

MODERN/POSTMODERN POLITICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION: ROMANIA AND ITS OPTION

*La definición de modernidad y postmodernidad política:
la opción rumana*

Viorella MANOLACHE*
Bucharest University

Abstract

The study confirms the author's constant concerns to evaluate the modern /postmodern Romanian space, the transition effects and the involvement of the Romanian elite in (re)configuring a new political, economic, social and cultural profile. The article proposes a comparative picture, appealing to the postmodern *versus* rule: communism vs. postmodern, qualitative analysis vs. quantitative analysis, old elite vs. new elite. Without choosing to present hard and categorical conclusions, the study launches the large lines of the Romanian attempt to consort with Western political, economic, social and cultural perspective and to overcome blocking the canon.

Key words: modernity, postmodernity, communism, post-communism, retro-institutionalization, transition to democracy, formal and informal institutions, old and new political, social, economic, cultural elite.

Resumen

Este estudio plantea un modelo de evaluación de la modernidad y posmodernidad rumana, los efectos de la transición y el papel de la elite rumana en la (re)configu-

* Graduated Science Political Faculty, Law Faculty, has a master in Journalism and Public Relations and PhD. with a research theme concern with *Romanian Political Elitism*, Bucharest University. Assistant researcher at the Romanian Academy, Institute of the Political Science and International Relations, at the Department of Political Philosophy. Email: vio_s13@yahoo.com. Fecha de recepción del artículo: 16 de diciembre de 2008. Fecha de aceptación: 5 de mayo de 2009. Versión final: 13 de diciembre de 2009.

ración de un escenario político, económico, social y cultural nuevo. El artículo propone un criterio postmoderno de comparación en el que se confronta: comunismo *versus* postmodernismo, el análisis cualitativo frente al cuantitativo, las antiguas elites frente a las nuevas. Aunque resulte complejo llegar a una conclusión categórica, este ensayo muestra las líneas directrices del intento rumano de asumir los modelos occidentales políticos, económicos y sociales y de superar situaciones de bloqueo anteriores.

Palabras clave: modernidad, postmodernidad, comunismo, postcomunismo, retro-institucionalización, transición democrática, instituciones formales e informales, antiguas y nuevas elites políticas, sociales, económicas y culturales.

The concept of “great break” proposed by Francis Fukuyama¹ is an all-heel meant to help us in the “deciphering of the rules of the game” practiced in a sliding, postindustrial world. Consequently, we have to introduce in the equation two concepts, typical for postmodernity, defined by Fukuyama (2002) as *spontaneous order and hierarchy*. Following Elinor Ostrom, Fukuyama tries to approximate the conditions, the context through which the *spontaneous order* can be outlined.²

The communicational associations remain networks or individual agents groups that share informal norms or values beside that necessary for the common transactions on the market. This postmodern perspective confirms the Habermasian idea according to which the unfolding of social and moral perspectives requires to be descentered in conformity with the descentering of the world understanding. The concept of communicational action remains sufficiently capable to stand for the point of reference to

1 Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Break-The Human Nature*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2003.

2 By adapting, limiting the aforementioned concepts to the Romanian political area, we have proposed to describe the two perspectives on the repeated interactions between the two associations: one predominantly ethnic (UDMR), the other with a prevalent civic profile (The Civic Alliance). *The spontaneous order* occurs provided that some clear limitations are imposed, concerning the transfer of these “associations” from the ethnic and civic sphere to “political organizations” (PAC and UDMR as political parties represented in the Romanian Parliament.) How can this repeated interaction be accounted for? In our opinion this finds an explanation in the fact that the informal social norms reflect the capacity of these “biflor” groups to “dominate” other ethnic and political groups (The Romany Party, The Romanian Armenians’ Union, The Turkish Democratic Union, The Lipovenian Russians’ Community, FDRG, The Romanian Ukrainians” Union, PUNR, PRM, The Romanian Albanians’ League etc.) The fact that the “hierarchical authority” did not intervene to amend the effects of this *spontaneous order* proves that, in Romania, the political, ethnic, civic, religious etc. tolerance won over the historical disagreement that divided the Romanian political sphere into centers of the left or right.

what Habermas considered “a reconstruction of interacting stages”. These can be described, as we could see, by the structures of the perspectives implemented in various types of action.

The nature of social and political connection refers to the existence of some experiences shared within some paradigmatic contacts, in the form of the *preprint*. The monolithic, Kuhnian companies, based on the members of the subspecies seem now to be insufficient.

The Serge Moscovici model of a social psychology seem to fit better to the (apparently!) politically functioning Romanian reality. Borrowing a set of concepts that Paul Ricoeur³ used to employ we hold that the Romanian political sphere of the 1980s has been subject to the parallelism and complementarity of forced memory and forgetting abuses. The postmodern denouncing of *the duty of memory* presupposes the guilty approximation of the distance between history and memory. This deepens, in its explanatory form, the link between explanation and understanding, continuing to keep the ability to decide exerted by the social agents and the self-understanding indebted to memory.⁴

Romanian society, which has got out of the Soviet isolationism and protectionism, has tried to diminish the impact between the Romanian

3 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Timi oara, Amarcord Publishing House, 2001.

4 Placed in a cone of lights and shadows, the inventory of post December Romanian political elites tries to (re)activate (with the ways of a *Legitimationarsenal*) the justification of their new identity.

Characterized as superficial and marginal, the Eastern Europe option to stay in a certain historical flux is the sign of impossibility to adapt to the political, economical and cultural rhythm imposed by Western Europe. Only on this basis can we understand the atypical Romanian forms crystallized in the personal dictatorial ship of Ceausescu and the dictatorship of the party. With a mention: using a typical scheme of conquering the power, the communist *new elite* imposed her own economical and social project, according to their Leninist-Stalinist “experimental networks”, preparing the *contra elite*, on all the levels of the state, taking in their reform justice, security, education, academics etc.

Through the constitutional legitimation of the ruling position in society, the party became a national institution, and the politic capital, the privilege of a limited power of a restrained anti elite. *Thus the advance was in history against History, but necessarily with it, inoculating it another idiom.*

According to G. Eyal, I. Szelenyi, E. Townsley, the raise of capitalism from the ruins of state socialism was made in Central Europe because of a lack of economic bourgeoisie. Post communism is associated, in this new equation, to the transition from a form of collective property to a private one. Mentioning that the former communist nomenclature was aware of the falling of the old communist system designed a scheme of changing the political functions into private property, trying to change it into a *grande bourgeoisie*, becoming in fact a kleptocracy.

phenomenon and the global one. Most of the political parties meet the political and social dissatisfactions, offering some guidelines capable of diminishing the differentiation. We call to mind, in this respect, Durkheim's sociological theories, mostly on the difference between the notion of work and that of spare time, religion, home etc. Thus, the Romanian public life⁵ is also, in its turn, distinguished from the private life, sometimes even leading to rationalized forms, in Max Weber's terms.

However, the effects of urbanism are best felt in the "lewd economics", a concept launched by J.F.Lyotard. Indeed, urbanism is dependant on what Marx named "power of production". The axiom according to which each political economy is lewd starts from the conviction that there is no reference to external reality. In Michel Foucault's words, urbanism, psychiatry, criminalities, sexology etc. —all this knowledge constitutes "legitimation" and a new way of applying the power. "The power" is everywhere. The sovereignty of the state, as juridical-reflexive frame, or the domination of a minority are not initial attributes, but "ending forms". The postmodernist preference for hybridization presupposes a boundless availability in which the ruling word is, in one of Guy Scarpetta's terms, "impurity". As compared to the aggression of "the hybrids' empire" from the postindustrial world, in the central east-European area we can also notice the presence of other options plunged into ecology.

It seems that, according to the author of *Postmodern Ethics*, we are involved in a new worldwide disorder or, in other words, in a game of reorganizing the world. It is the rule of a political puzzle in which the potential of disagreement and dissonance between spheres (moral,

5 The new aspect of Romanian localities best illustrates the bent towards the culture of consumption. Where in the past there were only mixt stores, food stores, butcher's shops, joineries, tailor's shops etc., now there appeared the new forms of stimulating the consumption: fast-food, shops with technical outfit, computers, all dominated by the attractive image of banks, associations or travel agencies ready to offer their customers all sorts of facilities. These marks of the Romanian postmodernism are, naturally, associated with a society in which the consumer's life style, mass consumption, dominate its members' conscious life. This is a society in which fashion and taste are eclectic, "opportunities" seem numberless, and the search of new market segments seems constant. The services and industries mainly offer entertainment. It is known that, in its canonic sense, the term *nation-state* used to imply, beside its juridical nature, (in this sense, as a set of norms that euphemize and dissolve forces and interests within some legitimating illusions) a civic nature, as a system of force rapports. Yet, the *nation-state* gives way to the prerogatives of the *wealth-state*. This represents an attempt to mobilize the economic interests as a means of setting free the political calculation from moral restraints.

political, minority, sexual) “never totally halted, erupts and comes to light”. Bauman’s conviction restricts to the fact that there is no efficient centralized control that could offer to the unsafe area, continuously reproduced, a naturalness appearance. Indeed, as Foucault had demonstrated, “the fight for power and the endless war” are the only safe foundation of an organized abode. At this moment, despite globalization and its effects that were felt in the common effort to build a new social, economic, political sphere, we are going through a time of insecurity and of dissolution of *megalothymy* in contemporary liberal democracies. We are, in Fukuyama’s words, *free and unequal*. Thus, the liberal democracy could be overthrown whether by the excess of *megalothymy*, whether by that of *izothymy*, that is of the fanatic desire of equal recognition. The only forms of *megalothymy* that are not allowed in contemporary societies are those which lead to political tyranny. The difference between these societies and the aristocratic ones preceding them is that *megalothymy* has not been chased away, but left to manifest itself subterranean. The democratic societies start from the premise that all persons are created equal, and that their predominant ethos is that of equality. Thus, those manifestations of *megalothymy* that survived in modern democracies are somehow opposed to the ideals that society publicly sustains.

In the Romanian territory, *sociability* is assaulted by *socializing*. It is a tendency that won consistency along with the means of rebuilding the social and political organism after December 1989. Bauman thinks that this tendency has acquired power while local traditions, persistently undermined, lost their influence and “the ability to establish moral duties and to supervise their implementation”. It is a phenomenon that we identify in the time of Ceau escu’s mass politics, when the gradual dissipation of community in masses was a general phenomenon. This tendency can be seen in the practice of the ex-socialist body of countries that attempted to achieve what George L. Mosse considered to be an integrative part of a political theory in which even spontaneity is planned. The communists, as well as the Nazi, are acknowledged to be masters in the building of the sacred destined to serve the profane. At this point we remember the invention of “new traditions” adapted to the needs of the nation and comply with under its strict supervision. (23th August, the President’s and his wife’s birthdays etc.) Bauman remembers the “fascination of the intelligentsia” that, with “a mixture of admiration and envy”, used to watch the unfolding manifestation of popular enthusiasm created by command. Such enthusiasm in the postindustrial world of the West was missing, disclosing an exhausted, weary face of civilization. The

stereotypy of daily duties, of duties that were mechanistically carried out⁶ would institutionalize the mania.

The postmodern culture, on the contrary, institutionalizes the “melancholy” by the contempt towards ceremonies and rituals, fights against passions on the field of personal interests and against collective outburst of enthusiasm in the name of organization. It is a condition of active indifference, counterbalanced by promoting the national, protocron spirit, overbidding by left-right parties. The postmodern break that Zgmund Bauman speaks of can be identified in the fact that the Romanian state, in its version after December 1989, does not claim anymore the capacity, the need and the desire to dominate, setting the antistructural forces of sociability free, unwillingly or on purpose.

Sorin Alexandrescu⁷ noticed the fact that, if the dictatorships of the right aimed a political modernization, keeping intact the rest of the modernization program, the left dictatorship had in view the economical development, invalidating the remainder of the same program. Both dictatorships believed that it is possible, and even necessary to disclose the components of modernity, carrying out some of them, while suspending or destroying others. However, all dictatorships intended to take over only the target of modernization. They did not understand that modernization cannot be carried out without modernity, that economical development, the private property and democracy are inseparably connected. The overthrow of the right and left-hand dictatorship (after more than 50 years!) demonstrated that, in the Romanian case, modernity had to be either accomplished, either wholly passed over (even by appealing to *tiranicide!*) Thus, we are, in Pisier’s view, close to the badge “nations with no history” as opposed to the nations plunged into history. The “cold” societies are those that, due to the institutions they created for themselves, seek to automatically countermand the effect that the historical factors could have over their balance and continuity. The “warm” societies are those that, by the inward adaptation of the historical becoming, make of it the drive of their development. In the West, modernity ended normally, when its program was (to a greater extent, in Lyotard’s view, and to a lesser extent, in Habermas’s opinion) carried out.

6 Serge Moscovici, *The Invention of Society—Psychological Explanations for Social Phenomena*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1993.

7 Sorin Alexandrescu, *Looking Back, Modernity*, Bucharest, Univers Publishing House, 1999.

The coming out from modernity was, due to this, synchronically and in an organized manner, by the Europeanization of the structures. On the contrary, in the East the coming out from modernity was done involuntarily, before carrying out the actions in the program, along with its deformation and the systematic “forcing” of society. Romania did not get out of modernity! Romania’s modernity has been taken away, being forced by Ceau escu to go back to behaviors and mentalities that preceded modernity. Postmodernity entered the Romanian territory, too, (as, in fact, all the preceding social-cultural models) due to the re-integration in an Europe that was mostly postmodern (postindustrial). Thus, in Romania, postmodernity does not replace modernity but it adds to it, both proving to be layers of a society that one might say, as in other times in history, that it is a society, if not hybrid, than certainly heterogeneous (p. 340-341).

The ticket for a “new setting”, that of the “European community” testifies for the governing of Romanian action and thought by what Lyotard considered to be “the idea of humanity’s emancipation”. An “Enlightenment” desire accepted by the present political world as a chance of setting us free of a whole ignorance, poverty, lack of education.⁸ Out of this promise there spread out various Romanian political platforms, oscillating between political and economical liberalism, Marxist “isms”, radicalism a.s.o. The integration in the new setting leads (or leaves the impression of leading) to a “self-transparent” humanity, to a “universal citizenship”. The Romanian political class engages itself in launching discourses (electoral, parliamentary etc) after this “rhetoric of emancipation”. J. F. Lyotard warned that it was not the absence of progress, but, on the contrary, the technical, scientifically, artistic, economic and politic development that made possible “total wars”, totalitarianism, the growing discrepancy between the richness of the West and the poverty of the East, unemployment and the “new poverty”, the “general lack of education”. All these inconvenient (social, political, economic etc.) insert “secret obstacles” in the way of the “silent perpetuation” of the modern project. Yet, the postmodern man brings about another duty, a decisive one: that of making humanity able to fit the (very complex) means of feeling, understanding and making, which exceed what it asks for (78). This duty implies the resistance to simplicity,

8 J. Fr. Lyotard, *Postmodernism for Children*, Cluj, Apostrof Publishing House, 1997.

to simplifying slogans, to the requirements for clarity and facility, to the desire for restarting of safe values. The Romanian political class will have to take into account these Lyotardian exigencies, if it does not want to become obsolete or to take with it, in its dissolution, “the Romanian humanity”, too.

The new setting that gradually settles in this Romanian political sphere is mounted in our collective “unconscious” and it has to be accepted as a moment of relaxing and of re-activating the Pythagorean break between *mathematikoi* and *politikoi*.

CASE STUDY: POLITICAL ELITES AND THEIR OLD/NEW OPTION

In the post-Decembrist Romania *the political elites* had been elected from the nomenclature and among the young technocrats of the ‘80s, raised in the spirit of perestroika, under the protective wing of the communist regime. The *post-Decembrist political elite* auto-reproduced itself on the basis of a Romanian capitalism marked by a weak ethic and under the obedience of a provincial mechanism of self-reproduction.

According to Ivan Szelenyi and Victor Nee⁹ the main beneficiaries of transition were those social categories which were disfavored by the socialist system, those categories which proved to have lost by the introduction of a centralized economical system, by the destruction of private property and/or by the *administrative bureaucratic elite*. According to Ivan Szelenyi we might be placed in a “interrupted bourgeoisie”. “The direct controllers of the redistribution mechanism won’t suffer just a relative loss but also a diminution of the value of the politic capital achieved as personnel”. If Ersz Szalai established that during the socialist period a *technocrat elite* had been formed, able to keep its position due to the expertise it had, on the other hand Jadwiga Staniszkis considered that the survival of the *socialist elite* may be connected to the power conversion phenomenon. According to this approach, the power accumulated by the personnel during the socialist period¹⁰ is transformed in trumps by the apparent *new elite* involved in the mechanisms of economy. Admitting the survival of an *communist anti elite* (or at least a

9 Ivan Szelenyi, Katherine Beckett, Lawrence P. King, *Handbook of Economic Sociology. The Socialist Economic System*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994.

10 Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism And What Comes Next, What Was Socialism, And Why Did It Fall?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996.

group of it) and its shaping as a gravitational center of a new *governing elite*, in this case we may identify some other types of *elites*: *peripheral elites*.¹¹ In this case, the solution proposed by the *central elite* was that of interposing between it and population a controllable *political peripheral elite*, which to implement the transitional policies and support the electoral consequences.¹² Moreover such an option would have been very useful from the perspective of combining the democratic ways with the desire of the *central elite* to maintain and reproduce itself on ruling positions.

In conclusion we can say that the re-activation of the East-European post-communist *elites* with typical marks, wanted to implicate them in a political revival of the secondary socialism. According to the study of Katherine Verdery (*The Political Life of Dead Bodies. Post-socialist Reburials and Changes*)¹³ the *dead bodies* became a great way of accumulating symbolic capital. The falling of the Communist Party in Eastern Europe had decreased the value of the politic capital, opening the way for identifying and accumulating of new capital resources. *The symbolic capital becomes a source of political profit.*

The post-communist examples viewed as a typical Eastern-European form of getting out of communism, can be added to the idea of global transition to democracy, by emphasizing the technical solutions proposed for the economical, social and political difficulties occurred. If after the revolutions we can make a distinction between the *paretic*¹⁴ or

11 Vladimir Pasti, *Sociologie politica*, Bucuresti, Ziua, 2004.

12 Akos Rona-Tas "The First Shall Be Last? Entrepreneurship and Communist Cadres in the Transition from Socialism", *American Journal of Sociology*, vol 100/1, 1994, p. 40-69.

13 Katherine Verdery, *Via a politic a trupurilor moarte. Reînhumiri și schimbări postsocialiste*, București, Vremea, 2006.

14 Pareto defined the *elites* from two perspectives: from a strictly statistic point of view, *elite* means that social category embracing the most appreciated individuals in their domain of activity. We can talk in this case of a *diplomatic, religious, politic elite* etc. The second approach makes the distinction between the *governing elite* (the *dominant* one) and the *governed elite* (the *dominated* one).

The power monopoly becomes the result of a superior organization form of the overlapped layers, which by a coordinate action, ensures its political and social domination related with a disorganized majority, lacking of will, of coherent ideology, without an organization or a shared plan of action.

The *elite* qualities are mostly materials (money, functions, social and political positions). The moral factor is excluded, the *elites* using any ways to justify political inequality and cheat the dominated. Unable to create an original speech, incapable to constitute in a exemplary group, the *governing elite* is characterized only by one system of values and latent behaviors (called residues) which constitutes, according to Pareto, the fundament of its cohesion.

*weberian*¹⁵ *elites*, we will choose for our analyze a combination between the models, establishing *central points of social stratification, the model of distribution of resources and power, the ways of recruiting, relationship between groups*. The intensification of struggles and the (re)negotiation of the dominant positions marked the phenomenon of politicization of the post-communist *elite*, in the phases of transforming the socialist bossiness and the centralized-distributed economy in a free economy. The *consensual elite* and the *peripheral* one, lay their basis on the historical compromise, and had been reactivated as a consequence of the return of the *elites* to their initial role.

Therefore, in the Eastern-European countries where the *technocrat elite* had been cooped by nomenclature (the case of Hungary) and also in the countries lacking of *contra elite* and marked by *anti elite* (the case of Russia and Romania from the perspective of chronological gaps), the reproduction of the *elites* had succeeded. With one exception: Poland, where the *contra elite* was better organized, the depurations had been radical, fact which created the conditions for the apparition of a new *political clientage*.

The *new Romanian elite* had its networks of clientage, even though they do not recognize each other their legitimacy. Although it is a small phenomenon, it exists the idea that the affiliation to the *elite* is an inherited right. *Numerous representatives of the actual elites are aristocratic-proletariat descendents of the anti elites of the '50s or '60s*. In the beginning of the Romanian transition, the *formal* institutions co-existed in parallel with the *informal* ones. The *formal* institutions, referring declaratively or otherwise to the *informal* ones, are either inherited, or consistently adapted and only then applied. This institutional division grips the emergence of some efficient normative, social and political structures with coordinating and unidirectional roles.

15 Max Weber overlapped the term *elite* with bureaucracy. According to him the characteristic of bureaucracy may be: 1. The principle of the jurisdictional and official domain, which is regulated by law or administrative documents. The bureaucratically activities are considered to be officials obligation and they are fulfilled by persons which carry out certain conditions. 2. Bureaucracy has a hierarchic system, in which the superior levels have the obligation of supervising the lower ones. 3. Management is based on written documents (files), on stable rules and competence. Max Weber emphasized the danger of bureaucracy over democracy. Considering it immanent in a democratic society, he considered, analyzing the situation of Russia, that between the interests of bureaucracy and the interests of democracy conflicts may appear.

Persevering in this theory, the *informal* institutions replace the *formal* ones. *The initial institutional division is replaced by the exclusive dominance of the informal institutions.*

Our hypothesis sustains the idea according to which the Romanian social and political landscape goes through certain changes placed under the sign of *retro-institutionalization*, as a characteristic of transition. This phenomenon, on the one hand, implies the opposition to the institutionalization and, on the other hand, it implies a paradoxical pressure on institutionalization. The diagnosis of this transitional syndrome provides evidence according to which the jam of the administration is accompanied by legislative hesitations, followed by lack of any control mechanisms of a correct institutional functioning.

By studying in detail the Romanian political parties programs, we tried to discover some elements capable of putting into practice *the new political option grafted upon the structure of transition*. In the Romanian case, we are convinced that the version of a new opportunity to re-evaluate modernity, to “read” the signs of an epoch as indicators, is much closer to Lyotardian “illegitimacies”. The point of convergence of political programs and platforms is represented by the *legitimizing of research* through the level of political performance in education, health, or culture, for example (*performativity*), and through new perspective opened over *instabilities*. However, we shall not insist on the political effects discovered within the present-day Romanian socio-cultural changes, avoiding an exploration of the Romanian transition as “a crisis experience”. Thus, we slip away from comparing the political effects of transition with other crisis experiences. Consequently, we have purposely omitted an analysis of the political authoritarianism of the state, as we are convinced that it cannot protect people from what sociologists consider “the whims of the market”.

The crisis of the political background has at its base the crisis of fundamental political concepts and values. The structure of the parties, their functioning, their degree of institutionalization and professionalization within the political system so criticized by the citizens are at a deadlock also because of the conceptual crisis. Such disorders would resume to the innocent persistence of the parties to invent the vehicle of the necessary reforms starting even from the reinvention of the wheel. We must admit that neither the democrat party was an exception, but it proved a constant notoriety toward a new approach of the responsibility assumed for the public’s benefit. The institutions of the state are in Romania just some

structures dependent on their leaders. Let us also consider the fact that the constitutive scission of the political area is recognizable in the “social leaderships” considered by Leford when analyzing the Clusters’s political anthropology. What unites Clusters “leaderships” of the political ones is recognizable in placing them both under the sign of severalty and social relations, giving the feeling of a mechanical reproduction based on a strong introspection of cultural norms.

Bringing the problem up to date, the continuous quarrel between the President and the Prime-Minister is actually an issue of disagreement between the two, maintained on the public agenda by Traian B sescu’s outbreaks and T riceanu’s oppositions, which prevent a normal institutional relation between the Presidential administration and the Government. Things are the same in the case of the motion regarding justice, approved by the Senate: its adoption has not been made because of an objective analysis, after the clear criteria of the justice. Adopting the motion does not mean that the institution of the Parliament considers that the institution of the Justice Ministry works badly, just that a Parliamentary ad hoc majority made out of people belonging to the opposition and the power decided.

Thus, the Romanian institutional and political scene remains vulnerable in front of a “pre-transition syndrome” even in a post-transition aiming at accomplishing and consolidating a higher degree of institutional clarification and democratization.