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Hijacked Modernization: Romanian Political Culture in the 20th Century**

Abstract: In the context of this article, political culture consists of the prevalent elite social representations of the political order and the norms derived from them. The article discusses the legacy of economic underdevelopment and the unfinished process of modernization of the Romanian society as the major determinants of contemporary Romanian political culture. A look at the evolution of the most important social representations held by intellectuals throughout the 20th century may provide some clues about the internal reasons for the failure of modernization.

Does Political Culture Matter? Two Warnings

Historian Barrington-Moore Jr. once stated, in reference to small East European countries, that they should not even be included in discussions on social and political change, as "the decisive causes of their politics lie outside their own boundaries".¹ Popular wisdom and refined econometrics alike have long since established that geography, in other words, the foreign environment, is the most important determinant of East European politics. Geography is a proxy for many things, ranging from the Churchill-Stalin key for power distribution in Europe to trade and the inflow of foreign investment,² substantiating the warning that "geographical cohesion overpowers indigenous capa-

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¹ Barrington MOORE, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

² For more detailed accounts, see Jeffrey KOPSTEIN/David REILLY, »Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Post-Communist World«, in: *World Politics*, 53 (2003) 1, pp. 1–37; Martha de MELO/Cevdet DENIZER/Alan GELB/Stoyan TENEV, *Circumstance and Choice: The Role of Initial Conditions and Policies in Transition Economies*, World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper Series, No. 1866, October 1997, available at <<http://www.worldbank.org/research/inequality/SAIS/lecture5-6/demelo.pdf>>; Herbert KITSCHOLT, »Post-Communist Economic Reform: Causal Mechanism and Concomitant Properties«, paper prepared for the 2001 Annual Meeting of the APSA, San Francisco.

bilities".³ In fact, when proposing a classification of political cultures based on anthropological theory two decades ago, Aaron Wildavsky used Romania as the sole example of one of the four categories, the "fatalistic" culture.⁴ Its inspiration lies in the Romanian folk ballad, *Mioritza*.

Mioritza is the story of a shepherd who reacts to the news that his envious fellows plan to kill him in order to steal his herd with perfect indifference, preparing for death and a cosmic wedding with the Universe. Wildavsky cross-tabulates the strength of group boundaries with the nature of prescripts binding the groups. Whether prescriptions are strong and groups are weak – so that decisions get frequently made for them by external factors – the result is what he calls a "fatalistic" political culture,⁵ dominated by distrust on all levels. The individual citizen sees no point in exercising his "free will"; nor does he have enough trust in his fellow citizens to be open to collective action. A country marked by these behavioral patterns will invariably fail to fully exploit its freedom as well as its power potential. Wildavsky really completes the trip from gloom to doom, making bad history eternal through the creation of "fatalism" as a permanent cultural trait. Any reference to performance could then be reduced to the *bon mot* of French, Romanian-born essayist Emil Cioran upon hearing the news of a big earthquake in Bucharest: "*Nous sommes mal placés!*" And any talk of political culture would become superfluous.

Romania belongs to the part of the world where foreign influence is the most important agent of political change. In 1940 the constitutional monarchy was reversed by domestic fascism due less to the strength of the Iron Guard than to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The pact deprived Romania of important territories, which dealt a mortal blow to the legitimacy of the monarch. The subsequent communist regime was entirely Soviet sponsored; the fall of Ceaușescu, who was betrayed by the Army and the *Securitate* in front of a yet manageable popular uprising in late 1989, has also been attributed to a plot led by Moscow. Political culture matters only when people are free to choose the form of government they prefer, and for Romanians this is a brand new experience. Only after 1989 has political culture started to matter more, as the whole world reached a degree of liberalization without precedent.

Therefore, when addressing specific features of contemporary Romanian political culture, one must issue a twofold warning: (1) such an approach

³ KITSCHOLT, »Post-Communist Economic Reform«, p. 9.

⁴ Aaron WILDAVSKY, »Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation«, in: *American Political Science Review*, 81 (March 1987) 1, pp. 3–22.

⁵ Cf. Michael SHAFIR, *Romania. Politics, Economics and Society: Political Stagnation and Stimulated Change*, London: Frances Printer (Publishers) Ltd., 1985, pp. 133–134.

must *de facto* be confined to elites and intellectual history; any attempt at generalizing to society as a whole must be dismissed as a methodological mistake; and (2), the importance of both elite and mass culture comes only *third* after the two major intercorrelated determinants: foreign influence and economic development.

Survey data testify to the inadequacy of "cultural legacies" as factors accounting for mass attitudes towards democracy and post-communist regimes. The countries of South-Eastern Europe are in fact not different to those of Central Europe when it comes to democratic orientation and its correlates. Classic cultural determinist theory as synthesized by Huntington⁶ thus finds no support in public opinion data.⁷ Explanatory models of interpersonal trust also show the *Mioritza* argument is shabby: both interpersonal trust and trust in the outside world are related to development more strongly than to psychological or cultural factors. To conclude: the legacy of economic underdevelopment is the major determinant in contemporary Romania. Cultural legacies also matter, but not to the same extent; and of the cultural legacies at hand, the communist legacy clearly is the most important.

However, we have a lead to follow through all the disruptions in traditions, institutions and ordinary life in 20th century Romania. This is the unfinished process of modernization of the Romanian society, despite successive state projects specifically addressing this aspect, from the liberal bourgeois to the communist state. The failure of this political project is also to a great extent determined by external factors, but less so than democratization. Internal opposition to modernization has always been bigger, especially at the level of the intelligentsia. The implications of "modernization" have also been subject to bitter disputes. Strange as it seems, in contemporary Romania this debate goes on in very similar terms to the debate of interwar times, by-passing the Communist interlude, and here we do indeed find an element of indisputable continuity justifying a political culture approach.

In the context of this article, political culture therefore consists of the prevalent elite social representations of the political order and the norms derived from them. This definition is quite different from the cross-sectional societal pattern of aggregate cognition, affect and behavior on politics advocated

⁶ Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

⁷ Richard ROSE/William MISHLER/Christian HAERPFER, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998; Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI/Denisa MINDRUTA, »Was Huntington Right? Testing Cultural Legacies and the Civilization Border«, in: *International Politics*, 39 (June 2002) 2, pp. 193–213.

by Almond and Verba.⁸ By social representations I understand "not simply widespread beliefs, but theories or branches of knowledge in their own right that are used for the discovery and organization of reality", organizing principles that provide common reference points for individuals and communities at a given point in time, thus enabling communication among members of a community by providing a code for naming and classifying the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history.⁹ A look at the evolution of the most important social representations held by intellectuals throughout the 20th century may provide some clues about internal reasons behind the failure of the modernization project. There have also been clashes among various competing social representations and these are precisely the ones we plan to follow.

Romania had merely three decades of state building after becoming independent from the Ottoman Empire when the First World War began; and the challenges that the war and the post-war situation brought about were tremendous. One challenge was that of democracy in a post-war society made up of large masses of peasants deprived of political rights and a small group of landowners who enjoyed the monopoly of political participation. The second challenge was that of multi-culturalism, that is the integration of sizable ethnic minorities (27 percent of total population), partly a by-product of the Peace Treaties of Trianon and Versailles and the incorporation into Romania of neighboring territories mainly but not exclusively inhabited by Romanians in accordance with these. The third challenge was development: overwhelmingly rural Romania produced much less than it spent, and, after a few years, the continuous deficits had added up to a considerable national debt. I would like to introduce a fourth challenge, closely related to the first three, and perhaps the key to all of them, the modernization of the state itself; the passage from the state as expression of a peasant society to a modern legal state.¹⁰ Most of the social representations of the intelligentsia were defined in connection with, and more often than not, in opposition to these modernization endeavors imposed from top down by an enlightened, Western oriented oligarchy grouped around the constitutional monarchy. This oligarchy held politi-

⁸ Gabriel A. ALMOND/Sidney VERBA, *Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

⁹ Serge MOSCOVICI, *The Invention of Society: Psychological Explanations for Social Phenomena*, Cambridge, MA: Polity Press 1993;
Willem DOISE/Alain CLÉMENCE/Fabio LORENZI-CIOLDI, *The Quantitative Analysis of Social Representations*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf 1993.

¹⁰ Kenneth JOWITT (ed.), *Social Change in Romania, 1860-1940. A Debate on Development in a European Nation*, Berkeley: University of California, Institute for International Studies, 1978.

cal power for most of modern Romania's history until the advent of the Second World War, except for brief moments; and despite many setbacks, it has incessantly pursued a modernization project mainly inspired by the French model. The remarkable continuity of this project, despite the controversy surrounding it, may be attributed to the uneven distribution of power, which allowed this group enjoying the consent of the monarch to carry on with little investment in building some societal consensus over the target pursued. Whenever Romanian Liberals pushed ahead with democratization as a natural consequence of their overall modernization project, they discovered that widespread participation was very likely to endanger the modernization project itself. On several occasions, this prompted the Liberals to make a full stop and go back on their commitments in an attempt to regain control of the process, which in turn generated strong anti-Liberal resentments leading up to a confrontation with, at times an outright rejection of, the modern political system that had emerged after the adoption of the franchise.¹¹

Most of the inter-war discourse that I will present in this paper has therefore never become part of the official discourse;¹² but its radical taint is at least partly due to its development in contrast to, or dissent from, an ever-patronizing liberal bourgeois oligarchy running the country. Many radical voices in this discourse also had roots in Western Europe, where radical rightwing ideology in various forms and shapes had been growing constantly since the end of the First World War. Romanians were part of the European intellectual environment; Romanian doctoral students were generally enrolled in West European institutions of higher learning, most notably in Paris, Berlin and Vienna, and translations from *en vogue* authors such as Oswald Spengler or Georges Sorel flourished in Bucharest.¹³

Modernization as Rape

The social representation of modernization as a violation of the traditional self has a history going far beyond the First World War, to the late 19th century conservative group of "Junimea" [Youth], which opposed imported Western

¹¹ The Iron Guard, an Orthodox nationalist movement with grass root support, was the very embodiment of this kind of anti-system opposition.

¹² Except for the short-lived government of the Iron Guard between September 1939 and November 1940.

¹³ Equally influential were the French Catholic right with authors like Charles Maurras and Hermann Keyserling, the White Russian radical right (A. Soloviev, Léon Chestov [Lev Shestov], Nikolai A. Berdiaev) and Italian fascists like Benito Mussolini. Edmund Husserl's and Martin Heidegger's classes were also frequented by students in philosophy. Carl Schmitt seems to have been largely unknown.

institutions and considered them "forms without content". Later on, both Nicolae Iorga, the most influential intellectual of the generation of founding fathers, and his disciple Nae Ionescu, who was to become a professor and intellectual advisor of Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran, resented the import of modern political institutions and were skeptical not only about the compatibility of Romanian traditional society with these novelties but also, and more importantly, about their suitability in the Romanian setting. Ionescu was completely against any form of Westernization. Iorga, a historian, was more moderate, and confined himself to warning that domestic institutions must not be overlooked. He was very critical towards the two modern Romanian constitutions, the Constitution of 1866 and that of 1923, and to the idea of importing ready made constitutions altogether. Iorga warned that such imitations made in total disregard of unwritten laws embedded in Romanian society would remain confined to paper.

*The 1886 Constitution was made by an excellent tailor, used, however, to cut clothes for different bodies than ours, so we have lived since with our body somewhere and the foreign suit elsewhere [...] with no other effect on our political life than more hypocrisy.*¹⁴

While this is an obvious exaggeration and specific policies should have helped the institutions defined by the 1866 Constitution to become engrained in Romanian soil, Iorga hit a sensitive nerve when drawing attention to the distance between formal and informal rules. His point was that elaboration of formal rules in ignorance, or disregard, of unwritten traditional rules already at work would compromise the Romanian project of political modernization from the very beginning. The traditional ideas that he considered part of the unwritten Romanian "Constitution" over a variety of past regimes were the national character of the state, the limits to and defense of a "traditional" territory and above all the state as an expression of the peasant society, with the direct links between the ruler and the ruled and without the oligarchy serving as an intermediary. Iorga strongly disliked the 1866 Constitution, which practically excluded all peasants, on grounds of both illiteracy and poverty, as he clearly idealized peasant society and was instrumental in the adoption of the

¹⁴ N[icolae] IORGA: »Istoricul constituției românești« [History of the Romanian Constitution], in: *Noua Constituție a României (23 de prelegeri publice organizate de Institutul Social Român)* [The New Constitution of Romania (23 Public Lectures Organized by the Romanian Social Institute)], București: Cultura Națională, s.a.; reprint under the title *Constituția din 1923 în dezbaterile contemporanilor* [The Romanian Constitution of 1923 Debated by Contemporaries], București: Humanitas, 1990, pp. 25–53, pp. 25–26.

franchise during the war. This mixture of idealization of the traditional rural society with an emphasis on large popular participation and dislike of elites is typical of Iorga's overall populist doctrine. And on many points he was right: imposed introduction of many new institutions, with little by way of internal synchronization among themselves and not followed up by sensible policies of implementation, was already generating a culture of omitting laws. This was later to help Romanians endure the communist institutional revolution, but nowadays it seriously hinders the process of adjusting to the new European institutions. This phenomenon is typical of forced modernization. Imperfect and flawed pieces of legislation are "corrected" in the sense that people do not abide by them and the state does not enforce them.¹⁵ In Iorga's own words:

*Let it be a lesson to all reformers of today and tomorrow [...] to all those who come to the government with pockets full of bills which get passed but are never applied, because the poor nation lives much better on its customs than on all the laws; it turns a good law into a custom, leaving aside the bad ones.*¹⁶

This argument was pushed further to be radically transformed by Nae Ionescu or his students Mircea Vulcănescu and Emil Cioran, who portrayed modernization as the annihilation, either good or evil, of the Romanian "essence". The father of this argument is Ionescu, the most charismatic intellectual leader of 20th century Romania. For him, the rejection of modernization is only a part of an overall refusal of the West understood as "Catholicism"; it is an active and transforming orientation towards the outside world that he identified as alien to the Orthodox spirit.

All the falsity and artificiality of Romanian culture in the last one hundred years is the result of the attempts to transplant [...] in the Moldo-Wallachian realities some Western forms of life which had grown organically there [...]. The pre-assumption behind this was the belief that cultural or spiritual forms can be transmitted and therefore imported. [...] a fundamental error everywhere verified as such [...].

¹⁵ Ledeneva describes contemporary Russia in similar terms. See Alena LEDENEVA, *Unwritten Rules: How Russia Really Works*, London: Centre for European Reform, 2001

¹⁶ Nicolae IORGA, »'Sat și oraș'. Conferință ținută de Nicolae Iorga, la Institutul Social Român, in ciclul "Sat și Oraș" la 2 mai 1927« ['Village and Town', Conference at the Romanian Social Institute, 2 May 1927], in: *Sociologia românească*, (1943) 1-6; quotation from the reprint in: Iordan CHIMET (ed.), *Dreptul la memorie* [The Right to Memory], Vols. I-IV, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1992-1993, Vol. IV: *Certitudini, îndoieli, confruntări* [Certainties, Doubts, Confrontations], Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1993, pp. 90-106, p. 93.

*Being Romanian is a natural state, a balanced state of existence, generating through life development specific forms [...]. Being Romanian means to have a certain mould from which certain kinds of attitudes or behavior grow with necessity. [...] our will cannot change these circumstances, because we cannot naturally surpass ourselves unless ceasing to be ourselves altogether.*¹⁷

Ionescu denounced therefore the creator of the Romanian modern state, Liberal Ion Brătianu, who ruled the country, more or less transparently, for two decades, from the arrival of the first Hohenzollern (to whom he was instrumental in persuading to accept to become the first King of Romania in 1866) through the achievement of independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877 until he resigned in 1888. These decades of semi-authoritarian rule were used to build the foundations of a modern state, including a system of compulsory education and the building of a railroad system which would spread, in King Carol's words, "the feeling of belonging to one nation of Moldovans and Wallachians", a modern financial system and a state bureaucracy.

"Ion Brătianu, the father built our modern state. Is this state indeed *Romanian*?" Ionescu interrogated.

*If it is, then of course Brătianu was indeed a Romanian. What if our state, however, is not really Romanian? Then things change: Brătianu was a "good Romanian", in other words he had the best intentions for our people and state, but a "Romanian" he was not. A seed that ends up as wheat cannot be referred to as oats.*¹⁸

For Ionescu's pupils of the self-proclaimed "New Generation", modernization meant therefore a denial of the Romanian self. In the words of Vulcănescu:

On the one hand, an organic civilization, a natural one, of the village, emerged who knows how, from neighborhood of lands, from kinship and common life together, from the passage from father to son of language, habit, secrets of knowledge and norms of behavior [...].

On the other hand, an artificial, hallucinating, unnatural one, emerged out of the thirst for material speculation and profit [...] a civilization of paranoids based on Man's pretence that he is Godlike and his adoration of the Golden Calf, his imagining he can master Nature, remaking it after the patterns of his own thought [...].

¹⁷ Nae IONESCU, »A fi 'bun român'« I-V, [To Be a 'Good Romanian', series of columns I-V), in: *Cuvântul*, 6 (1930) 1987, 1; 6 (1930) 1988, 1; 6 (1930) 1991, 1; 7 (1930) 1995, 1; 7 (1930) 2033, 1; quotation from the reprint in: Mircea ELIADE (ed.), *Roza vânturilor 1926–1933* [Rose of the Winds, 1926–1933], București: Editura Cultura Națională, 1937, pp. 197, 297.

¹⁸ IONESCU, »A fi 'bun român'«, *ibid.* p. 297.

*Here and nowhere else the terms of the debate lie: either the Ilk or the confusion of Babel.*¹⁹

Vulcănescu rejected both Marx and Spencer, together with the idea that the world experiences a process of "evolution", the law-bound, compulsory succession of one phase after another. Therefore, he doubted that urban civilization would replace the rural. Vulcănescu openly spoke of the need to embrace "anti-modernism" programmatically and regain a new "economic Middle-Age", which would allow a "return to the village". In his way, he was anticipating post-materialism. Though older than those in the self-proclaimed "New Generation", culture philosopher, Lucian Blaga, shared their view that prehistory is not a phase before history, but something of "permanence". Blaga agrees with Vulcănescu when describing the rural world not a stage of evolution, but as a civilization in its own right, which can and should survive on its own terms.

*The difference between village and town [...] the village is not placed within a mechanical geography, unlike the town it is not subject to the mechanical determinism of space [...] it is placed in the centre of the world and fades out into myth. The village is integrated with a cosmic destiny, a total life trajectory with nothing left beyond its horizon [...].*²⁰

Others went even further in denouncing the modernization, such as the novelist Liviu Rebreanu, who had nevertheless depicted rural life in realist terms:

*Our ridiculous façade, of "civilization", of our towns we find "European". We do not want to see the gap growing between the urban caricature of the West and the soul of our villages, the real Romanian soul [...]. We always rush to import brand new foreign forms imagining that such is the way to prompt the "civilization" of Romania [...]. One hundred years of such imports has cut our appetite to continue the experiment.*²¹

¹⁹ Mircea M. VULCĂNESCU, »Puțină sociologie« [A Bit of Sociology], in: *Dreapta*, Vol. II, s.a., nr. 4; quotation from the reprint in: CHIMET (ed.), *Dreptul la memorie* (above fn. 16), vol. IV, pp. 151–158, pp. 151–152.

²⁰ Lucian BLAGA, »Elogiul satului românesc«, Discurs de recepție la Academia Română, la 5 iunie 1937 ["Praise for the Romanian Village", Inaugural Speech at the Romanian Academy], in: Academia Română, *Discursuri de recepție* [Inaugural Speeches], No. 71, București, 1937, pp. 3–5, 12–16; quotation from the reprint in: CHIMET (ed.), *Dreptul la memorie* (above fn. 16), Vol. IV, pp. 127–139, p. 129.

²¹ Liviu REBREANU, »Europeism sau românism?« [Europeanism or Romanianism], in: *România*, 1 (31 Ianuarie 1924), 88; quotation from the reprint in: *Ibid.*, pp. 225–227, p. 226.

Young Emil Cioran, who considered populism "a shame", denounced it in violent terms. Had Romania followed the path of anti-modernism preached by populists, he wrote, "Romania would have been today like Asia, a land to be visited by ethnographic expeditions".²² Unlike the rest of the "New Generation", strongly influenced by populism, Cioran saw modernization as a necessary rape and considered that the regime must "squeeze" the Romanian nation to cut its "unhistorical sleep" and force it into transformation and history. He was also quite unique in his generation, which embraced a sort of fundamentalist Christian Orthodoxy, to look for a shortcut to history in a massive conversion to Catholicism, his professor, Nae Ionescu, having managed to persuade him that Orthodoxy and modernization were incompatible.

West Is West, East Is East

At the end of the First World War, fought by Romanians almost to the destruction of their state side by side with the *Entente*, Romania enjoyed the full support of France at the Trianon and Versailles Peace Conference. This made it possible for Romania to negotiate a deal fulfilling the political and military objectives long pursued by the Brătianu family: unification of all Romanian-speaking lands, including Transylvania. Romania had lost over half a million soldiers in the war, roughly 15 % of the total population, and the social structure of the old Kingdom was shaken to the bone by land reform and political liberalization. A couple of years later, after unification with the former Habsburg provinces of Transylvania and Bukovine, and with former Tsarist Moldova, Romania entered the age of "Greater Romania" and became a large European country, doubling its population to 18 millions. Gratitude towards France and the need for elite strata large enough to manage modernization on this massive scale led to a flow of students into Western countries. Paris alone counted over 3000 Romanian students by 1920. The economic crisis of the early thirties and the disappointment with the agrarian reform (which had a negative impact on the economic performance, land being divided into slots too small for a profitable exploitation) gradually gave birth to a counter-reaction. As summarized by a contemporary liberal author:

*We finally have a "querelle des anciens et des modernes" [...].*²³

²² Marta PETREU, *Un trecut deocheat sau "Schimbarea la față a României"* [A Troubled Past or "The Transfiguration of Romania"], Cluj: Editura Apostrof, 1999, pp. 141, 227.

²³ Mihai RALEA: »Europeism și tradiționalism« [Europeanism and Traditionalism], in: *Viața Românească*, 16 (3, Martie 1924) 3, quotation from the reprint in: CHIMET

The same with Russia, our country, at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, faces out of the sudden two ways forward [...] through the Western or the Eastern model, through consciousness, civilization and reason, or through Byzantine Orthodoxy, illegitimately and arbitrarily turned into autochthonous nationalism. For seventy years now the same problem has surfaced again and again in every decade.²⁴

The Liberals believed that the difference between East and West was simply one of development, due to different historical evolution. It would have been difficult for the Brătianu family to think otherwise considering that they had ruled the country for two generations through the independence war with the Ottoman Empire, the creation of the nation state and the adoption of the first two modern constitutions. These steps had taken almost 50 years, in which literacy and urban development literally exploded. Whether left or right, their opponents, however, believed that structural differences separated the West from the East. Nae Ionescu, as we have seen, reduced the antinomy to the opposition between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Nationalists and pro-Westerners alike identified Orthodox Christianity as the heart of the matter.

[There is] an antagonism between modern culture and Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy did not embody the capacity to create a culture in the earthly sphere of the daily life. It is no coincidence, nor is it due to inauspicious historical circumstances, that Orthodox people have not been at the forefront in promoting modern culture. If it abides truthfully by the Orthodox law, an Orthodox people either resists modern culture or is at best not interested in it. Such a nation simply stands by its religion but with no contact with one another, and without understanding [...] the history of Orthodoxy is a series of opportunities lost beyond recovery.²⁵

The author of these lines considered it therefore "too late" to switch from Orthodoxy to other historical forms of Christianity. Such a choice had been offered in the past and turned down and it now belonged to the realm of lost opportunities. Other authors, such as literary critic Eugen Lovinescu went even further blaming Orthodoxy for most of Romania's historical failures. Nationalists such as Nae Ionescu, Nichifor Crainic and most of the "New Generation" were, however, exulting Orthodoxy. Crainic wrote that the Western civilization might very well have attained its limit, while in the Christian East

(ed.), *Dreptul la memorie* (above fn. 16), Vol. IV, pp. 231–233, p. 231.

²⁴ IDEM, »Precizări« [Rectifications], in: *Kalende*, 1 (1929) 3–4; quotation from the reprint in: *Ibid.*, pp. 317–319, p. 317.

²⁵ Mircea FLORIAN, »Cultura română și ortodoxia« [Romanian Culture and Orthodoxy], in: *Ideea Europeană*, (1 Decembrie 1926) 194, quotation from the reprint in: *Ibid.*, pp. 259–272, pp. 271–272.

"the future is present".²⁶ The leading representative of the self-proclaimed "New Generation", historian of religion, Mircea Eliade considered that the most important project, the national one, had been accomplished by the previous generation in 1918, so as for him, the only thing left to do was an inner revolution, the creation of the "New Man". The New Man was necessarily Orthodox, other confessions having lost their purity and spiritual power throughout history.

*[Here lies] the destiny of modern Romania. A country and a people living entirely under the sign of the Cross [...]. What the peoples of the West did not achieve or were unable to preserve let us try and achieve. If we can invoke a mission of Romania, a New Man created by Romanians, here it lies, in this collective drive for holiness, for total Christianity.*²⁷

Emil Cioran saw another difference between the West, and its multitude of cultures, and Romania representing just one of them, and a minor one at that. He therefore called upon Romanians to awake from their sleep or vanish from history. His Hamlet style argument was that Romania should be a major cultural actor or not be at all. Cioran was an adept of Spengler, and as such believed in the "eight great cultures" and their inevitable conflict every now and then, a discourse re-launched and revitalized by Samuel Huntington, and extremely popular in Cioran's youth.²⁸ His dream was that Romania would become the next great culture, and being a self-centered personality of formidable proportions he did not hesitate to reveal the underlying motives:

*In a great culture the individual saves himself; furthermore, he is always saved. The individual is lost only in small culture.*²⁹

The problem with Cioran's delusions of grandeur was that Hitler was the only political actor he considered capable enough to take the lead in such a historical leap.

²⁶ Nichifor CRAINIC, »Parsifal«, in: *Gândirea*, 3 (1924) 8–10; quotation from the reprint in: *Ibid.*, pp. 44–53, p. 53.

²⁷ Mircea ELIADE, »De unde începe misiunea României?« [Where Does Romania's Mission Start?], in: *Vremea*, 10 (28 Februarie 1937) 477, p. 3, quotation from IDEM, *Textele "legionare" și despre "românism"* [The "Iron Guard" and "Romanianism" Papers], Cluj–Napoca: Dacia, 2001, p. 48.

²⁸ The relationship between Cioran's early works and Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Vol. 1, Wien 1918, Vol. 2, München 1922, was substantiated by Marta PETREU in her book *Un trecut deocheat sau "Schimbarea la față a României"* (above fn. 22).

²⁹ Emil CIORAN, *Schimbarea la față a României* [The Transfiguration of Romania], București: Editura Vremea, 1936, p. 32.

These arguments have resounded again and again after 1989, when a sort of religious revival took over the Romanian intellectual life. The communist regime was tolerant and to some extent even supportive towards the Orthodox Church, but the fundamentalist Orthodox laic tradition was censored, due both to its doctrine of prevalence of spiritual over material life, and to its historical association with the Iron Guard. Despite this fact, intellectuals after 1989 rediscovered Orthodox fundamentalism, the works of Nae Ionescu and Mircea Vulcănescu were reprinted in mass editions together with translations from the White Russian tradition, A. Soloviev, L. Chestov, V. Volkoff, N. Berdiaev. The main Romanian publisher, Humanitas, came under attack from the French intellectual Left for these reprints,³⁰ but the publishing house was merely adapting to the market trend. Fundamentalist civil society groups, such as *Anastasia*, founded their own publishing houses, which became extremely successful living on this type of literature. This led to the insulation of many anti-communist intellectuals from the debate of the early nineties about transforming Romania into a modern liberal democracy. Painter Sorin Dumitrescu, leader of *Anastasia*, said it plainly at a press conference in 1990 after having founded with other intellectuals the first would-be civic movement in Romania, baptized the *Civic Alliance*. Harassed by journalists with questions related to the immediate debate on the new Constitution and economic choices facing post-communist Romania, Dumitrescu declared that "The questions by the media do not correspond to our obsessions".³¹ Christian organizations such as ASCOR and the Foundation *Anastasia* pushed the often silent or inert Orthodox Church to take a public stand in matters such as homosexuality. After years of silence on the matter, Patriarch Teoctist finally gave in to pressure by ASCOR and by other civil society organizations to the point of using a public address to the Parliament as a platform for an appeal to the MPs vote in favor of preserving the Communist Penal Code article branding consensual homosexual sex a felony. The anti-Communist intellectuals of *Anastasia* also made an important contribution towards restoring the legitimacy of nationalism and fundamentalism, preached by former communist prelates, who had cultivated a rather low profile in 1990. By and large, the interference of civil society, initially inspired by a desire to help the Church reform itself, finally

³⁰ The debate included also some Jewish non-French authors, such as Michael Schafir, but it revolved around the polemic between Gabriel Liiceanu, director of Humanitas and his defenders and a few French journalists from *Le Monde* and *L'Esprit Moderne*. Michael SHAFIR, »The Man They Love to Hate«, in: *East European Jewish Affairs*, 31 (2000) 1, pp. 60–81, provides a summary of the debate.

³¹ Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, *România, mod de folosire* [Romania, a User's Guide], Bucureşti: Editura Staff, 1994.

helped the Church to return to its anti-modern, anti-Western position of the interwar era.

A much milder position within the framework of the same ideological heritage is to be found around the magazine *Cuvântul* (originally the name of a rightwing newspaper run by Ionescu until its suppression by King Carol 2nd), where essayist, Dan Ciachir, had a regular Ionescu-style "Orthodox column" throughout the nineties, while chief editor Ioan Buduca reinterpreted contemporary events such as the Malta meeting between Bush and Gorbachev into Ionescu's conceptual framework. In addition to these anti-Communists, a large number of communist agitators had reconverted to nationalism already during the last ten years of Ceaușescu's rule and are nowadays drawing upon Ionescu and his ideology for their scribbling, be it new nationalistic party programs, editorials or books.

The influence of the interwar fundamentalist Right made itself felt well beyond the overt political discourse during the first post-communist decade. The *Museum of the Romanian Peasant* [Muzeul Țăranului Român], initiated and designed by painter Horia Bernea, himself the son of a leading Iron Guard intellectual retrospectively fulfilled Eliade's programmatic vision of "a people living entirely under the sign of the Cross". Bernea returned the former museum of the Communist Party to its original destination as a folk art museum, blowing it up into a glorification of peasant Christian metaphysics very much along the lines of Blaga. Thanks to his artistic vision and dedicated team, the museum eventually became a faithful image of traditional orthodoxy as pictured by interwar intellectuals but a not-so-true, idealistic, representation of peasant imagery and life. Bernea's personal qualities – he was a charismatic figure and among the few intellectuals not tainted by collaboration with the communist regime – helped to make the museum of folk art into a success story. This museum completely eclipsed the *Museum of the Romanian Village* [Muzeul National al Satului "Dimitrie Gusti"], designed by the old Romanian Social Institute, even though the latter features the most extraordinary collection of old houses, mills and churches brought from all over Romania to Bucharest on the occasion of an interwar exhibition. This testifies the infatuation with tradition, Orthodoxy and peasant life among Romanian post-communist intellectuals.

Discourse and Practice of Survival: The Status Society

It would be wrong to disregard entirely the classification by Wildavsky of Romanian political culture as "fatalistic". Repeated subjugation to foreign intervention has obviously taken its toll on political behavior. The "survival society"

even reached into the philosophical realm to become invoked by Blaga as an alternative form of civilization, not the absence thereof:

A minor culture, born out of improvisation and spontaneity, as well as from a total lack of will for eternity stands a better chance to last for thousands of years in its stillness [...]. While a major culture, emerging out of the thirst to defeat both space and time, is due to its dynamism, much more exposed to catastrophes and extinction [...].³²

The Romanian elites adjusted to the new rules of the game with amazing flexibility for two reasons. One was repression of dissent: in Greater Romania communists, and at times fascists as well were repressed mercilessly. Nae Ionescu died after long imprisonment, Eliade was in a concentration camp for Iron Guards; Iron Guard leaders were strangled in prison by their guards; during their brief government many anti-Fascists, including Iorga, a national patriarch, were assassinated or executed. The communists arrested first and foremost the liberal students who rallied for free elections, and found ways of accommodating many former Fascist characters and all-time opportunists. Besides the intimidation caused by political violence, often practiced by the state itself, the second explanation for "survivalism" lies in the structure of the Romanian society as a "status society", a collectivistic hierarchical society with limited value placed on individual freedom. Romania has passed from a peasant to a communist version of a status society. Weber originally defined status societies as societies dominated by status groups and ruled by convention rather than law, and status groups as groups of humans who

in the context of some association effectively claim a special evaluation of their status and possibly also attain certain monopolies on the grounds of their status [...]. The firm appropriation of opportunities, especially of opportunities for domination always tend to result in the formation of status groups. The formation of status groups in turn always tends to result in monopolistic appropriation of powers of domination and sources of income [...]. Hence, a status society always creates [... the] elimination of individual's free choice [... and] hinders the formation of a free market.³³

Of course, there are no ideal-types in real life, but Romania, by 1900, with roughly 85 percent illiterate peasants and a strong landowners' party, plus the strong communist regime, established after the Second World War, a regime

³² Lucian BLAGA, »Permanența preistoriei« [The Permanence of Prehistory], in: *Saeculum*, September-October 1943, Sibiu; quotation from the reprint in: CHIMET (ed.), *Dreptul la memorie* (above fn. 16), Vol. IV, pp. 139–150, p. 139.

³³ Max WEBER, *Economy and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 177–180 (section on Charisma and Institution Building).

which evolved from Stalinism to sultanistic totalitarianism, comes very close to the status society model at many points in time. The specification is necessary because the concept of freedom itself is quite meaningless in such a society. The government is not the sole actor that infringes upon individual freedom, and in many cases its influence is indirect; the structure of the society itself allows uneven access to freedom of choice according to group membership. Accession to a status group by outsiders is possible, but only within the rules of the game. Treatment by public authorities varies according to the group one belongs to and emancipation is usually sought as a personal endeavor and not as a societal design. Status societies rely on the acquiescence of majorities: status needs social recognition to subsist. The word "freedom" itself is strikingly missing from Romanian political literature except in connection with "national independence". While French and German authors were widely read by Romanian intelligentsia, the Anglo-Saxon individualistic and liberal tradition was almost unknown. Intellectuals were therefore seeking protection and privileges for themselves or their caste from the government, and not more rights on behalf of the whole population. Strange as it may seem, populists such as Iorga or Constantin Stere, seem to have been among the few championing the people. Communism, a version of the same status society itself imposed other status groups and changed the hierarchies, but kept the overall model. Intellectuals who were not sent to prison due to their opposition were included among the privileged. Professional associations were created, such as the Union of Writers, designed as official "status groups".

Democratic theory uses concepts such as individual freedom and political rights, looking at formal institutions as embedded in formal rules such as constitutions, and at informal institutions or procedures. Dahl distinguishes therefore between a substantive and a procedural democracy, Diamond discusses "electoral democracies", while Linz and Stepan speak of consolidated and unconsolidated democracies. These classifications address only distinctions among the political processes in a given society, and not the society itself. I would argue that in the case of rural and post-communist societies it is the nature of the society as a whole that is distinct from a modern society, not just the nature of the *political* society, and this bears importantly on the outcome of the democratization process. Following Jowitt, but from a slightly different perspective, I believe the superimposition of communism on traditional rural societies led to a sort of neo-traditionalist or status societies governed by unwritten rules more than formal laws: the "survival society". Jowitt believed the nature as status societies of East European rural countries prevailed over the communist attempt to reach an impersonal society based on formal rules. I believe that the modernizing nature of communism was doomed from the

start by the essential contradiction embedded in the communist power structure, the legitimation of status groups such as *nomenclatura* enjoying domination monopolies and the enforcement of the hierarchy even over the ideology.

The prevalence of a type of authority, distinct from the specifically modern legal rational type of authority provides the rationale for the claim that rural and communist societies are comparable. Traditional authority prevails in rural societies, while combinations of bureaucratic and charismatic authority gain the upper hand in the communist societies. Both types of societies are, however, far from the legal rational type found even in pre-modern societies on their way towards capitalism.³⁴ From an external, rational point of view, the distribution of legal and social rights within these societies stands out as unpredictable; but from an internal point of view, it stands out as fairly predictable given the patterns of authority generating the unwritten rules. The catchword in such a setting becomes "survival", understood as the quest for the right group to belong to. The intellectual history of 20th century Romania therefore is full of major and outrageous examples of collaboration with non-democratic governments, often practiced by the same characters. Major Romanian writers such as Tudor Arghezi or Mihai Sadoveanu paid homage to and endorsed without any reservations whatsoever every Romanian dictator they lived under, from King Carol 2nd to Stalinist leader Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, and in-between the two of them wartime dictator Marshall Ion Antonescu. With few exceptions, contemporary Romanian intellectuals have followed in their footsteps. By the eighties it was quite exceptional to find a writer who had managed to avoid putting his or her name under any document praising Ceaușescu and his wife Elena. There was a certain degree of freedom, those who refrained from taking part in such manifestations of support for the leader and his wife could publish their work but they remained barred from the officially acknowledged status group and excluded from the privileges – such as trips abroad and holidays in a party dacha – associated with *nomenclatura* standing. The first thing that liberal intellectuals excluded from these groups did in 1990 was to create alternative groups, which preached democracy and liberalism, but reproduced the same pattern under a different ideology. Indeed, most of the intellectual organizations in Romania have arbitrary and non-transparent membership criteria, from the famous *Group for Social Dialogue* [Grupul pentru Dialog Social] to the newly created professional or civic associations of youngsters. Drafting statutes for associations with enough restrictions in them to keep anyone out who does not belong to the clan is a

³⁴ Legal, rather than democratic, culture seems to be the crucial variable for development. This is the conclusion drawn by the World Bank on the basis of a multinational survey.

favorite pastime in town even today. But today intellectuals, who do not act to spread the open society, though loudly professing their liberal faith, have little to say for themselves. During communism the quest for survival reached dramatic heights; even today, it is a subject of contention whether it was just or unjust for intellectuals to remain in academia while colleagues were being fired under Stalinism. The former indirectly contributed towards the legitimization of the new regime, but they also taught new generations, trying to preserve the best of interwar culture. Conversion to the new regime was painful to the point of being equivalent to brainwashing. Such is the famous case of philosopher Constantin Noica, Romania's follower of Heidegger and yet another of Nae Ionescu's disciples. Noica, who had been close to the Iron Guard in his youth, was arrested and imprisoned by the communist regime for writing a book on Hegel together with a whole group of friends. In prison he converted to Marxism-Leninism and wrote a book on it. He was subsequently released from prison; and though never enjoying a position in an official university, he was tolerated as *guru* of sorts for Romanian intellectuals during the 1970s and 1980s and allowed to travel beyond the Iron Curtain. In his case the survival need was internalized, leading to a full perversion of the discourse: Noica was no vulgar opportunist. In his letter to his friend Cioran in Paris, *Lettre à un ami lointain*, he reiterates the argument against liberal democracy and the West of the Iron Guard, this time from a Marxist position.

*We try to be in the position we'd like the West to have as well, that of assertion of our right together with our opponents stating theirs, and not against it [...]. It now seems to us that freedom is not akin to Man, necessity is: that Man stands not against the one denying his freedom, or freedoms, but his necessity, his necessary sense of living, or if you with your freedoms so prefer [...] his necessary non-sense of living.*³⁵

One additional word on the status society is necessary. As Jowitt noticed, personal and not impersonal relations are the norm in this type of society. This makes patterns of survival, as well as alliances or adversities difficult to predict. In impersonal fascist Germany it was exceptional that somebody could escape through the holes in the net. During authoritarianism or even totalitarianism in Romania anything could befall an individual if he belonged to the right group or knew someone of importance, who would intervene in his favor. Both Eliade and Cioran, for instance, managed to leave for the West

³⁵ Alina MUNGIU, *Românii după '89. Istoria unei neînțelegeri* [The Romanians after '89. History of a Misunderstanding], București: Humanitas, 1995, p. 227; [German edition, *Die Rumänen nach '89. Sozio-politische Studie*. Hrsg. im Auftrag der "Friedrich Ebert" Stiftung, Vertretung Rumänien, Reșița: InterGraf-Verlag 1996].

in times when the Iron Guard they both belonged to was subject to persecution going as far as execution of leaders after summary trials. Not only did they leave, but also due to their good position in the literary establishment, they managed to leave as representatives of the regime persecuting the Iron Guard, as cultural diplomats. As their friend, Jewish writer Sebastian noted in his *Diary*, democrat Sebastian and Noica with his strong sense of integrity were likely to be denied such preferential treatment.³⁶ Noica turned down a state award he had coveted for years upon hearing that the Iron Guard leaders were assassinated in prison, while Eliade and Cioran were fleeing to start a new life on the payroll of the state killing their friends. Throughout the communist era, individual bad or good luck stories, stories of preferential treatment or persecution, were determined to an important extent by the same personal factors. Of course, individuals with middle or upper class background would seem to be more likely candidates for persecution by the communist state than those with a solid blue collar background, but this pattern was frequently reversed. Stories of alliance and enmity have often cross political lines. After 1989, an anti-Communist intellectual defended Ceaușescu's Poet Laureate, Adrian Păunescu, on grounds of unbroken personal also when the roles had been reversed. *Securitate* contributed to the mix of right and wrong by recruiting heavily among political prisoners, who, when released, were required to sign a paper committing them to report on any anti-Communist activity they might encounter. When the *Securitate* files were opened in the wake of the revolution of 1989–90, it turned out that most anti-communist party leaders, who had survived prison, had signed such a document and even submitted regular reports.

Women should be mentioned when it comes to cultures of survival, and indeed the best thing that happened after 1989 was the emergence the first stories and books with women characters.³⁷ Their presence in politics had

³⁶ Mihail SEBASTIAN, *Jurnal 1935–1944*, București: Humanitas 1997; [English edition, *Journal 1935-1944: The Fascist Years*, Chicago, IL.: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2000; German edition, "*Voller Entsetzen, aber nicht verzweifelt*" – *Tagebücher 1935–1944*. Berlin: Claassen Verlag, 2005].

³⁷ Many names are worth mentioning here: that of Adriana Georgescu, the secretary of the last non-Communist Prime Minister, imprisoned twice when she was in her early twenties, raped and beaten, after she had spent the war being part of an anti-fascist organization; that of Lena Constante, member of group of leftist intellectuals, who spent years in isolation in a prison cell; that of Elisabeta Rizea and Marina Chirca, peasants who resisted torture and incarceration without giving away the resistance movement; that of Monica Lovinescu, leader in the exile of the anti-communist intellectual resistance, beaten savagely by the *Securitate* in the streets of Paris; and the many wives, sisters and women friends of interwar politicians who followed them into prison.

been a matter of discretion throughout the century. Indeed these dark tales seem to be male only. But it is not so: Communist prisons have done justice to women, and their diaries or memoirs of prison show more courage and resistance than stories of most men. Climbing the steps to his trial, Noica met a girlfriend of his, a high-society young lady who was arrested simply for copying a few pages of his Hegel book. He broke down and cried. She wore a white dress she had ironed in prison by putting it under her mattress. She smiled at him and told him to cheer up: this was a life experience she would not have missed for anything in the world.

Two Different Traditions

The fame after 1989 of the "golden trio" of Eliade, Cioran and Noica gave the wrong impression for the new generations of students that they represent the best and all there is by way of Romanian tradition. Romanian born Hungarian philosopher, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, blames this trend on Romanian liberal intellectuals, most notably Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Pleșu.³⁸ This development cannot be entirely blamed on a few people, however. Something in the lives and works of the "golden generation" must have struck a chord for contemporary Romanian intellectuals to make it "the reference generation", or simply *the* generation. The inclination for the famous rightwing trio of Eliade, Cioran and Noica in post-1989 Romania has deep roots in Romanian contemporary political culture. On one hand, it is the acknowledgment of their unequalled fame as Romanians in the West, and thus a feature of the "survival" culture. On the other hand, their writings strike an essential chord, which was there throughout communist rule, the propensity for "spiritualism" of Romanian intellectuals.

The primary reason behind the cult of Eliade and Cioran in post-1989 Romania is therefore the strongly felt need for recognition by the West among Romanian intellectuals after their isolation in Ceaușescu's Romania. This need was as enormous as their isolation had previously been. Cioran and Eliade became instantaneous reference characters due to their success in the West. Fame is the name of the game. It is not quite fair to blame Romanians for praising right-wingers Eliade and Cioran, who had a very limited reputation when leaving Romania but rose to fame in the West (France, US.) In Romania almost nobody knows that Eliade was close to the Iron Guard in his youth;

³⁸ Gáspár Miklós TAMÁS, »Scrisoare către prietenii mei români« [Letter to My Romanian Friends], in: *Dilema* (București), (16–22.02.2001) 11; first published in Hungarian, »Levél román barátaimhoz«, in: *Élet és Irodalom* (Budapest), 44 (15 December 2000) 50.

and even if they know they care little. If this is important, his Romanian admirers reason, why was it not important for the West that worshiped him? With Emil Cioran it is even simpler, as he was a bright essayist obsessed with Romania's destiny – or lack of it – and European continental culture, writing in French (something all Romanian intellectuals very mistakenly believe they are able to do themselves) and acknowledged in Paris, (the still undisputed intellectual capital of the world in Romania), as the best contemporary stylist of the French language! How not to fall under the spell of such a character? Noica has ensured his posterity by being the master of the most important non-Communist intellectuals such as Liiceanu and Pleșu. Their would-be counterpart and old-time friend, playwright Eugen Ionescu, equally published by Liiceanu, was not an equal success in post-1989 Romania simply because his plays are quite eclectic for the large public: if our students believe they could one day write essays on Romania's fate as Cioran (as Horia-Roman Patapievi, the most famous contemporary Romanian essayist does already), or sci-fi short stories in the tradition of Eliade (a prolific and quite ungifted novelist and short-stories writer in Romanian) none can dream of following in the steps of the French academician and author of the *Rhinoceros*, whose performance is so obviously unique and unrepeatable, if not fully incomprehensible for many.

But Eugen Ionescu may turn out to be not only the most literarily gifted of the four, but from afar the best man. In his letters he complained that:

I have the impression, reading again Blaga, Eliade, etc., that it is the same story always with us: a frantic will to keep apart from the universal, an irreducible hostility towards the West, a new Balkan mythology; nothing else; a province, unable to join greater entities. French culture seems to have had such superficial influence on us.³⁹

The interwar decades featured quite a few other bright intellectual liberals, including Ghita Ionescu, the first Romanian political theorist, later to become the founder of *Government and Opposition* and Professor at Manchester University; Henri H. Stahl, historian and anthropologist, whose work was translated into English by Daniel Chirot and quite a few others.⁴⁰ Their mentor, closer to some than to others, was German-educated sociology professor, Dimitrie Gusti,

³⁹ Eugen IONESCU, Letter of 23 December 1943, in: Maria ALEXANDRESCU VIANU/Vlad ALEXANDRESCU (ed.), *Scrisori către Tudor Vianu* [Letters to Tudor Vianu], Vol. II (1936–49), București: Minerva, 1994.

⁴⁰ Stahl's influence is easier to trace in the work of Americans studying Romania and Eastern Europe (such as Daniel Chirot, Kenneth Jowitt, and Andrew Janos) than in the work of Romanian scholars; other pro-democratic intellectuals worth quoting are Alexandru Ciorănescu, Virgil Madgearu (assassinated by the Iron Guard simply because he was in favour of free trade), Petre Andrei (also assassinated by the Iron Guard), Mihai Ralea, and Mircea Florian.

father of the Romanian school of sociology, which was later destroyed by the Communist regime. In the struggle for the young generation, King Carol 2nd propped up Gusti, a moderate conservative himself, against Nae Ionescu: but as Stahl, who was Gusti's right hand, admitted in a recently published posthumous interview,⁴¹ Gusti never managed to secure his influence except for a small circle of followers, while Nae Ionescu became the most charismatic figure of Romanian academic life ever. The appeals by the Iron Guard for building or restoring old Orthodox churches were far more popular than Gusti's attempt at enrolling students as field operators in his ethnographic studies of Romanian rural society.

And thus we get to the structural cause behind the success of the right-wing writers: the inclination of Romanian intellectuals throughout the century for a sort of mystical chauvinism, as Stahl labeled it. This is only the ostensible display of a more general taste for vague ideas, impossible to prove and drawing more upon creativity than upon analysis, based almost exclusively on generalizations rather than on syntheses, seizing only what is discontinuous and concrete, as Jowitt⁴² once noted, but with the ambition to provide universal theories explaining everything. The idea is to catch up fast with the West, to reach the universal recognition enjoyed by what Cioran, in terms familiar from Spengler's paradigm, refers to as "great" as opposed to "small" cultures. To get from the minor to the great culture one needs, as Cioran once said, "a lot of exaggeration", in other words one needs to overdo things. The main sacrifice required by this ambitious program might be subsumed under the catchword "suppression": suppression of empirical validity and reality checks and suppression of the modest inferential scanning of the social world for answers; and all this to pave the way for speculative answers in line with the theories preferred. This approach had all along been present in the Gusti group: but it never gained the majority then, and fell into complete oblivion later. Blaga was perhaps the first to claim the prevalence of the imaginary over reality, writing "We deeply believe that truth must be expressive – and therefore that myths are more truthful than the reality".⁴³ Eliade had also declared war on positivism and empiricism in the name of intuition and "spirit". Mircea Vulcănescu, the only one with a foot in both camps, as he was both a follower of Gusti and Ionescu, was nevertheless clear on the origins of his

⁴¹ Zoltan ROSTAȘ, *Monografia ca utopie. Interviuri cu Henri H. Stahl* [Monograph as Utopia. Interviews with H. H. Stahl], București: Paideia, 2000.

⁴² JOWITT (ed.), *Social Change in Romania* (above fn. 10).

⁴³ Lucian BLAGA, »Revolta fondului nostru nelatin« [The Revolt of Our Non-Latin Sources], in: *Gândirea*, 1 (1921) 10, p. 181–182; quotation from the reprint in: CHIMET (ed.), *Dreptul la memorie* (above fn. 16), Vol. IV, p. 41–43, p. 41.

social thought, confessing that he was studying rural social reality from "the perspective of the social thought of Nae Ionescu, the idea of structural unity which gave birth to *autochtonism* as a triple movement: Orthodox, Monarchist and Peasant".⁴⁴ The chosen name for the new doctrine that he put forward was "spiritualism" which was deeply linked, as Eliade believed, to Orthodox Christianity. "Not politics, but action", preached Eliade's "*Spiritual Itinerary*" by contrast to the designated enemy, the Liberals, whose political corruption was not seen as a transitory or limited phenomenon, but as a natural consequence of any democratic politics. "Intellect and reason are missing" from this manifesto, one of its critics noted worryingly at the time.⁴⁵ So was freedom, or any social concern. The "spiritualist" revolution was a revolution in the name of death, not social life, and the exultation of death in the Iron Guard's manifestoes or young Eliade's columns carry strong echoes of the fascist "*Viva la Muerte*".

This overall intellectual approach was popular in both political camps, the extreme Left and the extreme Right, and the political support this approach enjoyed makes all the difference in explaining its current prevalence. Both the Iron Guard and the communists preferred talking about an imagined Romania to understanding the real Romania: this would have cut short their social engineering projects, exposing them from the onset as totally unrealistic and their plans as unfit for the society. No social science study worthy of the social sciences was published under communist rule. The social investigation tradition was assassinated, as Stahl noted, and nowadays it has a difficult time trying to restart. Stahl's own experience is worth noting: when in the early eighties he managed to publish a book after years of fighting with the censors: it was a devastating critique of Eliade and Blaga, for their amateur approach to folklore and social representations of Romanian rural society. Eliade taught at Chicago at the time; Blaga had been reintroduced in textbooks after years of exclusion. Stahl's main attack was on Blaga's trilogy of culture, a metaphoric and vague would-be grand theory of Romanianness, claiming that there are unique Romanian features to be found in the Romanian landscape, in Romanian character and in the Romanian folk art in a "style matrix". At the time, Blaga's theory and Eliade's speculations on the myths of the Dacians, the alleged ancestors of the Romanians, were very convenient for Ceaușescu, who had embarked on a policy of repression towards the Hungarian minority based

⁴⁴ Mircea VULCĂNESCU, *Prolegomene sociologice la satul românesc* [Sociological Prolegomena on the Romanian Village], București: Eminescu, 1997, p. 111.

⁴⁵ Șerban CIOCULESCU, »Un "Itinerariu spiritual"« [A "Spiritual Itinerary"], in: *Viață literară*, nr. 86, din 26 mai 1928; quotation from the reprint in: CHIMET (ed.), *Dreptul la memorie* (above fn. 16), Vol. IV, p. 503.

on the dual notion of historical precedent and precedence and who needed to boost the legitimacy of his regime. Blaga and Eliade, the right-wingers, became overnight allies of national-communist intellectuals forging the ideology that later prevailed in Milosevic Serbia and Ion Iliescu's first two terms as President in Romania after 1989.⁴⁶ Stahl, the long time Social-Democrat, found himself isolated and violently attacked by communist-time literary magazines. The bulk of the community endorsed Eliade and Blaga in their open debate with Stahl, who denounced them as misleading and even dangerous by virtue of their polemic refusal to use methods of cultural anthropology, in other words, to put their theories to any test.

The situation perpetuated after 1989: today it still is fashionable to search for grand explanations of the Romanian exceptionalism rather than try to make comparative analyses and deconstruct it. Why would post-1989 intellectuals continue a tradition equally shared by the far right and the far left? One answer is obvious: because most of the intellectuals, after Stahl's death, are those who attacked him two decades ago. Another answer is most scary: because young intellectuals seem to follow more in the steps of Cioran and Eliade than those of Stahl and Gusti, mostly for reasons of cognitive convenience. Why? Well, since it is still easier to bolster one's self-esteem by easy rather than by hard means. The problem remains the lack of self-esteem one seems to get from being a part of a "minor culture" and the great ambition to surpass it fast and with little investment. The golden trio not only managed to achieve some fame for themselves, but they wrote hundreds of pages that may be seen as prescriptions of how to get cured from being a "cultural minor". However, being an intellectual nowadays supposes another baggage of knowledge than the package Noica used to recommend, including Plato and classical German philosophy (selected not to embarrass his politically and socially cleansed "pure" philosophical approach, in other words leaving aside anything that could be considered social theory). Today it is common for Romanian graduate students or post-docs to quote Orthodox monks and Cioran, when they are debating economic development; and most post-graduate programs or fellowships are dominated by young intellectuals doing soft humanities (from marginal theological studies to fashionable post-modern topics) as opposed to hard economic and social science (or any science). This has something to say about the prevailing market trends, but also about the preferences of those making these educational choices. They represent a counter intuitive orientation, at least for a country badly in need of a long delayed modernization.

⁴⁶ TAMÁS, »Scrisoare către prietenii mei români« (above fn. 38).

And here lies the crux of the matter: can an intelligentsia unable to modernize itself provide this essential service for the rest of society? Romanian society is deprived of expertise and badly needs a real academic elite, missing experts in everything, from Russian studies to economy, from sociology (in the eighties there were no university departments doing sociology, political science or psychology, all forbidden for political reasons) to environment or constitutional law. Did the post-1989 investment in humanities produce something matching the achievements of the interwar generation, who managed to make valuable contributions in fields ranging from Hellenistic studies to economic theory? In other words, did social autism pay off? The sad answer is no: with the possible exception of mathematics and computer science, the Romanian contribution to science has equaled zero in the past decade, as any system of academic evaluation shows.

All ills have a cause and the destruction and deep perversion of the Romanian intellectual life is grounded in heavy repression and infiltration by communism, which was considerably stronger in Romania than in Hungary or Poland. The crucial difference here is the total suppression of any dissent, but mostly of any dissent on the left during Romanian communism. Romania did not have an alternative intellectual group, not even within the Communist party: all Romanian thinkers with the potential of a Lukács or a Kolakowski died in prison. Converted right-wingers such as Constantin Noica, professor and mentor of Pleșu and Liiceanu in the seventies, survived and were allowed to teach, although outside the university: Noica was not only against democracy but also against the West; fortunately, however, many of his followers, most notably Liiceanu and Pleșu, turned out as democrats and Western-oriented. There were other charismatic mentors in Romania at this time;⁴⁷ many were actually Orthodox priests or monks, who had been active within the intellectual right in the 1920s and 1930s and kept spreading the "good word" in a somewhat conspiratorial fashion. In the same period Stahl was frequented mostly, if not exclusively, by foreigners studying Romania, as his reputation as a Marxist was unappealing for Romanians.

Is anything wrong with Orthodox spiritualism, one could ask, besides its failure to contribute properly to the much-needed modernization? The sad answer is yes. The link between Orthodoxy and non-democratic attitudes is neither random, nor spurious. When left alone by intellectuals, Orthodoxy is far from practical life: it does not teach individualism or promote quests for justice and morality as does Protestantism,⁴⁸ nor does it endorse any political

⁴⁷ Dumitru Staniloae, Petre Tutea or Nicolae Steinhardt would be cases in point.

⁴⁸ Constantin RĂDULESCU-MOTRU, *Cultura română și politicianismul* [Romanian Culture and Politics for the Sake of Politics], București: Librăria Socec et Co., 1904.

action of the kind recommended by Eliade or the Iron Guard. It can be accused of failing to provide the basis for democratic education, but no more. In the hands of the intelligentsia and nationalist clergy, however, it supplied more often than not the grounds and legitimacy for anti-liberalism.

Centre and Periphery

Societies cope with lack of success as poorly as individuals. Intellectuals usually feel it is their task to explain it – and for most of the 20th century Romanian intellectuals seemed to do little else. Historically, it started with the work of Constantin Dobrogeanu Gherea, a Romanian socialist and anarchist of Russian Jewish extraction, who had in fact come to Romania as a refugee. Gherea adapted to Romania the Marxist theory of "second serfdom" and explained the negative effects of capitalism on rural Eastern Europe. Western capitalism was thus pushing the rural East into a second serfdom. Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), and Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) were little known and practically not quoted in Romania, but thanks to through Gherea and Stahl, the main theorist who cast Gherea's ideas in a theoretically more acceptable form, the notion of the second serfdom spread further. Strangely enough, it was shared at the time by both Liberals (such as Stefan Zeletin) and Corporatists (such as Mihail Manoilescu). Certainly, there are differences among these authors, but also a basic similarity between their arguments. They all put forward the social representation of Romania as a periphery, absorbing effects radiated by a distant centre and thus unable to shape its own fortunes.

Quite a few Western authors, among them Jowitt or Joseph L. Love⁴⁹ have identified in Eastern Europe and notably in Romania a sort of "Third World before the Third World" and in the theories of these Romanian social scientists an anticipation of arguments on "development of underdevelopment" or "path-dependent development" by radical economists.⁵⁰ The two authors quoted are actually drawing upon quite different Romanian authors to reach this conclusion, but in the end it is the influence of Stahl's interpretation of Romanian social history that prevails in both.⁵¹ The image of an asymmetrical world

⁴⁹ Joseph L. LOVE, *Crafting the Third World: Theorizing the Underdevelopment in Romania and Brazil*, San Francisco: Stanford University Press, 1996.

⁵⁰ Kenneth JOWITT, »The Sociocultural Bases of National Dependency in Peasant Countries«, in: IDEM (ed.), *Social Change in Romania* (above fn. 10), pp. 1–30, p. 2.

⁵¹ Stahl was in his turn drawing upon the classic Romanian social democrat Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, who moderated Gherea's arguments and added a historical perspective that was more to the point.

with uneven relations between centre and periphery, in which the development of the latter was strongly dependent on the former, has become at some stage popular with a whole array of related social science theory, notably Immanuel Wallerstein's "world system theory" and Raul Prebisch's "dependency theory". The basic idea has policy consequences, and important ones: it led to protectionist policies promoted by the Liberals, and the governments of King Carol 2nd, and theorized by Manoilescu in a book that was widely translated and became quite influential in Latin America.⁵² Prebisch is likely to have read Manoilescu; and Wallerstein was a student of Stahl.

Today there is little doubt that protectionist policies prove to be economically disastrous. Policy makers mistakenly seeing protectionism as a modernizing strategy in the face of a constantly unfavorable external context and noisy internal opposition must nevertheless be seen with some indulgence. Enlightened Romanian intellectuals also had more realistic and modest dreams: books were translated and studies written periodically on the success of small peasant countries such as Denmark or Japan, though such publications never enjoyed a large circulation. We must also keep in mind that the international climate was particularly unfavorable, economically as well as politically, between the two world wars, the only juncture in Romanian history when modernizers might have made a difference. The modernization project was put on hold with the advent of communism and catching up after 1990 proved difficult and painful after the massive destruction that communism had caused. Whoever gets to see today the missions of the International Monetary Fund monitoring fiscal policies in Bucharest, pronouncing verdicts and giving media interviews cannot be but reminded of the presence within the National Romanian Bank, throughout interwar times of a French representative of the Bank of France, more powerful than bank governors and even prime ministers. Of all social representations that can be considered "maladies of growth", the image of Romania as a dependent periphery seems to be the most difficult to shake off.

⁵² Mihail MANOILESCU, *Théorie du protectionisme et de l'échange international*, Paris: Marcel Giard, 1929.