layer had emerged increasingly defined themselves in terms of the relationship entertained with each other, and thus entered into a process of class formation, while the "legal country", a metaphorical term with the help of which Eminescu described the liberal institutions, provided the juridical apparatus necessary for creating and justifying this polarized structure as well as the resulting economic exploitation:

"The land, in its constitutive parts, evolves toward dissolution and anarchy. And things could indeed hardly be otherwise. Just like the worker's role is to produce useful objects, the role of administration is a concrete and valuable work, just like any other. By the power awarded it by state authority, an

administration is supposed to dispose of any impediments to a country's intellectual and economical development [...]. But the present administration and the elements making it up constitute by themselves a permanent impediment to our development [...]. On the one hand, the economic exigencies of an allegedly civilized state increase daily and require an ever-growing amount of work in order to be met, on the other hand, the physical degeneration of the worker's race and the disappearance of the instruments of his work eliminate the very possibility of work. Parallel to these two general evils, which create constantly growing gaps, we note that the frontier points are being opened in order to let in entire flocks of foreigners who come to supplant a people which perishes by the ineptness of its sons" (Eminescu 1881c, 76ff).

"Every constitution, as a state's fundamental law, has as its correlate a particular class on which it is based. The correlate of the Western states' constitutions is a rich and cultivated middle class, a class of patricians, of industrial manufacturers – who see in the constitution the means of representing their interests in line with their significance. [...] Where are *our* positive classes? The historical aristocracy – it always has to be historical in order to be important – has almost disappeared, there exists no positive middle class, the gaps are filled by foreigners, the peasant class is too uncultivated, and, although it is the only positive one, no one understands it, no one represents it, no one cares about it" (Eminescu, 1876, 59).

The key factor in this diagnosis is represented by Eminescu's insight that cosmopolitanism (in its liberal variant), although acting as a global design, was rooted in the local history of the Western societies which elaborated it.

The ideology it sought to export to underdeveloped countries by means of rational models of capitalist organization was therefore a success story, but one that consciously ignored the historical realities which it confronted in the Eastern European periphery. Social revolutions such as had taken place in

1848 all over Europe were a “luxury” which small states, whose political or economic independence was constantly threatened, could not afford. Hence, advocating individual liberties in such a context could only act (as it already had) to the detriment of state power. Eminescu thus pleaded against a contractualist state, against individualism, free trade, and strictly formal modernization, and for a state representing the entire nation (instead of just separate individuals), for safeguarding nationality, and for protectionism.

These analyses led him to distinguish between two types of “civilization”, the economic and the political: “The precondition for state civilization is economic civilization. Introducing the forms of a foreign civilization in the absence of its economic correlate is sheer wasted work. But this is what our liberals did. Instead of taking a look at society’s essential ill, they were concerned with the accidental and meaningless ones” (Eminescu, 1877, 30).

### ***Eminescu on misery: Misery as the high cost of peripheralization***

Mihai Eminescu is one of the few theoreticians that succeeded in analyzing the nature of Romania’s “social misery” by offering a set of determinant factors and direct effects. One of the main causes that greatly contributed to the profound moral degradation is the “usury practice” (a state of constant exploitation sustained by landholders that has direct and negative effects over the peasants and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanian middle-class).

According to Eminescu, this type of usury is responsible for the corruption of peoples’ verticality by inducing them to commit an increased number of crimes and felonies. In fact, it is all reduced to a conceptual triangle or a vicious circle between the people of justice, the usurarian ones (that bribe the first category) and the victims (that must obey the faulty verdicts and speculative policies). This is the mechanism through which the conscience of rightfulness suffers alteration up to the highest levels due to the

inefficient institutional policies and lack of reliability, reaching even “the most elevated social classes in terms of culture, status or fortune” (Eminescu, 1998, 25). The increased bureaucracy and a legal system hard to understand that suffers one too many legislative changes are bound to negatively influence the citizen’s moral sense of purpose. Continuing on the same line, Mihai Eminescu manages to highlight by the instrumentality of his sociological theory the fact that “a great deal of the ones that find themselves imprisoned are nothing else but the sure victims of the usury practice and of the promiscuity derived from it” (*idem*).

Interpreting statistical data through a nationalist lens, Eminescu states that the increased number of taverns, opened mainly by the Jewish people settled on Romanian territory, has a negative or even a destructive impact over the citizen’s moral and financial state. Although this type of discourse was blamed in his time, we can sustain that the objectivity of such a theory cannot be touched. That is because Eminescu also embraces the critical type of analysis when it comes to the imitative behavior adopted by the Christian Romanian elites (“the exploitation of the peasant’s misery is made in the same way even by the Christian landholders” (Eminescu, 1998, 29) that follow a single principle: the higher the misery, the higher the extortion through scandalous interest rates.

From the same critical perspective, the Romanian theoretician bans the immoral conduct by saying: “We have to know about the peasant’s exploitation in Moldavia that reached its peak through usury means and exhilaration in order to understand why he is unable to evolve, why he is moving backwards; because he appears in front of us as a depressed idiot, with no life and no pleasure for life” (Eminescu, 1998, 29).

In addition to the factors remarked above, Eminescu also adds the freedom regime which, in his opinion, “succeeds in exploiting in the most usury form the greatest socio-economic class, the agrarian population, its ruin doing nothing else but damaging the statehood,

fiscal incomes and national welfare in genera” (Eminescu, 1998, 31).

The discovery of the main causes for the “spiritual misery” that continues to spread all around determines a highlight of the series of effects that appear at the societal level: emigration, low marriage rate, high mortality rate, high level of criminality etc. The Romanian emigration in Bulgaria or Serbia for example is due to the agrarian rule in 1864, a law that instead of helping the peasant to develop a better quality of life, did nothing but worsened the poverty and misery; the constant line of work exploitation and moral frazzling determines the Romanian peasant to emigrate, in search of a better *modus Vivendi*. „This type of migration proves the misery state in which the agrarian population or the poor urban one find themselves, a true conviction of the actual state of things.” (Eminescu, 1998, 31).

## **Modernity after the First World War: The third Renaissance**

Greater Romania is the “organic end” of the first two Renaissance cycles. From now, state frontiers overlap with the boundaries of national ethnicity. The intellectual discourse was freed from the national imperative, so that the interwar period was prolific in producing different projects aimed at modernizing society and the state. Some of the doctrines thus produced were reconsidering the role of Orthodox faith in politics, others promoted various relationships between capital, labor, society, and the state.

There was an inflorescence of answers to the provocation of modernizing the society. We will take into account only two of them, the national peasant doctrine of Virgil Madgearu (one of the leaders of the National Peasant Party) and the corporatist doctrine of Mihail Manoilescu (one of the most respected European economists in the interwar period). The main concern is the “rural issue” – how to link technology, politics and the urban classes and economics with the

interests and needs of the peasants. Almost 80% of Romanians lived in the countryside and were the main GDP contributors, but only a fraction of the national revenue returned to the countryside. Therefore, *internal integration* was the main issue of modernity for the Romanian society at that time.

*Neoserfdom* of the peasantry was the most crippling cost the Romania had to pay for her modernization between 1864 – when the capitalist reform of the land has started – and 1918 – when the main national cycle ended with the forming of Greater Romania. Neoserfdom meant a newer and much powerful enslavement of the peasantry by foreign speculative capital with the aid of the modern institutions. Given the integration of Romania as a periphery in the logic of the world system as the Turkish domination subsided after 1829 (the second cesure, changing the peripheral axis), the foreign capital did not produce industrial facilities, but raided the easier opportunities by speculating the need for luxury of the land owners. In order to do this the speculative capital strongly encouraged the modernization of the infrastructure of the state – the law and the roads, in order to efficiently export the agricultural products and let the speculative credit circulate at ease.

### ***On the peasant doctrine of development (Madgearu)***

Madgearu considered that within his multi-directional model of transition from feudalism to capitalism as illustrated by the dissimilar developments in England, Denmark, France, and the European South-East, the specific evolutions of the agrarian countries were linked by the particular relation in which they stood with the capitalist world-economy, and which was inherent in their very backwardness. Analyzed on the basis of Romania’s example, “specific evolution” in Eastern Europe – a concept which Madgearu explicitly employed – was given by: 1) the contrast between neoserfdom and the liberal state institutions; 2) the limited role of commercial capital in the development of

liberal structures ; 3) exploitation of the State through the political oligarchy ; 4) the parasitarian and artificial character of the national industry ; 5) the coexistence of “industrial feudalism” with a nascent industrialism, and 6) the direct transition from commercial to finance capitalism without passing through the industrial “stage” (cf. Madgearu, 1936, [1925b], 98f).

For Madgearu, agricultural evolution could not be explained on the basis of a unilinear and teleological process of transition from feudal exploitation to capitalist wage labor. Rather, its mode of labor control was a function of the relations of production which the allocation of land had made it possible to enforce : “*The legal abolition of feudal relations of property and work becomes a reality only if the land transformed into private property does not remain a means of domination and exploitation, if the ‘emancipated’ peasants are not compelled to engage their work and their cattle on boyar property. Otherwise the legal form contradicts the real substance*” (Madgearu, [1922], 1936, 24, 169).

The immiseration of the peasantry and the technical regress of agricultural exploitation had then been the direct consequences of neoserfdom, i.e., of the form which emancipation had taken.

The property of the land has to become “a work property” [*proprietate de muncă*] and not an “instrument of exploitation against the peasant” in order to ease the condition of the peasant and to fully integrate the rural economy with credit and technology. The work property is fully configured to produce a decent life for the peasant families and to facilitate the economic progress of the agriculture with the help of the newly designed rural credit. The new rural credit was to be developed according to the natural cycle of the crops and cattle.

### ***On the corporatist doctrine (Manoilescu)***

Manoilescu argued that industrialization was the condition *sine qua non* of every country’s

development, since it was only through industry that the enhancement of a country’s economic purchasing power could lead to more advantageous international exchanges (Manoilescu, 1929, 91). Placing *labor productivity* at the center of his analysis, the Romanian economist contended that, contrary to the tenets of classical economic theory, human labor was qualitatively unequal and differentiated with respect to the amount of skill it required and the productivity it supplied, so that labor quality, not labor quantity (as for Adam Smith) was decisive in determining the value of goods exchanged on the world market : “*La quantité de travail humain mise en branle (déclanchée) serait un signe de supériorité pour une branche de production ! C’est au contraire l’économie de travail qui est un critérium. Ce n’est pas le maximum de travail, mais le maximum de productivité de ce travail humain, qui devrait être signe de toute supériorité économique*” (Manoilescu, 1929, 332).

For Manoilescu, therefore, a correct labor theory of value would have to take into account not only the profitability, but also the productivity of labor. While the classical economic theories revolved around Ricardo’s concept of comparative advantage, according to which a country should concentrate on the production of those goods in which it had the smallest disadvantage on the world market, Manoilescu insisted that economic operations were generally advantageous if their labor productivity was higher than the national average, which was always the case for industrial activities when compared to agricultural ones. A displacement of forces of production toward industry would thus always lead to higher productivity, whereas renouncing industrialization in favor of a specialization in agricultural exports, as the free trade doctrine implied, would lead to dependency : “*Les théories qui, sous prétexte de division du travail et de spécialisation de la production recommandent aux nations d’employer leur nouvelles forces et l’excédent de leur population à des activités inférieures d’une productivité faible, sont les théories du regrès et de la*

déchéance nationale” (Manoilescu, 1929, 184). Profitability, the *individual gain* of the capitalist entrepreneurs behind such unequal exchanges, should then be clearly distinguished from productivity, the total *national gain* achieved in a branch of production. The ideological implications of postulating a necessary identity between individual and national gain, Manoilescu observed, were particularly detrimental to agricultural countries, where the high revenues of capitalists joined the country’s inherent low productivity in keeping down the national gain.

Manoilescu’s doctrine on corporatism is centered on the *social functionality* of the different *occupations* (not classes) which should be *vertically integrated* to produce a *functional political order*, i.e. an order *erving the national interest*.

Although Manoilescu acknowledged his debt to the model of corporatist organization that Emile Durkheim elaborated as a solution to anomie (Durkheim, 1967), his own approach added to the social and economic components of the corporatist conception a cultural and political dimension – corporatism, for its Romanian theoretician, was “the political form which our nationalism acquires” (Manoilescu, 1933, 8). Nevertheless, on more than one occasion, he distanced himself from the concrete forms which corporatism took in other parts of Europe, stressing that “pure” corporatism did not involve a subordination of economic corporations to state authority, as was the case in fascist Italy (cf. Manoilescu, 1937, 31), but amounted to an „integral” conception of human society, the nation, and national goals with respect to social, economic, and political dimensions.

“The transformation of our national economy has occurred exclusively under the impact of the private interests of the foreign or the local bourgeoisie. The true national interests have not only not been determinant, but they have not even been exactly known, because, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we guided ourselves by means of the false and

tendentious science of the West.” (Manoilescu, 1942, 83)

In a radical break with both Marxist and Weberian criteria for the definition of social classes according to *class interest*, the Romanian corporatist thus emphasized *functionality* – understood in terms of historical responsibility and social duty – as a decisive feature, on account of which Romania’s bourgeoisie could and should be brought “before the nation’s court of justice” (Manoilescu, 1942, 119). From the corporatist perspective which he espoused and which he viewed as a resurgent aspect in the 1930s European reversion to mercantilist practices and to communal, neo-corporate forms of social organization, the functions and “missions” of the bourgeoisie could only be measured by the extent to which they had been implemented in the “integral service of the nation” (Manoilescu, 1942, 117), i.e., from the perspective of the local history in which they were embedded.

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