

**The “Third Way”: Agrarianism and Intellectual Debates in
Interwar Romania**

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Introduction

The historical context

For the East Central European political and intellectual elites of the second half of the Nineteenth century and the first decades of the Twentieth century, the foremost canonic battle was fought around the issue of national revival as well as around adapting modernity to the specific conditions of their own countries. By modernization, in this context I mean scientific spirit, neutral state, capitalist economy and secularization. By secularization, I also mean an attitude given by: i) the passage from a significant rationality to an operational rationality; ii) the breakdown of the order attributed to the world which is synonymous with laicization. Beyond these terminological predications, the modernization process appropriated the ambivalence of three major orientations in culture: i) the imitation without reserves of the patterns of Western culture; ii) the total rejection of the West in the name of preserving the traditional character and the national specificity of East Central European cultures; iii) the adaptation of Western achievements in education, society, economy and politics to the specific conditions of these cultures.

The predominantly traditional and overwhelmingly rural societies of East Central Europe had to face the competition of a West in expansion. Their relative backgrounds lay in the absence of a middle class which could have supported and promoted the process of modernization, as well as in the historical pressure of great empires, Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg, which emphasized the marginality of the East-Central European political and intellectual elites. Most of them educated in the Western universities, these elites tried to analyze their own local realities, which often proved to be far less modern, by using the patterns of modernity: the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment, the ideas of the French Revolution and German Romanticism – a very particular and complex historical process which I would call the “*re-inventing of modernity*”.

In all countries of the East Central European area, in which the peasantry made up a significant percentage of the whole population, the agrarian issue was a major question in finding a proper path for development. Agrarianism has emerged as a specific reaction to the capitalist relationships upon to economies still in a medieval and very rudimental stage of development. Under these circumstances, the agrarian issue had specific particularities from country to country, depending on certain factors: i) the level of urbanization and that of the development of the middle class; ii) the agricultural productivity and the potentials of the internal market; iii) the relationship between peasants and great landowners. The high level of urbanization in Bohemia managed to create an internal market and contribute in this way to the development of agricultural production. In Hungary and Poland, with a less urbanized social class but with a large class of nobility, the modernization of the economy, and especially that of agriculture, was slower and still remained at a traditional level. Because of the powerful Turkish influence and the lack of a local aristocracy, in Bulgaria and Serbia, the status of the peasantry was the most difficult in the whole region, and the modernization of the economy was done very slowly until the beginning of the Twentieth century.

The difference between continental Eastern Europe and East Central Europe was that in Hungary, Poland and the Baltic lands there were to be found such modern farms among the richest feudal proprietors, and slow modernization among the less rich landowners had also started, while in continental Eastern Europe even the great landowning aristocracy was no able to develop its economy in comparable proportions. (...)

The difference in this regard is not just quantitative, it is qualitative, and it reflects perfectly the differences between the two major regions of Eastern Europe.¹

In this context, the Romanian case bears some peculiar characteristics. The Romanian political elites had some choices to achieve and internalize modernity: they could have promoted a nation-building project and searched for a path of development in the direction of industrialization and urbanization or they could maintain the preponderant agrarian character of economy. But the unification of all Romanian provinces into a modern state and the achievement of independence were considered to be more realizable and desirable for the Nineteenth century Romanian political elites. These goals had a priority over social and economic reforms and this issue has shaped the whole Romanian modern history. The historical pressure regarding the unity of all Romanians was simply too strong and seductive for the Romanian modern elites. The modernized reforms of the Organic Statutes, the land reform of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the Constitution and the parliamentary system, the foundation of universities in Iasi and Bucharest, were modern in principle and advanced for that time in the East Central European region. All these achievements contributed to the development of Romania, but they were accompanied by the continuous depreciation of the status of the peasantry, the endemic bureaucracy and the wide spread of politicianism. It is interesting how “certain social structures and institutions – the bureaucratized state and the

¹ Peter Gunst, *Agrarian Systems of Central and Eastern Europe* in Daniel Chirot, *The origins of backwardness in Eastern Europe: economics and politics from Middle Ages until the early Twentieth century*, Berkeley: University of California Press, (1991), p. 74-75. For the particularities in social and economic development of the East Central European countries, see also John Lampe, Marvin Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, (1982).

system of public education – arose not in response of social differentiation and complexity but in anticipation of them².

For a scholar interested in the study of Romanian modern history, this intellectual energy dedicated to defining themselves and to constructing a modern state can seem rather intriguing. The main direction in which the Romanian modern elites have excelled was the nation-building project. A modern state required not only laws and institutions, free access to primary education and an active public opinion, but also an effective administration and a growing economy. The development of a national bureaucracy was a consequence of the process of modernization: in the case of Romania, this process was first a political one: political modernization made bureaucracy possible but an economic modernization could have been sustained only by a local bourgeoisie, underdeveloped during the Nineteenth century. Without a strong middle class and with a very rudimentary peasantry, the lack of their own land, the agrarian issue was the main problem the Romanian political and intellectual elites had to deal with it. But

The national progress of Romania did not correspond with the social or material progress of the peasantry. On the contrary, the high points in Rumanian history from the national point of view often marked a decline in the peasant's status³.

This huge contradiction between the urgency of providing a solution for the agrarian issue and the low status of the peasantry⁴ has strongly influenced the evolution of Romanian history. At the turn of the Twentieth century, the ideological context was dominated by liberals, adepts of protective state industrialization (*through ourselves alone*) and

² Andrew Janos, *Modernization and Decay in Historical Perspective: the Case of Romania* in Kenneth Jowitt, edit. *Social Change in Romania, 1860-1940: a debate on development in a European Nation*, Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, (1978), p. 114.

³ Henry Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, New York: Archon Books, (1969), p. 18.

⁴ Well-illustrated by the statesman and historian Radu Rosetti (1853– 926) in a valuable study about the peasant rebellion from 1907: *Pentru ce s-au rasculat țaranii* (For what the peasants revolted), Bucharest: Socec, (1907).

conservatives, who agreed that the situation of the peasantry should be improved, but through a slow and organic evolution which does not affect the social structure of the country. Under the specific conditions of a late modernized country, Romanian liberalism adjusted itself to certain elements of state protectionism and nationalism. The industrialization of the country demanded state support for the exports in the absence of a market to balance the change of products. In the conditions of the decline of conservatism, some specific reactions contoured to the process of modernization. For the historian Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) and the literary movement around the cultural magazine *Sămănătorul*, (The Sower) Romania should preserve its agrarian character based on the traditions of rural communities, whose resistance during Romanian history has been perceived in terms of “vitality”. In short, Romanian society should remain agrarian, traditional and unaffected by foreign influences. A very particular response to this tendency of the idealization of the patriachality of rural life comes from the populist editorialist Constantin Stere (1865–1936) and the cultural moment around the magazine *Viața Românească* (Romanian Life). With the prestige of his revolutionary past from Russia, Stere tried to adapt both Western capitalism and Russian populism to the specific conditions of Romania. He has the conviction that the predominant character of Romanian society should be preserved, not in the direction of the idealization of the peasantry but in the direction of the emancipation of it. The foundation of this emancipation should be the small peasant property supported by a “rural democracy”, a process of a gradual transformation of the status of the peasantry by avoiding the devastating consequences of capitalism. The socialist Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855-1920), on his real name Solomon Katz, thought similarly of a gradual and economical change, which was different from the capitalist way, yet he argued that capitalism was inevitable in this evolution. He continued the idea about the importance of the agrarian issue sustaining that agriculture should follow the development of the native industry. He also described the particular situation of institutionalization of the feudal

relationships between landowners and the peasants with the inspired expression *neoiobagie* (neoserfdom). It is significant to mention that Dobrogeanu-Gherea was the only socialist thinker who was interested in the agrarian issue, the other socialist leaders: Christian Racovski, Stefan Gheorghiu or I. C. Frimu been preoccupied to the organization of the workers movement and the specific conditions of the proletariat and not to the agrarian issue. For all these, the peasantry was just a reactionary and lack of revolutionary potential social class which could not accomplish the goals of the socialist revolution even if the many peasant rebellions indicated the fact that the acutely contradictions from the Romanian society were to be found in the rural and not in the urban milieu.

The violent peasant rebellion from 1907 demanded not only an extended land reform but also a profound transformation of the structure of Romanian society. The lack of resources and the education of the peasantry obviously contrasted with the promises of politicians and with the technical solutions proposed by liberals, populists, nationalists or socialists. On the other hand, during the Balcanic wars (1912-1913), many Romanian soldiers, who were mostly peasants, saw to the south of the Danube a different, more emancipated and wealthy peasantry. There was already a social basis for the trend of a new social movement, agrarianism, with radical accents, which hoped to become national just before the First World War. In the arising of this movement a predominant role was played by the rural teacher Ion Mihalache (1882-1963), in which the emphasis was put on the alliance between the peasantry and the traditional rural elite: the teachers and the priests. The term *agrarianism*, for which the political expression will be *peasantrism*, was used for the first time by the economist Virgil Madgearu in a political speech in 1927 for depicting the agrarian issue and the solutions proposed by the new-founded National Peasant Party. Despite the fact that Madgearu tried to conciliate capitalism with a very traditional and rudimental agriculture through a large cooperative system and credits sustained by the state, it was obvious that

agriculture in itself could not sustain a long-term social and economic development. However, it is not a coincidence that “the peasant problem was divorced from the national question, though it was no less acute”⁵. This intellectual obsession of a proper, specific way of development, neither capitalist, nor socialist, based on the small land tenure and the large system of cooperatives, constituted the core of Romanian agrarianism. The drama of Romanian agrarianism was that it emerged in a period when the land reform was imminent, as a consequence of the promises made during the First World War, and not as a result of its own political struggle. When a peasant party actually won the power, the Great Depression and the attitude of King Carol II towards all political parties accelerated its decline. Some other collateral factors also contributed to the political evolution of Romanian agrarianism: i) the double origin of the National Peasant Party, formed through the coagulation of two ideologically distinct parties: the National Romanian Party and the Peasant Party; ii) the symbolic transfer of leadership: from the former populist Constantin Stere to Virgil Madgearu; iii) the political attitude towards King Carol II and towards the extremist parties; iv) the modulation of its doctrine from radical agrarianism to a more ‘liberal’ position as a state protectionist advocate. It can be said that *the agrarianism* was constituted from the need of a theoretical clarification related to the resolving of the agrarian issue. But, as a political movement, *the peasantry*, trying to respect the rules of the democratic games in a fluctuant political environment from interwar Romania, had more success as an opposition party than it had as a government party.

Argument

⁵ Philip Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe: from Prehistory to Postcommunism*, 2nd edition, New York: St. Martin’s Press, (1997), p. 137.

For a proper reading of my thesis I propose two matrixes of interpretation: as an intellectual history of the agrarian movement from the interwar period and as a social history of the intellectual debates related to the agrarian issue. I consider Romania's modernization as a double-tracking process: cultural-ideological and social-economical. As intellectual history, modernization here is referred to as the symbolic rapport with the West. It was synthesized in the last part of the Nineteenth century by the conservative leader Titu Maiorescu⁶ (1840–1917), co-founder of the highly influential cultural association *Junimea* (Youth), in the formula “*forms without content*”: the uncritical import of Western models. As social history, modernization is a process which contains the first Romanian constitution: the Organic Statutes (1831-1832), the abolition of slavery and the land reform (in 1864), with the revolutionary interlude of 1848. The significance of these two moments that took place within only few decades is very important: they constituted the core of developmental debates in interwar Romania. Two names, particularly, can be quoted here. First, the neoliberal Stefan Zeletin⁷ (1882-1934), who reconsidered the role of the Organic Statutes in the developing of a national bourgeoisie that could freely participate in the world trade circuit. Second, the peasantist Virgil Madgearu⁸ (1887-1940), who analyzed the consequences of the land reform from 1864 regarding the status of the peasantry and the interferences of capitalism with the rural world. Both of them proposed potential solutions to the developmental problem taking into account the positive role of the local bourgeoisie or the small peasantry.

For an adequate understanding of the evolution of Romanian society, the works of Stefan Zeletin and Virgil Madgearu are more relevant than the ones of the most prominent Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran and Constantin Noica. Eliade, Cioran and Noica were brilliant

⁶ Titu Maiorescu, *In contra directiei de astazi in cultura romana* (Against the Current Direction in Romanian Culture) in *Critics*, vol. I, Bucharest: Minerva, (1984).

⁷ By his real name Stefan Motas; see his volume *Burghezia romana originea si rolul ei istoric* (The Romanian Bourgeoisie, Its Origin and Historical Role), Bucharest, (1925), 2nd edition, Humanitas, (1991).

⁸ Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism*, Bucharest, (1936), 2nd edition, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, (1999).

leaders of a generation, the so-called ‘generation ‘27’, the year in which Eliade has written his famous manifesto which tried to put the specificity of Romanian culture in a universal perspective. Their intellectual activity was very influential in the interwar period. For me, it is questioning how the intellectual history of the latest years reactivated the myth of the splendor of the interwar generation – the famous triad Eliade, Cioran, Noica – but almost ignored the figures of Zeletin, Madgearu and their theoretical contribution to the modernization of Romania. It has to be said that the mentioned triad: Eliade, Cioran, Noica should be considered famous only in a Romanian context. Noica, for example, is almost unknown outside Romanian culture; Cioran is adopted by French philosophy and Eliade had an international career on the both sides of Atlantic.

Even without a traditional education in social sciences, professors like Zeletin and Madgearu, both of them with doctorates from Germany, managed to understand the society which they lived in. My hypothesis is that authors like Stefan Zeletin and Virgil Madgearu prove, when they analyze the social history of modern Romania, a sophisticated social thinking in accordance with the intellectual tendencies of their time. A comparative case study between Zeletin and Madgearu, and their role in the development of Romanian society could be, placed in an East Central European frame, a very good topic for a dissertation. The present dissertation has the aim of a symbolic rehabilitation. Zeletin and Madgearu are part of an intellectual tradition in full accordance with the tendencies of European thought. I will try to go beyond the dogmatism of a certain historical method and to interrogate the connections between social and intellectual history in interwar Romania by analyzing the specificity of agrarianism. I will refer, in the limits of this thesis, mostly at the specificity of Romanian agrarianism as mirrored in the works of the peasant leaders, trying to compare the perspectives of Zeletin and Madgearu on the development of Romanian society. I will also try

to explore the manner how agrarianism was an attempt to stress a different pattern of modernization as a “third way” between liberalism and socialism.

Since liberals promoted the free market, yet with state protectionism to sustain an uncompetitive economy, agrarians considered small land tenure as more efficient and not based on exploitation, unlike great land tenure and the engine of economy. On the other hand, the main difference between agrarianism and socialism lies in the nature and form of property: for the socialists, the change can be only revolutionary and the form of property commune; for agrarians, the change can only be made through social reforms starting from the bottom of society, which is the peasantry. My approach will be more of a biography of some ideas which influenced the evolution of Romanian agrarianism in the first half of the Twentieth century. My proposed view is that agrarianism has tried to offer a theoretical support for a political movement which, for a short time, was the main challenger for the political domination of the Liberals. A comparative case study between the main ideas of the promoter of agrarianism, Virgil Madgearu, and the promoter of neoliberalism, Stefan Zeletin is a good starting point for understanding the level of sophistication of the intellectual debates in interwar Romania. And also, this is almost a neglected subject matter that still waits its researchers.

The analysis of Romanian agrarianism should be understood in the East Central European context dominated by a recrudescence of the agrarian movements. Focusing mainly on the interwar period, I would not describe the economical history of that period, but its social history and the intellectual framework of a political movement which it proposed to represent the largest social category: the peasantry. For this purpose, I used, as internal sources, the books, articles, political platforms and political speeches of the main peasant leaders (Ion Mihalache and Virgil Madgearu) who examined the agrarian issue and also those of the populist (Constantin Stere), socialist (Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea) or liberal (Stefan

Zeletin) authors. As external sources, I have read the books of two experts, David Mitrany and Henry Roberts, who had the privilege to be witnesses of the period they examined. My approach about Romanian agrarianism will pursue the following structure: the intellectual origins, the political evolution and the theoretical corpus.

In the first chapter of my thesis I will investigate the intellectual origins of Romanian agrarianism: from populism to peasantry. I will discuss mainly the ideas of Constantin Stere and his opponents to show the intellectual frame of the populist movement. The reaction, from a Marxist perspective, of Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea is by far the best theoretically argued, and the intellectual debate between these two proves that the agrarian issue was an imperative one. The roots of the Romanian agrarianism are to be found in the theoretical debates related to the agrarian issue from the beginning of the Twentieth century.

The second chapter will be dedicated to the formation and evolution of a main agrarian political organization: the National Peasant Party. Two personalities will be highlighted here: Iuliu Maniu, the leader of the Romanian National Party, and Ion Mihalache, the leader of the Peasant Party. Together, they will try to oppose the domination of the National Liberal Party and form a new but stronger political organization: the National Peasant Party. Dedicated to represent mainly the peasantry, the National Peasant Party had to change its doctrine, in response to the consequences of the Great Depression, and adopt a more “liberal” political orientation open to foreign capital investments.

Finally, the third chapter will try to discuss the specificity of Romanian agrarianism. The ideas of Virgil Madgearu, the main promoter of agrarianism, will be presented in a comparative perspective to the neoliberal ideas of Stefan Zeletin. Their ideas had a major echo in the interwar Romania: they were discussed and criticized by social-democrats, like Serban Voinea, or corporatists like Mihail Manoilescu, intellectuals who embraced different

political views and emphasized different theoretical perspectives. The conclusion will reload the main ideas of each chapter. For this, a short historical outline is useful.

The Agrarian Issue

Between 1829 and 1831, a series of laws, known as The Organic Statutes, lifted the Turkish restrictions from trade in the Romanian Principalities after more than one century of Phanariot rulers in the change of a Russian protectorate. The Organic Statutes were adopted after numerous debates in the Romanian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia but they can be considered the

First Romanian Constitution including, beside a statement of general principles for societal organization, form of government and societal structure, articles of all kinds of administrative and organizational details. The institutional provisions were certainly new and modernizing in effect. (...) But many measures intended to advance modernization stopped halfway. The boyars were still exempted from taxes and the restructuring of the agrarian relations was in the peasant's favor⁹.

For a full picture about the Organic Statutes, I will quote another opinion:

The Organic Statutes radically changed the whole agrarian system of the two Romanian provinces. The modern conception of property, as a right in itself, not qualified as before by the professional use of the object, shaped the Romanian agrarian law for the first time¹⁰.

Yet, it has to be said that they meant by no means a profound modernization of agriculture, but only a reorientation of the agricultural exploitation in a more extensive way. The increasing need for grains to be exported caused agriculture to develop extensively, by

⁹ Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians A History*, edit. Matei Calinescu, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, (1991), pp. 105-106.

¹⁰ David Mitrany, *The Land and the peasant in Rumania*, New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, (1968), p. 33.

extension of arable surfaces, and not intensively, by using new, modern methods of cultivating the soil. The technology used in agriculture was rudimentary and the economic expansion produced only a slim stratum of merchants and entrepreneurs while not improving the peasantry's situation. An important and very necessary land reform was realized in 1864, under the Principality of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, but more for political than for social reasons and only with partial results. The most important accomplishment of this land reform was the official abolition of serfdom and the regulation of agrarian relationships based on the principle of property rights. Many peasants received land and, theoretically, they could create the basis of the small land owners' middle class. But practically, the peasants did not have the tools for working on their own land or money to invest in acquisition of technology, and some forms of feudal relationships¹¹ were still practiced. The landowners did not themselves work on the land and they advocated managing this job through tenant proxies who exploited them even more. Peasants had to work a number of days yearly in advance and not for their own benefit but to pay for their daily food. The effect in time was devastating and manifested in violent peasant rebellions in 1888 and 1907. The latter was especially violent and the repressions of authorities were very tough. Thousands of unarmed peasants were shot while a new, more radical land reform became an emergency. This reform was promised in order to raise the moral of the troops, most of them being peasants during the First World War, and was accomplished in 1921. In just one generation, with all economic difficulties and political instabilities, a stratum of small landowners was created. But the communist regime, after 1945, would destroy, using terror, violence and deportation this rural middle class (the so-called *chiaburi*).

The essential mutation of the post forty-eight Romania is the transformation of the economic and social rapports imposed by the land reform of 1864. The statute of peasants, the organization of work, and the repartition of rich are

¹¹ Called "neofeudalism" by Robin Okey; see the volume *Eastern Europe, 1740-1980: feudalism to communism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, (1982).

modified: the rapport on land is defined by property. (...) The hunger of land became a component of social history of the Principalities¹².

Then a second opinion of an expert about the consequences of the land reform:

An ideal reform would have made the peasants both economically and politically independent. The reform of 1864 did either. It did not give them sufficient economic strength to stand up against political inequality, nor did it give them sufficient political power to withstand economic oppression¹³.

Summarizing the facts, the land reform of 1864 was perceived as a political and social necessity by the Romanian elites but the results were certainly unsatisfactory. Without political rights and without economic autonomy awarded to the peasants and a gradual evolution, Romanian society produced only a partial modernity. The new institutions created after the Western model had decisive influence on the social actors. Unlike the neighboring countries, no political organization existed in Romania before the First World War which aimed to represent the interests of the peasantry. The only attempt to build a political party to represent the interests of the peasants was realized by the institutor Dobrescu-Arges in the 1890's, but his effort had a very short life. Only after the War, a "peasant mystique" created by the hope of a new land reform made possible the foundation of a peasant party. When it was actually set up, a new and more radical land reform was made in 1921. The old Conservative Party, representing the interests of the great landowners, collapsed and the new National Peasant Party had to aggregate the regional interests of the National Party from Transylvania, led by the respected politician Iuliu Maniu, with the local interests of the Peasant Party founded by the village-teacher Ion Mihalache.

When they came to power in 1928, the leaders of the National Peasant Party managed to administrate the challenges of the Great Depression. They failed to generate a political force comparable to that of the Liberals, their opponents. They also tried to delimit

¹² Catherine Durandine, *Histoire des Roumanians*, Paris: Fayard, (1995), pp. 163-164.

¹³ David Mitrany, *The Land and the peasant in Rumania*, New York: Greenwood Press, p. 62.

themselves from the socialists with whom they shared the same conception of a different course of development from the Western one. But they created something different and this is the real legacy of Romanian agrarianism: a path of social and economic thought rooted in the conviction that a rural middle class of small owners could generate a potential for the development of Romania. This may be the drama of Romania's modern history: to generate endeavors from which no-one could benefit.

Romania had in less than a century passed from a pastoral society to one producing grain exports for a capitalistic, world wide market, but its own society was still characterized by neoservile relations. At the same time, it was seeking to endow itself a modern industry. A transition what had taken a millennium in the West the Romanian elite was now seeking to achieve in haste and without permitting a politico-social revolution.¹⁴

In the intellectual ambiance from the turn of the Twentieth century, of uprising the national demands in all East Central European countries, a wide-ranging question remained: which is the proper way to develop a backward country? In Romania, with its rudimental agriculture and its rural overpopulation, the situation tended to be more acute. For resolving the peasant issue in a proper way, several different answers were given and these theoretical contributions will influence the latter evolution of the Romanian agrarianism. Trying to analyze the causes of the backwardness in the specific context of Romania, many intellectuals, most of them with intense political activities and defending their own political positions, provided different answers.

The liberal answer was in the direction of industrialization and state protectionism. A native middle class could be developed only with the support from the state. The conservative answer was for the rejection of any foreign influences and the maintaining of the social status quo. The socialist answer was quite different. According to its historical perspective, capitalism was an inevitable step in the economical and social development of each country.

¹⁴ Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, (1974), p. 322.

Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea examined this particular situation of implementing capitalist relationships in an agrarian feudal framework: a hybrid which he called *neoserfdom*. The extended and low productive agriculture led to a crisis of land. In addition, the rural population increased constantly, but the great tenures of land remained the same. Agriculture could survive only on small plots and a débouché for the rural overpopulation could be assured by industry. In this way, will be create a strong proletariat who will realize peacefully the socialist revolution. Finally, the populist answer was also focused on the social and economic virtues of the small peasant property. Constantin Stere and the other populists rejected capitalism and they considered that industry should be only collateral to the necessities of agriculture. A country with such a large rural population as Romania should preserve its “pre-eminently agrarian” character and developing in the agrarian direction. The problem of property and agricultural productivity on the one hand, the transformation of the peasants from simply tax-payers in active political actors on the other – there are the two major challenges to which agrarianism should provide their own answers.

Chapter I:

The Intellectual Origins of Romanian Agrarianism: The Clash of Ideas at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Romanian Populism in the East-Central European context

An analytical discussion of the formation and evolution of Romanian agrarianism should start with a terminological delimitation. It is populism¹⁵ with its *fin-de-siècle* emphasis on the intellectual precursor of the agrarians' movements in East-Central Europe. But the real origin of populism is to be found in Russia, in the intellectual atmosphere dominated by late Romanticism and Slavophilism. Alexander Herzen with his "idealization of a pre-capitalist, natural economy of small producers"¹⁶ prepared "the natural link" between the Slavophiles and Westernizers on the one hand and the Populists on the other. In Bulgaria also, the populist goals of social Darwinism and the emancipation of peasantry inspired the agrarian movement in the turn of the Twentieth century, whose leader was Alexander Stambolinski. He claimed "the conditions of modern life demanded the supplanting of political parties by cooperative organizations that would group the major occupational formations in a system of functional

¹⁵ The concept of populism has a *genus proxim* which entails a large number of meanings because the concept of "people" can refer to the peasants, urban masses or to the entire body of a nation. For a large discussion one can consult Margaret Canovan, (1981), *Populism*, New York: Junction Books.

¹⁶ Andzej Walicki, *A Slavophile controversy. History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteen-Century Russian Thought*, Oxford: Claredon Press, (1975), p. 595.

representation”¹⁷. No farther than in Hungary, populists rejected both the feudal past and capitalism, and tried to advert socialist ideals. But their anti-capitalist ideology had no ties with the industrial workers, who were considered to be “not nationalist enough”.

Thus, when neither capitalism, nor socialism was acceptable what remained was a ‘*third road*’, - and we could asset that this concept was embraced by the populists in the entire region of East Central Europe¹⁸.

In a revealing study dedicated to Eastern European populism, Ghita Ionescu¹⁹ differentiates a few stages in its evolution. The “pure populism”, originated in Russia²⁰, starting with the mid-Nineteenth century (the so-called *narodnichestvo*), as an intellectual reaction to Western socialism through the transformation of archaic collectivities (*mir*) into advanced socialist models, aimed to avoid the historical stage of capitalism. The southern Slavs did not know the *mir*, their traditional community, an association of several families, was the *zadruga*. Unlike Serbians or Russians, “the Bulgarians had neither *mir*, nor *zadruga*; they too, however, were Slavs and since their national revival had been greatly under Russian intellectual influence”²¹. In Russia, Populism was influenced by Slavophilism – a conservative utopia of Western criticism from the cultural Russian traditions – but both were distinctive ways in which, as Alexander Herzen thought, “the view of the village commune as the embryonic stage of a new and higher form of society and the conviction that collectivism was a national characteristic of the Russian people”²² could be met. In Bulgaria, the leader of

¹⁷John D. Bell, *Peasants in Power Alexander Stambolinski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union: 1899-1923*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, (1977), p. 60.

¹⁸Peter Hanak, *The Anti-Capitalist Ideology of the Populists* in Held, Joseph, *Populism in Eastern Europe: Racism, Nationalism and Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, (1996), p. 159.

¹⁹ Ghita Ionescu, Ernest Gellner, *Populism. Its meanings and national characteristics*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, (1969), p. 99.

²⁰ About Russian populism in Andzej Walicki, *A Slavophile Controversy History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteen-Century Russian Thought*, Oxford: Claredon Press, (1975). About populism in Eastern Europe in Joseph Held, edit. *Populism in Eastern Europe Racism, Nationalism and Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, (1996).

²¹ David Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant A Study in Social Dogmatism*, New York: Collier Books, (1961), p. 63.

²² Andzej Walicki, *A Slavophile Controversy History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteen-Century Russian Thought* pp. 586-587.

the agrarian movement, Alexander Stamboliski, “loudly identifies itself with the village against the town and with agriculture against industry”²³. Even the political parties were considered to be “unhealthy”, western imports inappropriate with the traditional character of people.

The next stage was the “transition between populism and peasantry” which was in Eastern Europe followed by “pure peasantry”: *the third way*, a reaction against both Russian populism and Western socialism.

The populist and peasantist ideologies in Eastern Europe were in part the result of the efforts of the respective national intelligentsias to find intellectual solutions to the problems of the evolution of their societies; it was the real impact on the various societies of the overwhelming agricultural problem which made them directly relevant²⁴.

The Romanian variant of populism²⁵ (or *poporanism*, from *popor*, the people) did not create a strong political movement like the Bulgarian one or a conservative philosophy similar to the Russian one; it was more a cultural movement of sympathy with the peasantry’s fate. It was preoccupied with advocating devotion and compassion for the peasantry, improving their economic condition through a profound land reform and accomplishing a true national culture based on a real depiction of the peasantry and the democratization of public life. The main exponents of this cultural movement, without political emphasis, were the Bessarabian-born writers Constantin Stere and the literary critic Garabet Ibraileanu.

In 1906, Constantin Stere and Garabet Ibraileanu founded the cultural magazine *Romanian Life*. They believed in the necessity of the peasantry’s emancipation through education, social reforms, and kept distance from the revolutionarism of socialist ideals. They promoted an intense cultural activity but without a political tenure. In a series of articles

²³ George, D. Jr. Jackson, *Comintern and peasant in East Europe: 1919-1930*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, (1966), p.122.

²⁴ Ghita Ionescu, Ernest Gellner, *Populism. Its meanings and national characteristics*, p. 100.

²⁵ About the Romanian populism and its evolution in Zigu Ornea, *Poporanism*, Bucharest: Minerva, (1972), or Dumitru Micu, *Poporanism and “Romanian Life”*, Bucharest: EPL, (1961).

published between August 1907 and April 1908 and entitled *Social Democratism or Poporanism*, Stere exposed his ideas. With influences from Russian narodnicism and grounded in his Siberian exile experience, Stere succeeded to impose on the public discourse a new perspective of the agrarian issue. He agreed that Romania does not have an industry and a proletariat powerful enough to sustain the exports and, implicit, the economic development. Out of this, he foresaw the necessity of a “*rural democracy*”²⁶ – the concept was developed later by the peasant leader Ion Mihalache – based on the peasant smallholding, which could be implemented through land reform and industrial protectionism sustained by the state. This perspective, larger than the socialist one and adapted to the socio-historical conditions of Romania was called by Stere “poporanist”. For the literary critic Garabet Ibraileanu, the poporanist movement had its origins in the writings of Mihail Kogalniceanu and Alecu Russo and in the works of Nicu Gane and Ioan Slavici, Romanian writers from the mid-Nineteenth century, because they used folklore as a source of inspiration²⁷. In an article written in 1925, Ibraileanu redefined poporanism not as an ideology or a literary paradigm, but as an attitude of sympathy of intellectuals towards the peasantry. He also admitted that, because the emancipation of the peasants had been realized and the land reform achieved, poporanism had lost its existing rationale²⁸. Ibraileanu opposed to the idealistic vision of the peasantry promoted by *Samanatorists* which totally opposes Western pragmatism and glorifies a feudal past. Their true animator was the historian Nicolae Iorga, who believed in an organic and gradual evolution of the nation and the imperative of its spiritual regeneration. Iorga also rejected the policy of industrialization because, he thought, this policy ignored the essential agrarian character of Romanian society. And, of course, capitalistic relations that appeared in the ‘alien’ city undermined the moral foundations of the traditional Romanian

²⁶Constantin Stere, *Social democratie sau poporanism* (Social Democracy or Poporanism), Galati: Porto-Franco, (1996), p. 188.

²⁷Garabet, Ibraileanu, *Poporanism*, in *Curentul nou* (New Current) nr. 5, 1906.

²⁸Garabet Ibraileanu, “Ce este poporanismul?” (What is Poporanism?), in *Viata Romaneasca* (Romanian Life) nr.1, XIV, 1925.

society. Like many other intellectuals of his time, Iorga was a person of prolific political activity but his movement was just a literary one and nothing more. Albeit, the fact is not without significance: in a period when the intellectual environment was dominated by writers, poets and literary critics, an agrarian literary movement proved that there was an intimate connection between the social and the intellectual framework relating to the situation of the peasantry and the agrarian issue. The intellectual roots of agrarianism can be found here: in this relationship between the social and the intellectual background, with its roots in the rural world.

The debate between Populism and Socialism

In the intellectual debate between populists and socialists Stere's is a fascinating case: with revolutionary experience in Russia, deported to Siberia for "revolutionary instigation", but imported back to Romania, his ideas were less revolutionary and against the Marxist doctrine. Nevertheless, Stere never mentions in his articles the populist Russian sources of his ideas; on the contrary, he supports his arguments with the scholarly authority of Marxist thinkers. Like his opponent of ideas, Iorga, Stere was deeply involved in politics. A prefect of Iasi from the national Liberal Party during the peasants' rebellion of 1907, and the deputy of the Peasant Party of Bessarabia when Romania unified all its historical provinces, he was also a doctrinaire of the first program of the Peasant Party. As a theoretician, he denied the role of Marxist ideas in advocating a path of development because the working class was not established enough. He sustained that the peasantry was a distinct social category, neither proletarian nor bourgeois, and its progress could be realized through rural democracy: universal suffrage and land reform. However, he does not reject industry but he considered

Romania as a “pre-eminently agrarian country” and his concern was to protect society from the upsetting consequences of capitalism. Implicitly, he considered agriculture as an autonomous and anticapitalist way of production. Therefore, a proper way of development could emerge only on the basis of small peasant property. His thesis, though well argued, presents some difficulties in practice. The undifferentiating of the peasantry could not provide an economic development and industry simply could not be just an accessory of agriculture. An industry focused mainly on household activities, which would follow agriculture in non-productive season, could not offer a débouché for the labor force from agriculture let alone supply technologies for a better production. In sum, “Stere’s theory really provides no adequate solution to the problem of improving the level of agriculture or the status of the peasant”²⁹.

Stere’s ideas were criticized by the socialist theoretician Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, who made the best adaptation of the Marxist theory at the turn of the Twentieth century. In his influential study of 1910, called *Neoserfdom*, Gherea analyzed the impact of capitalism on a backward and predominantly agrarian country like Romania. The fusion of social and economic precapitalist relationships from the village and the global and national expansion of capitalism were referred to as *neoserfdom*.

We know now what neoserfdom is: is an establishment of the economic and social-politic agrarian to the specific particularities to our country which consisting in four terms:

Rapports of production mainly feudal;

A liberal state of right which lay the peasant to the discretion of his master;

A legislation which decrees the inalienability of land and regulates the rapports between masters and workers;

Finally, the insufficiency of land of so-called little land owner for his work and his family, who force him to become obedient to the great property. (...)

*This hybrid and absurd structure, this neoserfdom, constitutes the agrarian problem specific to our country*³⁰.

²⁹ Henry Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, Archon Books, (1969), p. 147.

³⁰ Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, *Neoiobagia Studiu economico-social asupra problemei noastre agrare* (Neoserfdom: An economic-sociological study of our agrarian problems), Bucharest: Socec, (1910), pp. 369–370.

This hybrid form of production combined economic relationships between peasants and landlords based on serfdom with a legal bourgeois system which made the development of the peasantry³¹ practically impossible. Gherea offered in this way a variant in Marxist terms, adapted to economy, of the theory of Titu Maiorescu – “forms without content” – adapted to culture. For Gherea, neoserfdom was a very particular situation, specific to the peasantry of Romania, and his solution was in favor of socialism without capitalism. Like his poporanist opponent Stere, Gherea thought of a gradual and economical evolution, different from the capitalist way, which seemed to be more reasonable for the conditions of Romania with a large stratum of peasantry and without a proletariat or a middle class.

Both Stere and Gherea expressed their ideas in opposition to each other and they reproduced “the confrontation between the Russian socialists and the Russian populists”³² in a framework in which the main political dispute was between liberals and conservatives. None of them was pro-capitalist; Gherea advocated the idea of an industrialization which would necessarily lead to socialism and Stere only admitted the possibility of development based on the small rural property. To better sustain their position, the populists – and mainly Stere – invoked the national argument: they reproached the socialists that “the national evolution depends on the slow and uncertain growth of industry”³³ and that was not to follow the pattern of the more industrialized countries in a pre-eminently agrarian country, where the number of industrial workers was insignificant. Another argument used was the link between the intelligentsia and the peasants, the poporanist ideal of a rural democracy: the formers could help the latter to achieve economic, social and political reforms in order to improve their living, starting from the presupposition that “the distribution of the land among the peasants would almost automatically lead to active peasant participation in national

³¹ A detailed analysis on Gherea’s theory in Joseph Love, *Marxism and background in Crafting the Third World: theorizing underdevelopment in Rumania and Brazil*, Stanford University Press, (1996), p. 73. See also Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, *Neoserfdom*, Bucharest, 1910.

³² Ghita Ionescu, *Populism. Its meanings and national characteristics*, London, (1969), p. 101.

³³ Ghita Ionescu, *Populism. Its meanings and national characteristics*, p. 103.

production and to the expansion of the domestic market”³⁴. Populism was so influential in Romania at the turn of Twentieth century because it emphasized the fact that peasantry represented the overwhelming majority of the population, and the main economic and social problem was the agrarian issue, not proletariat or the evolution of capitalism. Because peasantry was not a revolutionary social class, the reforms ought to be moderate and the peasants’ emancipation should be produced gradually. But for this goal a cultural solution was not enough, a major land reform had to be accomplished.

Another critique of Stere’s ideas comes from an ex-socialist sociologist and literary critique Henri Sanielevici (1875–1951), who accused him of the repression of the peasants as a prefect in 1907, of corruption and betrayal of his own ideals, since he joined the liberals in 1899, and finally, of collaborationism during the First World War³⁵. Sanielevici was not an influential intellectual of that time but this polemic proves that poporanism was in the middle of the time’s debates. In his articles written in 1920 and published in the periodical *The New Current*, Sanielevici did not hesitate to label the new-founded peasant movement as a “reactionary tendency” because the land reform it proposed would have perpetuated the relations of neoserfdom already existing in the rural environment.

A different outstanding stage of the intellectual debate relating to Romanian populism was the Academic Speech³⁶ delivered in 1909 by the writer Duiliu Zamfirescu. With the aesthetical orientation of Junimists (from *Junimea*, Youth), Zamfirescu considered that poporanism depicted an unreal and artificial life of the peasantry. At that time, his speech made an enormous impression. Many personalities reacted immediately, among them, the conservative leader, himself an academician, Titu Maiorescu. He declared in his writings that “our only reality is the Romanian peasant, with his problems and his life” but this can not be

³⁴ Ghita Ionescu, *Populism. Its meanings and national characteristics*, p. 105.

³⁵ Henri Sanielevici, “Falimentul poporanismului” (The Bankruptcy of Poporanism) in *Poporanism reactionar* (Reactionary Poporanism), Bucharest: Socec, (1921).

³⁶ Duiliu Zamfirescu, *Poporanismul in literatura* (Poporanism in literature), Bucharest: Carol Gobl, (1909).

known only through literature³⁷. Maiorescu developed “an ideology which effectively shaped Romania’s development within the limits of a patronizing theory of peasant specificity”. Each further agrarian theory would try to emphasize the character of Romanian peasantry, which is different from Western materialism. After a quarter of a century, in 1936, the philosopher Lucian Blaga delivered his own speech³⁸, in which he strongly emphasized the atemporal village “uncorrupted” by history. For Blaga, the durability of village in time was synonymous with the idea of endlessness. Between these two symbolic moments, a village at the borderline between progress and tradition and the atemporal village, there is to be found almost the whole history of Romanian agrarianism. A cultural moment focused on land reform and universal suffrage as the emancipation of the peasantry, but a political moment was more preoccupied with the economic reforms with no distinct class orientation.

No political party dedicated to represent the interests of the peasantry existed in Romania before the First World War. The only attempt to provide a political action for the peasantry was made around 1880, by the rural teacher Constantin Dobrescu-Argeș, as an alternative to the domination of the traditional parties. The “moment Dobrescu-Argeș” would be the spark that generated the birth of peasantry around the First World War; the political movement of agrarianism. Poporanism defined itself mainly as a cultural movement, neither as a literary tendency like Samanatorism, nor as an ideological direction like Socialism. The theoretical achievements were presented in the articles of Constantin Stere, written under the influence of the great peasant rebellion in 1907. The moment of 1907 was only a spontaneous revolt, not a social revolution but the measures taken by Romanian authorities reflected the fear of a possible influence of the Russian revolution and the necessity to preserve the integrity of the state. A viable solution for the peasant issue was a historical necessity. A

³⁷ Titu Maiorescu, *Against the today direction in Romanian culture* (1868). On the relation between literature and society in Alex Drace-Francis, *The making of Modern Romanian Culture. Literacy and the Development of National Identity*, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, (2006).

³⁸ Lucian Blaga, *Elogiu satului romanesc* (In Praise of the Romanian Village), Bucharest: The Royal Foundations, (1937).

peasant political organization could emerge only after the First World War. The Peasantrist Party was founded in December 1918 and was led by the rural-teacher Ion Mihalache. Constantin Stere joined the Party and prepared its doctrine in which the main role belonged to the peasants themselves. The official doctrine was established in 1921 under the name “The Project of Program of the Peasantrist Party in Romania” and exposed in the collective volume in 1923, “The Doctrines of Political Parties”, by Virgil Madgearu. But only after the coagulation between the local interest of the Peasantrist Party and the regional interest of the National Party of Transylvania, led by the respected politician Iuliu Maniu, could the new political organization, the National Peasant Party, hope to become a real force and counter-balance the domination of the National Liberal Party, dominated by the leader Ion Bratianu. After the elections in 1927, which were considered to have been the freest in the interwar period, the National Peasant Party was elected with a large majority and tried to accomplish its political program. During the mandate, the National Peasant Party abandoned its initial radical agrarian orientation. The economic policy, driven by Virgil Madgearu, was conducted to support the free trade and a limited industrialization, looking very similar to a genuine ‘liberal’ program in the time. But the economic consequences of the Great Depression and the political inability of the peasant leaders themselves, corroborated with the attitude of King Carol II who desired power only for himself, determined the failure of the National Peasant Party after a very short period of governance. This failure of the National Peasants is similar to the failure of the interwar democracy in Romania. This was the real drama of the Party: to be in power and having to manage a situation which forces them to change their entire policy. The evolution of Romanian agrarianism: from radical populism to ‘liberal’ economics was the rise and decay of an organization which aimed to represent the ‘real’ social class of Romania: the peasants.

Chapter II:

From Cultural Movement to Political Action: The National Peasant Party in the Interwar Period

Romanian agrarianism as a political movement: The road to power

Not much before Romania entered the First World War, the rural teacher Ion Mihalache, coming from the County of Arges, proposed not the idea of a party, but that of a league dedicated to represent the interests of the largest social category: the peasantry. This peasant league would be a reformist organization with a double task: political and moral. It presupposed the enrollment of the rural intellectuals, school teachers and priests, and a part of the city middle class, both unsatisfied by the liberal oligarchy and the excesses of conservatives.

The peasant league will not be a political party, but a “league”, which it addresses to all whose are the adepts of the great reforms for peasants, no matter from which parties they will come; and expressly to intellectuals.(...)
The peasant league would have this program of reforms: expropriation, universal vote for all Romanians, progressive income taxation and, as a corollary: popular school and army³⁹.

³⁹ Ion Mihalache, “O Liga Țărăneasca” (A Peasant League) (unedited article) in the volume *Ce politica sa facem* (What Politics To Do), Bucharest: Romanian Printhouse, (1914), p. 93.

This is the first document which attested the appropriation of the peasantry to political action. Because the main political opponent was the National Liberal Party (the Conservative Party will cease to exist after the war) and because peasantry was considered to be a homogenous social class, the peasant movement defined itself as a *class party*, yet not promoting the class struggle like socialists but harmonizing the interests of different social classes. A trans-social class party, in which the core should be formed not only from the peasants themselves, but also from small intellectuals and middle class leaders of cities and villages, it was devoted to the idea of the social and economic emancipation of the peasantry. Their political direction had a certain similitude to the political views of social-democrats, confessed by peasantrist themselves:

Even if theoretically the socialist doctrine is in opposition to peasantrism, which is based on individual property, collaboration between social-democrats and peasants is not only useful for both parties but also seems to be the only means of defeating the financial oligarchy⁴⁰.

The social-democrats also agree with the fact that both political organizations have as their goal the diverting of the oligarchic system promoted by liberals. But the historical role to turn off capitalism belongs to the proletariat and the alliance is possible only with the poor peasants and with the rural middle class “corrupted” by capitalism⁴¹.

In the enthusiastic atmosphere immediately after the First World War, Ion Mihalache, a very charismatic person, wearied in the traditional costume from his original county⁴², tried to clarify the peasantrist doctrine and to keep a distance from other political parties influential at the time but without a clear doctrine, like the People Party of the war hero General

⁴⁰ Inedited text, written probably in 1922 during the debates for a new Constitution and published in the volume Virgil Madgearu, (*Agrarianism – Discursuri Parlamentare* (Agrarianism – Parliamentary Speeches), Bucharest: State Imprimeries, (1927), p.48.

⁴¹ This point of view was formulated by Serban Voinea, *Marxism Oligarhic Contributie la studiul dezvoltarii capitaliste in Romania* (Marxism Oligarchic Contribution to the Problem of Capitalist Development of Romania), Bucharest, I. Branisteanu Printing, (1926). The volume, written in Paris, is a reaction from a Marxist position to the book by Stefan Zeletin, *Romanian Bourgeoisie* published in 1925.

⁴² See the monograph dedicated to him by Apostol Stan, *Ion Mihalache – destinul unei vieti* (Ion Mihalache: The destiny of a life), Bucharest: Saeculum, (1999).

Alexandru Averescu or the Nationalist Democratic Party of the distinguished historian Nicolae Iorga. The People Party, led by the influential General Alexandru Averescu, seemed to be destined for a great political future; its leadership wanted to preserve the social order and a moderate land reform. But its political success was proportional to the devotion dedicated by people to the figure of General Alexandru Averescu. The People Party will come to power, but only for a very short period of time, followed by an alliance of small parties from the so-called Democratic Bloc. The Nationalist Democrat Party was more of an assemblage of small intellectuals attracted by the nationalist lineage and the strong scholarly prestige of Nicolae Iorga. Like the People Party, the Nationalist Democrat Party did not succeed to attract and maintain a faithful electorate and their importance in the whole interwar period lacked significance.

In the first years after the war, there was a period of ideological clarification for all the parties when political life was shaped in Greater Romania. Despite the variety of parties, only liberals and national-peasants produced solidly argued ideologies. To the left, the Communist Party joined the Comintern in 1921 but because it proposed that the new provinces should become autonomous, it was rejected as an outlaw in 1924. The Social Democrat Party led by Constantin Titel-Petrescu never succeeded in winning the elections and reaching Parliament. It would be absorbed by the communists when they came to power after the Second World War. Without a real left alternative to liberals, the center of political life moved to the right where neither the People Party of General Averescu nor the Nationalist Democratic Party of Nicolae Iorga, nor the national-Christian organizations nor the nationalistic mystique of the Iron Guard could produce a coherent ideology. And maybe what counted more was the obedient attitude of the political leaders to the traditional institution of the monarchy, which facilitated the road of Prince Carol II from a dandy royalty to an authoritarian king and,

implicitly, the road of interwar Romania from a parliamentary democracy to a personal dictatorship.

As leader of the Peasant Party, Ion Mihalache wanted to represent a new electorate, the peasantry, with new principles of political action and a new program of moral reform. He demanded a new Constitution, universal suffrage and an extensive land reform, autonomy for the church and the improvement of education and the sanitary system. As Minister of Agriculture, from the part of the Democratic Bloc, Ion Mihalache proposed a very radical project of land reform “in the name of the great majority of the population: peasantry”. But the powerful opposition of the liberals, with the indirect support of King Ferdinand, made the governance of the Democratic Bloc very short and the agrarian bill proposed by Ion Mihalache not pass. The project of the land reform proposed by Mihalache foresaw extended expropriations, the limitation of the rent and the transmitting of property only within the family to prevent the fragmentation of the land, the organization of the peasant property in cooperatist associations based on mutual help to increase their productivity and specialization of the agricultural production. Even though this legislative proposal was not accepted, the land reform of 1921 was one of the most advanced in Europe at that time. However, nobody was prepared to administrate the numerous difficulties that appeared because the new provinces of Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania had specific agricultural situations, very different from those of the old Kingdom.

The new peasant program dedicated especially to agriculture will be largely expressed by the economist Virgil Madgearu in his economic works and political speeches, where he emphasized the ideal of prosperous and independent peasant class (the principal examples given have been Denmark, Belgium and Switzerland), but they would be non-capitalist and based on a new concept of property considered as a *social function*, “which confers not only

individual rights but also social duties”⁴³. Despite the conventional populist mistrust towards the West and its isolationist policy, the radical agrarianism from the beginning of 20’s, promoted by Madgearu and Mihalache, was more open to the reception of the foreign capital and desired to involve the customary peasant economy in the complexity of regional and world economy.

Peasantry can not be liberal because the new liberalism has monopolistic tendencies, since peasantry is cooperatist; can not be conservator because the ideals of conservators and peasants are divergent; finally, can not be socialist because it based on the small property understood as social function⁴⁴.

Peasantry is not a continuation of the political legacy of conservatives, landowners who only wanted to preserve a social order favorable to them, but of the intellectual legacy of populists, therefore, a social and cultural movement, not a party. Its social conception and the direction of its political action are non-revolutionary: they want to win power only by legal methods and exclusively in a democratic way.

In the regime of the universal suffrage a liberal party (or a similar one) and a socialist party will succeed to govern only with the political support of the peasantry which forms the overwhelming majority of the population and of election⁴⁵.

On the other part of Carpathians, in Transylvania, Iuliu Maniu (1873–1953) led the Romanian National Party. With an intense political militancy against the policy of magyarization after the *Ausgleich* (1867), respected both as a politician and as a person, Maniu looked at the Balcanic political habits in Bucharest with increasing fear. His party was a regional one, dedicated to represent the interests of the Romanian middle class in Transylvania. With his powerful political instinct, Maniu realized the potentials of the new political organization in the “Kingdom” – the main denomination for Wallachia and Moldavia

⁴³ Virgil Madgearu, *Doctrina Taranista* (The Peasantist Doctrine), in the collected volume *Doctrinile partidelor politice* (The Doctrines of Political Parties), edited by Romanian Social Institute, Bucharest: National Culture, (1923), p. 7.

⁴⁴ Virgil Madgearu, *The Peasantist Doctrine*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Virgil Madgearu, *Taranismul* (Peasantry), Bucharest: Social Reform (1924), p. 12.

used in Transylvania – the Peasantry Party. He decided to form an alliance and a new, more powerful party. But the negotiations were long and difficult. The members of the Romanian National Party wanted to limit the centralist policy promoted by the authorities in Bucharest. The administration of the new territory of Greater Romania, with a large segment of minorities, created many difficulties and a centralizing policy was the response of the political leaders to this huge challenge. From this perspective, the fears of the members of the Romanian National Party appeared justified. There were important ideological differences between these two parties. The Romanian National Party called for an extended regional autonomy, a real parliamentary democracy, social protection and the development of the middle class. The Peasantry Party also promoted democracy but its electoral basis was formed mainly from peasants. The necessity to find a counterbalance to the political dominance of the National Liberal Party was one objective reason in the favor of fusion. The compatibility between the personalities of the leaders of these two parties, Maniu and Mihalache, also contributed to the realization of this. But what impeded the most the possible fusion was the “Stere case”⁴⁶. The influential conservative group from the Romanian National Party accused Stere of collaborationism during the First World War. He was dismissed from the Peasant Party as a political price paid by the peasants for the accomplished fusion. All other technical details are the following: the new leadership under the presidency of Iuliu Maniu and the double vice-presidency assured by Ion Mihalache and Virgil Madgearu, the unification of the territorial organizations and the elimination from the party program the principle of being a class-party were promptly negotiated. The unity of the new party seemed to be strong and it succeeded in attracting many people but its double origin would be one of the major causes of the problems. The main winner of the fusion was Virgil Madgearu, who

⁴⁶ Ion Scurtu, *Iuliu Maniu*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Printing, (1995), p.38. A detailed version about this case in Pamfil Seicaru, *Istoria Partidului National, Taranesc si National – Taranesc* (The History of National, Peasantry and National-Peasantry Party), Madrid: Traian Popescu Printhouse, (1963). For Stere’s answers to all accusations see *Preludii: Partidul National Taranesc si <<Cazul Stere>>* (Forewords: National Peasant party and “The Stere Case”), Bucharest: Adevarul Printhouse, (1930).

consolidated in this way his position inside the party. As the main doctrinaire of the new political movement, *the peasantry*, he exposed and defended its major goals, which were followed in the whole period of the political activity of the National Peasant Party:

- Administrative decentralization and local autonomy;
- Freedom of elections;
- Solidarity of all social class with the peasantry;
- Cooperative system, financed by agricultural credits;
- Real protection of the peasant property;
- Organization of small and middle industry;
- Equal conditions for local and foreign capital⁴⁷.

In November 1928, the National Peasant Party won the elections, considered the freest of that time, and came to power among a popular wave of enthusiasm. With Iuliu Maniu as Prime Minister, Ion Mihalache for Agriculture and Virgil Madgearu for Commerce and Industry,

The primary stress is upon restoring or rather creating for the first time, a truly constitutional regime. Secondly, the aid of foreign capital is to be sought to repair the national economy. Thirdly, if not as an afterthought at least not underlined, agriculture is to be assisted⁴⁸.

Among the first measures taken by the new government were the stabilization of currency (leu), the administrative reform bill and the adoption of a policy of “open gates” to attract foreign capital. Two factors dramatically limited the beneficial effects of these measures: the Great Depression and the return of Prince Carol II to the country. Carol II (1893

⁴⁷ Virgil Madgearu, *Taranismul* (Peasantry), Bucharest, Social Reform Printhouse, 1924. The whole program of National Peasant Party is depicted in *Programul si Statutele Partidului National Taranesc* (The Program and the Statutes of the National Peasant Party), Simleul Silvaniei: Lazar Printhouse, (1926).

⁴⁸ Henry Roberts, *Rumania: political problems of an Agrarian country*, (1969), pp. 130-131.

– 1953), the direct heir to the throne of Romania was a prince with a tumultuous private life⁴⁹ and a long row of love affairs. He denied his royal duties, refused to participate as combatant in the First World War and married in secret, in 1918 at Odessa, his mistress Ioana Maria Valentina (“Zizi”) Lambrino. The marriage was declared null by the Romanian authorities and the Royal House shortly arranged for him a legal marriage with Princess Elena of Greece, in 1921. The marriage did not last long because Carol gave up, again, his royal responsibilities for another woman: Elena Magda Lupescu. Because of this intolerable situation, he simply left the country in 1925 with his new mistress. In his place his minor son, Mihai, was named, assisted by regents. The death of one of the regents in 1929 caused a dynastic crisis. The unfruitful discussions between politicians of the issue of the nomination of a proper person to be the new regent caused general dissatisfaction. Public opinion and a part of the political class favored the return of Prince Carol who, it was thought, could bring order to the country. And, indeed, like his grandfather Carol I in 1866, Carol II returned to Romania in incognito in 1930. As Prime Minister and leader of the dominant party at that time, Iuliu Maniu asked Carol II, as a guarantee of his good intentions, to give up his extra-marital relationship with Elena Magda Lupescu. Carol promised Maniu that he would respect these conditions and was shortly proclaimed King of Romania in June 1930. But Carol did not have any intention to give up either his mistress or the throne. His decision provoked the resignation of Iuliu Maniu as Prime Minister.

In fact, the attitude of the National Peasants, and particularly that of Maniu towards Carol II was ambivalent. They believed until the last moment the declared, but never kept promises of Carol. The reverence towards the institution of the monarchy was too great and the attitude of many Romanian politicians, mostly educated before the war, was deferential in

⁴⁹ See Paul Quinlan, *The Playboy King: Carol the Second of Romania*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, (1995).

front of the king. This “*failing in pre-modern*”⁵⁰, so obvious in the periods of political crisis, could explain the paternalism of the political culture and the weaknesses of the institutions during the interwar period. In just a few years, Carol II learned how to manipulate the political parties and how to transform democracy into a personal dictatorship. Yet, after the territorial losses of a significant part of Transylvania in 1940, Carol II was forced to resign in favor of Marshal Ion Antonescu. He would finally leave Romania, without regretting it, and established, together with Elena Magda Lupescu, his residency in Portugal, where would die in 1953.

Romanian agrarianism as a political movement:

Rise and fall

The inability of National Peasants leaders, and especially that of Maniu, to negotiate with the versatile Carol II and to fulfill the expectations of its own electorate had a great contribution to the loss of its initial capital. The lack of a real parliamentary control, internal struggles and the conflicting interests made that the peasantrist government did not differ too much from the much detested liberal government⁵¹. While, “the true sources of power and influence in Romania were not embodied in the electoral process”⁵². The Great Depression undermined the economic program of the National Peasant Party and accelerated its political bankruptcy. The fall of agricultural prices was so dramatic and the inflation so overwhelming that a lot of peasants lost their income. The feeling of dissatisfaction and frustration of the

⁵⁰ Sorin Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul roman* (The Romanian Paradox), Bucharest: Univers, (1998), p. 95.

⁵¹ Pamfil Seicaru, *History of National, Peasant and National-Peasant Party*, p. 73.

⁵² Henry Roberts, *Rumania: political problems of an Agrarian country*, p. 137.

peasants towards both liberal and peasantist governances, can explain, at least partially, the political success of the Iron Guard in the 30's. Still, the depression and the arrival of Carol only cannot explain the whole picture: the incapacity of the National Peasant Party to preserve the initial political capital and power and the ability to act mainly as a party from opposition. The explanation can be seen in the dual-structure of the National Peasant Party.

In addition to these two external factors – the arrival of Carol on the political scene and of the depression on the economic scene – the National Peasants were also laid low by internal weaknesses and contradictions. These derived a) from the dual origin of the party, b) from certain shortcomings inherent in the peasantist philosophy, and c), as a result of a) and b), a watering down of this philosophy into a somewhat eclectic position which locked the strength to oppose the onrush of the Rightist authoritarian doctrines of the Carolist era⁵³.

The National Peasant Party, formed through the fusion of the National Romanian Party, originated in Transylvania, and the Peasantist Party had to combine two different ideologies: a regionalist one, dedicated to representing the Romanian small bourgeoisie in Transylvania, and a radical agrarian one, dedicated to representing the whole peasantry in Greater Romania. The unity of the party was merely an illusion: powerful personalities from its leadership, like Iuliu Maniu, Ion Mihalache, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, Dr. Nicolae Lupu, Virgil Madgearu, imposed their own ways of action. Iuliu Maniu, for instance, was an adept of the formalist line with many deliberations and unfinished political debates. Ion Mihalache tried to maintain a neutral line, not in the same time open to the possible negotiations. Alexandru Vaida-Voevod and Dr. Nicolae Lupu were much more opportunists, dissidents from the party. Virgil Madgearu was a pragmatic politician, a good but not very innovative theoretician, and a reputed university professor. Nevertheless,

The principal effect of the dual origin was not, however, party instability but the ambiguity which it imparted to National Peasant policy. This effect should not be overemphasized because the Peasant party's policy was by no means fixed and had undergone important modifications even before amalgamation⁵⁴.

⁵³ Henry Roberts, *Op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

⁵⁴ Henry Roberts, *Op. cit.*, p. 142.

The evolution of its doctrine was quite spectacular: from the radical agrarianism of the early 20's and the principle of a class-party, to the necessity of a widespread cooperative system of the late 20's and the nationalist position of the 30's, with the political concept of a peasant state. The economical measures taken by the National Peasants during their governance to limit the effects of the depression had a protectionist character, peasant in form but very liberal in fond. International negotiations for an agricultural loan were made, the currency was stabilized and the national budget reorganized. Special attention was paid to the protection of national industry against international trusts. But agriculture had too less to gain on this anti-depression policy.

Analyzing the economic evolution of modern Romania, Madgearu admitted in his writings that capitalism was the main dominator in world economy, but he tried to argue the fact that, in the historical conditions of Romania, agriculture was a different and non-capitalist way of development. According to his peasant credo, he concentrated on the "modernizing of Romania's agriculture without jeopardizing her non-capitalist economic and social structure. He thought of the co-operative as an association based upon mutual aid and income from labor and excluding the idea of profit"⁵⁵.

But the results did not live up to the expectations. The co-operatives were not governed, as Madgearu himself had to see with disappointment, "by the true spirit of cooperation, but were, rather, capitalist enterprises, dominated by the village bourgeoisie and, occasionally, landlords, whose main concern was to obtain as high dividends as possible for themselves and other share holders"⁵⁶.

The most remarkable results were achieved not in internal but in the regional and international policy. In 1930, the peasant minister Virgil Madgearu supported the foundation of the Agrarian Bloc, an organization of Eastern European states who tried to

⁵⁵ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania: 1866 – 1947*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1994), p. 326.

⁵⁶ Keith Hitchins, *Op. cit.*, p. 327.

coordinate their economic policy and to gain preferential prices for agricultural products. The Bloc was formed by Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia. Their failure to achieve their aims was mostly determined by the chain-effects of the depression.

One indigenous plan, the ideal of insularity, of a Romania on the border between Liberalism and Socialism, based on the economic virtues of small tenure and on the moral virtues of the great peasantry, was promoted and defended during the entire political activity of the National Peasant Party. Abandoning the agrarian radicalism from the beginning in favor of parliamentary support, the National Peasant Party sacrificed its own electoral base. Trying to avoid the socialist extreme-radicalism and the negative effects of capitalism, the National Peasant Party adopted some practices of their traditional opponents: the National Liberal Party.

In comparing the Liberals and National Peasants, in many ways antithetical, one is struck by a curious parallel between them. Both were somehow out of phase with world developments. The Liberals embarked on a policy of economic nationalism and semi autarky during just the years Europe was making a last if unsuccessful effort to restore the old economic order. The National Peasants, when they came into office, attempted to reverse Romanian policy at just the time when the European economy was moving into a new stage of economic nationalism. Both parties fell into contradictions arising from their Western preoccupations and the realities of the Romanian situation. The Liberals in attempting to copy Western capitalism ceased to be “liberal” in the process; the Peasants in attempting to copy parliamentary democracy ceased to be “peasants”. The Peasants’ economic policy bore a far greater resemblance to traditional liberalism than did that of the Liberals, whereas the Liberals’ economic policy – at least in its restrictions and hostility to Western capital – had points in common with the initial attitude of the Peasants⁵⁷.

In addition to the paralyzing economical effects of the Great Depression there was a continuous decline of the National Peasant Party during the 30’s. A significant part of its leadership, especially the young peasants, Mihai Ralea, Armand Calinescu, Petre Andrei, unsatisfied with the political direction promoted by Maniu and his strong control of the party,

⁵⁷ Roberts, Henry, *Rumania: political problems of an Agrarian country*, p. 169.

deserted, and a part of its membership was attracted by the nationalist peasant mystique of the Iron Guard. And, even more confusing for its general political activity and surprising for its membership and for the public opinion, was the “pact of nonaggression” in 1937. It was concluded between Maniu in the name of the National Peasant Party and the Iron Guard leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu with the participation of the liberal faction of Gheorghe Bratianu. It was only a pre-electoral convention made with the clear aim to ensure free elections during a very unstable period. There was no political appropriation between the two political formations and no political union was formed, yet this pact caused a serious damage to the image of the National Peasant Party.

After two failures and short periods in government, in 1928–1930 and 1931–1932, as president of the National Peasant Party, Ion Mihalache tried to reconcile the party program with the philosophical sources of peasantry, exposed few years earlier by the conservative philosopher Constantin Radulescu-Motru:

The peasantry is more than a social class; it is the origin of all social classes. Since the other social classes began their formation by differentiating their own interests, differentiation which helped them to achieve the conscience of their unity, the peasantry remained the same homogenous mass from its origins, the whole people, without the consciousnesses of any other unity than that of the people itself.⁵⁸

A new political concept is reinforced now: the national-peasant state. Considered as a historical necessity, the national-peasant state opposed both the socialist idea of a common property over land, and capitalism which only follows the pursuit of profit. Economy should be organized only on a cooperative basis, industry should be protected by the state and a local administrative autonomy should be maintained.

It will come here, on the ruins of capitalism and liberalism, a new form of State, similar with the Romanian worker, who is the peasant. It will be the national peasant State! The feature of this state will be “Romanian national”, so “peasant”. (...) For us, “social” is “peasant” and “national” also “peasant”. For

⁵⁸ Constantin Radulescu-Motru, *Taranismul – un suflet si o politica* (Peasantry – a soul and a policy), Bucharest: National Print House, (1924), p. 39.

us, peasant means nation, people, and country. To be peasant means to be, from birth, nationalist⁵⁹.

Nevertheless, the years that will follow the economic depression were not suitable any more for the National Peasants. The disappointment produced by their policy caused the foundation of other political organizations which also pretended to represent the peasants' interests. The Ploughmen Front was an organization created in 1933 in the County of Hunedoara, in Transylvania, by the local lawyer Petru Groza. It addressed the poorer stratum of the peasantry and directly reproached the National Peasants who deliberately ignored them, mainly during the Great Depression. However, they had only little success during the elections and they remained a small regional party with an insignificant political influence until the end of the Second World War when Petru Groza collaborated with the new communist power and formed the government in 1946.

Until that time, in the unstable political climate of the 30's, the rising influence of the extreme nationalists' organizations would be due to the collapse of democracy. The killing of important political figures – the historian and the statesman Nicolae Iorga, the liberal minister I. G. Duca and the peasant leader Virgil Madgearu⁶⁰ – by commandos of legionnaires horrified the national and international public. Drastic measures were taken and because the personal dictatorship of Carol II proved to be too weak, the military regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu was enforced.

After the war, the communists, imposed by the Soviet Union, came to power and would declare all other political parties outlaws. When it became obvious that the Great Powers, Great Britain and the United States, will not intervene for the stabilization of the

⁵⁹ Ion Mihalache, *Taranism si nationalism* (Peasantry and Nationalism), Bucharest: The Institute for Graphic Arts "Bucovina" I.E. Toroutiu, (1936), pp 7-9.

⁶⁰ In order to keep the historical truth, I have to say that Virgil Madgearu was not killed for political reasons. It was a personal revenge of an unworthy student who joined the Legionaries. I received this correction from Professor Serban Papacostea from the History Institute "N. Iorga" Bucharest. I hereby gratefully acknowledge his help.

political regime of Romania, and the communists already controlled all pillars of power, a small group of politicians of the traditional parties made the decision to leave the country and to establish a counter-government in the West. They were caught in the commune Tamadau, in front of a private plane which would have taken them abroad. The small group and those who were suspected to collaborate were jailed. It was an artificial pretext of the communists to accuse the leaders of the “historical parties”, as the National Liberal Party and the National Peasant Party were called, and to send them to prison.

During the trial, Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache showed courage before their communist prosecutors, sustaining that their only goal was to preserve democracy and the functions of the state. Until the last moment, Maniu and Mihalache believed that democracy could be saved and negotiation with the communists would be possible⁶¹. But the communists did not wish to share power with anyone. Many political leaders of the interwar period died in the communists’ prisons. Iuliu Maniu ended his life in 1953 in the prison for political prisoners in Sighet, while Ion Mihalache survived until 1963 in the high security prison of Ramnicu Sarat.

The National Peasant Party was re-established in December 1989 and tried to continue the same political direction of moral rectitude and respect for the democratic rules set up by Iuliu Maniu at the beginning of the century. The main figure of the new National Peasant Party, with a Christian Democrat doctrine, was his ex-private secretary, Corneliu Coposu⁶². His political activity, his immense moral prestige as a former political prisoner and the great respect for his political adversaries made Corneliu Coposu a model in Romanian post-communist politics. His sudden death before the political coalition under his leadership, the

⁶¹ Confident in the possibility of free elections, Maniu and Mihalache prepared a new program for their party according to the new political conditions. The title of this document is “Despre programul Partidului national Taranesc cu explicarea programului de Ion Mihalache si Iuliu Maniu” (About the program of the National Peasant Party. Explained by Ion Mihalache and Iuliu Maniu), Timisoara: Center of Studies of National Peasant Party, (1945).

⁶² About Corneliu Coposu in Tudor Calin Zarojanu, *Viața lui Corneliu Coposu* (The Life of Corneliu Coposu), Bucharest: The Printing Machine Editing, (2005).

Democratic Convention, could win the elections, symbolized a breach with traditional ways of policy.

The rise and fall of the National Peasant Party illustrates the dilemma of a political party which was forced by external economic conditions and internal political constraints to give up its doctrinal core: agrarianism. In the political history of Romania in the first half of the Twentieth century, the National Peasant Party remained the party that tried, without true success, to find a third way between the liberal domination and the communist threat.

In each and every country of Eastern Europe parties abandoned the sentimental desire to do something for the peasants, finding it necessary to advance a program which rested on something more tangible than the celebrated peasant soul. Sooner or later each party had to adopt its program to the peculiar conditions existing within its own country, and in the process abandon some of the more utopian policies it has exposed when it was only a minority opposition party⁶³.

I can not be agreeing with the affirmation above, at least in the case of the National Peasant Party from Romania in the interwar period. Firstly, because this party and the entire political movement that legitimate it does not celebrate the abstract “peasant soul” but the real peasantry, considered as a very distinctive social category. Secondly, because the economic policy of the National Peasant Party sustained the peasantry and created a small stratum of rural bourgeoisie, entrepreneurs and merchants, which constituted their electoral basis, and not the great mass, still very poor, of peasants. The sociological studies realized by the student teams conducted by the professor Dimitrie Gusti regarding the daily life of the peasants showed the deficiency of diet and the insalubrious conditions of hygiene for the most of them. Their “utopian policy” was in fact their agrarian radicalism, “abandoned” in the favor of the peasant state, a concept lifted in the thirties, in a context in which nationalism tended to become the dominant note of the Romanian politics.

⁶³George Jr. Jackson, *Comintern and Peasant in Eastern Europe...* p. 244.

At its origins, the Romanian agrarianism proposed itself to promote and extended and radical land reform which should resolve the agrarian issue once and for all. For this, its true animator, Ion Mihalache, wished for a reorganization of agriculture on new basis: extended expropriations and strict control of the land renting, reconvention of the agricultural debts, preferential credits for peasants, and the autonomy of the small peasant property into a system of cooperatives based upon reciprocal aid. For bringing the peasantry in the center of the political life agrarianism should define its own ideology and political strategy. This task will be assumed by Virgil Madgearu, a reputed economist with middle class origins, and public exposed under the name of *peasantrism*. The sustaining of the private rural initiative and protection of the peasantry, considered as social category with distinct interests, the local administrative autonomy and the opening to the foreign capital represented the core of this doctrine. For achieving to power in the conditions of the fluctuant party system from interwar Romania a peasant party, was formed through the union of two distinct political parties. The double origin and the double electorate have had a double effect. The benefic effect was the national representativity of the new party who became in this way the main challenger for the almighty liberals. The bad effect was the migration from the initial radical agrarianism toward a more 'liberal' direction under the economic pressure of the Great Depression. In addition, the attitude of obedience toward the institution of monarchy, the rigid political principles in the internal affairs and the uninspired pact of "nonaggression" with the Iron Guard have converted the political capital of the National Peasant Party into a political tragedy.

Indeed, the whole doctrine of agrarianism defined itself as a third way between liberalism, their main political opponents, and socialism. Their political success was realized basically in the first years of the interwar period, and maybe is not an irony that their political longevity has manifested mainly as an opposition movement and not as a leading party.

Chapter III:

The Core of Agrarianism: the Clash of Ideas Around the Agrarian Issue

Romanian Agrarianism: A short overview

In the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe, peasant parties promoted and extended the idea of a peasant society at the crossroads between two worlds: one Western, industrialized and capitalist, the other Eastern, proletarian and communist. The historical paradox is that while peasant leaders tried to adapt liberal principles to the specific agrarian conditions of their countries, communism emerged and came to power not in the Western and more industrialized countries, as in the classical Marxist scheme, but in the Eastern and less “proletarian” ones. Communism failed in the West where the revolutionary potential of the urban proletariat could not fulfill the Marxist prediction of class struggle, yet won in the East, where the peasantry was the largest part of the population and traditionally suspicious to all urban influences.

It has always been a “proletarian” revolution without a proletariat; a matter of Communist management of peasant discontent. But while this shows that in the countries where this has happened the peasants were ripe to revolt, it does not show that they inclined to Communism. (...) It is true that Marxist Socialism had provided the first popular revolutionary movement in the West, but it is overlooked that in Eastern Europe there was a strong Populist, that is agrarian – peasant revolutionary movement before the new “scientific” Socialism came upon the scene. And even thereafter that new Socialism was never in the East anything but a revolutionary hothouse plant, an intellectual importation from

the West, without native roots, clinging as a creeper to the strong growth of peasant radicalism⁶⁴.

Eastern and Central European agrarian movements were more influenced by Eastern European Nineteenth-century populism than the revolutionary ideas of Western European Marxism. There existed a dream of the Populists to have a peasant society unaffected by the overwhelming Capitalism. For Marxists, Capitalism was also a main ideological enemy, but peasants were constantly considered as not being revolutionary enough, even too reactionary. The traditional and inert behavior of the peasantry was well-known for both Liberals and Socialists; but for Populists and Agrarianists, these features were signs of national specificity rather than those of backwardness.

If the true promoter of Romanian agrarianism was the rural teacher Ion Mihalache and its political leader was the old-fashioned Iuliu Maniu, then the most influential theoretician of agrarianism was certainly Professor Virgil Madgearu. Born in the Danube harbor of Galati in 1887, as a son of a local entrepreneur, Virgil Madgearu completed his first studies in the city of Galati and gained his doctorate in economics at the University of Leipzig in 1911. He returned to Romania and in 1914, and started teaching at the Academy of Commercial Studies. He led an active intellectual life as the co-founder of the magazine *Independenta Economica* (Economic Independence) and as a scientific secretary of the Romanian Social Institute, headed by the reputed sociologist Dimitrie Gusti. Madgearu was deeply preoccupied with the economic and sociological problems of interwar Romania. He collected his conferences in the book “Agrarianism, Imperialism Capitalism” (edited in 1936), and realized, with a large documentary apparatus, the first attempt to an analysis of the evolution of Romanian economy from the interwar period by his book *Evolutia economiei romanesti dupa razboiul mondial* (The evolution of the Romanian economy after the World War)

⁶⁴ David Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant*, New York: Collier Books, (1961), p. 207.

(published in 1940). For Virgil Madgearu, the effort of industrialization, which started in Romania in the last part of the Nineteenth century – when Romania entered the orbit of international capitalism – did not produce a fundamental change in the structure of the Romanian economy. Due to the insignificant amount of private capital compared to state capital invested into and working in it, the Romanian economy could not be considered as a proper capitalist economy. Moreover, the active rural population was more numerous than the industrial one.

According to Virgil Madgearu, “Romania is still a semi-capitalist state with an economic social-agrarian-peasant order”⁶⁵. Only the demographic rural pressure can assure the process of an authentic transformation of the economy. Under this demographic pressure, the normal tendency of agriculture would be in the direction of its intensification. The practice of an extensive agriculture on small parcels with low productivity could not lead to a sustained rhythm of an increasing economy. Agriculture produced goods primarily for covering its own consumer necessities. It had a sporadic contact with the market and its influence on economy was low. Some structural conditions had a decisive influence on this: overpopulation, the rudimentary agricultural technique, the small and spread plots of land, the lack of cadastre and communal roads⁶⁶. Only agriculture organized on cooperative principles could properly assure the expansion of agricultural production. It means that smallholders should be organized into common associations on production and delivery, sustained by credits adequate to the peasant economy. Industry could not provide an impulse for developing agriculture or sustain the necessities of the internal market. An orderly economy

⁶⁵Virgil Madgearu, *Evolutia economiei romanesti dupa razboiul mondial* (The Evolution of the Romanian Economy After the World War), Bucharest, Scientific Printhouse, 2nd edition, (1995), p. 265.

⁶⁶Virgil Madgearu, *Evolutia economiei romanesti dupa razboiul mondial* (The Evolution of the Romanian Economy After the World War), Bucharest, Scientific Printhouse, 2nd edition, (1995), p. 271.

organized by the state⁶⁷ could limit these enormous disparities between the agricultural sector based on small individual properties and the industrial sector which is rooted in large monopolies. Such an order, called “directed economy” by Madgearu, could also provide a healthy accumulation of capital, based not on individual and anarchic necessities but on national interest. These thoughts can be summarized as follows:

He could discern no fundamental change in the structure of the Romanian economy: the capitalist sector in general was still small, since capitalism as a mode of production had touched only a few branches of industry in a significant way and agriculture maintained its predominance. He concluded that there was still no possibility that the Romanian economy could be integrated into the world capitalist system, for its structure continued to be determined by several million peasant holdings, which formed an economic network governed by values qualitatively different from those of a capitalist economy. Nevertheless, he could not ignore the fact that capitalism exerted a powerful influence over Romanian agriculture⁶⁸.

Madgearu also played a significant political role. As a peasant deputy he criticized the Liberal economic policy for its overdimensioned bureaucracy, suprataxation, excessive protectionism and corruption. As minister in the National Peasant governments, he was preoccupied with the improvement of the state of agriculture, considered the main economic domain, and to establish a new trade and industrial policy open to foreign investments. The entire economic philosophy of Virgil Madgearu can be synthesized in a few main assertions.

First, agriculture is an autonomous and non-capitalist way of production. It is not related to exploitation but to providing for the needs of the peasant family; it even caters for the expenses of labor, for seeds and technology for the soil.

The evolution of agriculture follows its own way. (...)

The fundamental difference between agricultural and industrial production is that in agriculture production is *organic* [underlined by the author] but in industry is only *mechanical*⁶⁹.

⁶⁷Virgil Madgearu, *Evolutia economiei romanesti dupa razboiul mondial* (The Evolution of the Romanian Economy After the World War, Bucharest, Scientific Printhouse, 2nd edition, (1995), p. 289.

⁶⁸Keith Hitchins, *Rumania: 1866 – 1947*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1994), pp. 333-334.

⁶⁹Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism*, 2nd edition, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, (1999), p.42

Quoting the Russian economist Alexandr Ciaianov, Madgearu shows that the structure of the peasant individual economy is sustained basically by the peasants' family needs and further by the intensity of labor, the technical means used, the natural conditions and the demands of the market⁷⁰. The small holdings are not isolated, in fact, among them exists an entire system of complex reciprocal relations; it can be argued that the peasant economy becomes the national economic unit itself⁷¹. Such an economic unit, in which the capitalist category of the salary is practically unknown, forms the basis of the peasant state.

Second, the great land tenures are inefficient, hard to be managed and depend in a greater way on the progress of industry and the fluctuations of the internal market. The small agricultural producer depends to a lesser extent on market laws: he can decide how to cultivate his land. A cooperative system grounded on the small property of rural producers represents the solution for getting out of the vicious circle of *neoiobagie* (neoserfdom). This new character of agriculture is due to the harmonious combination between private property and individual freedom. A real land reform means mostly a reform of private property, but a property regarded as *social function*. In this way, property creates not only rights but also duties towards society: the obligation of the proper exploitation of the land, the transmission of property through succession, the limitation of selling or mortgaging the tenures. The regime of property instituted in this way creates a class of free peasants, masters on their land, the basis of the future peasant state, and a social environment beneficial for agricultural development. Thus, agriculture and not industry is the main engine of the economy because it takes into account the true social structure of the country and fully satisfies the real needs of the consumers.

⁷⁰Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism*, 2nd edition, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, (1999), p.75.

⁷¹Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism*, 2nd edition, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, (1999), p.84.

An agrarian regime established on small peasant holdings, will maintain a dense population, will intensify the agricultural production and will form an internal market for industrial production, capable to consume great stocks of goods⁷².

Third, a powerful peasant class cannot be consolidated without a “consciousness of class” and a “capacity of political action”⁷³. Under the specific conditions of the universal suffrage, class tendencies of the peasants concretize themselves in peasant parties. The specific interests of the peasantry are quite different from those of the bourgeoisie who, in order to supplement their income, has to increase the taxes and this leads to unjustified increase in the prices of land and, as a direct consequence, to the decrease of the living conditions of the peasantry. The interests of the peasantry are also different from that of the proletariat, who promote a social revolution against the capitalist bourgeoisie. Because in the majority of the East Central European countries the social organization is preponderantly agrarian and because the proletariat has an insignificant social ponderosity, the social evolution in this part of the world simply cannot follow the directions of the Marxist theory⁷⁴.

Under those conditions, can agrarianism, based on the autonomy of traditional smallholding, as a non-capitalist way of production, provide a satisfactory explanation for the social evolution of modern Romanian history? Can agrarianism provide the possible conditions for a genuine peasant state? Virgil Madgearu tried to answer in the positive, starting from a statistically determined fact: because in the first half of the Twentieth century in Romania, the number of peasants was significantly greater than all other social layers, the agrarian issue was the main challenge which had to find an adequate solution. His assumption is that the peasantry constitutes a very distinct social class, different from the urban bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The peasantry is a traditional social class, not an artificial

⁷²Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism*, 2nd edition, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, (1999), p.52.

⁷³Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism*, 2nd edition, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, (1999), p.58.

⁷⁴Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism*, 2nd edition, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, (1999), p.70.

social construction of the society. With the political support of the universal suffrage, the peasantry could become, according to the political predictions of Virgil Madgearu, the decisive political factor in interwar Romania. This political force demands its own party, which should be “national”, because of the great number of the peasants, and “peasant”, because of its political goals. These goals implied a profound social and economic transformation of the country, according to its new political structure.

This could happen in two ways: i) through the creation of a powerful class of free peasants, proprietors on their small holding and united in cooperative associations based on mutual help; ii) derived from the first, through the creation of a peasant state, because this effort implied a national ideal. A peasant state could be achieved only in a democratic way, using the instrument of elections and local autonomy, and actively involving the peasants in public affairs. This kind of state was far from the revolutionary ideal promoted by the socialists. It was also far from the bourgeois ideal of capitalism, considered inappropriate for the real structure of Romanian society. Although Madgearu was a convinced democrat in promoting his political goals, he could not see his ideal he fought for achieved.

He anticipated *correctly* the electorate potential of the peasantry, under the conditions of free elections and universal suffrage, but he considered *inaccurately*, in my opinion, the peasantry as a uniform social class with the same goals and political ambitious. The economic conditions differing from one region of Greater Romania to another (even within the same rural community) proved the fact that the peasants were mainly interested in the achievement of immediate material interests. The interaction between the individualistic interests of the peasants with small holdings and the “bourgeois” interests of the middle-landlords created disparities among the peasantry, and this caused the collapse of the basis of the cooperative system and finally ruined the proposed peasant state.

The Third Way

Virgil Madgearu was not only an eminent economist and an active politician eager to promote the principles of agrarianism; he was also a reputable polemist. In a public conference sustained in 1925 at Romanian Social Institute⁷⁵, Virgil Madgearu prepared a critical analysis to the volume of Stefan Zeletin dedicated to the Romanian bourgeoisie. Like Zeletin himself, Madgearu agreed that a local bourgeoisie developed in the Romanian Principalities at the beginning of the Nineteenth century under the influence of the Western capitalism. But – and this is the major difference – for Madgearu, this bourgeoisie had no developmental characteristics, it only exploited national wealth. These characteristics were related mainly to the organization and exportation of cereal production. To accomplish this purpose only two solutions were theoretically feasible: i) the expropriation of peasants; or ii) the expropriation of boyars. The first solution was unacceptable for Western capitalism, because it would determine the destabilization of the internal social structure of the Principalities. The second solution was inoperable, because it would have implied a revolutionary bourgeoisie and an industrial proletariat strong enough to oppose the great boyars and landowners. The result was a historical compromise, concretized in the land reform of 1864, and with a juridical justification in the Constitution of 1866. The phenomenon was named “neoserfdom” and this is the real origin of the local bourgeoisie. Because the regime of “neoserfdom” was an artificial construction, the result, logically, was that the Romanian bourgeoisie was itself an artificial creation. This pattern was not disposed to follow the normal way of Western capitalist evolution: from commercial capitalism to the

⁷⁵ The title of the conference was “Formarea si evolutia burgheziei romane” (The formation and the evolution of the Romanian bourgeoisie) and is a direct answer to the very controversial volume of Stefan Zeletin, *Burghezia romana originea si rolul ei istoric* (The Romanian bourgeoisie: Its origin and historical role). The text of the conference is inserted in the volume *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism*, 2nd edition, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, (1999), pp. 98 – 122.

industrial and to the financial one. A normal evolution would involve the undermining of the regime of “neoserfdom” and the creation of an agrarian peasant regime, much more adequate to the new economic and social conditions of Romania. But this great transformation presumes, first of all, a deep reform of schools based on “morality” and “social idealism”.

According to the necessities of the moment in a new united Romania, the idea of school reform also interested Stefan Zeletin. Therefore, these two theoreticians met at the point of educational reform in an essay written one year later under the title “Nationalizing the School”⁷⁶. Zeletin was not only a sociologist interested in the analysis of the evolution of the Romanian bourgeoisie; his preoccupations were also related to philosophy and historiography. With a doctorate in philosophy on the influence of the Hegelian determinism on English empirical philosophy, obtained in 1912 at the University of Erlangen, Zeletin was a materialist, for whom traditional history was only a chronological row of figures and facts and social history dealt with the large historical processes produced by collectivities and not by individuals.

The fundamental scientific difference between the traditional chronologic history and social history is that the first occupies with *the unique facts* and the last occupies with *the reversible facts*⁷⁷.

The reply would be given by the reputed medievalist Gheorghe Bratianu, who considered that the research of historical sources should be made “without preconceived ideas”, paying attention to the connections between facts and their evolution⁷⁸. Bratianu, a connoisseur of the subtleties of historical documents, rehabilitated chronology in the study of history and considered historic Darwinism proposed by Zeletin unilateral, based on an *a priori* approach to history, and not on the authentic research of historical sources.

⁷⁶Stefan Zeletin, *Nationalizarea scoalei* (Nationalizing the School), Bucharest: Cultural Foundation Principe Carol, (1926).

⁷⁷Stefan Zeletin, *Istoria sociala* (Social History), Bucharest: Agrarian and Social Pages, (1925), p.9.

⁷⁸Gheorghe Bratianu, *Teorii noua in invatamantul istoriei* (New Theories in Teaching History), Iași, (1926).

The main theoretical contribution of Stefan Zeletin regarding the modern social history of Romania was the intimate correlation established between the origins of the modernization of Romanian society and the formation of a native bourgeoisie. He tracks the beginnings of the process of modernization as a direct consequence of the Organic Statutes and the introducing of Western capitalism in the Romanian Principalities. Western capital and the demand for cereals in the Principalities stimulated the commerce and made possible the initiation of a local industry. This process was beneficial not only for the industry but also for agriculture⁷⁹, which could take advantage in this way from the possibilities opened by the new markets. Because both the native bourgeoisie and the peasantry have the interest of becoming as prosperous as possible, a competition between them is logically impossible. The development of agriculture is directly influenced by the development of industry. In the incipient phase of capitalist development and in the context of the “neoserfdom” regime of the peasantry, the essentially feudal working relationships within the bourgeois institutional framework is a normal phenomenon. This “neoserfdom” is not only the characteristic of the situation of the Romanian peasantry as some “random authors”⁸⁰ used to say; it is a universal phenomenon in all countries in the transition process towards capitalism. Zeletin tried to lend a scientific basis to the evolution of the native bourgeoisie by using a historical Hegelian pattern and a Marxist economic rhetoric against the “literary sociology” promoted by theoreticians of the “reactionary currents” like Titu Maiorescu, Nicolae Iorga, Constantin Stere, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and Henry Sanielevici⁸¹.

⁷⁹Stefan Zeletin, *Burghezia romana originea si rolul ei istoric* (The Romanian bourgeoisie: Its origin and historical role), 2nd edition, Bucharest: Humanitas, (1991), p. 244.

⁸⁰Stefan Zeletin, *Burghezia romana originea si rolul ei istoric* (The Romanian bourgeoisie: Its origin and historical role), 2nd edition, Bucharest: Humanitas, (1991), p. 213. The “random author” is no-one else than the socialist Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and the text is a polemic replica, but it used similar bibliographical sources, like Karl Marx, Werner Sombart and Friedrich List, against his book: “Neoserfdom”.

⁸¹Stefan Zeletin, *Burghezia romana originea si rolul ei istoric* (The Romanian bourgeoisie: Its origin and historical role), 2nd edition, Bucharest: Humanitas, (1991), pp. 247-252.

The economic interpretation provided by Stefan Zeletin on the formation and the evolution of the Romanian bourgeoisie came to similar conclusions to the cultural approach of another literary critic: Eugen Lovinescu. In his massive three-volume book⁸², *The history of the Modern Romanian Civilization*, Lovinescu uses the theory of imitation of the French sociologist Hyppolite Taine to prove the idea that the process of modernization in Romania was due to the imitation of Western patterns. The constitutional projects from the beginning of the Nineteenth century which were started by the elites of Moldova and Wallachia, using as the *Code Napoléon* as model, are considered to be the first manifestations of liberalism in a broader sense and a Western type of mentality. Conscious of the huge gap between the development of the West and patriarchal Romania, the native urban elites imitated and internalized Western laws, institutions, mentalities and habits, in short, an entire civilization. This process was called by Lovinescu “synchronism”. The entire modern Romanian civilization is solely the creation of this urban, bourgeois class, and no other “reactionary force” could achieve this.

What accurately defines the intellectual Romanian environment in the interwar period was definitely the tone and the intensity of the debates relating to the relationship of Romanians with the West. Lovinescu and Zeletin can be considered as Westernizers in a period in which the struggle for symbolic domination was dedicated to defining the national essence and the place of Romania in the new European context. They advocated the determinative influence of Western patterns of civilization on modernizing the traditional structure of Romanian society. They also tried to promote the values of the bourgeoisie and liberalism⁸³ against those who tried to defend the virtues of the peasantry. Among Traditionalists, as they were called, were theologians, philosophers, even historians. In order

⁸²Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria civilizației române moderne* (The History of Modern Romanian Civilization) (vol. I-II-III), (1924-1926), 2nd edition Bucharest: Minerva, (1992).

⁸³As a curiosity, neither Lovinescu, nor Zeletin were members of the National Liberal Party. Zeletin was, indeed, for a short time enrolled as a member, but in the People Party; he refused to enroll in the National Liberal Party because he considered it “too corrupt”.

to define a genuine Romanian specificity, unaltered by the contact with the decadent Western civilization, a new element would be introduced in public debates: religion. More precisely, Orthodoxy. The most illustrative example is Nichifor Crainic, a famous theologian and journalist of the interwar period, and the editor of the traditionalist magazine *Gandirea* (The Thought). For Crainic⁸⁴, Orthodoxy was definitely an element of Romanian specificity, maintained by belonging to the Eastern spirituality, which was qualitatively different from the Western civilization, and was based on the traditional strength of the peasantry. Tradition is perceived as a dynamic force which could assure the existence of Romanians along history. Even more, modernity eroded Romanian spirituality. To save it, Orthodoxy should be imposed on culture, science, law and on the state, the latter envisioned as an “ethnocratic” form of national community.

The volume of Stefan Zeletin, *The Romanian bourgeoisie*, raises a fundamental issue: the modernization of Romania, should it go in the direction of Westernization and industrialization, or in the direction of preserving the traditional agrarian character of the country? The intellectual reactions come not only from Romania and the peasants, but also from Paris and the social-democrats. Because Zeletin used a Marxist scheme in presenting his ideas in which capitalism should triumph in Romania, Serban Voinea directly attacked Stefan Zeletin that he simply ignores the fact that

The entire socialist Romanian thinking is supported by the central idea that the social developing of modern Romania is constructed under the influence of Western capitalism⁸⁵.

The Voinea – Zeletin debate about the specificity of Romanian modern social history did not only have intellectual connotations, it also entailed an ideological one: it is related to

⁸⁴On his real name Ion Dobre (1889 – 1972); his ideas were published in the volumes of essays *Puncte cardinale in haos* (Cardinal Points in Chaos), Bucharest: Vremea, (1936), 2nd edition Albatros (1998). A very detailed presentation of texts about the intellectual debates of the interwar period can be found in Iordan Chimet *Dreptul la memorie* (The Right to Memory), 4 volumes, Cluj-Napoca, (1992-1993).

⁸⁵Serban Voinea, *Marxism Oligarchic Contribution to the problem of capitalist developing in Romania*, Bucharest, (1926), p. 17.

open versus closed strategies of development⁸⁶, in the original terms: neoliberalism versus neoserfdom. According to Zeletin, the economic realities and a new mentality created the real Romanian bourgeoisie, and its evolution is quite similar to that of the Western pattern of history. According to Gherea, Romania was in a very specific situation in which pre-modern relationships co-existed within a bourgeois institutional frame. For both, the course of history should lead to capitalism: in a liberal and nationalist⁸⁷ manner for Zeletin, as a way to socialism for Gherea. A different form of development for Romania was envisioned in a corporatist way by the engineer and economist Mihail Manoilescu (1891 – 1950) in his incisive study “Rostul si destinul burgheziei romane” (The Meaning and the Destiny of the Romanian Bourgeoisie). Neoliberal in economic theories, royalist in political activity, Manoilescu was a technocrat with a solid international recognition, who tried to construct a sociological foundation for his original theory⁸⁸ of corporatism, “integral and pure”.

He tried not only to define and structure the character of the Romanian bourgeoisie but also to position himself against the peasants’ doctrine⁸⁹. He reproached to the peasants that they simply “did not understand the peasant issue”. Edifying the peasantry only on the basis of the smallholding and ignoring the density of rural population was to design an artificial

⁸⁶ About this debate in the essay of Daniel Chirot, *Neoliberal and Sociodemocratic theories of development: the Zeletin – Voinea debate concerning Romanian’s prospects in the 20’s and its contemporary importance* in Kenneth Jowitt, ed., *Social change in Romania: 1860-1940 A debate on development in a European Nation*, Institute of International Studies, Berkeley: University of California, (1978).

⁸⁷ I added “nationalist” to “liberal” because the thought of Zeletin is ambivalent. According to Balazs Trencsenyi, Zeletin tried to achieve a “national autarchy and ‘Westernization’ simultaneously” and that was a “Munchausenian moment” of modernization. The whole essay, *The ‘Munchausenian Moment’: Modernity, Liberalism and Nationalism in the Thought of Stefan Zeletin* can be read in the volume Balazs Trencsenyi, Dragos Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Constantin Iordachi, Zoltan Kantor (eds) *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*, Budapest: Regio Books, (2001); the quotation is from page 74.

⁸⁸ Significant studies about his theory belong to Philippe Schmitter, *Reflexions on Mihail Manoilescu and the political consequences of delayed-dependent development on the periphery of Western Europe* in Kenneth Jowitt (ed.) *Social change in Romania: 1860-1940. A debate in Development in a European Nation*, Berkeley: University of California, (1978) and Joseph Love, *Crafting the Third World: theorizing underdevelopment in Rumania and Brazil*, Stanford University Press, (1996).

⁸⁹ See *The peasant doctrine and the bourgeoisie* in *The meaning and the destiny of the Romanian bourgeoisie*, (1942), 2nd edition, Bucharest: Albatros, (2002), pp. 265-178.

experiment far from reality. Their aversion against industrialization and the bourgeoisie was just a politicianist attitude, lacking a real scientific ground. Also, for him, the way in which the peasants achieved a land reform proved theoretical inconsistency and political dishonesty. Finally, the peasant doctrine was unrealistic and incomplete; it treated only some “adjacent issues” and did not have a social ideal to follow. They visualized a social revolution in the name of and for the peasantry, but this goal has proved to be over-ambitious for the peasantry. The declared goal of Manoilescu was to apply the “principles of scientific organization” to the whole society, which function on corporative basis. His unorthodox economical views were opposed to the Madgearu’s agrarianism and specially to the Zeletin’s line of liberalism. Because of the low productivity of agriculture, despite the all efforts of the peasants, Romania should center its policy on industrialization. He sustained that in the international economic relationships predominated the “disadvantageous exchanges” between the agrarian countries and the more industrialized ones. From this reason, the rhythm of industrialization should rapidly grow up. His voluntarism led toward a corporatist direction, inspired by the model of Italy, which was quite different than the reformist liberalism promoted by Zeletin.

Conclusion

In the mid-Nineteenth century the Romanian intellectual elites rediscovered their own socio-economic realities, in fact their own roots, mostly through their Western academic experience. They realized the huge gap between the cultural and economic level of the Western countries and Romania and that something should definitely be done in order to solve the problem. An increasing number of theories were provided to find the most adequate way of developing the country.

The passion with which the Romanians have argued these various views for the last half century derives from the urgency of the very difficult problem of adjustment to modern Western society as well as from the fact that the sides taken in the dispute often reflected the social and economic interests of their proponents. In turning to the political movements, one finds in their party ideologies, in their economic policy and practices, and in their political behavior all the elements of crisis and distortion associated with Western influence and inspiration⁹⁰.

Among these theoretical contributions to the development debate in the first decades of the Twentieth century, agrarianism undoubtedly has its own position. First, agrarianism emphasized the idea, similar to those of Constantin Stere, Radu Rosetti and Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, that because of the increasing number of peasants without the possibility to support themselves (especially due to the numerous obligations towards landowners), the agrarian issue represented the main problem which demanded an adequate solution applied to the specific conditions of Romania. In order to achieve this goal, the agrarian theoreticians, Ion Mihalache and Virgil Madgearu, proposed the sustaining of the small peasant property through a cooperative system based on mutual assistance and preferential rural credits.

⁹⁰Henry Roberts, *Rumania: political problems of an Agrarian country*, pp. 340-341.

Second, the agrarians considered that the small peasant tenure is a non-capitalist and autonomous way of production, which should be self-sustainable and could assure the development of industry. Stefan Zeletin completely rejects this idea; he thought that capitalism had a beneficial influence on the peasantry, assuring a débouché for the development of industry. Third, the agrarian doctrine should be redesigned for counterbalancing the devastating effects of the Great Depression and more “liberal” measures should be taken to protect the economy. This doctrinal inconsistency was severely condemned by Mihail Manoilescu in his study dedicated to emphasize the significance of the Romanian bourgeoisie. The above authors prove that the importance of the agrarian issue was acknowledged and that they tried to provide a satisfactory solution, but they did not hold unanimous views. Numerous compromises had to be reached to obtain the political unification of two different parties and to retain power under the conditions of increasing political extremism. All this eroded the structure of agrarianism. To sum up, agrarianism was a political movement in the period of great opportunities that helped to keep the idea alive. Similarly to agrarian movements in East-Central European countries, Romanian agrarianism was an attempt at establishing a basis for a peasant state, exactly at the moment when capitalism succeeded in surviving political threats of extreme nationalism and the challenges of economical crises. From this perspective, the “peasant solution” proved to be economically untenable and politically disadvantageous. Agrarianism and its political expression, peasantry have opened an immense horizon of expectations but did not deliver in terms of political solutions. It was a political as well as intellectual movement with favorable prospects and competent leaders yet average achievements. Posterity will have to judge agrarianism in the context of its inevitable limitations.

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