THE ROMANIAN ANTI-SYSTEMIC 2012-2014 CYCLE:

FROM AN APPARENT CRITICAL POSITION TO

REASSIMILATION IN THE OLD POLITICAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

In this paper I look at the birth of the Romanian new civil society focusing on the Bucharest scene. Analysing its development from the 2012 anti-austerity protest to the 2013 environmental Roșia Montană anti gold mining protests I try to see how it was possible for a movement that seemed to start out as anti-systemic to be reincorporated by factions of the the old political system to then face internal conflict and dissolution. In the process I critically discuss and develop what the 'legacy of postsocialism' and 'anti-communist discourse' amount to arguing that a postsocialist variant of neoliberal rationality has been carved out.

Aknowledgments

"[…]Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?"

(Bertolt Brecht, The Solution)

First of all I must thank my supervisors, Lea Sgier and Don Kalb. Without their help and critical comments this paper would not be the same. I feel indebted to Elena Chiorean, Endre Borbath and Cristian Tudorache for their help and valuable comments. Without my family, and all my friends I would not be here today so I must thank them too.

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1. INTRODUCTION

On the 12th of January 2012, Târgu Mureș, a medium-sized Romanian city situated in Transylvania, was the scene of an unplanned demonstration against the privatization of part of the healthcare system. No later than the next day, the protests spread throughout the country. Manifestations were held in most of the country's major cities, including the capital, Bucharest. It was the scene of a discursive hegemonic struggle between multiple diverging narratives. Manifold views were, for a period, stuck in a problematic coexistence of an anti-governmental protest: from a *dangerous* anti-capitalist discourse, to a neat and clean anti-corruption and rule-of-law enforcement liberal discourse, or a soft and hard nationalist discourse often via anti-communist paranoia based on the already well-known post-socialist interpretation according to which *'former communists now dressed up as capitalists'* took hands of power creating *'a self-serving fake capitalism that is actually a masked communism'* (Kalb 2009).

It would not be an overstatement to claim that the 2012 protests were the scene of birth of an important new social and political actor in the form of civil society. Subsequent social movements in 2013 and 2014, out of which the 2013 Roșia Montană anti-gold mining protests were, with no doubts, the biggest post-2000s protests in Romania in terms of participation numbers, saw the crystallization as protagonists of groups of civil society actors in two important cities: Cluj and Bucharest, that first appeared in January 2012. Building on existing literature on the protests (Mihailescu, Iancu, and Gutu 2012; F. Poenaru 2014a) I track the dynamics of the hegemonic struggles surrounding this newly emerging civil society with a focus on the Bucharest scene, as, symbolically, the most important scene due to its spatial relation to the center of political power.

Widely seen as linked to the global anti-systemic movement represented by movements such as the Indignados in Spain or the Aganaktismenoi (Outraged) in Greece, from a first glance it becomes clear that the Romanian protests did not lead in any way to similar political results. If in Greece or Spain the support for alternative political movements that had not ever been in power substantially grew in the context of anti-systemic movements, the Romanian situation led to a less impressive result. Not only did the few attempts to create alternative political movements fail, but, in the end, important parts of the seemingly anti-systemic movements were captured and ended up offering active support for main stream political movement factions.

The aim of this paper is to understand what made it such that the newly born civil society out of what seemed to be anti-austerity protests performed a major reversal which led to support for the same neoliberal forces that had been initially criticized; the movement thus largely ending up, two years after the 2012 protests, supporting a former politician of the party which was in power during the 2012 protests, now claiming to be an independent, with an economically libertarian program focused on the fight against corruption, in the first round of the 2014 presidential race, a candidate who, when, after the presidential elections, launched a so-called anti-systemic new political party, would programmatically declare as follows:

> *"Today the M to the power of 10 [M10] has been born. […] 'M' means: modernizing Romania, the word 'work [muncă]', the word 'morality' [...] it means meritocracy, each one in his own place according to merit, it means work, it means you administer your fair earnings, not the state [...]" (Monica Macovei quoted in Popescu 2015)*

Moreover, in the second round of the same presidential elections a large majority of these civil society actors actively supported the center right wing candidate of the same party that was in power in 2012, though, it must be admitted, now it had suffered a change in form and went under a different name.

While the way the movements evolved does seem surprising, the case of the Romanian social movements and their quick reintegration into a form of neoliberal discourse is by no means an isolated example. In fact, similar situations have developed in post-socialist countries where social movements did appear after the 2008 financial crisis and the neoliberal austerity responses given by their respective states; one of the most evident cases that comes to mind is that of Bulgaria, country neighboring Romania that had gained access to the European Union at the same time with it, where massive anti-austerity protests led no further than to *"[t]he constant reshuffling of the elite"* (Medarov 2014). Thus, along with an analysis of a diverse range of materials related to the social movements from 2012 onwards, understanding how this surprising discursive dynamics was possible will require an in depth look into the historical-contextual possibilities offered by Romanian post-socialist space.

If we are to abide by the mainstream literature offering a description of East European and Balkan political scenery we should not be surprised that the protests of this new civil society almost exclusively focused on anti-corruption, which was often seen as a means of explaining all social problems. According to mainstream explanations corruption is indeed the most important issue in postsocialist countries (Krastev 2004; Krastev 2002; Sajo 1998; Mungiu 2006). It is not the case that I am arguing that corruption does not exist as a problem in East Europe, generally, and more specifically in Romania. Instead, I argue that the mainstream story does not account for the way the corruption issue and its respective counterpart, anti-corruption discourse, gets put to use as a political instrument that annihilates any possible discussions related to the actual politics being implemented in East Europe, thus emptying out the possibility of emergence of forms of critical politics. It seems to me that both Bulgarian, and Romanian anti-systemic movements ascribed to such an overinflated account

of corruption. I will argue that this has been one of the main discursive features that led to a relatively easy re-assimilation of the movements back into the old political system.

At a second level, when it comes to the historical legacy of postsocialist countries mainstream social science finds itself at fault due to a form of almost racist cultural argument it puts forward (Tismaneanu 2009; Sztompka 1993; Krastev 2004; Klicperová, Feierabend, and Hofstetter 1997). In his expressively titled article *"Civilizational Incompetence: The Trap of Post-Communist Societies"* Piotr Sztompcka argues that

> *the secret of current tensions and drawbacks experienced by ECE societies is to be sought in the area of "intangibles and imponderables", the deep cultural legacy inherited both from the distant pre-modern past of this societies and the more recent syndrome of "fake modernity" imposed by real socialism. (Sztompka 1993)*

For him '*civilizational incompetence'* means having "*deficiencies in a) entrepreneurial culture, b) civic or politic culture, c) discourse culture, d) everyday culture."* (Sztompka 1993).

It is not my point here to discuss how sometimes legitimate claims made around such arguments were extended such that they were put to use in order to reduce the remainders of the social welfare state continuously in East Europe, however. As opposed to this mainstream narrative, in my paper, following Poenaru (F. A. Poenaru 2013), I put forward an alternative according to which anti-communism is not just a legitimate reaction to the horrors of the totalitarian past, but a political discourse that prevents the articulation of a critical stance. As such I show how this discourse silences critiques that aim at ensuring a better livelihood, and ensures that neoliberal subjectivity, i.e. entrepreneurial subjects that are responsible for their life course and do not depend on any form of social assistance, becomes the only model that can be followed.

1.2 The Structure of the Paper

The paper is structured as follows: In chapter two, I proceed by discussing certain methodological aspects. I discuss my data body, ethical questions and chosen methods of data analysis, thus preparing the terrain for the theoretical and historical discussion I put forward in chapter three. In chapter three, I bring to light the theoretical elements that have been indispensable to my research. I first discuss linkages between local spaces and global relations, thus situating the Romanian new social movements in the context of the global anti-systemic cycle that ensued after the 2008 global financial crisis. That leads me to discuss the hazy concept of neoliberalism. In doing so, I then also offer a historical contextualization of neoliberal processes in the postsocialist space, more generally, and in Romania, in particular. At this stage I also discuss the concept of civil society and its practical effects on the historical transition of Romania and the postsocialist space, focusing on the doctrine of the neutral civil society and the prevalent theme anticorruption, which will be important in my empirical analysis.

My empirical analysis is developed in chapter four and five. In chapter four I look at the anti-governmental protests of 2012. I first provide a fairly descriptive account of the developments and then focus on central themes to provide an interpretative analysis. My main focus here is to show the manner in which these protests, often depicted as anti-austerity protests, differed significantly from what anti-austerity movements are usually assumed to be. In chapter five I look at the 2013 environmental protests against the Roșia Montană gold mining project and the subsequent emergence and development of the Uniți Salvăm group until its split at the presidential elections in 2014, when part of its members supported Monica Macovei's candidacy. I stop with my empirical analysis around the events related to the second round of the presidential elections and the Uniți Salvăm's group relation to them.

Following a similar structure to that of the third chapter, I first provide a fairly descriptive account of the events and their relation to the 2012 protests. I then provide an analysis concentrating on the continuities and discontinuities with the 2012 protests and the discursive elements that allowed the anti-systemic movement to end up splitting, due to part of it supporting factions of the old political class.

In the final conclusion chapter I synthesize the findings of this paper, linking them back to the concepts of postsocialist neoliberalism, and postsocialist civil-society. I thus aim to provide a further developed conceptual language to relate to the postsocialist space of Romania, both theoretically, and practically, in terms of understanding what the possibilities and limitations of alternative politics are here. Reflecting on my main findings and linking them to very recent developments of the Romanian New Civil Society, I suggest possibilities for rearticulating a version of emancipatory politics in Romanian space.

2. METHODOLOGY

I started out my research with the intuitive idea that the best way to research into the Romanian new civil society would be to corroborate my inside knowledge of it with that of other participant protesters, while contextualizing all this with the help of media reports on the protests. Thus, I initially thought out my research process as being centered on the analysis of data gathered from interviews with participants and key figures of the movements. While this has remained crucial, in the research process I figured out that the use of archive material ranging from media reports on the movements to manifestos written by protester groups would constitute an important perspective to be taken into account when analyzing these movements of the past, i.e especially of the 2012 protests. Thus, triangulating (Hammersley 2008b; Thurmond 2001) archive material with manifestos and interviews allowed me to avoid falling into the trap of taking protesters' retrospective views on the events as their views during the events.

Thus, in order to develop my analysis I used a diverse set of materials. The databody for this thesis consists of materials I have gathered in three fieldwork periods in Romania: July-September 2014, December 2014-January 2015 and April-May 2015 coupled with participant observation of the events in January-February 2012 and 2014. This multiple method research approach is grounded on several types of data: participant observation of the events, semi-structured interviews with protesters, archive material: traditional and online news material coupled with online material from the Facebook social platform pages of the groups involved in the protests, available manifestos of organizations involved in the movements, and video footage of the protests and protesters.

2.1. The status of participant observation

In building the databody used for this research paper, data gathered through participant observation of the 2012 anti-governmental protests and 2014 events has a major role. I had the occasion to do actual observation of the protests themselves in Bucharest from the January 14, the second day of protests in the capital city, until the end of February, when I relocated for a period of 4 months in Krakow, Poland. It is at these protests where I met Andrei, Cornel and Cristi, who would later become informants. This is also where I met Vlad Petri, the Romanian film director who started documenting social movements at that time.

Along with participation in the daily street protests, I also had the occasion to observe the workings of the left liberal's group's internal strategical and political meetings. The left liberal group was, at that time, one of the most important groups of the youth protest scene found in a consistent interplay with the other youth protest groups. It is in this group that I got well acquainted with, among others, Ștefan, a representative member around which the group was constituted, who later became one of my key informants. It is worth mentioning that Ștefan, a central member of this group, had extensive access to media coverage. His presence at high audience news broadcast shows ensured that the group and his own position were highly publicized. Ștefan remained involved in this group during the 2013 Roșia Montană anti gold mining protest and became an active member of the subsequently formed Uniți Salvăm community. He presently remains actively involved in the Bucharest civil society scene.

My participant observation continued in the summer of 2012. Constituted in the early part of the 2012 protests, while remaining informal, the left-liberal group, reduced in size when the protests became less numerous and finally ceased alltogether, remained socially involved.

With changes in terms of size, some old members leaving, addition of new members, but also keeping a significant section of fiteen to twenty core members this group has remained involved in the Bucharest social and political scene until the present. I continued observing it from the summer of 2012, when I relocated back to Bucharest, until the present. While from September 2013 onwards my participant observation of the group has become fragmented as I was not always located in Bucharest, I have nonetheless remained sufficiently in touch with the group to be able to gain valuable insights of later developments too.

I corroborate these data with participant observation of three key moments in the story of the Uniți Salvăm community in 2014: their actions around the boycotting of the European Parliament May 2014 elections, the internal tensions and split resulting in late 2014 / early 2015 from part of the group's support for Monica Macovei's presidential run, and, finally, their actions around what seemed an apparent support for the center right wing candidate, Klaus Johannis, in the second round of the same presidential elections in December 2014.

2.2. Interviews with informants

I have conducted a total of nine semi-structured interviews with both key figures of the protest movements, and participants who were closer to the role of simple, yet constant participants. I fully transcribed three of the interviews, and included them in the databody, while creating summaries with the key discussed themes for the other six interviews which, when analyzing data, I then used to find relevant data in the actual interviews and transcribe selected fragments (for the full transcript in Romanian of one of the interviews see Appendix II).

Two of the interviews were taken in my first fieldwork trip in August–September 2014. Three of them were taken during the second fieldtrip in December 2014 – January 2015 and another three were taken in my last fieldtrip in May 2015. An additional last interview, taken earlier, in March 2014, for a different project is partly included in the databody. While the theme of the current research was not clear at that time, taken from a Romanian Central European University student who had been involved in the 2012 anti-governmental protest, the interview was related to a research about student involvement in politics and thus provided a valuable addition to the databody.

2.2.1. Ethical Issues

For the sake of ensuring no harm is done to my informants (Arksey and Knight 1999, 126) through the research process I have discussed the issue with all of my informants and obtained informed consent from them while pledging to ensure their anonymity. Thus, my informants are referred to by pseudonyms, with the exception of Vlad Petri, the director of ethnographic documentaries on the Romanian social movements who agreed to have his real name used in my paper. I decided to ask him for a non-anonymous interview since the discussion with him has a different status: he was researching/documenting the social movements I discussed with him, rather than simply participating in them. Moreover keeping anonymity in this case, in the context of my use of other materials produced by him, would have been superfluous.

While the possibility of in-group identification (Arksey and Knight 1999, 133) cannot truly be excluded, considering the fact that most interviewees know each other and are aware of the diverging positions they have, it seems to me that the benefits of the research outweigh the risks it poses.

2.2.2. Selection Procedure

In selecting informants to be interviewed I had access to a large pool of protesters I already knew, and the possibility to reach actors I was not aquainted with, through social network connections. Thus, to ensure a wider variety of the material I reached out and gained access to three informants that I did barely knew or was not aquainted at all before intervieweing (Daniel, Cornel and Ovidiu). I was aquainted with the other informants to varying degrees. If I was fairy well aquainted with Ștefan, Vlad Petri and Dorin, my first conversation with Cristian and Andrei took place when I interviewed them.

I had access to interview actors that participated in all the events, i.e. both in the 2012 anti-governmental protests and the 2013-2014 events, along with those who only joined the Romanian movements with the occasion of the environmental anti gold mining protests of 2013. Thus, half of my informants were involved in both the 2012 anti-governmental protests and in the Roșia Montană gold mining protests and Uniți Salvăm community. Daniel, Cornel, Cristi and Ștefan were highly involved as key figures in all these movements.

For various reasons, my other informants were more highly involved in one of the movements than in the others. Marian was involved in the 2012 protests but, due to relocation, was only able to observe the 2013 and 2014 movements from a distance. On the other hand, Andrei was highly involved in the 2012 protests, but, as it became clear in my interview with him, he was not as pleased with the way the movement had evolved in the Roșia Montană protests and voluntarly chose not to participate. Ovidiu and Dorin were both more involved in the Roșia Montană protests. While Ovidiu noted that he sympathized with the 2012 anti-governmental protest, but could not participate at the time, from my conversations with him what resulted was that Dorin was not as enthusiastical about the 2012

anti-governmental protests as he was about the 2013-2014 Roșia Montană and Uniți Salvăm events.

Interviewing both constant participants at the actions of the Bucharest civil society from 2012 onwards, and those who chose to be more involved in some of the actions, while being less or completely uninvolved in others ensured the possibility to obtain a diverse material from informants who had widely different motivations to participate in social actions.

In the same quest to ensure access to a diverse material and a large number of viewpoints, I made sure that my interviewees ideologically self-identified differently. Thus, while Andrei and Ovidiu identified as leftists, each of a quite different sort, and Ștefan saw himself as a left-liberal, the others, i.e. Daniel, Cornel, Cristian and Dorin, were either fuzzy in terms of ideological positioning or claimed themselves to be ideologically neutral. Thus, Daniel and Dorin provided a fuzzy, yet interesting ideological mix between traditional-conservative values, and progressive standpoints. Cornel and Cristian, on the other hand, clearly saw themselves as ideologically neutral, strongly depicting a discursive opposition between them, as neutral-ideological activists, and leftist oriented and right leaning people taken altogether.

2.3 Archive material

While hopefully not visible in this paper, one of the greatest difficulties I had while researching for this project has been securing a clear differentiation between what my informants were telling me and was in fact a retrospective view on the movements and what had to do with their actual views during the protests. A good way of getting around this was not exclusively relying on interview material. Instead, I triangulated (Hammersley 2008b; Thurmond 2001) data with that obtained through the research of a diverse set of archive

materials. In this way, I tried to minimize the chance of falling in the trap of using fragments of interview data to retrace social events (Hammersley 2008a, 91) when in fact the fragments in question would relate more to the subjective experience of my informants. Thus, while for the 2012 protests I appealed to articles published in the opposition partisan newspaper Jurnalul Național that contained large actual interview segments of protesters, in the case of the Uniți Salvăm and Roșia Montană protests I found it useful to focus on material produced by the protesters on online social platforms that served as organizational instruments (for a sample of an archive material used in data analysis see Appendix III).

For the 2012 anti-governmental protests I use a selection of the aforementioned articles published in Jurnalul Național, an important newspaper extensively reporting on the protests to which I added a selection of articles by newspapers and online media favorable to the parties in power at that time in order to be able to get a grasp of the context (Aligică 2012; Damian 2012; Mircea 2012; Mureșan 2012; Neagu 2012). Though the Jurnalul Național newspaper, as is the case with all Romanian media was highly politically partisan, I have selected a series of articles that present a large variety of positions; they are constructed around giving direct lengthy quotes from a diverse range of participants at the protests. To this, I added public conversations of participants on the Facebook online platform of the protests, the Piața Universității page, which was used as an organizational instrument, and ethnographic video material from Vlad Petri's documentary (Petri 2014).

Regarding the 2013-2014 developments, i.e. the Roșia Montană gold mining protests and the actions of the Uniți Salvăm community I use media material to contextualize the protests in their respective political situation (Mihai 2013; Ciobanu 2013; Sciences et Avenir 2013; *Gandul.info* 2015), but focus on data from the interviews I have taken with participants.

2.4. Data analysis

In analyzing data I employed a slightly modified version of Benford and Snow's (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow 2008) framing processes in social movements framework. I take their Goffman (1974) inspired framework and adjust it to a more materialist setting in which meanings are accounted for by also taking into account material interests of actors and the limitations brought about by their structural position (Wolf 1990). Thus, I seek to establish the terms in which "the problems or issues [are] addressed" (Benford and Snow 2000, 618) in the movements I analyze. In other words, I focus on the main diagnostic framings used and attempt to establish the master frames, i.e. "*collective action frames [that] are quite broad in terms of scope, functioning as a kind of master algorithm that colors and constrains the orientations and activities of other movement"* (2000, 619) that guided their attempt to understand the social issues they were at odds with. Synthesising the concepts of *diagnostic framing* and *master frames*, I propose, as it is essential for my case study, to look at the master diagnostic framings that made the Romanian anti-systemic movements be so different to their western counterparts.

In order to understand how some framings were successful, what Benford and Snow call frame diffusion (2000, 620), following Don Kalb's suggestion (2011; 1997), I turn frame analysis into a more historical and material related endeavour. I try to establish a link between the historical context, i.e. historically existing possibilities of discursive articulation, the class componence and interests of the groups I look at, and their dominant discourses. Thus, I avoid creating a situation in which in my research discourse becomes a completely autonomous space radically separated from extra-discursive practice (for a critique of this position see Griggs and Howarth 2011); instead I see discursive articulations as working in a

logic of continuation with the extra-discursive. Thus, as Glynos and Howarth put it, by understanding discursive articulations as strongly linked to material and historical processes, I avoid *"overplay[ing] the role of interpreting the individual beliefs and desires of relevant actors"* (2008). In consequence, rather than providing a psychologizing analysis, I attempt to uncover the social structures that construe and limit possible logics of discursive articulations. Thus, the logics of the discursive articulations I look at are not to be understood either as stemming from individual beliefs, or from social structures by themselves (Howarth 2005, 323). Thus, logics of discursive articulations ought to be studied at the level of the interplay between existing historical and material conditions and discourse, where a limited amount of space (Wolf 1990) is left for reconstituting meanings of what Laclau called floating signifiers (Laclau 1990), i.e. concepts whose meaning is to be socially negotiated in the Gramscian logic of a fight for hegemony in civil society (Buttigieg 1995; Gramsci 1971).

In this context following Howarth's point according to which "theorists oppose the balkanization and reification of methodology", i.e. [m]ethod is not synonymous with a freestanding and neutral set of rules and techniques that can be applied mechanically to all empirical objects" (2005, 317). In chapter three, I continue by considering the specific conceptual tools and historical perspectives needed to understand the discursive articulations constructed by the new Romanian civil society.

3. THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

3.1. Local Histories, Global Linkages

The Romanian new social movements and the tactical maneuvers of their actors cannot properly be understood without being put in global context and fathomed as part of the global rise of new forms of contentious politics. Since the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008, we have witnessed the multiplication of forms of social contention throughout the world. While tackling local issues that appear widely different, these movements stand together through the fact that, in one way or another, more progressively or conservatively, they challenge what some authors have called *the global neoliberal project*[1] (McMichael 2011; Harvey 2005; Friedman and Friedman 2008). Whatever different political alternatives they propose, if any, it is common for these movements to articulate a critical discourse towards neoliberal institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Thus, formulations such as the one bellow uttered by Egyptian activist Wael Khalil's have been heard more and more often all over the globe[2].

> *"[…] this country's future lies not with the same highly paid, unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats of the IMF, nor with their sacred indicators of budget deficits and market economics. Our future lies with a new home-grown economics that caters for the majority of Egyptians, the schools where their children are educated, the hospitals where they receive healthcare, and the jobs that guarantee them decent and honourable living." (2011)*

[1] For the time being, let us understand the "neoliberal project" as referring to the well-known mainstream macroeconomic theory and its various "constitutively uneven, institutionally hybrid, and chronically unstable" (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2012, 268) practical applications.

[2] Both in and outside (Cole 2011; Mason 2013) academia a strong intuition lurks according to which apparently disparate and unrelated events, *from the Arab Spring to Athens, from Occupy Wall Street to Moscow* (Greene and Kuswa 2012), are in fact structurally tied through an intuitive critique of capitalism felt by millions of people, to use Mason's words (2013)..

The Romanian movements also showed dissatisfaction with both the domestic neoliberal governance and its international counterparts. From the start of the protests, slogans critical to the effects of the austerity measurements of the government such as *"Educația noastră nu e averea voastră!"*, *"Ne doare spatele, ne mânâncă ratele!"*[3] could be heard in University Square, the central location of the Bucharest protests. Slogans against the IMF, from which, conditional on reducing public spending and wages, the Romanian government had obtained assistance in 2009 ("IMF Executive Board Approves €12.9 Billion Stand-By Arrangement for Romania" 2009), and other banking institutions were also heavily present:"*Nu vom fi, niciodată nu vom fi, colonie FMI!"*, *"Pân' la primăvară, FMI afară!"* or "*Austeritate pentru bănci!"*[4].

In this context, faced with socio-economical disaster and worldwide growing popular discontent, one may have expected the emergence of alternative governmental rationalities. Yet, curiously enough, it seems that, while "*not a single protest has achieved its aim"* (Mason 2013), nowadays, more than half a decade after the debut of the crisis, far from a shift, we are witnessing what, for the time being, using a concept in urgent need of clarification, I will call *a paradoxical, ever increasing, domination of neoliberal governance* (Postone 2012, 234; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2012). Emblematic for this is the case of Romania, a country in which some of the most draconic austerity measures were taken in 2009, and neoliberal reforms have been continuously enforced since then (Stoiciu 2012).

This does not, however, mean that the techniques of governance have remained static. On the contrary, changes do occur, and different neoliberal actants are involved, more intensely than

[3] A rough translation of these slogans would go along the following lines: *"Our education is not your fortune!"* and *"Our back hurts, our credit debt is eating us!"*
[4] These three slogans would translate as follows: *"We will never be an IMF colony!"* , *"When spring comes we will get rid of IMF!",* and *"Austerity for the banks!"*

ever, in hegemonic struggles everywhere on the globe. Thus, attempting *to overcome* its crisis, neoliberalism is not static, but in a continuous multi-levelled, spatial and temporal, form-changing process. If we want to open up the terrain for the possibility of not just talking about, but doing progressive politics, it is crucial to understand these multiple hegemonic struggles, both in their various historical forms of appearance and in the way they connect to each other at a systemic level.

Wolf's distinction between the structural and tactical forms of power comes in handy here. To properly understand the tactical manoeuvres going on between actors at the micro-level we must not accept the naïve idea that *"'real people doing real things' inhabit self-enclosed and self-sufficient universes"* (1990, 587). Power should not, thus, be understood in purely transactional terms (as tactical power manoeuvres are to be understood). Prior to the deployment of tactical manoeuvres the social field of action is shaped in such a way that some discursive and non-discursive actions are more or less legitimate while others are impossible to articulate. This is what, picking up on Foucault's idea of governmentality and the Marxist idea of *"the social relations of production"*, Wolf calls structural power.

Thus, in the specific case I deal with, the tactical choices of the different actors involved in the Romanian civil society cannot be understood without making at least two important linkages.

Firstly, a linkage to the specific historical context is needed. Here a crucial point is to understand the discursive links to the socialist past, links that largely shape the limitations imposed on possible critical discourse (Simionca 2012). Secondly, while taking into account the historical specificities of local political and social phenomena a linkage to the global dynamics of the neoliberal project needs to be traced.

Only in so far as these two things are accomplished is it possible to understand the specificity of the Romanian discourses, not as having to do with an inevitable particularity of local culture, i.e. Romaniannness, but as local reactions, i.e. tactical choices, bounded by both the interlink between particular manifestations of global processes and what is discursively possible to articulate historically. By highlighting the local-global dialectics, one avoids falling in the trap of depoliticizing social phenomena that happen in peripheral zones due to positing an imaginary construct of an exclusively local culture as the main explanation factor for everything that goes wrong[5].

Starting from the perspective of a political micro-analysis, my work is an attempt to do just that, i.e. to come up with an understanding of the discursive forms of the newly emerging Romanian civil society, not as something that has to do with a pre-posited, fixed local culture, but with the interplay that goes on around a dynamic local culture that comes into being, in large part, as a reaction to local manifestations of global neoliberal processes.

Centering my analysis on the discursive struggles surrounding the emergence of new civil society actors provides an opening point to examine neoliberalism at work, not as an abstract amorphous all-encompassing evil monster, but as particular, spatio-temporally localized, fully incarnated, fully penetrating the capillaries of social relations: neoliberalism in flesh and bones, so to speak. My case study of a micro-region is anchored in the semi-peripheral region of Central-Eastern European postsocialism. Thus, in significant ways, it is relevant for the whole region, and, when possible, I will draw connections to parallel developments in the area.

[5] See the endless chain of explanations that put "mentalities" as the central factor of explanation for the impossibility of post-socialist countries to reach the level of western countries. For academic work that resorts to this problematic explanation see, for instance, Heintz's work on the refashioning of work ethics in Romania (2006).

In order to clarify the relations between the study of the hegemonic struggles of a nascent civil society and the global neoliberal project I proceed at two levels: On a first level, I attempt to provide a conceptual clarification of what neoliberalism is. As it is a concept prone to *"appear as a kind of gigantic, all-powerful first cause"*, often leading to empty analysis: *"to say that all our problems are caused by 'neoliberalism' is really not to say much"* (Ferguson 2010, 171), clarification is imperative. From this conceptual clarification itself, the second level I shall then pursue will become evident: an understanding of the local historical context in which the neoliberal project is employed is a sine-qua-non condition for avoiding an empty use of the concept of neoliberalism from the point of view of analysis. Thus, I then discuss the Romanian postsocialist variant of neoliberal governmentality deployment.

3.2. Neoliberalism as Complex Unity: From State Power to Bottom-Up Governmentality, and Back

Having accepted that it is not very useful to use the concept of neoliberalism as referring to a posited gigantic, all powerful and indefinable first cause, a question comes to mind: <What exactly does neoliberalism refer to?> The issue here is that in critical literature, within the social sciences, this term is often used in substantially different manners

While mentioning that 'neoliberalism' is sometimes used as a sloppy synonym for capitalism, an abstract causal force from the exterior that leads to the destruction of livelihoods, or as referring to the emergence of a new cosmopolitan global meta-culture, James Ferguson identifies three main uses of neoliberalism in the existent literature (2010, 171): neoliberalism as a macroeconomic doctrine, neoliberalism as a regime of policies and practices and neoliberalism as a form of 'rationality', in the Foucauldian sense.

In what follows, I discuss the distinction between the economical theoretical neoliberal doctrine and its historical applications, while highlighting the closeness between these two usages of the term. I argue that, while it is often tacitly assumed, the third understanding of neoliberalism is not actually in opposition/tension with the first two understandings. I then propose that by understanding neoliberal rationality in the context of a Gramscian theory of hegemony, the links between the first two ways of looking at neoliberalism will become evident.

The first two uses of the term are closely inter-related. Neoliberalism as a macroeconomic doctrine refers to a political economic doctrine that

> *"goes back to the late 1930s. Radically opposed to communism, socialism, and all forms of active government intervention beyond that required to secure private property arrangements, market institutions, and entrepreneurial activity, it began as an isolated and largely ignored corpus of thought that was actively shaped during the 1940s by thinkers such as von Hayek, Ludvig von Mises, Milton Friedman, and, at least for a while, Karl Popper".*
>
> (Harvey 2003, 157)

The academic body of work produced by the neoliberals is linked with the later political implementation of neoliberal policy, from the 1970s onwards, starting with the Thatcher-Reagan era. The focus was, and still is, on promoting a *"radicalised form of capitalism, based on deregulation and the restriction of state intervention"* (Hilgers 2010, 352) through a shift from *"the left hand of the state"*, i.e. social inclusion, to the *"the right hand"*, i.e. finance, law and order (Bourdieu 1999; Kalb 2011, 8; Hilgers 2012, 81). How this specifically happened in each region is however subject to great variation. While the main instruments of deregulation and privatization were formally similar the way they took shape concretely was not. As the theoretical principles of neoliberalism are applied in real existing spaces and times with different class configurations and dynamics, Hilgers is right to say that

neoliberalism *"can never be understood in radical separation from historical configurations and has to be evaluated differently depending on context"*.

Thus, neoliberalism as a regime of policies and practices is not a linear top-down process of imposing the same monolithic macroeconomic doctrine, but a spatially and temporally discontinuous process that can proceed in a large variety of ways. The contingencies of democratic politics, hegemonic struggles in civil society, or the world-systemic economical position of specific states / regions, may help us understand *"the otherwise paradoxical fact that a number of regimes pursuing undoubtedly neoliberal macroeconomic policies have also seen substantial rise in social spending"* (Ferguson 2010, 171). Only by a careful investigation of historical conditions can the apparent paradox of the differences between *real existing neoliberalisms* be untangled.

3.2.1. Neoliberal Governmentality and Hegemony

Studies using the notion of neoliberalism as a 'rationality' in the Foucauldian sense have recently been proliferating in the social sciences under the name of governmentality studies. In such studies there is often a tacit, or even explicit, opposition towards studies that employ the first two meanings of neoliberalism that I have just outlined. With their focus on the study of politics from below, i.e. a study of micro-political processes through which *"subjects are created"* (Ferguson 2010, 171), these studies often have a great degree of suspicion towards those focusing on the top-down implementation of neoliberal policies and accuse them of flirting with *"conspiracist interpretations"* (Hilgers 2010, 356). Thus, often times, governmentality studies break with, to use Hilgers' classification, systemic explanations of neoliberalism and try to work-out full explanations of social phenomena exclusively starting from their micro-level discursive genealogies.

I hold that such an attempt is doomed to failure from the start, and the instruments of the studies of neoliberalism from a systemic perspective are needed to provide more comprehensive explanations. While governmentality scholars, as Foucault himself, are right to oppose overreaching structural explanations that leave no room for agency, they may not be as right to argue that any structural explanation flirts with conspiracy. Here the Lacanian inversion of the well-known anti-structuralist slogan of the 1968 revolts *"Structures do not walk on the streets"* is suitable. Structures do walk on the streets (Zizek 2003) and they account for the possibilities and impossibilities to articulate discourses. Here, the distinction between tactical and structural power is useful again: a wide variety of tactical maneuvers can be employed; however this variety of employable maneuvers and those that cannot be thought of are given by the effects of structural power. Subjects are, thus not *tabula rasa* interpreters that can freely develop any possible discourse, instead they are placed in a given context where there is some room for maneuvering pre-existing meanings. Agents are, thus, neither fully autonomous liberal individuals, nor helpless points in a fully determined structure; instead, somewhere in between, agents have a limited liberty to find points of resistance to local manifestations of global structural power.

As opposed to the outlined view, I argue that it is not the case that the understanding of neoliberalism as a regime of policies and practices and the understanding of neoliberalism as a 'rationality' need be opposed. We could profit more from seeking links between the notion of neoliberalism as a 'rationality', neoliberalism as a doctrine and as a regime of policies and practices.

Understanding the subject as a *"behaviouristically manipulable being"* (Lemke 2001, 200) opens up the terrain for a higher focus on technologies that serve to create the neoliberal subject, i.e. for governmentality. How and in what ways this process proceeds, mainly in

western societies, is what much of the governmentality studies focuses on. The general drives highlighted by governmentality scholars towards the creation of a *"self as enterprise"*, i.e. to *"increasing individualization, competition, and personal responsibility and force individuals to act and understand themselves as entrepreneurs of their own destiny"* (Hilgers 2010, 358) are important. However, as Hilgers correctly notes, governmentality is not *"a fixed technology of government"*: *"[t]here is no 'pure' neoliberal governmentality. Governmentality is always linked to other modes of power"* (Hilgers 2010, 359). More concretely, while governmentality is a dominant mode of power in Western developed regions, more classical disciplinary techniques of power often dominate in peripheral capitalist regions. Giving governmentality a privileged epistemological status may end up producing s confusion of the logic of things with the things of logic, to use Marx's words.

I claim that governmentality techniques can better be understood as particular tools in the context of the general hegemonic struggle inside civil societies. If we understand neoliberal rationality, i.e. neoliberal governmentality as such, there is no longer an opposition between the first two understandings of neoliberalism, as having mainly to do with state-employed policies, and these latter techniques of governmentality that take place mainly in civil society. Thus, on the one hand, rather than having to choose between seeing neoliberalism as mainly a process of creating subjects as enterprise-selfs, or as a macro-economical doctrine and its various applications, this way the two processes can properly be seen as they are, complementary: neoliberal policies are state level actions, while governmentality is a strategy employed to obtain consent in civil society. On the other hand, neoliberal governmentality, as a tool in obtaining hegemony in civil society becomes intrinsically linked to understanding the history of the different *real existing civil societies* where it is enforced. From such a Gramscian perspective, by putting an accent on local histories, it will be easier to understand

shifts in the particular content and importance of neoliberal governmentality in different zones.

3.2.2. Historicizing Neoliberal Governmentality: The Case of Postsocialist Romania

Interesting particularities can be observed when it comes to the specific content of neoliberal governmentality in postsocialist Romanian space. In her research on the middle managerial class in Cluj-Napoca, Anca Simionca traces interesting linkages between the discourse pushing towards the enforcement of neoliberal subjectivity and hegemonic anti-communist discourses. Thus, in this context, if one is critical towards the tenets of neoliberal flexible work, one is automatically associated with the socialist past and accused of having an outdated communist mentality. In this way, since the socialist past is seen both as a moral and economical tragedy, any sort of discourse critical to neoliberalism is immediately silenced (Simionca 2012).

3.2.2.1. Illegitimate equivalences: socialist mentalities = material grievances

In order to fully understand this eerie situation I propose an incursion in the tumultuous events of the early 1990s transition to liberal democracy. I show how a peculiar type of anticommunism has been an essential part in the constitution of the Romanian variety of neoliberal governmentality. More specifically, I argue that the perceived negative legacy of the socialist past has been essential in enforcing neoliberal subjectivity.

Before 1989, the state discourse was centered on the working class and presented it in a positive light. This, of course does not mean that members of the industrial working class of 'real existing socialism' were free from exploitation and benefitted from generous social provisions. In fact, strikes focused on ensuring higher wages and a smaller working day by

industrial workers and miners were not unseen in the socialist era and they culminated in the 1977 strike of the Jiu Valley miners, in which Ceaușescu himself was forced to come to the Jiu Valley to calm things down. What is essential to retain here is that prior to 1989, with all the difficulties the repressive state created, working class strikes for material conditions existed.

It is, I believe, both academically, and politically important to understand how it is that after more than 20 years of postsocialism articulating material based claims has become extremely marginal in Romanian society. It seems to me that the new discursive position the worker and working class had after the fall of 'real existing socialism' are crucial if one is to understand today's surprising lack of articulated material claims in a context in which people's livelihood is becoming increasingly complicated.

After 1989 an important shift in discourse happened, such that the working class abruptly disappeared from the official discourse. As Kideckel notes in his ethnography on Romanian chemical industrial workers and miners, workers became a sort of pariah in Romanian society after the regime change (Kideckel 2008). Popularly seen as 'backward people' due to which the country cannot modernize and reach western standards, their involvement in a series of violent manifestations known as the 'mineriade' ultimately led to them being completely disregarded by the public opinion.

Throughout the 90s, mine workers were caught up in these political developments that, Kideckel rightly argues, while apparently showing them symbolically united, actually contributed to their complete disenfranchisement as political actors. Moreover, I would argue that their perceived symbolical unity in the events has led to the miners being completely discarded by public opinion in the aftermath of the *mineriade*. The six *mineriade* of the Jiu

Valley spread out between the early and late 90s were essentially mine worker marches to the capital of the country that often turned violent. Especially the 1st *mineriada,* when the march to free the central University Square of student protests turned violent, led to the creation of a homogenous image of mine workers (that spread out to all industrial workers) as violent, almost subhuman, anti-modern and backward creatures.

Rather than seeing the poor (rural or urban *losers of transition*) as irresponsible lazy people with backward mentalities that, not only deserve their fate, but are also responsible for Romania having not yet become a western-type *civilized country*, and employing what members of the Romanian leftist journal CriticAtac have not exaggerated in calling a *socially fascist discourse*, Kideckel's ethnography clears out the social tragedy industrial workers have gone through since 1989 and gives a good sense of the way these workers have developed a *'frustrated agency'*, always struggling for their livelihood and feeling like they cannot cope with the changing environment.

While noticing that, opposed to the 1977 mine workers' strike, in the end, the *mineriade* were political actions in which, although seemingly a united large homogenous group, mine workers were unable to push through some form of political and social demands, but ended up as symbolic scapegoats, Kideckel does not go too far in his critical reflections regarding this situation.

I would claim that, far from being the story of a single and very specific group of industrial workers, the scapegoating of the miners in the 90s is strongly linked to the general scapegoaring of all the working class as an important part of the anti-communist discourse; which has in its turn led to the silencing of material issue based claims: since miners were discredited due to their involvement in the violent *'mineriade'* and the repression of student

protests, in Romanian society the main type of discourse which was articulated by them, i.e. a type of discourse centered on material issues, has become illegitimate itself.

Some of the 'mineriade' protests of the 90s were also in direct reaction to the hardship the workers were experiencing. However, public opinion failed to be very sympathetic to their cause. Moreover, the idea of protesting for your material needs (wage rights, social assistance etc.) was discarded as well, and seen as something that the 'backward people of the past', not being able to cope with the new times, would do. Thus, from 1977 when miners protested to gain material security and Ceausescu himself was forced to come and negotiate with them, in postsocialist Romania the idea itself to protest for material needs has become unreasonable.

The discursive shift that occurred can largely be understood by reference to the specificities in which the postsocialist neoliberal subject was created. The above sequence in which the central actors are industrial and mining workers should be seen as the accepted typology of the socialist subject in postsocialist Romanian discourse. In fact, the scapegoating of the miners was part of the scapegoating of all subjects who could not adapt and make a livelihood in the new regime. Be it industrial workers, miners or elderly asking for their pensions, these people were depicted in postsocialist discourse as subjects of the past who were at their own fault in a problematic position. As such, for instance, when the mining industry was largely disbanded and workers who agreed to receive unemployment benefits at an early point received compensatory incomes, what was publicly highlighted was not the difficult social situation in which these people were, but the way some had recklessly spent their compensatory income on drinking. This perception remains predominant to the present. For instance in the comments of an announcement of a recent dramatic art project that focuses on highlighting the livelihood of those that have remained in the Valea Jiului mining zone, what predominates is the idea that *"these people deserve their destiny, and it is in fact a*

lesson of …humanity [what they are leaving through]", *"the glory years of the working class are gone"* according to this public discourse, thus whoever tries to talk about the social condition of the losers of transition, or, more generally, social and material conditions is an *"idiot neo-nostalgic that ought to go to North Korea and experiment communism"* (""Sub Pământ": Muzeul Văii Jiului Spune Povestea Orașelor Industriale Din România" 2015).

This serves to show that, as Simionca (2012) argues, in the Romanian discourse there is a strong alliance between the creation of the neoliberal subject and politically used anti-communist discourse. The miners' protests and the way they have been depicted in the public discourse has not only served to leave them voiceless in front of the continuous restructuring of the industry until its effective disappearance, but in fact has served in a wider scheme in which any material claims for better wages, a more secure workplace and social benefits have become associated with the "glory years of the working class" which are evidently gone. Thus, if, as Simionca rightly points out, one can, at least discursively, lean on a historically glorified Keynesian past if he is a worker in the West, while in postsocialist Romania, the past cannot be invoked and is to be seen as a threatening legacy. Moreover, when the past is in fact invoked, it is actually invoked to discredit material claims such as those made by elderly pensioners in the 2012 anti-austerity protests.

3.3. The Construction of Romanian Civil Society and its Disabling Political Effects

While there are many liberal variants of conceiving civil society, instead of attempting a genealogy of civil society as a theoretical concept (for such an attempt see Ferrarotti 1984; Cohen 1994), I look at a practically grounded concept of civil society that was of great

importance after 1989 in the post-socialist space. As it has had great influence on all the post-socialist space throughout the transition period, I focus on the way the traditional conception of civil society, as a structure that is distinct and in clear opposition to the state was brought back in. Civil society has not only been the buzzword in academic and non-academic work, but it has had its important share of influence in the actual socio-political processes of democratization of the former communist countries (Buttigieg 1995, 2).

In this understanding of civil society emphasis falls on, as already mentioned, the separation between state and civil society. Civil society is conceived here as an ideally autonomous space of non-partisan reasoning about public matters, a structure that keeps the state in check and guards against possible abuses the state is prone to. According to this narrative the totalitarianism of the communist space was very much due to the state being all-encompassing and civil society being quasi-inexistent[6]. Thus what remained to be done after 1989 in the post-socialist space was to build a civil society, such that the totalitarian danger could be avoided and democracy could be reinforced. In the following subsection I provide an outline of how this process went on in the post-socialist space and focus on certain important discursive elements in the Romanian case.

The traditional conception of civil society, as a structure that is distinct and in clear opposition to the state, has had great influence on all the post-socialist space throughout the transition period. Civil society has been the buzzword in academic, non-academic work and socio-political processes of democratization of the former communist countries (Buttigieg

[6] While I will not deal with this extensively here, it is important to note that anthropological studies have shown this position to be factually inaccurate and naïve. Confrontational points of ressistance in everyday life that one could understand as part of civil society did emerge in all the post socialist space (Giustino, Plum, and Vari 2013). For a study that deals with Romanian society in particular and the emergence of such points of resistance see Poenaru's research on the emergence of football culture as a point of ressistance in socialist Romania (2013).

1995, 2). Very much like the theory proposes, the stress fell on the separation between civil society and the state and, respectively, its conception as an autonomous part of society which keeps the state in control, i.e. civil society as a resistance point to totalitarianism and as a watchdog in already democratized countries. Thus, all Western democratizing programs focused on creating a civil society mimetic to the one to be found in western countries by financing formalised civil society groups (NGOs). The driving force behind this was the practical corollary stemming from this theoretical standpoint according to which the despotism of socialist countries could be explained by the omnipotence and omnipresence of the state and the inexistence of civil society. Freedom, however, can only be insured, according to this view, if civil society exists as an autonomous element, and this is what was attempted through the subsequent encouragement of the development of a formalized civil society focused on acting as a 'watchdog for democracy'.

Thinking of the post-socialist space in the terms of the traditional conception of civil society does have its benefits. One could hardly argue that the existence of formalized civil society actors that act as watchdogs for democracy, reporting, for instance, on any abuses when it comes to the organization of elections, or highlighting cases of corruption and arguing for increased transparency, such as the Pro-Democracy Association does in Romania, is a bad thing. Transparency of governance, anti-corruption and insurance of free and fair elections, as the main objectives of this new civil society, are worthwhile grievances. However, when it comes to their deployment in the discursive field things get more complicated. In the context of the main narratives of this new civil society, the possibility of developing a critical discourse around presently existing socio-political relations is severely limited. Two main processes occur: firstly, as politics is increasingly seen as a dirty thing, the public space

becomes depoliticised; secondly, the focus on transparency, anti-corruption, and rule-of law becomes the a priori answer to any socio-political problem.

The deployment of the noble distinction between civil society and politics as such, i.e. the state, in actual political practice is linked to the depoliticization of public space. Starting from the shared theoretical view of post-socialist governmentalities according to which the realm of politics is conceived as a realm of partisanship and interest-based ideas and actions, while civil society is a sort of Kantian space of freedom where the use of public reason manifests itself situated outside politics, what we arrive at is a paradoxical depoliticization of the public space: politics is seen, in opposition to the clean, modern, civil society, as dirty and stuck in the past and social actors begin to see themselves as apolitical. Moreover, taking the distinction between civil society and politics to its extreme, apoliticism and neutrality have become central tenants of a majority of discourses in civil society.

On a second level civil society's discourse focused on anti-corruption and rule of law issues was generalized to an unwarranted level. This contributed to a further depoliticization. While anti-corruption and the rule of law are important, they become highly problematic when they end up appearing as the answer to any political situation. Thus, in the Romanian space, any social problem is easily linked with bad, corrupt governance. Actual policy discussion is, at best secondary. When problems regarding social exclusion, poverty etc. are taken into discussion they are not seen as provoked by bad policy, but simply as having to do with corrupt political elites stealing 'the wealth of the people'.

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Starting from the conceptual elements I have discussed I would claim we could put forward an interpretation of the different structure of the Romanian anti-austerity protests compared to

their western counterparts. This is what I attempt starting with the next chapter where I duscuss the 2012 Romanian anti-governmental protests at length.

4. HOW TO BE AGAINST AUSTERITY WITHOUT ACTUALLY BEING AGAINST IT

In this chapter I track the birth of the new civil society in Bucharest during the 2012 anti-governmental protests. I call the 2012 protests anti-governmental rather than anti-austerity, as they were presented in both national and international media (Bran 2012; Walker and Bucharest 2012; Cercel 2015; Stoiciu 2012). I maintain that they were discursively substantially different from what is taken to be a prototypical anti-austerity reaction. In fact, this is the central thesis of this chapter. After first depicting the context in which the protests erupted (section 3.1.), I proceed by providing a descriptive account of the 2012 Bucharest protest scene and the main acting protest groups (sections 3.2., 3.2.1.). Taking the previous discussion of the post-socialist legacy and the way it has been put to use in the enforcement of a postsocialist variety of neoliberalism, I then discuss the surprising scarcity of material grievances in what were supposed to be anti-austerity protests (section 3.2.3). Starting from that, I focus on the discursive specificities of the Romanian protests compared to prototypical anti-austerity movements such as those in Spain or Greece (section 3.2.4). From here on I develop how it has come that anti-corruption became an all-explanatory master frame for the protester, and why protesters were reluctant to see themselves as political subjects. Let me now first return to the context that led to the eruption of the 2012 protests.

4.1. How Austerity Politics Met Little Societal Resistance…

Until the financial crisis hit, under a center-right government, Romania had experienced what was perceived as a vigorous growth of the economy which balanced out increased expenditure caused by measures such as the switch from a progressive to a flat tax rate and a

large increase in the number of public employees (Stoiciu 2012, 1). At the time of the financial crisis' debut in Europe[7], carefully preparing for the imminent 2008 parliamentary elections Romanian politicians in power insistently maintained that the crisis would not affect Romania (Fierbințeanu 2008).

However, immediately after the parliamentary elections President Traian Băsescu and the right-wing government of the Democrat Liberal Party (PDL) not only admitted that the crisis had in fact hit Romania too, but also took lead roles in implementing an uncompromising austerity program. Arguing that it was forced by circumstances, the Romanian government took a loan from the International Monetary Fund in 2009. Thus, in 2010, the same politicians who had argued that the financial crisis would not affect the country two years earlier, pushed for some of the most severe austerity measures taken in Europe, putting forth the thesis that they had little to no space of maneuver in the context of the international financial crisis and the loan contracted from the IMF.

As Victoria Stoiciu shows in her policy analysis paper funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, while amounting to severe social consequences there seems to be little evidence that the draconic austerity measures had the desired 'economic' effect (Stoiciu 2012). Moreover, in an ironic twist, even the IMF has suggested that, by overdoing austerity, the Romanian Government made economic growth impossible. Among the austerity policies that were implemented the most important ones were the reduction of all state employees' salaries by 25%, the reduction of social benefits by 15% and the hike of the VAT tax from 19 to 24%. In addition to this, so-called structural reforms followed; in other words, public sector jobs were

[7] It was at this time that, for instance, the infamous Troika institution was starting its seemingly endless repeated official visits to Greece.

slashed into[8]. This was followed by the adoption of a reformed Labor Code that drastically reduced worker's rights coupled with a New Social Dialogue Law that incapacitated already struggling trade unions (Stoiciu 2012, 3). Moreover, *"[s]tructural reforms also included the health care system. The cost cuts caused 67 hospitals to be shut down in 2011."*(Stoiciu 2012, 3)

One may reasonably expect such measures to bring about strong societal resistance. However this was not the case. The measures were met with little effective resistance until January 2012. While trade unions, especially the police trade union, protested against the cuts, *spontaneous* popular resistance was almost inexistent.

Two explanatory elements may serve to bring light to the mechanisms of this surprising absence of resistance. These elements are linked to the development of a neoliberal hegemonic discourse in post-socialist context. On the one hand an interesting discursive tendency of contempt against complaints oriented directly towards themes related to economic hardship/material needs developed in Romanian post-socialist society. Through a discursive interplay with anti-communist ideology what was achieved, perhaps most prominently in Romania out of all post-socialist space, was that any material needs related claims was automatically discarded as it was directly associated with the nightmarish totalitarian past (see Simionca 2012).

On the other hand, taken by definition, as lazy, inefficient, rent-seeking profiteers, state employees are seen as a burden to tax-paying individuals employed by privately owned

[8] "Romania was the EU champion in job restructuring, with 78,700 jobs terminated, representing 21 per cent of the total jobs terminated in EU countries. Of the total jobs terminated, 60,610 were government positions, representing over half (54.64 per cent) of the total government positions eliminated in the entire EU." (Stoiciu 2012, 3)

companies involved in the market game. In this context, even though they either lost ¼th of their income or were fired, popular support for state employees was scarce.

The absence of popular protests against the austerity measures does not mean that the population was satisfied with the new status quo. In fact, "*the main political vector of austerity, PDL, declined in the polls from over 35 per cent to around 15 per cent*". Moreover,

> "*[p]resident Traian Băsescu, the advocate of austerity in Romania, experienced a similar decline: 49.9 per cent of Romanians trusted him in January 2009, before the implementation of austerity measures, but only 9.8 per cent in August 2010, three months after the measures had been announced." (Stoiciu 2012, 6)*

Traian Băsescu, the president of Romania who, in his first presidential race famously declared the corrupt elite ought to be impaled in the center of Bucharest in the Revolution Square, increasingly began to be seen as part of the problem. Furthermore, due to the application of his self-declared doctrine of a "*player president*", i.e. a president that uses his executive power prerogatives at most, arguably sometimes even trespassing them, Traian Băsescu appeared more and more as a figure with authoritarian tendencies in the eye of the public[9] (Cercel 2012, 1139).

It is in this context that the 2012 Romanian protests would arise. After first providing an account of the protest scenes, in the following section I discuss the specificities of the Romanian 2012 protests, arguing that they are far off from the usual case of anti-austerity protests, as often assumed in international media.

[9] In Romanian society, not without reasons, it is widely acknowledged that after the 2008 parliamentary elections brought a PDL led coalition to power with Emil Boc as its prime-minister, replacing the National Liberal Party (PNL) minority government led by Călin-Popescu Tăriceanu, President Băsescu was the de facto possessor of complete executive power, as Boc acted as a puppet prime-minister and passed crucial laws, bypassing public debate and the legislative power, through an abusively used extraordinary procedure of government assumption. Furthermore, Băsescu is widely held to have had control over certain key elements of the justice system, including the National Anti-Corruption Direction.

4.2. …Until Resistance Did Come, or Did It? The 2012 Anti-Governmental Protests

It took 3 years for a significant societal reaction to appear after the first austerity measures were implemented. *"[F]ollowing a draft bill that actually stipulated the privatization of the health care system"* (Stoiciu 2012, 7) and the subsequent scandal between Raed Arafat, an Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Health that openly opposed the law, and Traian Băsescu, social resistance finally emerged in January 2012.

On the 11th of January 2012, Raed Arafat, pressured by Traian Băsescu, resigned from his position. Declaring himself against a provision present in the newly proposed health reform law that would grant straightforward accessibility to private companies to become emergency healthcare providers, Arafat had argued that a system in which the private companies would compete with the public system would be vulnerable (David 2012). His position led him to be called a reactionary seeking to block reforms in health and to subsequently be invited, in a *Society of Spectacle* reminiscent episode, to submit his resignation in a live television news show (Constantin 2012).

Arafat's resignation set in motion what have remained known as the Romanian 2012 anti-austerity protests. One day later, in Târgu Mureș, city of which Arafat was a local, a solidarity march took place. While proclaiming solidarity with Raed Arafat the demonstrators' chanted anti-governmental and anti-presidential messages asking for the President's resignation (Mediafax 2012d). On Friday, the 13th of January, protests escalated: gatherings were held in several large cities of Romania, including Bucharest, the capital. As the protesters in University Square, a symbolic square in the center of the Romanian capital

that had been the scene of violently repressed student uprisings in the early 90s, marched to the Presidential Palace, the anti-governmental and anti-presidential feelings that had dominated the Târgu Mureș march in the prior day remained prevalent in Bucharest on the 13th as well.

As a response to the social unrest, the president backed down and asked the government to withdraw the health reform law (Mediafax 2012a), while maintaining that the public had been misinformed and claiming that health reform, i.e. the modernization of the health system, is only wanted by a few young medical practitioners, while the rest of those involved in the system, including the wide public, in lieu of the social unrest, want to block any changes in the system (Public Relations Department 2012). However, protests did not cease, and, in fact, escalated.

In the following weekend, the Bucharest protest scene was to see the discursive emergence of a curious new social actor: *the Ultraș*, i.e. the Romanian equivalent of the so-called football hooligan (Gândul 2012). Showing up with their own agenda, i.e. militating against an anti-hooliganism law which basically permitted the gendarmerie to interdict the presence of individuals on football stadiums with a simple recommendation notice, football fans were initially seen as an external body by the other protesters (Stoica 2012, 267). They were soon to become the scapegoat for the protest's violent deviation. While the 14th of January saw a small confrontation between the gendarmerie and alleged members of the football galleries, on the 15th of January violent clashes between protesters claimed to be football hooligans by mass media, and the gendarmerie erupted through the center of Bucharest (Mediafax 2012b). While mass media depicted protesters as uneducated savage football hooligans, voices inside the protests saw the violent clashes as being set up and provoked by the power. The violence of the Sunday protests insistently highlighted by mass-media did not stop protesters from

showing up on a daily basis again the next weeks and even incorporating the football fans as part of the protesting body.

Five days after the debut of the protest, Raed Arafat was called back into his state function (Neagu 2012). While this did not make protests stop, it was becoming quite evident that protests were already losing momentum. On the 19th of January, almost a week into the protests, the opposition coalition, the Social-Liberal Union, organized a massive political meeting in Bucharest in an attempt to gain political profit from the protests. After the political meeting ended, political party members joined in on the University Square daily demonstration, resulting in an interesting discursive collision between the party members and the protesters (Nistor et al. 2012). It was expected that there would be difficulties once the political members of the opposition parties would be situated in the same spatial area with the University Square protesters, out of which many did not support the opposition parties. However, it seemed that the heterogeneous groups' major common demand, i.e. the president's resignation, was important enough, such that no major conflict happened that night.

On the 6th of February, in the context of popular pressures, the whole government resigned (Mediafax 2012c). However the executive's change did not also signal a change in governmental policy. The next prime-minister nominated by the President, Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, the former head of a Romanian secret-service, established a government with younger members of the same PDL party keeping the same line of the previous government.

Protests did go on, in a brutally unwelcoming weather, for the next weeks but the number of protesters progressively decreased. While most media (except opposition partisan) had almost entirely stopped reporting on the groups that were protesting, protesters and gendarmerie

forces kept coming on a daily basis. It was the hope of the protesters that a spring reawakening of the protests would take place when the weather would warm-up. This, however, never really happened.

In late April, following a parliamentary censorship motion, the new Ungureanu government fell and, on the 3rd of July the impeachment procedure of the President was successfully carried through (Antoniu and Micu 2012). Social unrest changed the balance of power inside the Parliament, where members of the party in power switched sides, and made these events possible. Following the fall of the Ungureanu government, an opposition government of the so-called Liberal Socialist Alliance (USL), a grand coalition between the National Liberal (PNL) and the Social Democrat Party (PSD), came to power, led by the social democrat leader, Victor Ponta.

4.2.1. Delineating the Key Groups: Multiplicity in Action

Due to the diversity of protesters, some Romanian social scientists have argued that the protests cannot be seen as a single movement (Deoancă 2012; Bulai 2012). It was common to

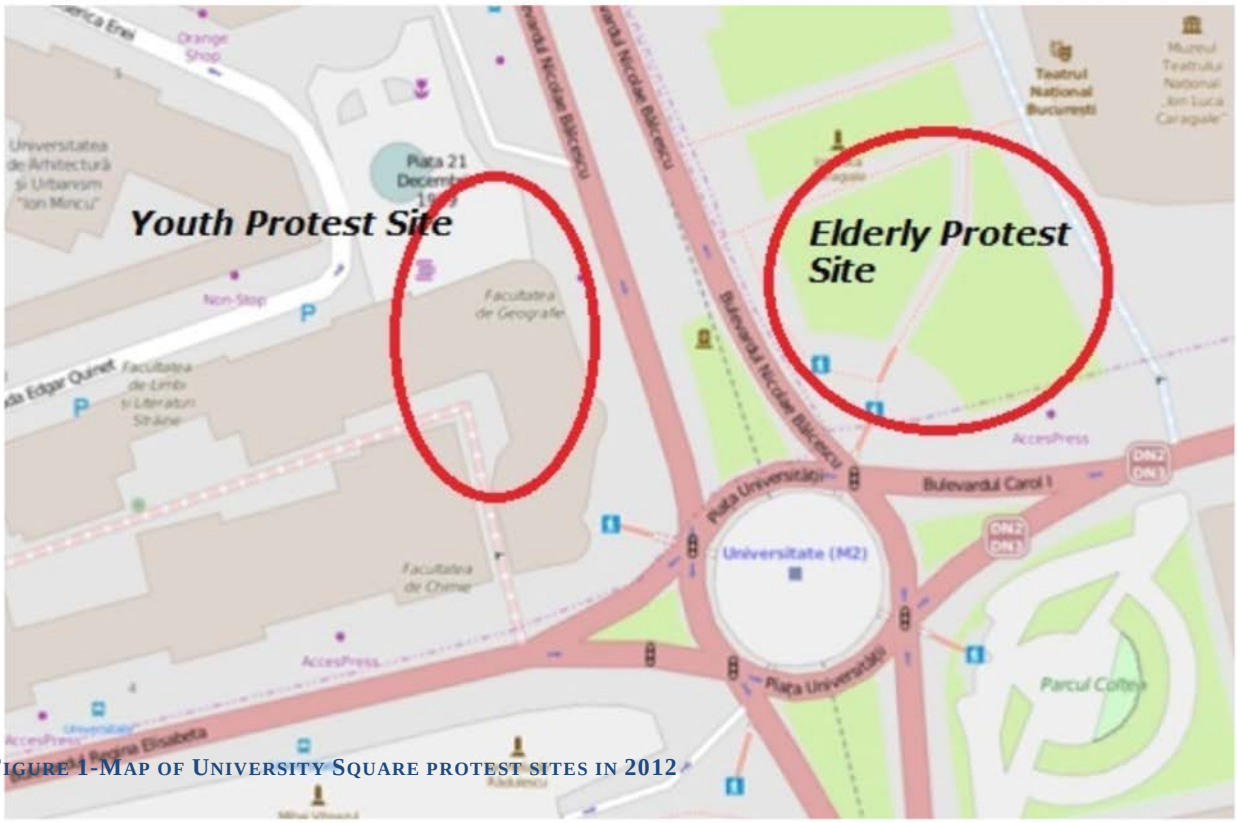


FIGURE 1-MAP OF UNIVERSITY SQUARE PROTEST SITES IN 2012

differentiate between two protest groups. For instance, in an interview one of those who was seen as a leader of the protests described a separation between two branches, graphically arguing for the existence of two lungs inside the protests (Stoica 2012, 282; Mihailescu and Crăciun 2012).

Especially after the first few days of protests, these so called lungs were clearly differentiated in terms of spatial positioning. It is possible, as the Romanian sociologist Alfred Bulai does, to speak of two spaces of protest (2012).

As already mentioned, the protests in Bucharest took place in the symbolic University Square, which had been the site of social resistance both in 1989, when Ceausescu was ousted from power, and in the early 1990s student protests. University Square is located at a large junction in the center of Bucharest, which is also home to an Underground station with the same name. With one exception[10], the protests always took place on the sidewalk, and the 4 lane/way road was not occupied, simply due to the fact that the protests were not very numerous. Media reports that no more than 2000 protesters were out on a daily basis, with a maximum of less than 7000 in the day in which political opposition members joined the protesters ("BILANŢUL PROTESTELOR de Luni - 13.000 de Manifestanţi În 52 de Localităţi. 'Un Întreg Arsenal', Descoperit La Protestatari Din Capitală" 2015).

Out of the four sides of the junction, two sides: the Faculty of Architecture and University of Bucharest side and the National Theatre side were constantly occupied during the protests (see figure 1). Whereas, on one side of the square, i.e. the side with the National Theatre (TNB), mostly middle-aged and pensioners protested, many of which were supporters of the

[10] The exception is that of the 19th of January when University square protesters were joined by members of the opposition parties.

political opposition, on the other side, i.e. that of the Faculty of Architecture, younger people, with a message which appeared to be more anti-systemic protested (see figure 2). Long withstanding, this generational cleavage kept its spatial dimension all throughout the protests.

As Deoanca argues, this generational cleavage can arguably also be seen as a social distinction between outright losers of the transition, and partial winners of it:

> *"The pensioners, the People's Party[11] sympathizers, old-aged women and the unemployed quartered in front of the National Theatre; briefly put the losers of [both postsocialist] transition and the austerity period. On the other side, […] students, intellectuals, creatives and right-wing dissatisfied were yelling their indignation altogether with incisive ironical slogans and placards elaborated with a public relations affinity. The protesters on this side are part of the "waged bourgeoisie" which rebels defending their privileged position in the capitalist mode of production while fearing that they themselves risk proletarization (Zizek 2012). Separated by a large boulevard, the two groups rarely interacted"*
>
> (Deoancă 2012, 192)

This is not to say that the two groups did not interact; while direct interaction was impossible because of the spatial separation of the groups, some protesters made a habit of visiting *the other side*[12]. Moreover, at a certain point, the group of youth protesters organized marches to visit *the other side,* where mostly elderly people protested.

Interestingly enough, the spatial cleavage was accompanied by a cleavage in media representation of the two groups: while the more watched side where mostly elderly protesters were present (the side of the Bucharest National Theater) boasted all main news TV cars which brought spotlights, creating an almost surreal studio-like protest scene, the

[11] The People's Party was, at that time, a rising political movement that looked ideologically confusing. Having as its leader the director of a yellow press TV channel, the party won seats in the 2012 local and parliamentary elections while criticizing the established political ellite as being all corrupt and arguing for measures such as giving each individual citizen of Romania a lump sum of 10000 Euros were they to gain majority.

[12] This is what the Romanian sociologist Alfred Bulai refers to when he speaks about protesters with the special status of "ambassadors" in his study (2012).

FIGURE 2-SCENE FROM THE 2012 UNIVERSITY SQUARE PROTESTS ON THE ARCHITECTURE FACULTY SIDE (YOUTH PROTESTERS)

Architecture Faculty side where mainly younger protesters were present received less media attention (Bulai 2012, 88–90).

Both groups were, in fact, quite heterogeneous. The same way the seemingly more progressive, Faculty of Architecture group of youth protesters contained subgroups ranging from football fans with nationalist tendencies, to the outright fascist movement of the New Right (which was, however, isolated and marginalized), and left-liberal and left-radical movements, the TNB group of elderly protesters was not fully composed of political opposition parties supporters. Even so, it can be argued that more substantial, discursive-related, differences between the two heterogeneous groups existed. In his study of the 2012 protest movement's frames, Bulai suggests that in terms of employed discourses a fundamental difference between the two spaces of protests had to do with the fact that on the

National Theatre side, the older, often retired, protesters were more prone to making social-economic claims as opposed to the protesters on the Faculty of Architecture side, who had political claims, i.e. "*claims related to civil rights and liberties, an unhealthy political climate and a democratic deficit*" (Bulai 2012, 89). Notwithstanding Bulai's use of a dubious distinction between political and socio-economic claims, it is factually true that claims made by the youth protesters on the Faculty of Architecture side were most often imperatives devoid of any material claims, as opposed to claims on the National Theater side which had a material-related aspect more often. Yet, the latter were framed such that the main reason of protest would remain a moral-principled one. Only by missing this point can the over-simplistic distinction between socio-economic and political claims be put forward.

Even so, if we remain at this first level of appearances, simply noticing the rarity of material based claims, it seems to me we do not go very far in understanding the specificity of the Romanian protests. Thus, if the protests were seen as a variation on anti-austerity movements the question that begs an answer here is why material based grievances were not central. After discussing the heterogenous nature of the protests I will focus on this issue.

4.2.2. Eerie Coexistences: Unlikely Alliances Against a Common Enemy

While paying attention to both groups, i.e. the group of elderly and the group of youth protesters, my focus was on the latter. This, often called Faculty of Architecture group of mainly youth protesters, contains most of those who constituted the core of an emerging new civil society which would then be involved in several other protests, including the massive 2014 anti-gold mining protests.

Rather than being coalesced around a common ideological framework, the Faculty of Architecture group, as its name indicates, was a group brought together simply by its spatial

positioning. Both formal groups, such as the România Curată (Clean Romania) NGO with its focus on anticorruption, the România Vie (Romania Alive) organization with its nationalist tendencies, the Miliția Spirituală NGO with its socially liberal ideology and other informal groups, such as the left-liberal I drew most of my participant observation from, would constitute important elements in this new civil society.

An important question that arises has to do with the nature of the discursive formations that allowed the ideologically diverse groups of the Faculty of Architecture group to peacefully coexist and engage in collective action. In this context, voices framing their protests in the context of the desire of a civilized political space, voices that saw the main reason of protest as having to do with the cleansing of a corrupted political class, found themselves in an unlikely alliance with voices such as those critical of contemporary capitalism arguing that the president is only an instrumental part of the system, a *"conventional president in the present neoliberal economy"* (Petri 2014). While few extremist groups, such as the outright fascist Romanian New Right group, were marginalized (Deoancă 2012, 170), and any attempts of established political figures to join the protest, most other groups coalesced in an eerie coexistence.

From an external standpoint, at a first glance, the protests may have produced the image of a clear unitary body. A more careful analysis brings to light the eeriness of the temporary alliance between ideologically radically different groups, but only from an inside standpoint the difficult to maintain alliance between varied groups was palpable. Not only were there two spatially differentiated spaces of protests, but, even inside each protest space, uneasiness in cooperation was evident from the interior. For instance, often located in the ideologically more left-oriented subgroups, it was evident for me how people were not at ease when other groups chanted slogans flirting with nationalist ideas. However, most of the times no direct

conflict with groups promoting such messages rose. Moreover, even in the rare occasions when direct conflict did rise, it was resolved such that none of the groups would renounce protesting.

The straight-forward explanation of this situation has to do with the fact that the 2012 protests brought together a diversity of groups that, while having very different diagnosis framings of societal issues, identified the elites in power at that moment generally, and particularly President Traian Băsescu, as directly responsible for the situation. Thus, as the leader of the left-liberal group in the Faculty of Architecture space argued:

> *"The most important common element was somehow personalized and referred to the president's abusive use of power; it was the common point of all the very different groups in the square."*
>
> *(Ștefan, key youth figure of the new civil society).*

Thus, even if for some of the protesters Băsescu represented a national traitor that ought to be replaced by a morally clean national bourgoisie, or maybe, even, made obsolete through the reinstatement of monarchy, while for others he represented the incarnation of neoliberalism, despite their differences, they all agreed on the need to oppose President Băsescu. It is this identification of a political persona as the fundamental problem that, on the one hand, made the protests possible, while on the other hand making the participating groups be in an impossibility to come up with a wider agenda then protesting against the president and government.

4.2.3. Drifting Through Postsocialist Romania: Failing to Articulate Material Claims

A theme that was repeatedly formulated on site by protesters on both sides, and that also emerged in my analysis of media materials was one that stressed how material interests were

not the main motivation behind the protests. Instead, many protesters felt a need to highlight that they were out on the street for value-reasons:

> *"We are not here to protest for not having what to eat. We are here because we have principles, and the current system leads to a dictatorship."*
>
> *("Cine Sunt Viermii Şi Ciumpalacii Din Piaţa Universităţii" 2015a)*

The prevalence of the need to justify the social protest as one that is not exclusively motivated by material interests was common to both spaces of protests: even when, indeed protesting for socio-economic reasons, the older National Theater protesters often felt the need to stress that their presence at the protests was one based on principles, i.e. *"a matter of dignity"*. This seems to suggest that the differentiation between the so-called socio-economic reasons of protests proclaimed by one side and the political-civic reasons of the other side may actually hide a, deeper level, common discursive feature.

Discussing the historical discursive legacies of socialism, and the anti-communist ideology, I have already suggested that in Romanian society there is a historically developed strong discursive tendency for contempt for articulating material needs related claims. This explains why neither group of protesters was eager to articulate such claims. Even when in fact articulating such claims, the older protesters positioned in front of the Bucharest National Theatre felt the need to highlight that their main protest motivation was a value based one rather than a material one. Coupling this contempt for material needs related claims with the fact that Faculty of Architecture protesters tended to be educated *middle class* youth having

no immediate material needs[13], it becomes easier to understand why Faculty of Architecture side protesters rarely articulated material-issue based claims.

My suggestion here is that a main feature of contentious street politics in Romania has to do with an impossibility, i.e. the impossibility of directly articulating material based claims. As such, there is a stigma associated with recognizing one has material issues. As one middle-aged protester expressively describes it:

> *"Fear grows along with debts and duties. You know how many old people are ashamed to admit they're starving? You know how many people in their 50s start drinking, ashamed they are ill and unemployed? It's very sad."*
>
> *(Petri 2014)*

I claim that in this case, even though support for the politicians that aggressively implemented austerity decreases, there is a restricted discursive access to means of criticizing increased economic hardships. In other words, while it is the increased difficulty of ensuring a decent means of livelihood that makes many of the protesters unhappy with the people in power, in the Romanian postsocialist discursive context it becomes extremely difficult to articulate such material demands.

A 34 years old protester interviewed by the Jurnalul National newspaper argues as follows:

> *"Although I am not too well off, I am not motivated by social reasons to be here… I am here because Băsescu is mocking national values. This is what hurts me most."*
>
> *("Uite Cine Sunt Ciumpalacii Şi Viermii Din Piaţa Universităţii" 2015)*

This process may lead to wildly differently perceived experiences. Some protesters interiorize it as an inadequacy of the political elite in adhering to national values, often folding to a more

[13] Or at least no immediate material needs that were as serious as those of the poor pensioners protesting on the other side.

or less extreme form of nationalism. Other protesters, *avoid* folding to a nationalist stance only to fall in the trap of a self-colonial attitude according to which the backward mentality of communist infested Romanians must be cleansed and brought to western standards such that Romania becomes *"a country like outside*[14]*"* ("Uite Cine Sunt Ciumpalacii Şi Viermii Din Piaţa Universităţii" 2015; "Cine Sunt Viermii Şi Ciumpalacii Din Piaţa Universităţii" 2015b). Common to all these reactions is however a similar structure: material based issues are silenced; in the context of a powerful stigma associated with demanding material safety, social demands often remain unarticulated and get substituted by other forms of discontent.

Even if happening more than 20 years after the fall of Romanian *real-existing socialism*, the protests are very much linked to the dominant discourses of the transition. The peculiar deployment of neoliberal governmentality in Romanian postsocialist context may elucidate the mechanisms that are at work here. The linkage between the discourse pushing towards the enforcement of neoliberal subjectivity and hegemonic anti-communist discourses is critical here. If one is critical towards the tenants of neoliberal self-responsiblisation, flexible work etc. one is automatically associated with the socialist past. Since the communist past is to be repudiated as a whole, any sort of discourse directly critical to neoliberalism is immediately silenced through its association with the past (for an account of how this has happened in the world of middle ranking corporation managers in a large Romanian city see Simionca 2012). It is in this context that both politicians and mainstream intellectuals discard any criticism to neoliberal reforms and reinforce the flexible, responsible neoliberal subject. But it is also in this context that material related issues were silenced in the 2012 protests. One cannot easily articulate a material-related demand since it links back to the communist past, and as such

[14] In this context, "outside" designates western space. Following a popular Romanian pop hit titled "I want a country like outside", protesters often invoked similar expressions when expressing their dissatisfaction with the status quo.

material demands are silenced and rarely expressed[15]. Thus, ironically, the Romanian anti-austerity protests were not really discursively dominated by anti-austerity positions.

4.2.4. The Romanian Variety of Anti-Austerity Reaction

As the birth point of a new civil society, the 2012 anti-austerity protests appeared similar to anti-austerity movements throughout Europe such as the Greek Aganaktismenoi (outraged) or the Indignados movement in Spain. It appeared so from an external point of view. While international media reported on the protests as being over "pay cuts and economic hardships" (Walker and Bucharest 2012), Romanian media linked the protests to the Indignados movement directly: for instance, in an article published in Romania Libera, Mircea Kivu asks "Who are the Indignados in Bucharest?".

Moreover, inside the movement this resemblance also served an important function. One of my informants, a leading figure in the 2012 protests, declared that the similarity between the Romanian and the Spanish Indignados anti-austerity movements was essential for him in constituting his own position inside the movement. He argued as follows:

> *"For me what went on in 2012 looked very much like… was in a way parallel to what was happening in Spain. There were a lot of common points: for instance anti-austerity politics, a center-right government, a social movement; it is true that what was happening in the [University] square differs from Spain including from the point of view of sheer numbers. In Romania it was a, not very structured in fact, strong outburst, but in the essence of their agendas I think there were common points with the Indignados movement, and for me this was an important reference point in how I understood the movement and got myself involved into it."*
>
> (Ștefan, key youth figure of the new civil society)

[15] For an account of how the traditional working class with its material related demands was shaped into the backward element that prevents modernization and westernization see Kideckel's study (2008) and my discussion of it in Chapter 3.

The linkage between Greek and Spanish anti-austerity movements and the Romanian movement makes sense. After all, the similar austerity policies adopted by the governments' of all three countries were at the center of the respective social movements in each country. At this level there is an important linkage between these protests. However, in what follows, taking the main demands of the protesters as a starting point, I reconstruct the discursive interplays of the 2012 Romanian anti-austerity protest that worked along quite different lines.

4.2.4.1. Eliminating politics: anti-corruption, apolitics and anti-politics

While articulating common themes to those of more well known anti-austerity protests, the Romanian protesters created quite different discursive linkages. If the Romanian protests, just as the Greek or the Spanish protests, were about protesting against a way of *doing* politics that was indeed very similar, they had quite different diagnoses of what this way of *doing* politics was actually about.

FIGURE 3- PROTESTERS WITH PLACARD READING "ALL PARTIES ARE COMPROMISED".

Whereas, for instance, *Puerta del Sol* protesters' claims centered on essentially material related issues, i.e. issues related to an increasing difficulty in ensuring livelihoods, the discourse of Romanian anti-austerity protests bypassed such material related framings in the favor of corruption as a main diagnosis framing. Not seen as a mere symptom, corruption stood out as the master diagnosis framing of the protests, as the issue that stands as the deep cause of all experienced social hardships. Nicely synthesized in the words of a young protester:

"Foreign media asserts that people protest due to the austerity measures taken by the government after the IMF loan. It is evident that these protests cannot fully be understood in the West. They are not faced with the same thing; in the west they cannot even imagine such a level of corruption (the true reason of the protests[16])."

("Uite Cine Sunt Ciumpalacii Şi Viermii Din Piaţa Universităţii" 2015)

FIGURE 4-A PROTESTER'S PLACARD FEATURING A SKULL THAT EXTENDS BY INCORPORATING THE NAMES OF ALL EXISTING POLITICAL PARTIES (AND THEIR SHIFTING NAMES SINCE 1989).

For the majority of Romanian protesters corruption constituted the sole explanatory factor of social problems. The perverse effect of "corruption" as a master frame of diagnosis of social problems is that it precluded any criticism of actually implemented policies.

While it was evidently not the case that workers with *'fully developed class consciousness'* were marching through the streets of Athens or Madrid explaining the relations between the real manifestations of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and their unemployment status, it was the case that people protested and directly opposed a neoliberal political program, and the associated austerity policies. Thus, if slogans such as "No more cuts!" were ubiquitous in other anti-austerity protests, they were almost inexistent in the Romanian anti-austerity protests. Intriguingly, what have remained known as the 2012 anti-austerity protests were in fact protests in which material based issues and discourses critical to austerity policies were, if not silenced, secondary, at best.

[16] This is not to say that Spanish or Greek protesters did not relate to this issue. However, in their case, corruption rather than being seen as the root of all problems, it was seen as part of the problem.

Moreover, not only was the political problem framed differently, but the relation with the political the protesters could have was also articulated in a substantially different manner. As opposed to the Indignados movement (Taibo 2013; Thomassen 2014), for instance, where politics was brought back in (as of such the movement has now brought forth an actual political organization), in Romania an apolitical and anti-political hegemonic discourse made it such that the movement itself was unwilling to get involved in the political game. Clearly functioning in the realm of the civil society/ politics liberal distinction the movement's discourse was one of clear refusal of joining in the political. In fact, proposal of involvement in politics was often seen as a form of treason to the movement. Let me recall an emblematic moment from my own participant observation when protesters were gathered in a participative democratic process of debate on issues of organization and establishing future goals. When a proposition for establishing a political movement/party came on the following lines:

> *"If all the political class is compromised we should come with an alternative. Why shall we keep letting them change each other in power? Let us get involved ourselves and replace them!"*

the overwhelming reaction was one of utter disgust to the proposition. Even when political solutions were actually proposed they came from outside the political realm: technical experts, i.e. technocrats, were envisioned as the only possible saviors[17]. As such, political space, rather than being envisioned as a space of real choice between alternative constructions of social lives, it is seen as an immoral space of corruption. Thus, any decent protester would want to position himself altogether outside politics.

[17] It is emblematic for the whole movement that it started out as a movement in support of one of these mythical technocrat figures, Raed Arafat.

4.3. Screening an Indignados Sequel: Different Director, Different Script

Unexpected as they were, the 2012 Romanian anti-governmental protests should evidently be seen as part of the anti-systemic post-2008 worldwide reaction. However, in terms of discursive features simply calling it an anti-austerity protest is problematic. By doing so, one misses out its specificities. This is of importance, not solely for reasons of bourgeois correctness, but for reasons of political strategy. If one wants to carve out a progressive form of politics in Romania, one should understand the substantially different reaction to austerity present in this space. The Romanian so-called anti-austerity protests were, as shown, substantially different to the Spanish ones, for instance. While we might take the Occupy or Indignados style protests as prototypes for anti-austerity reactions it would be a serious mistake, with disastrous consequences in terms of political strategy to assume that the Romanian reaction was along these lines[18].

If the prototypical anti-austerity movements posed material grievances, and an explicit critique of neoliberal policies amounting to an eventual political articulation posing a threat to the existing political system (see Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece) the Romanian anti-austerity protests worked along fundamentally different lines. With no coherent critique of actual policy the Romanian so-called anti-austerity protests delimitated from political space, and rarely directly related to material issues. When indeed spoken of, material issues and

[18] Assuming the Romanian reaction to be on similar lines to the prototypical anti-austerity reaction, leads, in terms of political strategy, to a situation in which a vanguard know-it-all elite talks to an inexistent public, since it addresses a problem that is discursively inaccessible to the public. Thus, the truer its revolutionary consciousness is, the more ridiculous this vanguard becomes.

difficult livelihoods were directly connected with the corrupt elites and their theft from the people, taken as a master explanatory frame.

In terms of political involvement, at their most critical stance Romanian youth protesters saw no alternative in the existing political class (see figures 3 and 4 above). However, an important discursive feature of the 2012 protests was that protesters were not willing to create a political project. Not willing to propose a political project, they situated themselves outside politics in a realm of supposed neutrality. While criticizing the whole of the Romanian political class for its corruption, most protesters were skeptical of any attempts to build political alternatives. Such a paradoxical attitude can only be explained by understanding the Romanian context and the way politics has been discursively constructed as a dirty, morally reprehensible space. As will be seen in the next chapter, this view has shifted substantially for the civil society groups that continued on their various contentious moves against the state[19]. As such, what emerged as a pseudo-political solution in 2012 was not a differently oriented political program that renounces austerity measures, but a quest for the ritual cleansing of the political class (see Poenaru 2014) from an external vantage point.

[19] However, as we shall see, these shifts, have not been as in the case of other anti-austerity movements, i.e, the creation of alternative political movements, but the incorporation of parts if the movement in the already existing political system.

5. REASSIMILATING A SUPPOSED ANTI-SYSTEMIC MOVEMENT BACK TO THE EXISTING POLITICAL SYSTEM

In this chapter I trace the events in which groups of the new civil society born out of the 2012 anti-governmental protests got involved in socially contentious movements in 2013 and 2014. I show how, instead of managing to create a political alternative, the movement failed, and important parts of it retreated into support for members of the existing political class. Focusing on the preeminent 2013 environmental protests against the Roșia Montană open cast gold mining project, and the way, inside these protests, the Uniți Salvăm (United We Save) community established itself, I track the discursive evolution of the movement in relation to the 2012 protests. Tracking the tensions inside the Uniți Salvăm community during its involvement in two electoral campaigns, the European Parliament elections and the Presidential elections, I show how the movement fell into the trap of supporting members of the existing political class, which brought it to practical dissolution.

More than one year and a half after the so-called anti-austerity 2012 protests, on September 1, 2013, in quite different political conditions, the first large environmental protests in Romania erupted. They were also by far the largest protests ever to have happened from the 2000s onwards in postsocialist Romania (Sciences et Avenir 2013; Ciobanu 2013; Odobescu and Ciorniciuc 2013). For weeks in a row (even tens of) thousands of people came out on the streets in reaction to the promotion of a special mining law drafted in a manner which allowed a controversial open cast gold mining project in the Western part of Romania, in the

Apuseni Mountains, Roșia Montană locality, which had long been delayed (Kalb 2006; F. Poenaru 2014a) to finally be put to action.

The project, which was in the end supported by all specters of the political class, was an economic black hole, as the state would basically sell its resources and only receive less than 5% dues from extraction. Moreover, with a proposed method of extraction that used dangerous substances such as different cyanides, it also posed an environmental danger; there was no real insurance that the company would continue guaranteeing environmental safety after the extraction process would have finished.

I start by providing a concise description of the dynamics of the movement and the emergence of an organizational group, Uniți Salvăm (United We Save), with relative autonomy that, at later stages, ended up pursuing different objectives. Prior to this, I provide a brief description of the political context, which had significantly changed since 2012. I discuss the different composition of the 2013-2014 events compared to the 2012 protests: more homogenous class participation and a more heterogenous ideological participation. I then examine the Uniți Salvăm organizational group and the dynamics that, at later stages, led it to be seen as supporting politicians from the same existing class that had always been criticized in these social movement circles, analyzing central themes that made such a development possible. Thus, keeping in mind the relation to the 2012 anti-governmental protests and highlighting the continuities and discontinuities between the two, I analyze the way the environmental single-issue framing of the initial protest worked putting it into connection to the trans-ideological and apolitical doctrine of the protests that, while following a roughly similar line to the 2012 protests, did have their individual peculiarities and led to different outcomes, as part of the movement actually split and chose to support a member of

the exsting political class. Discussing the discontinuities between the 2012 aand the2013-2014 moments I also discuss the emergence of a nationalist tendency inside the movement.

5.1. The Political Context: Changes that amount to Nothing

To understand the dynamics of the events properly and what made it possible for the movement to reach the critical moment in which important parts of it supported a politician of the old political system, a few background details of the Romanian political situation at that time are needed.

In terms of institutional political power the situation had significantly changed from the 2012 protests. The contingent situation of a fragile majority of the party which had introduced severe austerity measures, the Democratic Liberal Party, and popular pressure had made it such that in May 2013 the government[20] fell through a censorship motion promoted by the opposition parties in the Parliament (Antoniu and Micu 2012). In this situation, in an opportunist alliance named the Social Liberal Union, whose cohesion was given by the identification of a common enemy, the president, Traian Băsescu, and the governing party, the two opposition parties, the Social Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party came to power. The leader of the Social Democratic Party, Victor Ponta, became prime-minister. Fiercely criticized in a scandal related to him plagiarizing his PhD thesis, from the start Ponta had not been a sympathized figure, especially in the urban youth middle class. If the scandal around his plagiarized thesis did not create a mass movement and only brought out into the streets sympathizers of the, now in opposition, Democratic Liberal Party, in hopes of creating

[20] A Democratic Liberal Party youth-based government, headed by the young Mihai Razvan Ungureanu who, in a controversial gesture, resigned from his position as a head of a intelligence agency to become prime minister (the law does not allow members of secrete agencies to be politically involved) which, due to popular pressure mounted around the 2012 protests, had already replaced the previous government of the same party.

a mass movement and ensuring political gain, Ponta's move to switch back from his active opposition of the gold mining project to active support did bring about serious effects. As Dorin, a key figure in the civil society movements of Bucharest especially starting with the Roșia Montană protests, notes:

> *"This discrepancy between the governmental project and what the government effectively says was shocking. If we think it out well,in the electoral campaign Victor Ponta explicitly proposed cancelling the Roșia Montana project. The project had been supported by Traian Basescu [Romania's president at the time, Victor Ponta's political enemy], and so on. [..T]he shock was even bigger, he practically broke his word. The prime-minister [i.e. Victor Ponta] had explicitly stated he would not do this. This was... just too much. It was a tipping point…"*
>
> (Dorin, key figure in the Uniți Salvăm movement)

It was indeed a tipping point, and, as mentioned, the protest scene was by far the most numerous in post-2000 protests in Romania. There was a strong link between the 2012 anti-governmental protests and the 2013 anti gold mining protests. More specifically, the youth side of the 2012 protests, i.e, mostly the people who had protested at the Fountain next to the Faculty of Architecture in 2012, constituted the starting nucleus of the 2013 protests. For instance, in my talk with him, Ștefan told me that *"there is a direct connection"* between the 2012 and 2013 events:

> *"Roșia Montană was a clearly assumed cause in 2012. Alright, not by everyone and not as the only cause, but it got spread due to 2012. I do not think that we would have reached 2013 without 2012 from this point of view. Moreover, there are the common people that were both in 2012 and in 2013. Experience was extremely useful here. Most of those who were at the core of 2013 were there in 2012 too.*
>
> (Ștefan, key youth figure of the new civil society)

Thus, the 2013 protests should be seen both as being on a line of continuation of the 2012 protests, but alsoas being an altogether dfferent step in the dynamics of the new civil society. This is the reason why I focus on highlighting both continuities and discontinuities between 2012 and 2013-2014.

5.2. The Story of the Roșia Montană Protests and the Uniți Salvăm Community: From a Environmental Protest to Support for the Same Old Political Class

In large cities, especially Cluj and Bucharest, where anti-governmental protests also took place in 2012, people were now out protesting against a measure taken by a government headed by the 2012 opposition parliamentary political parties. If Victor Ponta, the leader of the opposition parties in 2012, had openly declared himself against the Roșia Montană gold mining project before he became prime-minister, his position shifted completely once in power, as he promoted the aforementioned special mining law (Dale-Harris 2013).

Once again, taking into consideration that it is both the largest urban zone in Romania, and the main location wherein institutions with symbolical political power are located, the Bucharest scene was the main protest site. If the 2012 anti-austerity protests never brought together more than five, six thousand people in University Square[21], and the whole square, i.e. including the motorway, was almost never occupied by the protesters, the Roșia Montană protests gathered much larger crowds of sometimes over ten to fifteen thousand people[22] that occupied University Square completely and subsequently marched through the city.

The theme of the protests was not unheard of. The Roșia Montană gold mining project had been controversial for some time already. Environmental oriented NGOs, including a local NGO founded by the well-off owner of large portions of land in Roșia Montană, Eugen

[21] One should also consider that in the case of the 2012 protests the most numerous gathering was the one in which members of the opposition political parties joined in the protest.
[22] Some even estimate a presence of over twenty thousand people in some of the protest days (Sciences et Avenir 2013).

David, had, for more than a decade, opposed actions taken to turn the Roșia Montană mining project into reality. Moreover, though not the main theme of the 2012 protests, the ecological theme related to the gold mining project was often articulated. As one of the key figures of both of the protests reported in an intervention in the European Parliament related to the anti-austerity protests back in 2012:

> *All the voices, for example, and this is a very good case for our protests, all people, even if they did not here about the Roșia Montana Gold Corporation criminal, project based on cyanide and corruption, after days of protests, altogether they sang: "We don't want it! We want cyanide, but for dictatorship, not for our democracy!"*
>
> (Crăciun 2012)

If the 2012 protests went on for days in a row until spring in University Square, the protests against the Roșia Montană gold mining company usually took a different form. Rather than daily protests, events took place weekly, on Sundays. Starting with the occupation of the same spatial coordinates of the 2012 protests, University Square, the protests slowly shifted and ended up taking the form of marches through the city. In a sense, as Vlad Petri recounts, *"the citizens, i.e. the participants, somehow won the street"* as a public space. Thus, along with marches through the neighborhoods of Bucharest, according to relevant political events, the movement often marched to the public institutions that were significant for the events in question. While this was an opportunity in terms of possibilities of the movement to become more visible and heard, e.g. when the law was passed through parliament the protesters marched around the Parliament building, it also stood at the base of the creation of a quite interesting dynamics when different tensions emerged between those who wanted to keep the protest a clearly single-issue one and groups, often backing the parliamentary political opposition, that wanted to visit different political institutions in the context of different political scandals, e.g. visiting the National Directorate of Anti-Corruption in the context of a perceived attack on it by the political power.

If in 2012 several small organizational units attained relative autonomy and started positioning themselves in regards to all sorts of adjacent political issues, the 2013 protests are the scene of birth of a very interesting large organizational unit. With its name inspired from one of the most heard slogans in the protests, United We Save Roșia Montană, framed as trans-ideological, it attempted to establish itself as a structure that would allow ideologically diverse protest participants to unite on matters they all agree on. With an anarchist horizontal mode of organization following the Occupy model, as repetitiveness regarding the weekly marches for Roșia Montană ensued, the movement positioned itself regarding a couple of other themes. Thus, as stated in their manifesto, on their page on the social platform Facebook, the main immediate goals of the movement were now, not only to militate against the Roșia Montană gold mining project, but also, on a related environmental theme, to militate against shale gas exploitation on Romanian territory, and, on a altogether different level, to fight for the change of a political party law that severely limits democratic participation (United We Save manifesto).

The last of their immediate goals is what brought the Uniți Salvăm community to organize a different type of protest with the occasion of the European Parliament elections in the spring of 2014 when they militated for a "citizen's boycott" until the political party law would not be changed. This is what marked the movement's turn to a different phase, in which it became involved in a different set of protests not directly related to the environmental causes that it had started out from. However, it must be mentioned that the organizational group had little control over participation quotas in protest events. While it did have a voice in public space, the Uniți Salvăm group could see the movements it officially endorsed range from the early Roșia Montană protests which mobilized over ten thousand people, to the meeting of

the citizens' boycotting of the Euro Parliament which mobilized no more than a couple of hundreds of people in University Square.

The Uniți Salvăm group retained an important voice in the public sphere, but it did not have the capacity to mobilize people for its actions. As such, while at the European Parliament protests mobilization was weak, in the wake of the presidential elections in late 2014 when a position was put forward related to abuses made by the prime minister of Romania, now a candidate for president, mobilization was much stronger.

The presidential elections mark an important point for the Uniți Salvăm movement, which for the majority of my informants represented the final break of the movement. An important part of it joined in on a political movement launched by Monica Macovei, an ex-Minister of Justice of Romania, now European Parliament member. This move brought about severe tensions inside the movement between the group who was now politically affiliated and the group who resisted such affiliation. For instance, in his talks with me, 3 months after the event in cause, Ștefan criticized those who were co-opted in the Monica Macovei candidacy movement:

> *"It was a point that divided the movement. This is what divided it and I think, that from this point of view it was irresponsible. Now they can say that after all it is their right to get involved, and yes, it is so, they can have a public voting option, but when you assume a position in a civic movement you ought to think better about what you do. […] You are no longer completely independent."*
>
> (Ștefan, key youth figure of the new civil society)

Further on Ștefan ironically wondered what would have happened if each member of Uniți Salvăm would have publicly supported another candidate, asserting that in such a case the movement would have ceased existing.

Thus, the un-co-opted group accused the former of being co-opted by the same political system which they had criticized until then. On the other hand, the co-opted group justified their position by arguing that Monica Macovei's candidacy, a symbol of the anti-corruption fight in Romania, represented a rupture from the old political system. Vlad told me that

> *"[F]or them the solution was Monica Macovei, the justice maker that will change things. For sure they imagined that a president like Monica Macovei, under her rule, a project like Roșia Montană would never have happened. I think this is the moment that completely broke Uniți Salvăm: the fact that some took the side of MM, while others found it unimaginable for a person who has been in politics such a long time, close to Basescu too, and had lost legitimacy, to run and try to create an independent movement."*
>
> (Vlad, film director following Romanian social movements)

What remains clear, though, is that, while the groups' position was clearer in the case of the European Parliament elections and attempts by the media to picture them as politically partisan were not successful, in the case of the Presidential Elections, with all the internal struggle inside the movement, from an exterior standpoint the movement seemed to take a politically partisan position in favor of political factions from the old political system, which, ironically enough, is what the movement had initially set out against. Part of the movement's support for Monica Macovei's candidacy in the first round and their support for Klaus Iohannis, the center right wing candidate of the, now differently named, Liberal Democratic Party, even if often self legitimized as a negative vote against the Social Democratic candidate, prime minister Victor Ponta, are clear elements that show how the initially critical stand towards the whole existing political class movement fell into the trap of ending up supporting factions of the same political class.

As Vlad noticed while documenting new developments that are related to attempts to reunite the movement for a different environmental cause, i.e. the protests against abusive

deforestation that started on the 9th of May 2015, the Monica Macovei candidacy moment left important marks:

> *"[A] big division was produced [by the Monica Macovei moment] and this weekend they tried to cross it but…: 'Look how cool, we are organizing a new protest, a protest related to the environment! Again, us as activists do it together!' …they kind of taunted each other, back then with Monica Macovei."*
>
> (Vlad, film director following Romanian social movements)

It is however, not out of the ordinary to expect such a moment to leave severe marks. When an important part of an anti-systemic movement drifts back into support for elements of the old political system fragmentation is inevitable.

5.2.1. Protest Composition and Performance

What is interesting to note is that the rather wide variety of participants present in the 2012 protests, especially in their beginning, was lost in 2013. For one, the ecological oriented project did not attract the same large bouquet of social classes. If back in 2012, in his European Parliament speech about the protests, Claudiu Craciun, key youth figure of the protests, stated that University Square 2012 was the scene of *"[p]eople from all walks of life coming together and finding something to bind them: solidarity, a need for change, a need for voice"* (Crăciun 2012) going on about how he understood that the football fans were not at all the "hooligans" and "beasts" media had scapegoated them into, it was not at all a similar case in the 2013 Roșia Montană protests.

Many of my informants who were more or less connected to both protests observed this difference. Ovidiu, who was more involved in the Roșia Montană protests than to the 2012 anti-governmental protests argued that the mode of organization was similar in both protests, i.e. *"the same anarchist modeled structures: without leadership, horizontal organizations"*, but that the Roșia Montană protest were more of a middle class protest:

> *"I saw no lower class participants with the exception of a homeless who was kept as a mascot. Ethically problematic, but they wanted to show they are brothers with the homeless […]. It was mostly an ecological middle class protest"*
>
> (Ovidiu, participant in the Uniți Salvăm protests)

On similar lines Vlad Petri, the director who has focused from 2012 onwards on documenting Romanian social movements recounting the two protests argued that he felt a different type of energy at the 2012 anti-governmental protests compared to that of the Roșia Montană protests:

> *"2013 was somehow a continuation, but below it in terms of energy. It was very interesting because it was the first large enviromental protest in Romania. It was... I don't know, I appreciate it, but comparing it to 2012 it was a lot more homogenous. It was in terms of class representations, clearly urban youth with average income, people that had what to live from, even quite well. It was not that thing, the fight of people who have nothing to eat, that have smal incomes, that feel threatened by unemployment. It was a more high-class protest."*
>
> *(Vlad, film director following Romanian social movements)*

If in 2012, especially in the first days an extremely heterogeneous group of people was present both in terms of social stratification and age, the Roșia Montană protests were indeed a protest mainly represented by urban well-off youth.

As it would be expected, in the context of a different type of participation, compared to the prior movement, protest performativity and the assumed roles of both protesters and the agents of the state were substantially different in the Roșia Montană events. Remembering the two protests, nearly all my informants who participated in both had the sensation that the two protests were quite different. Not only that, as Vlad told me, there *"was more anger back then* [in 2012], *like they were more upset, more authentic somehow."*, but *"even the way they were protesting was somehow different"*. If the 2012 anti-governmental protest's

> *"representations in public spaces were closer to syndical movements, to football matches. I mean there was a doll, a cranium, at some point they were carrying a coffin in which a kid was actually being carried that had a pancart saying 'Down with Basescu!'"*

(Vlad, film director following Romanian social movements)

the Roșia Montană protesters resorted to a different repertoire of forms of protest. Often in mockery, called the hipsters' protests (Ruse 2013), the repertoire was one with drums, and sound made with empty bottles filled with stones, along with inventive, often quite elaborate chants, and even artistic events such as concerts performed by violinists and quartets,. It had, as Vlad described it to me, a quite elitist feel. Combined with a context in which the gendarmerie, as opposed to the anti-governmental protests of 2012 tolerated them and did not intervene, the protests slowly turned into something that resembled less and less of a socially contentious action against the state. Vlad recounts that not only were people acting differently but the authorities also reacted differently:

> *"If in 2012 there was violence and the gendarmerie intervened just like at football matches with tear gas, with arrests, hitting people, in 2013 even they were something like: "Ah Ok! Look, we represent the state and we do not like what you are doing here! You are clearly violating the law from our perspective!" […] But they tacitly closed their eyes and accepted; it all became a form of dance... that at some point turned into the famous marches through neighborhoods. After some time, it was no longer a protest, but a form of street delivery[23], a walk through the neighborhood."*
>
> (Vlad, film director following Romanian social movements)

Thus, opposed to the 2012 anti-governmental protests, inside the Roșia Montană protests the class component was not nearly as heterogeneous as in 2012. The gain in numbers was coupled with a homogenization of class participation, which as we will see in the following section, does not mean that protesters were ideologically homogenous. In fact, it is along these lines I can relate with Ștefan's thesis according to which "the Roșia Montană protests were more diverse than the 2012 protests". While more homogenous in terms of class participation the events surrounding the Roșia Montană and Uniți Salvăm group were more

[23] Street delivery is a widely popular among middle and high middle class population yearly event in urban large cities in Romania (especially Bucharest and Cluj) in which specific streets are closed to traffic and various cultural programs take place.

heterogenic in terms of ideological composition. In these sense, as I extensively discuss in section 5.6, right wing factions were more often present in the 2013-2014 events compared to the 2012 anti-governmental protests. While ideologically groups shifted in the Roșia Montană protests, what was closer to being homogenous was the mode of expression of a youthful urban middle class. Whereas in 2012 expression forms varied and were not at all limited to those of the urban youth, the Roșia Montană protests were mostly dominated by these forms of expression. As such it becomes much easier to understand why one would make an apparently surprising statement according to which the protests of three to five thousand people of the 2012 anti-governmental were of higher intensity than protests of tens of thousands of people at the Roșia Montană protests.

5.2.2. A Strict Environmental Framing, Cynical Apoliticism and Masked Ideology

On the one hand I have mentioned above that the environmental theme of the protest was not one that efficiently mobilized lower class people. However, the way this frame was structured had many consequences on the movement. Opposed to the 2012 protests, the 2013 anti gold mining protests were single issue protests that were highly resistant to attempts to bring into attention any other topics[24]. It is however ironical that out of a protest that started out as a single issue one highly resistant to framing the Uniți Salvăm group was created and emerged as a group willing to tackle different problems. It seems to me that the only way that the

[24] They were in fact so resistant, that, when a scandal related to shale gas exploitation contracts that could be seen to be structurally very similar to the gold mining there was an important argument inside the movement about whether it is reasonable to also rally against the shale gas exploitation, featuring arguments, as Ovidiu, one of my informants, recounts, that went as far as in noting that the movement was started by a Roșia Montană villager who said that this is a movement that is solely related to the problem in Roșia Montană. Thus, in respect of the initiator of the movement protesters ought to not involve other themes, even if structurally so similar into the protest. In the end the similarities between the two issues were to big, and coupled with an violent reaction by the state apparatus in the shale gas issues, the movement did in fact end up supporting the anti-shale gas campaign.

resistance to assuming other topics inside the protests can be explained along with the emergence of part of the group as part of a political movement in 2014 has to do with the centrality of apolitics as a tenant of the movement, and a specific way it has been put to use.

As is clear from all the main documents released by the Uniți Salvăm movement, and as most of my informants, whether they self-identified ideologically or not, reported to me, no different from the 2012 anti-governmental protests, a large majority of protesters insisted on what they called an apolitical protest. For instance, in the group's description on an online platform answering to the question "Who are we?" the group posts the following message:

> *Uniți Salvăm is a heterogenous and transideological community of people, informal groups and organizations. Simply put we are different, and we have no common ideology […]*
>
> *We work as a civic platform independent of political parties, part of society involved in public life. Uniți Salvăm has as a mission the construction and consolidation of a pluralist society.*
>
> ("Uniți Salvăm" 2013)

Behind the nice Euro-bureaucratic like language used in this manifesto, what is clear is a direct aim of the movement to refuse any ideological belonging. If on the one hand this did indeed serve a strategic goal for the movement, as it allowed continued participation at the environmental protests of quite heterogeneous ideological groups, on the other hand it was the pretext for which possible incorporations of other, possibly social grievances, was never possible. Thus, the protests could never grow out as a movement that would directly contest the whole political system, or at least the whole of the existing political spectrum.

As Ovidiu remarked when telling me what dissatisfied him with the movement many of the protesters saw themselves as apolitical, and thought that if they were to expand the protest in anyway further than what it already was, i.e. a protest strictly against the mining law and Rosia Montrana environmental problem, they would automatically fall into the muddy imoral

space of politics. As in the case of the 2012 anti-governmental protests, the same discourse of apoliticism and antipoliticism so specific to Romanian post-socialist space brings about significant effects in the 2013 protests.

However, there is a catch here. The way the discourse of apoliticism and antipoliticism worked here was not as in the case of 2012 when any attempts to forge a political solution completely failed. Since in this case a large faction from the organizational group split up and did in fact attempt to involve itself in a political organization, it was now more the case of a cynical assumption of the postsocialist dogma of a-politicism and anti-politicism: the dogma is known and used when its effects are of strategic benefit for the group, but it shall nevertheless be bypassed when necessary.

Thus, the organizational group itself was not in fact really in a new found land of magical trans-ideological space, but was itself ideological from the beginning. As such the argument for a apolitical and trans-ideological movement was used when discursive silence against those attempting to add a political systemic critique of the regime to the environmental protests, but key figures of the organizational group that shifted to was simply forgotten when the *right* political movement had come up.

5.2.3. The Return of the Anticorruption Master Frame

> *"Anticorruption had become the number one thing, just that it was the other's corruption.[…]Before it was the interest of elites: a few of those in the political elite would discuss corruption, but the average citizen would not be very affected. […]Now, if governance is poor, at least stop stealing! Ok, you are incompetent, but at least do not steal. This "Don't steal!" had to find a way to open out, and it found it in this project [the Roșia Montană protests] that is perfect, I mean it is a textbook case [of corruption]."*
>
> (Dorin, key figure in the Uniți Salvăm movement)

The quote above illustrates the centrality of the discourse against corruption in the Roșia Montană protests. Perhaps the most important continuity between the 2012 movement and

the Roșia Montană protests was the use of the corruption theme as a master frame. The frame's orchestration as a diagnosis method for all social problems in 2012, translated to its use as a diagnosis frame for the Roșia Montană problem, which for most protesters was a token of what Dorin well synthesized differentiating it from *"case[s] of individualised, localised corruption"* and coining it with the term 'state corruption' or 'structural corruption'. After all, he argued to me, along similar lines to what I had heard from other participants, that it was *"top level corruption, structural corruption, state corruption*[25]*"* they were waging a moral battle against, in the context in which all the political class supported the Roșia Montană gold mining project.

More than in 2012, the theme of corruption stood at the center of future developments of the movement. Two key moments need to be discussed in the context. One of them, already mentioned, was that of the split of the movement and support for a presidential candidacy centered on the fight against corruption in the winter of 2015. However, there is a second prior moment that took place before the Uniți Salvăm group started habitually getting involved into different protests. This is the attempt of some of the members of Uniți Salvăm to lead the protest march to the National Directorate of Anti-Corruption, an institution established during the rule of President Traian Basescu and the Democratic Liberal Party to rule on cases of high corruption.

This was a moment of great internal tension inside the movement:

> *"The problem with the National Directorate of Anti-corruption was the fact that it had a political color. It was perceived by a part of this people that had a more radical critique of*

[25] It is interesting to note that this discourse against corruption was mainly aimed at state officials. In other words, corruption was not often looked at as a phenomena that involves both the state and private companies, thus happening inside the market system. Instead the whole blame was put on the state, and politicians in power.

the system, as a political instrument through which ex-president Traian Basescu fought his political adversaries. On the other hand Basescu supporters saw the institution as the symbol of anticorruption and regaining the morality of society. In regards to the Roșia Montană issue everyone agreed, but in the problem regarding the direction towards which the moral change needed to be done was different."

(Dorin, key figure in the Uniți Salvăm movement)

While the proponents of this symbolical march in support for the anti-corruption institution argued this was a way to protest against the corrupt political elite, those who opposed the march saw this specific institution, not as a neutral justice enforcing institution against deeds of corruption, but as a political instrument used by the center-right political spectrum against the other side.

As Dorin went on, in his opinion this was the point at which the movement started to break. According to him the group which opposed support for the anti-corruption institution tried to prevent the movement from getting immersed into a mainstream political feud. This leads us back to the apoliticism theme discussed earlier. As a central tenant of the movement, while some used it strategically and abandoned it when it no longer favored their cause, others honestly clinged to it. Thus, a question that begs the answer here has to do with why this group was not successful in doing so. It is not simply a case of an absolute majority not agreeing with this view. When asked about the size of these two groups, most of my informants usually did not give a clear response about which one had the majority. When they did give an answer, they argued that it was people with greater social capital and possibility to influence, but not necessary a majority.

I propose that for those that were sincere in their allegiance to a-politicism and ideological neyrality, this was a losing strategy. As I have argued, apoliticism and ideological neutrality are themselves ideological tools. As such, those who hoped to stick out of political clashes inside the existing system, and confront it as a whole found themselves in a problematic

position. Allegiance to the dogma of a non-ideological movement led to the drift into the same diagnosis master frame of anti-corruption that had been so omnipresent in the 2012 protests. If apoliticism and unwillingness to commit to a political option, initially seemed the best way to defend against co-optation by existing mainstream political factions, what it has done in fact is to severely limit the available critical discourse of the movement and lead to such a co-optation. From the standpoint of a neutral ideological position, along with high skepticism towards the transformation of the movement into a political force in itself, a systemic critique becomes very difficult. As such, the main theme that protesters could mobilize around in this context was that of anti-corruption thought out, in various degrees, as a juridical-technocratic fight against corrupt elites. This theme was so close to the already existing discourse on antti-corruption in Romanian society, that it would have been very difficult for it not to be colonized by existing forces.

It is interesting to note that attempts to come out with an ideological critique of the Romanian wild form of capitalism[26] along with the environmental protest were looked upon with high skepticism and marginalized. Not only did mainstream media attack such groups trying to depict the whole of the protests as a bunch of hypocritical anti-capitalist youngsters, but also inside the actual movement repeated appeals were made to "stick politics out of the protests". Thus, the a-political and trans-ideological dogma were devices that made any systemic critique of the political system impossible. As much as the protesters described themselves as being anti-systemic, if one looks at the actual discursive features of the protests, one is forced to admit that the protests were at first more keen on ignoring the political and militating strictly against one law, and later, at best, hopelessly arguing for the replacement of the whole

[26] After all, the Roşia Montană case could be a good example of a land-grabbing process in a peripherical zone. For such an account see Poenaru (2014a).

political class, or at worst supporting politicians from the existing class; it was certainly not the case of a structural critique of the system.

5.2.4. Silently Bringing Nationalism Back

The 2013 Roșia Montană protests and the continuation of the Uniți Salvăm civil society was marked by what was perceived by some, especially left leaning publications such as the CriticAtac journal (Mihai 2013; F. Poenaru 2014b), as a growing nationalist tendency. This is an element that systematically appeared both in talks with my informants, and in my participant observation. If in 2012 nationalist tendencies were not dominant, in 2013 they became central to the protests. By no means is it the case that nationalists and the Romanian fascists, "legionarii", "Noua Dreaptă", were dominant in terms of numbers; they were in fact absolute minorities. The majority of protesters, as middle class youth working in corporations had no link to organizations such as Noua Dreaptă. However the discursive acceptance of the right wing inside the social movement played out such that, to the advantage of the people in power who were trying to denigrate a legitimate environmental cause, the civil society appeared as dominated by nationalistic tendencies, even though it was not actually the case.

A fundamental frame articulated by a large majority of protesters that came in support for the nationalists was the 'inclusivity' frame, according to which, considering the fact that the Romanian protests tended to be scarce in terms of numbers, it was a strategic mistake to exclude extremist groups. Created as a byproduct of the 'neutral ideological' frame, this frame allowed right wing groups to gain a voice in the protests. For instance, when discussing moments of tension between the left leaning group and right wing groups Dorin tries to clear out the Uniți Salvăm community by arguing that the "*organisational nucleous tried to keep the heterogenopus character of the movement*".

An elucidatory discourse was articulated with the occasion of the European Parliament boycott protest when a left leaning protester argued a clear and systematic position against the inclusion of nationalist/ fascist leaning participants needs to be taken, he was counteracted with an argument along the following lines:

> *"This is a mistake. We cannot exclude this people. We all have our beliefs, but we can unite for our common causes. We can only be strong together and it does not matter if you are more or less of a nationalist."*

It is such a strategic option that led to the systematic inclusion of right wing groups in the Roșia Montană and Uniți Salvăm community events. This stands in opposition with the 2012 anti-governmental protests when such groups were rarely, if at all present at the protests.

An emblematic moment, for which the heterogenous nature of the community may not be enough of an excuse, has to do with a violent altercation in which a left leaning protester was attacked by a member of Noua Dreaptă nationalist faction. In retelling me the story of the event Dorin minimized its importance on several levels. First he argued that in a heterogenous movement one has to "*quit part of his radical identity elements"*. Thus, it is already, from starting point, implicitly partly the victim's blame as he *"had a clear anti-capitalist agenda, even in terms of clothing style"*. People from the Bessarabia is Romania nationalist faction were there and, as Dorin states seeming to try to provide an excuse for them, their agenda presupposes a *"radical position against the USSR and the communist left, in Cold War language"*. Here, as a key figure of the Uniți Salvăm community, trying to defend it, Dorin felt the need to stress that these people were not part of the community:

> *"They are not part of the Uniți Salvăm community. They saw the leftist people and a small violent conflict ensued. It was promptly stopped by the main organizers of the march: it had no sense. […] It was a minor incident"*
>
> (Dorin, key figure in the Uniți Salvăm movement)

Surprisingly, my informant was less worried about the *minor violent conflict* and more distressed with the way the left leaning group reacted. According to him:

> *"what left a bitter taste was the way that left leaning organization speculated and later accused Uniți Salvăm that it takes the side of nationalistic and xenophobic forces. It was evidently untrue, this had not happened. People from Uniți Salvăm had very diverse ideological preferences: both left, radical left, there was no discrimination based on ideological views"*
>
> (Dorin, key figure in the Uniți Salvăm movement)

In a similar way, Ștefan, another key member of the Uniți Salvăm community, reported to me that the left leaning organization's reaction was exaggerated and "of bad taste". Even if this is the case, what seems to me to be essential here is that key members of the movement, while of course not openly supporting the right wing faction, in fact, quite to the contrary, openly opposing them, found them, to a degree, normal. Such a view is prompted by their comparatively tougher stance on the leftists reactions compared to the violent event provoked by the right wing faction. It is as if, in their view, the violence of the leftist's reaction to the violent event was more violent that the vialoent act itself.

It is through such strategic choices that an atmosphere which was not to be found at all on the youth protest site of the 2012 anti-governmental protests was promoted. Thus, while the majority of the group was by no means actively nationalist/ fascist, what one would not exaggerate by calling nationalist outbursts with fascist tendencies were normalized. Even if openly opposed by the leaders of the community, the simple fact that their attitude was more visceral against the groups that uncompromisingly delimitated from such unfortunate events contributed in normalizing them.

Another situation that pictures the atmosphere created by these groups and their influence on the other protesters had to do with the intonation of a religious *'Credo'* and the subsequent

disapproval manifested by the present left leaning group at the march. In telling me the story of this event Dorin finds the left leaning groups to be at fault again in this situation:

> *"There was another tense moment. At the triumphal arch it was an attempt to point to the unity of the movement symbolically. It was related to creating the national project. Uniți Salvăm, which had the slogan United We Save the Whole of Romania, wanted to point out this new form of postmodern unity and we occupied a symbolical space. [...] What happened there was the proof of a lack of perspective of these left leaning groups, an incapacity to understand that you are at a defining moment for a new social pact, a new national pact.*
>
> (Dorin, key figure in the Uniți Salvăm movement)

For Dorin, the intonation of a religious Credo with members of the Noua Dreaptă fascist faction was a defining moment for a new social pact, and „symbolical for Romanian identity". In these narrative those who disagreed and actively but non-violently maniffested their disagreement simply lacked perspective. Moreover, Dorin goes on and implicitly suggests that the disagreeing group did not act adequately since it was "*not part of the organizational nucleus"*.

According to him the left leaning group was "*trying to annex the phenomen to a critical, left leaning ideology"* in a situation in which "*this was not the dimension of the protests"*. While it is true, an was openly recognized by left leaning groups as well that the protests did not have this dimension, this is by no means an argument against actively delimitating from nationalistic outbursts.

5.3 Uniți Salvăm (*United We Save* and legitimate) the Existing Political System.

In this chapter I have shown how a seemingly anti-systemic movement was turned around such that important parts of it ended up supporting factions of the existing political class. Ironically, added to the environmental theme of the initial protest, which was *ab initio* prone

to be captured by those with nationalistic-conservative sentiments, operating in a discursive context in which the first imperative was to keep the movement united in a neutral framework only reinforced the trend of the presence of a significant nationalist tendency in the movement. Such a trend was not there in the case of 2012 anti-governmental protests. Thus, as more homogenous protests in terms of class composition, i.e. middle class protests, the Roșia Montană and Uniți Salvăm movement proved to be, under the mask of a neutral ideological framework, more extreme ideologically.

The apolitical and antipolitical shifted from 2012 such that political cooptation in a project started by part of the existing political class became possible. Moreover, anticorruption discourse was also present in 2012 were just as important in the 2013 and 2014 Roșia Montană protests and Uniți Salvăm movement and was what fundamentally led the movement to be coopted into the Monica Macovei anti-corruption presidential campaign.

As such, the 2013-2014 moments can be seen as the sad moment of the reincorporation of an anti-systemic fracture into the old political regime. Of course, the system did not remain static as such, but the initial ruptures created through the anti-governmental protests of 2012 were sealed such that the specific postsocialist stigma against material grievances has remained just as central to the discursive field as it was before 2012. In this context it becomes clear why the only successful socially contentious movements in Romania are those centered on environmental themes. In fact, just as I am writing these paper, massive protests, though not on the same scale of those against the Roșia Montană gold mining project have started in several Romanian cities. For the moment, unfortunately, environmental themes that can escape the need for a proper critical political articulation, and are attractive to those synpathising with a nationalist type of language, remain the only ones that can mobilize the new civil society in Romania in large numbers. In the following chapter, while summarizing

the main findings of this paper, and discussing their applicability and limitations, I put forward what some of the needed elements in order to imagine the emergence of a progressive, critical movement in the Romanian discursive context.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Tracking the developments of the Romanian new civil society in Bucharest I have shown how what initially seemed an anti-systemic movement was easily reappropiated by the old political system. Starting with anti-austerity protests in 2012 in which not much critique against austerity was put forward the movement developed into legitimately criticizing an ecologically dangerous project. While its punctual critiques were often well-founded I have shown that lacking a political consciousness the movement had no chance in resisting appropriation. 2 years later after its debut, part of the movement foud itself supporting a politician of the old political system rebranded as an anti-corruption model. Such a situation generated internal tensions, and, as most of my informants told me, the movement practically broke at that point.

I showed how the discursive features of the movement can be understood in the context of what I have coined as postsocialist neoliberalism, a brand of neoliberal rationality enforced through the hegemonic deployment of anti-communist ideology. In a nutshell, these form of neoliberalism silences critiques of what one could coin as *real existing capitalism* by performing two operations: on one level the claim that Romanian society is not actually capitalist works by recourse to the well known concept of *communist mentalities.* Romanians ought to discard their backward mentality so that proper capitalism and the respective resulting wealth can appear. Thus, already, a critique of capitalism itself becomes impossible in such a discursive context.

Moreover, at a second level any attempts to argue for social rights are silenced, as subjects making such claims are seen as backword subjects of the socialist past. This is the atrocious discursive context in which, coupled with other Eastern European cases, the Romanian new

civil society found itself rapidly turned around in its critical anti-systemic battle. Thus, the same way the miners of Valea Jiului, discussed in chapter 3, as the typological socialist subject, have internalized the idea of their own worthlessness, as it appeared in the public discourse that targeted them, subjects in the Romanian new civil society have also internalized the idea that if one makes material claims, one is a socialist backward subject. As such the protests were not centered on material claims, even though they were evidently a reaction to the hardships imposed through neoliberal governance.

Instead the protests focused on populist themes, establishing anti-corruption as a master frame: i.e., the idea that a corrupt political class has been robbing the nation and this is the main battle to be fought. In such a context, increasingly difficult livelihoods were not explained by unfavorable policies for the lower and middle classes and a systematic politics that has decreased access to education, health and other social benefits, but put the blame on the moral character of local politicians. In such a context a protest easily becomes one that focuses on aspects such as corruption, or imposing the rule of skillful experts. As such these themes can very well be taken over by a neoliberal agenda. This is, essentially, how it can be explained that the protests were turned around to become a movement in support for a neoliberal candidate.

Sketching out an emancipatory political alternative might seem as an easy thing to accomplish. One could easily argue as follows: “Stop feeling ashamed, and start fighting to ensure better means of livelihood!” However the task at hand is much more difficult. In a context in which poor people self-victimize and see themselves unworthy because they cannot ensure a livelihood, the emergence of a progressive type of politics is highly unlikely. Instead, what becomes likely is that the mass of dissatisfied people who do not have access to an emancipatory language end up stuch with a rightleaning language with fascist tendencies.

Glimmers of hope can be seen coming from groups such as the CriticAtac left wing publication, but it remains hard to see how such groups could mobilize larger protions of the population and make their emancipatory discourse spread.

Appendix I – List of Interviews

Number	Date taken	Quoted in text as
1	21.03.2014	Marian, participant in the 2012 protests
2	22.08.2014	Andrei, participant in the 2012 and the Roșia Montană protests
3	02. 09. 2014	Daniel, key youth figure of the new civil society
4	16.12.2014	Cornel, key youth figure of the new civil society
5	05.01.2015	Cristian, key youth figure of the new civil society
6	07.01.2015	Ștefan, key youth figure of the new civil society
7	06.05.2015	Ovidiu, participant in the Uniți Salvăm protests
8	07.05.2015	Dorin, key figure in the Uniți Salvăm movement
9	12.05.2015	Vlad, film director following Romanian social movements

Appendix II – Interview Transcript

Interview with Ștefan, key youth figure of the new civil society

ALEX: Să începem cu 2012…

ȘTEFAN: Pe mine m-a surprins destul de mult 2012. Deși era o tensiune socială, nu erau foarte multe semne că ar urma un conflict, o revoltă. Așa că în seara în care au fost primele evenimente am ajuns acolo întâmplător, dar imediat a avut sens pentru că situația politică era destul de blocată. Era o grevă parlamentară aproape: opoziția și guvernarea nu mai colaborau deloc. Era un stil destul de autoritar de a face politică. Și am ajuns acolo întâmplător, dar am rămas, și am rămas mai mult timp, și asta și datorită elementelor structurale care țin de biografia mea: adică fusesem implicat în societatea civilă la momentul acela, eram și membrul unui mic partid ecologist și cumva părea natural pentru mine ca persoană să rămân acolo și să particip. Fără să știu ce se va întâmpla, care va fi formatul, cine sunt organizatorii: mi-am dat seama că nu prea sunt organizatori acolo. Erau foarte mulți oameni veniți cumva întâmplător, și a fost un proces de învățare foarte abrupt. Adică ajungi acolo, și ajungeai în fiecare seară: au durat câteva săptămâni protestele. Și fiecare seară era diferită, se putea întâmpla altceva. Așa că a trebuit și eu și alții să ne adaptăm foarte rapid la contextul ăla și să încercăm să învățăm ce înseamnă un protest: cum să ne înțelegem între noi, chiar dacă nu era ușor, cum să ne înțelegem cu presa, cum să facem față abuzurilor jandarmeriei dacă era cazul. A fost un proces de învățare și cumva de trezire, așa, fără să fie, să aibă conotații spirituale... cam așa am ajuns... Pentru mine, în mintea mea ce se întâmpla în 2012 a arătat destul de mult... era un fel de paralelă cu ce se întâmplă în Spania, în mintea mea. Pentru că erau foarte multe puncte comune: de exemplu în poziția anti-austeritate, guvern de centru-dreapta, o mișcare socială; e drept că din punct de vedere social, ce se întâmpla în piață nu semăna cu ce se întâmpla în Spania, inclusiv din punct de vedere al numărului. În România era un fel de izbucnire foarte puternică, puțin structurată de fapt, dar în esența agendei existau puncte comune și cu mișcarea Indignados, și pentru mine asta a fost un reper important în felul în care am înțeles eu mișcările și m-am implicat.

ALEX: Crezi că exista o agendă?

ȘTEFAN: Exista agendă, dar era foarte compozită. Lucrurile comune existau de asemenea. Cel mai important element comun era cumva personalizat și se referea la abuzul de putere făcut de președintele Băsescu atunci, și ăsta era punctul comun al tuturor grupurilor din piață, care erau foarte diverse. Era o nemulțumire față de clasa politică: de aceea sloganele cu 'PDL și USL aceeași mizerie' au prins într-o bună parte a pieței, era o nemulțumire față de corupție și față de sărăcie. Și la astea s-au mai grefat și anumite teme cumva conexe legate de... de exemplu Roșia Montană care prindea și corupția și... au mai fost, au mai fost teme grefate... dar dacă ar fi să le sintetizez ar fi astea: abuzul de putere, sărăcia, corupția, și... cum să zic, actul guvernării, calitatea guvernării.

Alex: Ți se pare că dintre temele astea a dominat vreuna, a existat o dinamică pe parcursul protestelor, au devenit unele mai importante?

ȘTEFAN: Da... pot să zic că tema anti-Băsescu a rămas o constantă. Era liantul. Dar accentele s-au mai schimbat. De exemplu când a picat Băsescu și a venit Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, atunci elementul autoritar a fost contestat, dar cumva pe baze noi: faptul că noul premier era fost șef de serviciu secret. S-a activat și lucrul ăsta. A fost o tentativă de eschivă din partea lui Traian Băsescu, dar nu cred că... nu pot să zic că a fost o dinamică foarte importantă între temele astea. Cred că s-au păstrat relativ egal pe parcursul protestelor.

ALEX: Spuneai că a trebuit să învățați să vă raportați la celelalte grupuri și să vă înțelegeți între voi. Poți să îmi vorbești despre asta puțin?

ȘTEFAN: Eh, aici sunt niște lucruri interesante, pentru că nu erau foarte multe grupuri organizate. Erau mai degrabă oameni, grupuri de prieteni care au început să, au fost nevoiți să se înțeleagă unii cu alții. În ceea ce privește grupurile, sunt câteva care s-au individualizat. De exemplu ultrașii, care și ei la rândul lor sunt împărțiți pe galerii și... Erau cei din ONG-uri. Erau studenții, care n-au venit niciodată în grupuri mari. A fost așa, un fel de socializare forțată. Era și o neîncredere foarte mare. Nimeni, oricine putea să pară infiltrat, sau cine știe ce interese ascunse acolo. Pot să zic că asta a fost o constantă: neîncrederea, lipsa de încredere, până la paranoia. Și asta nu a ajutat foarte mult lucrurile să se adune. Dar, cu toate astea, existau momente în care existau niște consensuri. Consensul ăsta, unul dintre ele, pe parcurs a fost că nu ar trebui să fie violente [protestele], că nu ar trebui să strigăm lucruri obscene sau... jignitoare. Faptul că fiecare poate să strige ceea ce dorește și să se mențină un anumit echilibru între scandaluri. Cam astea au fost grupurile, cel puțin pe partea de arhitectură pe care o știi și tu mai bine. Pe partea cu TNB, sincer nu cunosc bine...

ALEX: Politic erau foarte diverse grupurile, din ce îmi amintesc. Cum ți se pare că relaționau? Au fost momente...

ȘTEFAN: Da, da, au fost. Disputa dintre cei de la fântână și cei de la TNB. Cei de la TNB fiind mai degrabă adepții unui partid, cetățeni reprezentați; în timp ce cei de la fântână nu. La fântână mai era o linie de clivaj care s-a activat între cei progresiști și cei mai naționaliști. S-a activat devreme, dar mai degrabă prin luna martie... Ultrașii au fost primele săptămâni. Da, au fost momente tensionate, dar care nu au degenerat.

ALEX: Clivajul ăsta între progresiști și naționaliști cum s-a desfășurat?

ȘTEFAN: Inițial, când erau mulți oameni în piață, cumva lucrurile se amestecau. După aceea, când au început să vină mai puțini și erau 30-40 de oameni, micile conflicte și diferențele de opinie s-au simțit. S-a simțit când grupul devenise din ce în ce mai mic, dar nu a fost ceva care să genereze un clivaj, o despărțire, sau...

ALEX: Vezi vreo legătură între protestele astea din 2012 și ce a urmat după, în 2013?

ȘTEFAN: Da, da. Există o legătură directă. Chiar dacă din unele puncte de vedere a fost ceva nou. Roșia Montană a fost o cauză în 2012 clar asumată... Bine, nu de toată lumea, și nu singura cauză. Și cauza asta s-a răspândit datorită lui 2012. Nu cred că s-ar fi ajuns la 2013 fără 2012 din punctul ăsta de vedere. Plus că mai sunt și oamenii comuni care au fost și în 2012, și în 2013. Experiența a fost foarte utilă aici. Cei mai mulți dintre cei care au fost nucleul, să zicem așa, lui 2013, au fost și în 2012.

ALEX: În 2013 era un protest diferit. Era vorba despre Roșia Montană.

ȘTEFAN: În cauza Roșia Montană vorbim de ma multe spectre. Unii naționaliști, alții mai de stânga, alții mai de dreapta. A fost o diversitate mare, mai mare ca în 2012. În 2012 nu cred că era cineva de dreapta, cel puțin dreapta neoliberală. Dreapta neo-națională conservatoare da, dar dreapta neoliberală nu.

ALEX: În 2013 era și dreapta neoliberală? Cum au relaționat grupurile din 2012 cu dreapta neoliberală?

ȘTEFAN: Dreapta asta neoliberală era mai degrabă prezentă la nivelul public. Suntem în București. Actorii ce comiseseră abuzurile respective erau de stânga. Erau și mulți care aveau o problemă cu dreapta. Dar cei mai mulți erau dezamăgiți... la alegerile de anul trecut...

ALEX: Grupul ăsta, Uniți Salvăm, cum s-a format?

ȘTEFAN: S-a format pagina aceea cumva dintr-o nevoie de a comunica public. Ne consideram un fel de extensie a campaniei Salvați Roșia Montană. După aceea s-a făcut pagina aceea UnițiSalvăm, care pleacă de la sloganul Uniți Salvăm Roșia Montană. Și a prins conceptul ăsta de Uniți Salvăm, și a rămas ca un fel de extensie a campaniei în prima instanță și încet încet s-a autonomizat, adică au avut poziții proprii care nu erau neapărat aceleași cu ale campaniei. [fragment inaudibil...] Cum mergeai și în alte zone, dădeai de mesaje despre reforma electorală, alte mesaje. Uniți Salvăm s-a creat în stradă și la un moment dat s-a făcut o pagină care cumva a devenit reprezentativă pentru grup, dar dinamica era asta.

ALEX: Spuneai că s-a menționat și chestia cu gazele de șist. Cum a fost percepută în interiorul mișcarii?

ȘTEFAN: Din câte îmi amintesc, chiar au fost anumite dezbateri. A fost reticență din partea unora. Era și un subiect nou, și alte implicatii, de tip geopolitic, era o altă tehnologie și au fost unii oameni care ziceau că ar trebui să acceptăm cu rezerve. Întâi să se învețe, să cunoască subiectul și după aceea să... dar s-au întâmplat evenimentele de la Pungești și nu s-au mai tratat din perspectiva tehnologiei, ci din perspectiva drepturilor fundamentale cu privire la intervenția autorităților. Și asta a eliminat aproape orice urmă de rezervă... A fost asumată, îmi amintesc că prin decembrie au fost asaltați cei de la Pungești, erau trei mii de oameni în strada, cum nu mai fuseseră demult la Roșia Montană.

ALEX: A fost vreun moment care a fost intens mediatizat pe grupurile astea de stânga, Critic Atac... legat de... cred că ai fost și tu acolo, când la un moment dat a fost o altercație fizică între un grup de stânga și unul de dreapta; nu știu foarte clar exact ce a fost... îmi poți povesti?

ȘTEFAN: Pai da, a fost un moment delicat pentru că se întamplase la puțin timp după incidentul Barbu... și jandaremeria nu a mai fost cu noi... ne-a și zis că ne asumăm riscurile, deci au zis că nu mai merg cu noi. [Inaudible fragment] niște amenințări de facto, că trebuie să ne potolim, că au fost prea toleranți, deci erau semnale politice că s-ar putea să urmeze o represiune. Asta era ziua aceea; o tensiune mare, o simțeai. Tu ai fost atunci?

ALEX: Nu, nu eram în țară.

ȘTEFAN: Deci era tensiune mare, erau mulți oameni, vreo 4-5 mii. Anterior fusese un marș cu Unirea cu Basarbia. O parte din cei care fuseseră și la marșul cu Basarabia au venit și la marș. În paralel era și un grup îmbracat în negru. Și pe măsură ce mergeam fără jandarmerie ... era semnul că ar putea să apară provocări ca să zică că uite: nu au fost jandarmi și nu au fost pașnici, deci e nevoie de intervenția noastră. Și atunci am văzut acel incident între un tip care era într-adevăr de extrema dreaptă din ce am văzut și un alt tip care era de stânga. A fost un pumn sau doi. După aceea am intervenit eu, că am văzut că se întampla ceva și am fugit repede și m-am băgat între ei. L-am luat pe tipul ăla de acolo ca să nu mai atace, să nu se creeze o busculadă generală și asta a fost. Ăsta a fost incidentul. Putea să fie și mai rău, mult mai rău. Dar bine că nu a fost. Incident regretabil, l-am încurajat pe tipul respectiv să facă plângere la poliție. În principiu nu cred că ar fi fost greu de prins individul respectiv. Dincolo de asta, să transformi incidentul respectiv.... țin minte că au fost oameni care s-au dus la televizor și au spus că protestele au fost preluate de extrema dreaptă, ceea ce era o idioțenie mare. O prostie.

ALEX: Așa a fost percepută în... Eu chiar nu știu; nu am fost.... S-a mers pe ideea că uite, extrema dreaptă e acolo și e primită [...small talk with an outsider for a few minutes...]

ȘTEFAN:...așa a fost preluată de RTV în felul asta, ceea ce era clar, era postul legat de PSD, pe antena 3 nu cred, dar RTVul așa a preluat-o: uitați ce violenți, și se lega de povestea cu incidentul cu Barbu unde noi fusesem făcuți neofasciști. Deci tot discursul ăsta al stângii, sau al celor care au protestat a fost folosit pentru a demoniza mișcarea.

ALEX: De partea cealaltă, din ce citeam pe vremea aia știu că... stânga cumva era nemulțumită de faptul că, spuneau ei, nu a fost condamnată clar chestia și nu s-a delimitat mișcarea de noua dreaptă.

ȘTEFAN: Eu nici nu știu în ce formă puteam să ne delimitam pentru că la momentul ăla nu știu daca exista o... o structură care să facă chestia asta, cumva formală, oficială. Am avut problema asta că nu stiam cine și cum să reacționeze. Am reacționat individual, pe Facebook, așa... A apărut la un moment dat o declarație pe pagină, a apărut... dar, problema cu singuranța nu a fost în termenii pe care îi voiau cei... Mi se pare o reacție foarte isterică, de prost gust.

ALEX: Te-aș întreba acum legat de mișcarea din 2012 și de Roșia Montană: cumva politic erau ele... criticau dintr-o poziție sau alta puterea, dar cum vedeau ele ideea de implicare politică?

ȘTEFAN: Păi în 2012 erau cei care se simțeau reprezentati de USL și de PSD; ceilalti nu. Tot timpul a fost opinia asta, că tre să se creeze un nou partid. Am înțeles-o că e o nevoie generală în societate și eram surprins că nu apare tocmai aici, să strângem mai mulți oameni. Și deși era dorință asta pentru o nouă formațiune politică probabil că nu s-ar fi putut ajunge niciodată la o poziție comună privind doctrina. Asta o dată. Până la urmă cei mai mulți au preferat varianta civilă. Motivele pentru care s-a întâmplat asta... Probabil terenul ăsta politic e mult prea minat și necunoscut la momentul ăsta, așa... și doi, al doilea motiv, se referă la această diversitate, care nu ai cum să o.... adică dacă faci un partid îți asumi o doctrină, dar îți asumi un program de politici, și asta nu știu dacă ar fi mers. Deci astea sunt cele două mari motive pentru care nu s-a concretizat ceva politic, plus și o lipsă de capacitate... acuma retrospectiv, a fost bine, a fost rău... nu îmi dau seama, cert este că am fost o victimă sigură la alegerile din anul trecut, când au fost două episoade. La alegerile europarlamentare am declanșat greva cetățenească, am zis că nu ne ducem la vot până nu se schimbă sistemul electoral, și atunci am avut o poziție autonomă față de... sistemul politic. Nu am putut să o facem și la prezidențiale unde mizele erau mai mari și... am fost folosiți... mesajul nostru a fost folosit de către candidați și nemulțumirea, și a jucat mai degrabă împotriva lui Ponta. Oamenii au rămas mobilizați și din 2013, nu cred că era cineva la proteste care să fi votat cu Ponta.

ALEX: Cum s-a întâmplat că cel puțin din exterior a părut că chiar în primul tur și din campanie, o mare majoritate a aspectului vizibil al mișcării US era într-un fel sau altul cooptata în mișcarea MM.

ȘTEFAN: La alegerile prezidențiale...

ALEX: Da, da.. cum s-a ajuns la chestia asta?

ȘTEFAN: Păi nu știu, au fost câțiva oameni în campania MM, 5-6... Ei în ansamblul mișcării nu, nu pot să zic că erau determinanți, nu cred că au avut un rol important nici măcar în campania Monica Macovei, dar au fost o punte de legătură care a scindat mișcarea... asta a scindat, și din punctul ăsta de vedere cred că a fost iresponsabil... acuma pot spune și ei că până la urmă e dreptul lor să se implice; da, așa e... să aibă opțiune de vot publică sau... însă în momentul în care îți asumi o poziție în cadrul unei mișcări civice tre' să te gândești mai bine ce faci; adică... nu mai ești chiar așa... independent. Mă gândesc ce s-ar fi întâmplat dacă fiecare dintre noi ne-am fi dus... adică ne-am fi spart de grupuri și

cineva se ducea să ii facă campanie lui Iohannis, cineva lui Tăriceanu și tot așa. Unde am fi ajuns? Nu mai exista US ca mișcare.

ALEX: Da, și... cumva scindarea asta, acum, după campanie, în ce fel se prezintă? S-a rupt mișcarea complet?

ȘTEFAN: Da, s-a rupt. Ea nu e ruptă la nivel de principii, numai că sunt două linii: o linie care se lasă cooptată, și o linie care nu se lasă cooptată.

ALEX: Poți să-mi povestești despre linia care nu se lasă cooptată?

ȘTEFAN: Păi da, într-un fel e de diverse ideologii: adică sunt și oameni și patrioți, ca să zic așa; și de stânga, și de centru, de dreapta, viziuni de dreapta. Dar nu s-ar lăsa antrenați într-un proiect politic care ține de partidele vechi. Ei încearcă să țină linia.

ALEX: Politic s-a schimbat situația față de 2012, 2013?

ȘTEFAN: În ce sens?

ALEX: Încercări de a crea o mișcare politică?

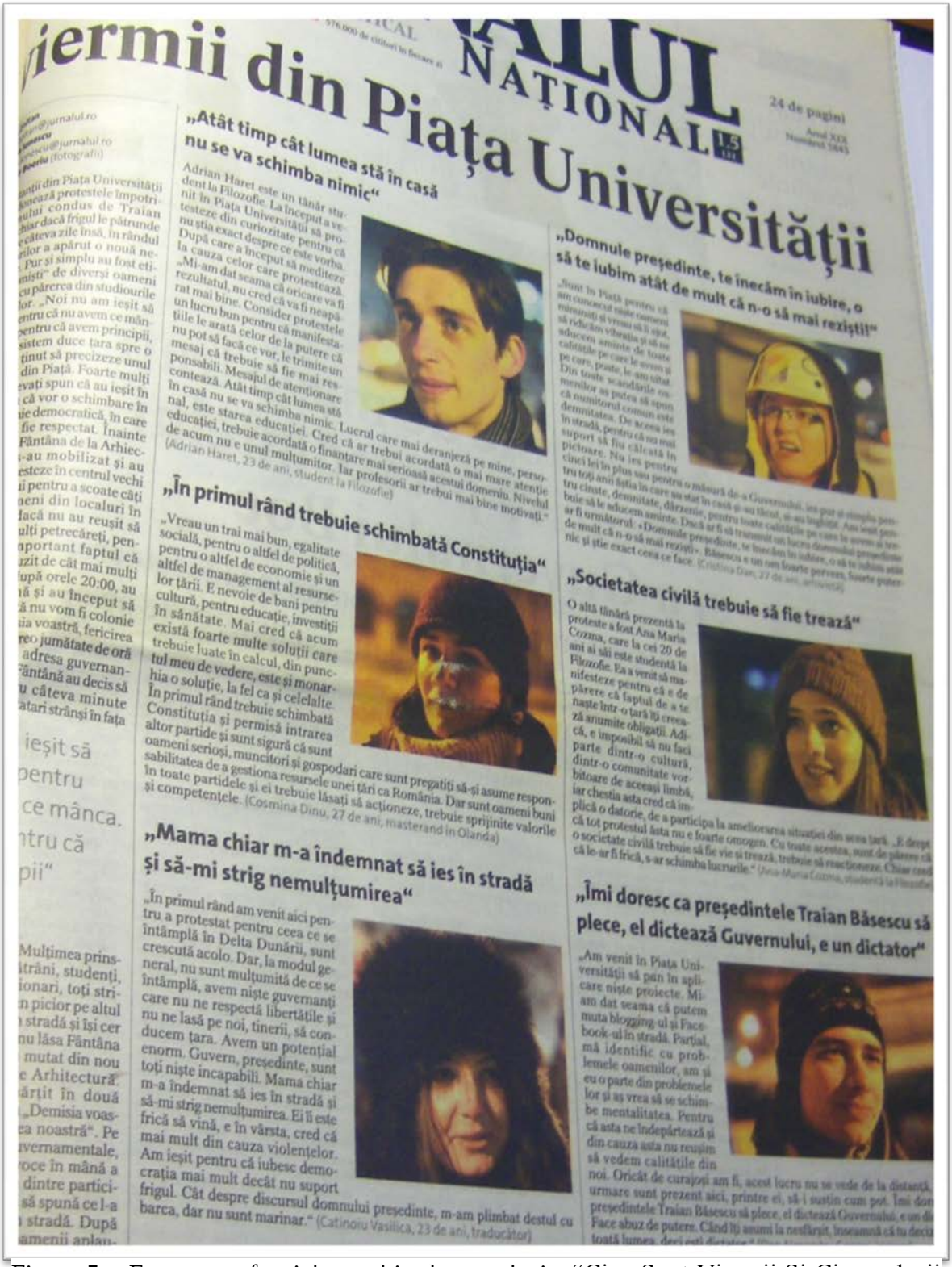
ȘTEFAN: Încercări nu sunt, nu ca grup. A, sunt unii oameni, și tot timpul și în 2012 era câte unul care spunea: hai să facem, hai să facem, dar grupul era minoritar. Și nu, asta nu s-a schimbat.

ALEX: Îmi amintesc că tot timpul a existat tensiunea asta și erau foarte mulți oameni care de la bun început erau critici cu privire la posibilitatea asta când era ridicată în public: "A face ceva politic noi înșine, uite, toți sunt un dezastru..." din start erau critici. De ce crezi că se întampla asta?

ȘTEFAN: Nu știu, poți să îi întrebi pe cei care... motivele pentru care eram eu reticent țineau mai degrabă de faptul că.... chiar dacă am avea partide noi, tot e nevoie de o mișcare civică, și am preferat să lucrez mai degrabă la asta decât la un partid nou; it is as simple as that; miza cred că e mai imprtantă. Știi, ziceam că partide pot să fie multe, dar Piața Universității e una singură. Și sunt și alegeri personale, și.... ceea ce nu înseamnă că... e invalidă... nu, îi înțeleg pe unii, chiar înțeleg de ce ar vrea să facă... În același timp și dacă o faci când nu trebuie, sau o faci prea devreme, tinzi să devii irelevant. Adică, nu cred că ducem lipsă de partide mici; ducem lipsă de partide care să aducă cadre alternative și care să fie relevante din punct de vedere social... și deocamdată nu cred că am ajuns...

...

Appendix III – Article Samples from Databody



viermii din Piața Universității

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„Atât timp cât lumea stă în casă nu se va schimba nimic“

„Domnule președinte, te înecăm în iubire, o să te iubim atât de mult că n-o să mai reziști!“

„În primul rând trebuie schimbată Constituția“

„Societatea civilă trebuie să fie trează“

„Mama chiar m-a îndemnat să ies în stradă și să-mi strig nemulțumirea“

„Îmi doresc ca președintele Traian Băsescu să plece, el dictează Guvernului, e un dictator“

Figure 5 – Fragment of article used in data analysis: “Cine Sunt Viermii Şi Ciumpalacii Din Piaţa Universităţii.” (Who are the worms from University Square?). http://jurnalul.ro/special-jurnalul/cine-sunt-viermii-si-ciumpalacii-din-piata-universitatii-602635.html.

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