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**Modernity in Romania:  
Nineteenth Century Liberalism  
and its Discontents**

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# **Modernity in Romania: nineteenth-century liberalism and its discontents**

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**Abstract.** The objective of the paper is to analyse Romania's experience with modernity by identifying and distinguishing two projects of modernisation in Romanian history, i.e. the liberal and the fascist one. Both projects are understood as competing projects confronting basic problématiques of a political, socio-economic, and cultural nature. The projects of modernisation are examined through the lens of a conceptual framework that distinguishes three levels in modernising discourses: a politico-philosophical level (critique, interpretation and legitimation), a level of social or strategic goals, and a level of political practice. Ultimately, the two projects are regarded as pursuing a similar objective, despite the different means and moral implications involved.

## **Introduction**

In this paper, I try to understand the historical experience of a single society - Romania - with modernity, or, perhaps more accurately put, the construction of modern society. I should perhaps be even more modest, as I further restrict my scope in time by looking at a specific period, ranging from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end of the 1930s. This period one could identify roughly with the rise and fall of Romanian liberalism. My aim is not, however, to come up with a detailed narrative of Romanian history in this time period, although I do share the claim of uniqueness that is often (implicit) in historical narratives. Instead, I will try to arrive at an understanding of Romania's particularity by looking from a more sociological angle, which leads me to also have an eye for commonalities in Romania's quest for modernity.

My contention here is that in order to understand the development of modern societies we should not assume the existence of universally valid social laws that designate social change, valid through both time and space. Instead, we should have a plural understanding of the world and, therefore, start from an assumption of possible varieties of ways in which modern society can be constructed. The pathways modern societies follow are not determined by inevitable or autonomous processes of change (such as industrialisation, urbanisation, or democratisation). Rather, national pathways are the outcome of human action, and, above all, struggles between actors; contestation forms then a key concept in

understanding social change.<sup>1</sup> Political actors tend to organise their actions in more or less coherent political projects, in which their visions of modern societies are defined. What becomes important here is to understand how actors arrive at their specific visions of modern society. How come that political actors perceive the 'what is to be done' question in various - often mutually exclusive - ways? In order to arrive at a further understanding of actors' perceptions we should have, first of all, an understanding of the reasons they articulate for social change, and the ways they arrive at critiques of existing arrangements.<sup>2</sup>

I hold that contending political projects that often play a crucial role at historical turning points start out with a critique of existing society, what we could call here a *crisis narrative*. I further assume that, starting from this critique, actors ultimately come up with alternative solutions to basic problems of modern society. I then understand the construction of modern society to be based on particular basic problématiques of a political, economic and cultural kind. In other words, these problématiques refer to questions of the construction of a viable political order (state formation, state-society relations, membership of the polity), the generation and distribution of wealth within society (the economy), and the creation and diffusion of meaning (definitions of the Other, diffusion of societal models<sup>3</sup>) (see Arnason 1993; Sewell 1999: 56; Wagner 2001: 7). In the ways various political actors deal with these basic modern problems we can differentiate the basic commonalities and particularities of political projects. In order to further explore the ways in which particular actors confront these problems, we might distinguish analytically between three levels in modernising discourses, the first two being related to the level of ideas, the third one to the level of practice. The first level and perhaps the most fundamental one is the politico-philosophical level, which consists of three elements: critique, interpretation and legitimation. On this abstract level, the (prior) existing societal order is criticised, modernity is (re-)interpreted in the local context, and legitimations for a new societal project are called upon. In principle it is the critique that is formulated on existing societal structures that provides the basis for specific local interpretations (in relatively small and dependent societies like Romania external 'reference models' often play an important role), and legitimations for the new order. A second level entails the formulation of the

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<sup>1</sup> See for a similar approach to Romania in the post-1989 period, Blokker 2002.

<sup>2</sup> A variety of factors can - in different temporal-geographical contexts - be of importance here: ideational ones, i.e. the ideas actors are exposed to from outside or that are (traditionally) available in society; socio-economic ones, such as general economic circumstances or the social position of the main actors involved; political ones, such as the (constraining or enabling) influence of existing political institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Sewell depicts the 'typical cultural strategy of dominant actors and institutions' as 'efforts not only to normalize or homogenize but also to hierarchize, encapsulate, exclude, criminalize, hegemonize, or marginalize practices and populations that diverge from the sanctioned ideal' (Sewell 1999: 56).

social or strategic goals of the modern project, the way in which it contributes to the construction of a new order. On this level the rather abstract assumptions of interpretation and legitimation are translated into more concrete solutions to identified priorities. Finally, at the third level we find ideas dealing with political practice, where solutions are translated (partially) into policy programs and institutional structures.<sup>4</sup>

In the following I will apply this conceptual scheme to the period in Romanian history in which liberalism was the most important political ideology, roughly from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1930s. The scheme helps me to identify and distinguish different projects of modernity, and to discover commonalities as well as differences between them. So, in the first part of the paper, I use the scheme to identify the Romanian liberal project, the liberal critique on feudal society and the liberal interpretation and legitimation of a new societal order. Then, in the second part, the emerging fascist critique and counter-project will be interpreted in a similar way, to arrive ultimately at a comparison between the two projects and the identification of commonalities and discontinuities.

### **The liberal project**

After centuries of foreign domination, in the early nineteenth century the autonomy of local élites in the Romanian lands was expanded by a combination of factors. Trading opportunities resulting from the opening up of Romania towards the international economy enhanced local economic power, and the loosening of the grip of the Ottoman empire contributed to a shift of political power from foreign ruling princes to local land-owning élites. The economically more significant parts of the land-owning élites ameliorated their economic position by expanding international trade in cereals drastically. Those situated on a lower social level were not in a position to exploit this opportunity and instead started using a liberal political discourse which was aimed against the Ottoman sovereignty and its regime of Greek Phanariot rulers in the Romanian lands. The liberal movement in the making was constituted for a major part of these lower ranks, who – next to collective self-determination - also sought equality with higher echelons, i.e. through ‘equal rights of representation, and equal access to high public office’. The liberals could then be portrayed as an ‘economic

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<sup>4</sup> An analytical scheme such as this one, however, does not always translate directly into historical situations, certain elements might prevail in certain situations, whereas others might remain in the background. Even more important, the coherency proposed by such a scheme can in reality hardly be observed. Despite the caution with which a scheme like this should be handled, it does give us instruments to distinguish between the various intentions of modernising agents and their projects of modernisation in different temporal contexts, and can help us to indicate continuity and discontinuity at various levels. The distinction made between the second level - social goals - and the third one - political action and institutionalisation - I made for purposes of completeness. In this paper I will mainly focus on the first, politico-philosophical level, and rather less so on the others. In practice, this might lead to a certain conflation of the other two levels.

declining class whose members were searching desperately for *alternatives* to economic entrepreneurship' (Janos 1978: 83). Their political consciousness was raised through education abroad as an overwhelming majority of what later would become the liberal *élite* studied in France, especially in Paris, and later in Germany. The material independence to do so was provided by their ownership of land (Călinescu 1988; Janos 1978: 80-1; Rădulescu 1998: 113, 1999: 209).

### *Crisis narrative of the liberal project*

The crisis narrative construed by the Romanian revolutionary *élite* had its roots in Western understandings (mainly French and German) of both liberalism and nationalism. From the liberal and nationalist ideologies, two main concepts were derived that informed the political actions of the liberal *élite* strongly. First, from Western liberalism and the French revolutionary program the principle of self-determination was taken, i.e. the natural right of nationalities to rid themselves of oppression through revolutionary upheaval. The triple motto of the French Revolution was adopted in 'accordance with its "horizon of expectations"', or, in other words, liberty was predominantly interpreted as national liberty (Zub 2000: 52). The liberal *élites* thus mainly invoked the national principle or question as they criticised the prerogatives of foreign rulers and thereby foreign domination. It was through such 'discursive weapons' that these *élites* sought to increase the autonomy of a native 'progressive' *élite*; a discourse that empowered them to oppose the existing political structures. The liberal perception of national independence leaned not only on Western liberal conceptions of political and economic progress and self-determination, but found further inspiration in the romantic vision of the nation, i.e., a conception of the nation as ultimately unique, with its own distinct language, culture and history (cf. Brown 1982: 283). Major revolutionaries did indeed articulate a conception of Romanians united in a single culture and state. Mihail Kogălniceanu - an important revolutionary and later statesman - forcefully promoted ideas of national specificity by invoking the historical continuity of the Romanian people<sup>5</sup>, whereas Nicolae Bălcescu - statesman and historian - supported a united Romanian nation that could rank among the most important nations in the world (Călinescu 1988: 177-80). The liberals criticised contemporary society by posing the question of 'how to set in motion a patriarchal and authoritarian system, a society overwhelmingly rural, dominated by landed property, in which the modern stimulating factors of capitalism and democracy were almost completely absent' (Boia 2001: 35). The national question almost inevitably called attention to another question, the socio-economic question or the principle of social justice. If a national society was constructed and the Romanians would rule themselves, how then should the

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<sup>5</sup> Kogălniceanu's *Cuvîntul introductiv*, an introduction to his course of national history which he pronounced in 1843 at the Mihăilleană Academy in Iași, was a clear attempt at narrating the historical unity of the Romanians by pointing at major national struggles in the past (Călinescu 1988: 178-9; Zub 1979: 9).

economy be set up and how would nationally produced wealth be redistributed? The liberals invoked this principle to strongly criticise the privileges of the ruling classes and to point to the necessity of socio-economic reforms, reforms that should lead to a more equal distribution of wealth within society and to a radically different organisation of the economy.

*The Romanian interpretation and legitimation of liberalism: commonality and difference*

The Romanian liberals' critique on the status quo was, as we saw above, complemented by the construction of an alternative model in the form of liberal nationalism. The Romanian struggle for an independent nation-state and socio-economic modernisation was in itself part of large-scale revolutionary change all over nineteenth-century Europe. The Romanian experience - similar to other East European countries - differed, however, in crucial aspects from the changes in Western Europe. First of all, the adaptation of liberal ideas in national contexts led to important perceptive differences. One of the most important elements in the development of modern Western Europe was the gradual separation of state and society. The devise of a social contract between different social groups, and between the state and society, was attempted to delimit state authority (Bideleux and Jeffries 1998; Held 1987: 41-2; Vajda 1988: 341).<sup>6</sup> In contrast, in Eastern Europe, the development of the state took a rather different turn, as the emphasis was not on curbing state power *vis-à-vis* society, but on constructing a viable state and social order in itself.<sup>7</sup> The interpretation of nationalism constituted another important difference between Western and Eastern Europe. Whereas the first wave of nationalisms in Europe consisted of a *Verfassungspatriotismus* in which the nation was defined in legal-historical terms (Taylor 1998: 215), later nationalisms, although often using the language of universalism, were exclusionary and often ethnically defined, basing state sovereignty not on individual citizenship, but on collective ethnicity (cf. Bideleux and Jeffries 1998). Nationalist élites in Eastern Europe struggled for national independence and autonomy, not so much for individual liberties.<sup>8</sup> The result was that the nation came to mean rather the opposite of individual liberty, and instead of reinforcing and protecting individual liberties, the state promoted a collective understanding

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<sup>6</sup> One should perhaps not overstate the homogenous experience of the West in this process; for instance, one could say that the development of the state and political institutions as opposed to society was less articulated – or at least had a different character - in England and the United States than on the continent of Western Europe (Wagner 1990: 38).

<sup>7</sup> It was not the *ancient régime* against which revolutionary strivings were aimed, but foreign domination (Platon 1985: 72). Furthermore, as Mommsen (1990: 213-4) argues, '[i]n East Central Europe the idea of the nation state was little more than a concept manipulated by dominant ethnic or cultural groups, often of a very small size, in order to strengthen their hegemonial positions within the polity'.

<sup>8</sup> See Janos 2000 for an account of national independence struggles by liberal élites in Eastern Europe.

of the nation (Vajda 1988: 344; cf. Stokes 1997; for a more general treatment of nationalism, see Taylor 1998).

The reinterpretation of the concepts of state authority and of nationality in Romania can be identified, on the one hand, in the predominance of the state (and its ruling élite) in political and economic reforms, and, on the other hand, in the exclusionary, ethnic concept of citizenship, which gave absolute preference to native Romanians over national minorities. This predominance of the nation-state boiled in reality down to the subordination of the social question to the question of national self-determination, i.e. political and economic independence (Platon 1985; Weber 1965: 503; Zub 2000: 55). We could take these interpretations as reactions of nascent Central and Eastern European states to the rise of Western modernity, as expressions of the native élites' desire to gain equal status for their countries in the international sphere and to protect their nation against foreign domination (cf. Musil 2000: 176; Taylor 1998). And indeed, at the time one could find similar reinterpretations of liberalism in most countries in the region (cf. Daskalov 1997: 152-3).

The liberal project was underpinned by various modes of legitimation<sup>9</sup>, the principle mode being a 'derived' legitimation based on the Western societal model. By referring to the superiority (in particular, the rationality) of Western societies and the nation-state concept, the liberals exposed existing Romanian society by pointing to its imperfect aspects, i.e. the nation-state concept was invoked as being the only vehicle that could raise the Romanian people to a higher cultural plane. The derived nature of this mode of legitimation necessitated the relegitimation of the Western model in the Romanian context. Partly, this could be done by referring to formal rationality as a superior principle for arranging society (institutionalised for instance in the state bureaucracy and the organised economy), but this in itself could not be enough. Relegitimation required supplementary modes of legitimation, related to the local context. One of these modes was provided by traditional legitimation. The liberals justified their assault on foreign domination of the Romanian lands historically by referring to the Romanian continuity in this geographical space. By pointing to the Latin origins of the Romanian people its sovereignty was demanded, as Romania was an 'island of Latinity in a Slav sea' (an identity rediscovered by the Transylvanian Latinist School in the 18th century), and constituted a common national space in the form of Dacia (Boia 2001: 34-5). Traditional legitimacy was in itself supplemented by nationalism, which turned the promotion of the nation into an absolute goal of the liberal state. Yet another mode of legitimation that fortified the indigenous relevance of the project as well as the role of the liberals could be called charismatic legitimation. The liberals claimed a messianic role in identifying the goals and strategies of the project of modernisation, as they were

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<sup>9</sup> My point of departure here is Weber's much used typology of 'classical' modes of legitimation, as well as his identification of 'auxiliary' modes.

knowledgeable about Western rationalism and the liberal philosophy of progress. This messianic tint one could find, for instance, in rather pronounced élitist elements in the set-up of the electoral system<sup>10</sup>, the educational system (through which a national culture was transmitted to the population), and in the cultural debates on modernisation (see below). In the economic sphere, élitism found its counterpart in state involvement in the national economy. Although a Western economic model was followed, the state and its ruling élite were apportioned, or rather, apportioned themselves, a more encompassing role than originally envisaged in the 'reference model'.<sup>11</sup>

### *Social goals and institutionalisation*

The main social or strategic goals identified by the liberals - the establishment of a unified nation-state, a constitutional state and the creation of a market economy - followed Western models rather closely. The centrality of these goals in the liberal program indicated the liberals' faith in progress and reforms that should lead to a rationalisation of society. At the same time, though, the Romanian liberals deviated from this faith in the actual translation of these social goals into institutions and policies. In the creation of both political and economic institutions one could detect the liberals' hesitance to extend liberal principles to society as a whole. The rationalisation of politics went hand in hand with a strong centralisation, whereas political participation was limited. So, the division of the united principalities into administrative districts brought with it their subordination to the central Bucharest government (Janos 2000: 86). Further, the emulative nature of the political changes was apparent in the construction of a formal state and political system, in the adoption of the Romanian Constitution in 1866 (based on the Belgian one of 1831) and the setting up of parliamentary institutions. However, whereas the system was formally based on the division of powers and representation of the people, in reality it only represented the uppermost layers of society. After *de facto* unification of the Romanian principalities in 1859 and *de jure* independence in 1877, the egalitarian elements

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<sup>10</sup> The electoral system that was set up in the 1866 consisted of four colleges: the first was made up of the largest landowners; the second of owners of medium-sized estates; the third of urban property-owners and educated citizens; and the fourth of the peasantry and others (Hitchins 1994: 20-1; Janos 1978: 85; Roberts 1951: 20). The owning (and educated) classes constituted the overwhelming majority in this system, whereas the weak position of the fourth college was even further undermined by electoral manipulation on a local level. In 1884, the electoral system was reformed by merging the first and second colleges, resulting in an effective preponderance of the 'urban, professional and official class' and putting the 'main weight of an extremely narrow franchise in an overwhelmingly agricultural country' on those classes (Seton-Watson 1934: 357). 93.9 percent of the population was not represented, and 98.5 percent did not have the right to vote for the senate (Ioanid 1990: 37).

<sup>11</sup> Both the classical liberal state doctrine of the rather limited nightwatchman state, and the universalistic, encompassing vision of the nation of the American and French revolutions conceived of a much more limited role of the state (see Taylor 1998: 202).

and inclusive perception of nationhood lost definite ground to an exclusive idea of the nation, of which only certain Romanians (those with property and education) were part.<sup>12</sup> In reality, this excluded not only most Romanians, but also led to the refusal of granting citizenship rights to Jews (institutionalised in the Constitution of 1866) (Volovici 1991). In the case of the latter, their exclusion was based on nationalism, but their economic activity was tolerated on economic rational grounds (Janos 2000: 74). According to Volovici, this meant that '[n]ationalism now signified the struggle for national sovereignty, the creation of a unified Romanian state. The national ideal had become national *policy* and national interests were to be defended above all, even to the point of conflict with other countries or various national minorities' (1991: 4). The two-party system dominated by the Liberal and Conservative parties bore a resemblance to the English system (Roberts 1951: 20), but was in reality subordinate to the foreign monarch rather than representing the Romanian people (Janos 1978: 87).<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the creation of an economy was a process steered from above. As in the political field, the Romanian liberals emulated the Western model. The developmental model aimed at the abolition of feudal institutions, the establishment of a modern system of property rights, and the creation of a modern economy through the marketisation or commodification of land and labour (Janos 2000: 81; Platon 1985). At the same time, though, Romania differed from the classical Western model in the relatively comprehensive state involvement in and co-ordination of the creation of a national economy, which served the interests of a growing middle class as well as those of the state bureaucracy itself. The role of the state consisted in reality in aid to industrial development in the form of protective tariffs and subsidies (from 1886 onwards), at the expense of agriculture and small-scale industries (cf. Brown 1982). In the context of increasing competition on the agricultural world market, protectionism by importing countries, and the precarious position of domestic manufacturing, the liberals pursued a policy based on the development of large domestic industries<sup>14</sup> (Welzk 1982: 48). The rather one-sided approach to industrialisation caused the marginalisation of large parts of the population and their alienation from the liberal project. This phenomenon became an important element in cultural debates on development, in which, from the last quarter of the nineteenth

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<sup>12</sup> In a way, liberalism lost its emancipatory aspects when it turned from a critical into a state doctrine in the 1870s, being confronted with political practice and institutionalisation (see Platon 1985: 75-6).

<sup>13</sup> The constitutional monarchy had been favoured by the liberals as it helped to legitimate an independent status for the weak Romanian state in the international arena.

<sup>14</sup> In 1887, the government adopted laws that introduced protectionist tariffs to shield a nascent domestic industry, as well as a law that encouraged national industry. The latter involved tax exemptions, state orders, and customs exemptions, and was geared towards the larger firms (Georgescu 1991: 127; Roberts 1951: 67; Welzk 1982: 48). The active role of the state in the economy in favour of large domestic industry became even more outspoken in the inter-war years, as the liberals started a policy of nationalisation of industry.

century onwards, the social consequences of the liberal efforts were increasingly discussed. These debates not only reflected the vision of conservatives, who sought to temper radical transformations, but also voices that represented in a way the marginalised and disembedded in Romanian society, i.e. the peasantry. The debate at the end of the nineteenth century foreshadowed and underpinned the construction of an anti-liberal crisis narrative in the inter-war years, and eventually the mobilisation and empowerment of marginal and uprooted groups by means of nationalism and fascism.

### *Contestation and potential crisis narratives*

In the Romanian lands, as elsewhere, the reception of the emancipatory ideas of the French Revolution broadly speaking evoked two major reactions, one positive and affirmative, the other negative and critical.<sup>15</sup> Even if we accept such a preliminary division of intellectual reactions - in 'Europeanists' and 'traditionalists' - this should not mean that we should assign progressiveness only to the former and conservatism only to the latter. In the liberal, Europeanist discourse we can find many rather conservative elements (for instance, in the perception of the nation), whereas instances of progressive thinking were part of the discourse of traditionalists (a focus on the rural population certainly not always meant a desire for recreating the past). Critique on liberalism invoked traditional (rural) symbols to criticise liberalism in as far as it promoted the ruling élite's interests and not the general good. Additionally, liberalism's emulative character was maligned, as it was supposed to destroy traditional ways of life. Nevertheless, critique hardly ever objected to liberalism's collectivist and exclusionary understanding of the nation. The uncontested terrain within the overall debate was the absolute value of an independent Romanian nation-state. The achievement of political independence and the establishment of a nation-state was seen as a form of progress as such, whereas remaining within the sphere of influence of the empires was regarded as being the opposite (Daskalov 1997: 142-143). Europeanists based their perception on the idea of a nation composed by native Romanians, which contained a romanticist dimension, i.e. the nation as a liberating force, aimed against feudal society and foreign domination. The imitation of Western industrialisation and urbanisation were then means to reach the goal of a Romanian nation-state; even more so in the form of protectionism and nationalisation of industry. Ultimately, the traditionalists had similar kinds of conceptions of the nation, but, by emphasising different dimensions in romanticism<sup>16</sup> (disenchantment, a nostalgia for traditional, rural communities),

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<sup>15</sup> See Wallerstein for the general European reception of the ideas of the French Revolution (1995: 85).

<sup>16</sup> The critique on the universal economic and political concepts of liberalism in Eastern Europe got a profound incentive from the main critique on modernity formulated in its birthplace, i.e., romanticism. Romanticist ideas provided relevant insights for élites that sought to construct and stabilise a national political community where a long-standing tendency towards state and

came to different conclusions. According to them, the Romanian nation was composed of the traditional village life which contained the pure values of the peasantry and, as a consequence, the realisation of the Romanian nation could only be achieved through opposition to or at least slowing down social change, in order to preserve essential Romanian traditions. An emphasis on the rural past did not necessarily lead to outright conservatism, as these ideas were reformulated into political programs that promoted an agrarian economy (cf. Irimia-Tuchtenhagen 1997: 321, fn 8). The most influential of the critiques on the emulative liberal model was the literary doctrine of so-called Junimism (*Junimea* means youth), developed in the period between the 1860s and 1880s. In this form of ‘progressive’ conservatism, the importation of Western ideas and structures in the early nineteenth century was criticised as having created only a ‘façade’ of Western culture, whereas the underlying traditional - rural - structure was left untouched. In the words of Titu Maiorescu - the Junimists’ leading spokesman – the rapid importation of Western institutions and ideas resulted in the adoption of ‘forms without substance’ (Hitchins 1978: 143; Marino 1995: 191; Voicu 1998: 2)<sup>17</sup>. Being a critique against direct importation of Western institutions and culture, it promoted slow and organic growth that would maintain the true (rural) character of Romania. A similar combination of conservative ideas and elements of more progressive ideas could be found in the strands associated with so-called peasantists and nationalists<sup>18</sup>. Their vision combined the idea that the structural

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nation-building had been absent. Romantic critiques replaced the rationally conceived state in liberalism and its emphasis on individual liberty with one based on a Herderian national character in which the essence or distinctiveness of different peoples stood at the centre. East European nationalist élites were in this way provided with ‘an intoxicating synthesis of national feeling and liberal ideology’ (Okey 1982: 77). In its totality being a complex and sometimes reactionary critique on original modernity while at the same time provoking nationalist liberations, that is to say, ‘in part reactionary, in part revolutionary’ (Russel 1946: 653; see also Löwy 1981), romanticism could be regarded as a crucial source – as a ‘psychic liberation’ - for national élites and their modernising projects. It had ‘a special resonance in countries that are socially, economically, and politically “underdeveloped”’ (Berman 1982: 43, 45). Indeed, German romanticist ideas rose exactly out of a sense of relative backwardness and against the initial project of imitation of French models, turning the quest for national identity inwards (Berlin 1997: 563).

<sup>17</sup> The ‘traditional’ critique of the Junimists was itself inspired by the strongly influential German romanticism of the nineteenth century (see Ornea 1996). Marino argues that the idea of ‘forms without substance’ could be traced back to thinkers before the conservative *Junimea* society and could be attributed to both Romanian thinkers and to non-Romanian ‘post-revolutionary’ thinkers such as Edmund Burke (Marino 1995: 193-4).

<sup>18</sup> A main protagonist of the nationalist movement was Nicolae Iorga, who, together with A.C. Cuza, was involved in the establishment of nationalist political parties. Iorga, a prominent historian, was one of the central figures in the emerging critique on the heritage of the French Revolution. In a similar way as Maiorescu and the poet Mihai Eminescu, Iorga pleaded for a re-evaluation of tradition, the restoration of indigenous values and critiqued excessive rationalism (Zub 2000: 85). He advocated organic evolutionism, condemning the French Revolution as a ‘revolution of rationalism’ and as being ‘too abstract to lead to something

features of Romanian society were to be found in its rural character and could not be rapidly changed by importation<sup>19</sup>, while they simultaneously endorsed an organic, evolutionary change of society. The ultimately divergent conclusions between Europeanists and traditionalists towards the nation led to different understandings of Significant Others (Verdery 1991: 34). Historical arguments about the origins of the Romanians led to opposing insights on the ‘true’ national identity.<sup>20</sup> Europeanists were criticised for betraying the nation with occidental values, whereas traditionalists for their part were blamed for seeking safety in Eastern Orthodoxy, both of which meant selling out the national soul to foreigners, be it Westerners or Greeks or Jews (see Verdery 1991: 34).

### **Romanian liberalism and its discontents**

The liberal modernising project encountered difficulties on various levels in the inter-war period. The critiques on the liberal interpretation of the national and social questions pervaded society as they were continued and radicalised by a new generation that was not inclined at all to follow the European model. The complex political problems that arose with the enlargement of Romanian territory after the First World War, i.e. with Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania in 1918, were an important impetus for the radicalised critiques. A range of tensions resulted from the formation of this Greater Romania: first of all, inter-ethnic problems became a heated issue of debate as the three newly incorporated territories contained much larger minorities than the Old Kingdom itself and thus

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useful' (Zub 2000: 87, 83-106). Various strands of peasantism focused on the problems of the peasantry and the negative effects of 'industrial civilisation'. Leading figures included the aforementioned historian Iorga, the economist Virgil Madgearu, and the populist Constantin Stere. Stere held that ‘the burning social problem which the West has to face as a result of capitalist development and the industrialisation of modern production does not yet confront our society, or confronts it in a totally different form – namely, as a peasant question, in all its extent and variety, and not as a proletarian question, as in the West’ (quoted in: Daskalov 1997: 156).

<sup>19</sup> As Hirschman points out, the argument that the ‘deep structures’ of society remain untouched by ‘cosmetic’ changes has been often used in reaction to major changes and reforms in Western Europe as well, and ‘is one of the principal weapons in the reactionary arsenal’ (1991: 79).

<sup>20</sup> A three-pronged divide in Romanian society concerning its origins and its identity becomes important here (see Verdery 1991: 31-33): the Latinist, Roman version of Romanian identity, stressing its origins in Western Europe and promoting the integration of Romanian society in Western European structures, which implied the adoption of Western models of statehood and economy; the Daco-Roman or Romanticist version of Romanian identity, referring to a history of the Romanian people consisting of a Western-European heritage combined with a ‘true’ native character of the Romanian people, leading to the acceptance of the ultimate value of Western ‘forms and substance’, but stressing the evolutionist and organic nature of social change; and the autochthonist version of Romanian identity, excluding any Western European origins of the Romanian nation and therefore perceiving only an authentically ‘Romanian’ path of social development.

paradoxically the realisation of a Greater Romania brought with it the relative reduction of the Romanian 'element' in the larger territory (cf. Livezeanu 1995); second, inter-regional tensions arose between the central Bucharest-based government and the administration and local ruling élites in the new territories; third, an inter-generational struggle between the older liberal élites and a 'new generation' of politically conscious students was one of the unintended consequences of the massive extension of the education system in the 1920s and 30s. The youth movement, heavily opposed to the older generation's visions on society, empowered itself by drawing on both domestically developed critiques on the liberal project and by leaning on the inter-war tendency of 'cultural pessimism' in Europe; fourth, the urban-rural divide continued to provide one of the key points of contention as the disproportionate emphasis in the liberal economic program on industrialisation and the necessity of creating an urban middle class could not remain without reactions within the largely rural economy. In a way, the urban-rural divide was abated by the large-scale land reforms in the early 1920s, but simultaneously exacerbated by the inclusion of the overwhelmingly rural male population in the government of the polity via the extension of male suffrage. The political inclusion of the latter meant that discursive representations of their marginalisation stood a much larger chance in the political arena than in the pre-war era.

The whole gamut of political, ethnic and socio-economic tensions influenced the liberal project decisively. Throughout the 1920s, the liberals still represented the relatively most powerful social group, especially since the conservative landed élites lost most of their economic and political influence after the great land reforms following World War I (Welzk 1982: 69-70). From their rise to political power in the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, but most clearly in the inter-war period, the liberals increasingly performed the conservative role of maintaining the status quo and defending the establishment (Brown 1982: 291; Platon 1985). The liberal current showed clear tendencies towards authoritarian solutions for realising the liberal project (see Preda 1998) and in this sense changed – contextually as well as substantively speaking – in a conservative project, seeking to continue the original project of modernisation by accentuating (temporary) authoritarian solutions for its realisation. Both the defence of the status quo and the 'neo-liberal' outlook fed into the growing importance of the state, in a real as well as in a conceptual sense.<sup>21</sup>

### *Crisis narrative of the authoritarian/fascist project*

The coalescence of the inter-war tensions made critique on the liberal project widespread and effective. If we analytically distinguish between critique articulated by traditional, pre-war social forces (the aforementioned Junimists,

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<sup>21</sup> See for empirical data on the growth of state structures, *Economia României* 1991 and Heinen 1986.

nationalists and peasantists) and critique stemming from recently emerged ones (fascists), we can see how the latter could capitalise on the most introvert vision of a modern Romania, whereas the former had merely plead for an organic, evolutionist approach towards social change. Both the traditional and radical critiques focused on unresolved political problems stemming from the pre-war period, i.e. the national and social questions; problems which had become more acute and more complex as a result of the inter-war transformation of Romania. In the early twenties, the gists of the peasantist and nationalist critiques were social integration (extending political membership to the rural population) and social equality (a more equal distribution of national wealth through land reforms). After the extension of male suffrage and far-reaching land reforms, the national question emerged as the dominant one. As Livezeanu argues: ‘... by partially satisfying the peasant demand for land, the land reform made it possible for the national question to displace the social question – that of the peasantry and its land hunger – as the chief issue in Romanian society’ (1995: 12).<sup>22</sup> In fact, the fascist critique radically redefined the substance of national identity and went beyond the reformist essence of the traditionalist critique. The fascists did not limit their criticism to the element of élitism or class interest in the liberal modernising project, which had contributed to a *de facto* exclusion of the major part of the population.<sup>23</sup> The fascists went further in that they criticised the liberal project from a point of view that completely rejected the universal implications of the French Revolution; in line with the romanticist critiques of Enlightenment rationalism they embraced a theory of organic national specificity. The emphasis on national autonomy and independence in the liberal project was clearly shared by the fascists, but their solution to the national question followed a completely different set of assumptions. National independence was not to be assured by the importation of Western artefacts such as democracy, legalism, industry or urban cities, but was to be based on ethnic homogeneity, ruralism and Christian orthodoxy.

#### *Interpretations and legitimations of a counterproject*

From the turn of the century onwards, the bourgeois, liberal project of modernity was criticised all over Europe. Being a reaction to the mass nature of society and the belief in progress on the basis of rationalisation, ‘reactionary modernism’ argued for the re-evaluation of spirit over reason. The ‘mechanic solidarity’ of the *Gemeinschaft* was preferred over the ‘organic’ one of the *Gesellschaft* (cf. Löwy 1981). New society should be grounded in ‘inspired’ culture instead of ‘soulless’ civilisation (the latter term was interpreted as inextricably bound up with liberal

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<sup>22</sup> Both the land reforms and the almost simultaneous extension of male suffrage seem to have been dictated by fear of ‘Bolshevik contagion’ (Heinen 1986: 102; Roberts 1951).

<sup>23</sup> In 1930, Romania's population was for 80 percent rural, whereas 20.2 percent was living in urban areas (Livezeanu 1995: 8-10).

and 'progressive' understandings of society).<sup>24</sup> A 'political-cultural revolution that would revitalize the nation' was the ultimate goal of the more radical cultural pessimists, those who sought to 'oppose the principles of 1789 yet found in nationalism a third force "beyond" capitalism and Marxism' (Herf 1984: 11-2). Although no straight line between nineteenth century romanticism and inter-war 'revolutionary' right-wing ideologies can be traced, the common denominator of many post-war discourses was 'anti-modernism' and an overall tendency against the encroachment of 'modern society' on 'authentic' life (cf. Herf 1984: 13; see also Bracher 1984: 16-38, and Wagner 1990: 247). The more radical reactions against 'liberal' modernity 'placed blood, race and soul beyond rational justification' (Herf 1984: 13). Society as such was perceived not as an aggregate of independent, rationally calculating individuals, but as an organic collective of socially behaving human beings (Gregor 2000: 166-7).

Whereas in other countries the widespread nature of anti-liberal critique stemmed from resentment with defeat (Germany) or inertia (Italy) - which caused the transformation and radicalisation of old nationalism into a violent and fanatic extremism - in Romania it was territorial expansion<sup>25</sup> (Manea 1995: 104). The realisation of Greater Romania amplified the crisis of liberalism and its incapacity to deal with urgent political and social problems. The subsequent search for alternatives was instigated by a new generation of intellectuals as well as by a right-wing student movement.<sup>26</sup> The student movement that emerged in the early 1920s was agitating against two issues: first, against minority, notably Jewish students, who were depicted as competing for scarce resources in an overcrowded university, and, second, against communist activism.<sup>27</sup> The national significance of the radical student movement in the 1920s stemmed from its size and violent methods but also from the fact that 'it reflected in a raw and exaggerated way many of the main concerns of mainstream nationalists and the ethnic Romanian population at large' (Livezeanu 1995: 246). By the mid-1930s the fascist organisations that originated in the student movement gained considerable political power and came to represent the 'new generation' as a whole (Livezeanu 1995: 246). The fascist movement not only opposed the foreign influences as represented by ethnic minorities and Bolshevik contagion, but it also criticised the older generation for not dealing effectively with the

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<sup>24</sup> Instead of taking the classical modernist meaning of civilisation as a culturally superior and advanced state of society, critiques often turned around the argument and emphasised not so much the progress that civilisation entailed but the down-sides of processes such as industrialisation and democratisation (Wagner 1990: 234).

<sup>25</sup> In other East European countries, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, similar anti-liberal discontent emerged, despite their 'winner' status after WW I (Chiot 1989: 389-91).

<sup>26</sup> For the development of the student movement and their ideas, see the accounts of two of its most important leaders, Corneliu Codreanu (Codreanu 1973) and Ion Moța (Moța 1978).

<sup>27</sup> The student movements demanded a *numerus clausus* for Jewish students, a phenomenon that could be found elsewhere in Europe (for instance in neighbouring Hungary, see Ambri 1980: 72).

social problems it perceived. The movement that from 1927 onwards was referred to as the 'Legion of Archangel Michael' and from 1930 onwards as the 'Iron Guard' held a rather strong appeal for intellectuals. After 1933, the enormously influential philosophy professor Nae Ionescu, educated in Germany and mentor of the young generation of intellectuals (among which Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran and Constantin Noica) openly started supporting the Guard.<sup>28</sup> The young generation followed in his wake, openly endorsing the Guard's radical anti-semitic stance (Volovici 1991: 132-150).

In the struggle over national identity that the major territorial changes of Greater Romania unleashed, the conservative critique of 'forms without substance' proved a powerful one, especially in the pan-European context of emerging neo-romanticism or 'reactionary modernism'. The fascists' rejection of democratic politics and rationalism was aimed mainly against the *unrealised* dream of the liberal modernising project. The 'anti-modernist' criticism that emerged was a cultural synthesis between nineteenth century 'organic' nationalism (Eminescu and Iorga), and inter-war neo-romantic cultural pessimism (as espoused by, for instance, Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger, and Martin Heidegger in Germany, Charles Maurras in France, and Nae Ionescu in Romania)<sup>29</sup>. Ultimately, fascism provided an answer to Greater Romania's weak national identity, similar to the role national-socialism played in inter-war Germany: 'In a period of economic, political, moral and intellectual crisis, it provided a simple solution, violent, "radical"' (Manea 1995: 100). The rationality of democratic politics as a field of compromise and negotiation was rejected, and 'a politics of absolute ethics rather than a politics of responsibility' was endorsed (cf. 'reactionary modernism' in Germany: Herf 1984: 14). The state was conceptualised as an organic state, the embodiment of the national soul rather than a rational structure based on the protection of individual rights. In this perception, the state was not so much a political instrument, but rather a cultural one, as Eliade and Ionescu believed (Ricketts 1988: 897; see also Codreanu 1973). The totalitarian or fascist state represented the higher collective interest and was a vehicle to further Romanian culture, ultimately based on Romanian ethnicity and Christian Orthodox religion. In this, the neo-nationalist, fascist perception went beyond any xenophobic element that pre-war nationalism and conservatism had contained, giving anti-semitism a primary place in its ideology (Ioanid 1990: 29). Nae Ionescu, Nichifor Crainic, a theologian and fascist theoretician, and others formulated the concept of a 'corporate ethnocratic state', 'a state with a peasant character' in which Jews were excluded from political

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<sup>28</sup> This generation's creed was based on 'the primacy of youth over old age – youth being equated with spiritual fervor, authenticity, creativity, idealism, while old age symbolized routine, inertia, political corruption, and petty materialism' (Călinescu 1993: 133).

<sup>29</sup> As Voicu argues, Ionescu's thought was based on the Junimists (Măiorescu and Eminescu), peasantism, and German ideas. Nae Ionescu did indeed study in Germany in the period 1916-1919 (Voicu 1998: 2).

participation (Volovici 1991: 118, 129)<sup>30</sup>. The totalitarian vision of the state was complemented by the cult of the 'căpitan', i.e. the Iron Guard leader Codreanu, who himself was to be accompanied by an 'ascetic elite' (Ionescu) or a 'new aristocracy' (Eliade). The movement would function as a role model for the population, turning Romanians into 'new men'. By their ascetic and submissive behaviour the élite would avoid the particularism of the liberal political class (see Ioanid 1990: 136).<sup>31</sup> The state as it had been developed by the revolutionaries in 1848 was perceived by Ionescu and other neo-nationalists as a foreign and artificial construction, not suited to Romanian society and obscuring the authentic nation under beneath it (Hitchins 1994: 316-7; Ricketts 1988: 102-3). As Eliade expressed it: 'If a good idea ever had a deadly result for a nation, then, in the case of Romania, that good idea was democracy' (Eliade, cited in: Ricketts 1988: 900).

The social question was redefined or, perhaps more accurate, relegated to a lower status. The fascist program often disregarded developmental aspects and when it did take such considerations into account, it did so mostly by defending rural traditions (Gregor 2000: 176-7).<sup>32</sup> Capitalism, industrialism, concomitant urbanisation and economic liberalism were rejected for much the same reasons as a democratic political system. They were foreign, artificial inventions that did not resonate in the 'authentic' life of Romania's overwhelmingly agricultural society. Ionescu regarded the city as 'too abstract' and modern industry as 'too rational' (Hitchins 1994: 317). Codreanu agitated against the domination of the material over the spiritual, which was threatening the 'original harmony of life' (Codreanu 1973: 237-8). Additionally, the liberal ruling class was perceived as using the capitalist economic system for its own enrichment whereas foreign (particularly Jewish) elements were portrayed as parasites on Romanian society, as they occupied essential positions within the capitalist economic system and introduced

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<sup>30</sup> The Jew was identified as the main obstacle on the road of national regeneration: 'The Jew was unacceptable not only because he was a "foreigner" with a different religion; he was identified with all the "vices": political (democracy, liberalism), social (corruption, social inequality, poverty), moral and cultural (cosmopolitanism, poisonous foreign influences) and spiritual (rationalism, individualism, Marxism)' (Volovici 1991: 139).

<sup>31</sup> The leader of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, Codreanu, expressed the messianic character of the movement in his *Pentru legionari* (For the Legionaries): '... the leader is not anymore a 'master', a 'dictator' that does what he wants and rules according to his own will: he becomes the expression, the incarnation of this invisible spiritual state, the symbol of this enlightened condition that underpins the entire national community. And thus the leader does not do what he wants, but what he needs to do. His action is not based on individual interests or on those of the present national community, but on the interests of the eternal Ancestry, of the eternal nation, from which the conscience of the peoples stems. In the sense of those latter interests - and only in the sense of these - individual interests as well as collective ones will reach their maximum level of satisfaction and conciliation' (translated from Italian) (Codreanu 1973: 268).

<sup>32</sup> In their early years, Hungarian fascists had a similar non-developmental attitude, but turned to the promotion of industrialisation in the mid-1930s (Gregor 2000: 176).

false, artificial concepts into Romanian society. Mircea Vulcănescu (a member of the young generation) divided Romania in an urban and a rural society, the first serving the interests of foreigners, whereas the latter represented the unchanged, traditional, true Romanian character (Ioanid 1990: 149-50). In contrast to the tendency of capitalism to create tensions between social classes, neo-nationalism aimed at going beyond class differences by promoting national unity and harmony. Mihail Manoilescu, an economist and a rather important political figure in inter-war Romania, provided the intellectual legitimation of the fascist state in his theory of corporatism. This state would be the only true expression of 'national economic solidarity' and instead of a horizontal division of society into different social classes corporatism would be a 'vertical formation, subject to the supreme objectives of the nation, tending to national solidarity, to universalism' (Manoilescu, cited in: Ioanid 1990: 90).

The fascist turn inwards called upon various modes of legitimation. The derived mode of legitimation of the liberal project - which was in the end a legitimation based on experiences of other societies - was rejected in favour of a legitimation based on Romanian national traditions, or 'quasi-mystical self-imitation' (Antohei 2000: xvi, introduction to Liiceanu). As Romanian society was in substance different from the Western ones, it was incompatible with Western forms. Nae Ionescu hinted at this in the twenties:

Everything in this world is linked together and forms a system. And politics cannot deviate from this rule. Thus... the constitutional parliamentary regime is a correlate of the Protestant mentality, of the individualistic-democratic, rationalistic and scientific mind-set, and of the capitalist-bourgeois economic formula erected on a preponderately commercial and industrial base (Ionescu, cited in: Ricketts 1988: 102-3).

The emphasis on traditional Romanian society was complemented by an effective claim to historical continuity in the form of local customs and habits. This traditional legitimation was based on an autochthonist rereading of history, i.e. instead of tracing the history of the Romanian people back to the Romans, as done by the liberals, Romanian roots were found in the people of Dacia, a native people, thereby excluding Western European origins (see fn 20). The enduring cultural inferiority complex towards the advanced West felt by many Romanians, despite the generous territorial provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, was convincingly dealt with by calling for a 'national regeneration'. The intense consciousness of the country's backwardness<sup>33</sup> could thus be countered through a radical move. In other words, a different way of realising the unrealised dream was 'to drop out of "competition" with the West and choose the alternative of a Balkan, patriarchal model in the autochthonous tradition' (Volovici 1991: 81). Such an alternative route to modernisation could hardly be imagined without a

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<sup>33</sup> Emil Cioran, member of the New Generation, expressed this backwardness as the 'vanity of a man born within a small culture is forever wounded' (Cioran, mentioned in Tismăneanu 1996: 390).

strong, charismatic leader who would be able to mobilise the Romanians behind the absolute goal of national regeneration, as a counterpart to Western pluralism and democracy. National regeneration was to be based on orthodox religion and an 'orthodox ethnic state' (Volovici 1991: 81), elements which provided for a unique Romanian pathway.<sup>34</sup> Here one can identify various modes of legitimation that ran directly counter to the legitimacy of the liberal project. The principal mode of legitimation of the fascist project was the charismatic one: charismatic legitimation was to replace the Western legal-rational legitimacy as the figure of the leader became the ultimate expression of a strong state, the 'eternal' national spirit and community (see Codreanu 1973: 268). Furthermore, as the individualism and the rational-procedural spirit of the Western model were detested, its overall legitimacy was denied (one could speak here of negative legitimation). Western rationalism, pluralism and its ruinous consequences for national unity were to be countered by the absolute goals of national community and social harmony, supreme values that required faith instead of rational calculation.<sup>35</sup>

### *Social goals and institutions*

The influence of the fascist project remained mostly confined to that of a critique of the existing order and an effective portrayal of liberalism's comprehensive crisis. The main social goal that was derived from its politico-philosophical tenets (irrationalism, collectivism, ethnocentrism, traditionalism and orthodox religion) alluded to the necessity of an 'ethnocratic corporate state', embodying the principles of an ethnic homogeneous community, rural values, and native political rule. The establishment of such a state pointed more than anything else to the purification of the nation and was to replace the rational structures (the parliament, the constitution) of the democratic state. The importance of the seizure of state power was acknowledged by the fascists, as it would enable them to overcome the opposition, to oppose to Westernisation and foreign elements, and to return to traditional forms of life (Ioanid 1990: 85). The actual institutionalisation of these ideas was hardly achievable in the short period that fascists actually shared political power (from September 1940 until January 1941). In the late 1930s, one could find tendencies towards authoritarianism in the political centre, but these were often conservative reactions against the revolutionary threat of the fascists.<sup>36</sup> Apart from the realities of power politics

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<sup>34</sup> As Totok aptly remarks: '[o]nly through the creation of unique cultural values would a small people be able to assert itself, to succeed in the world, and to find recognition' (Totok 1995: 925).

<sup>35</sup> A famous part of Codreanu's 'program' were its four rules of conduct: faith in god, faith in the mission, reciprocal love, and chanting together (Codreanu 1973: 240-1).

<sup>36</sup> In the right-wing government of 1937-38, led by Octavian Goga, an anti-semitic program was implemented by the 'old nationalist' Cuza (Volovici 1991: 116). The Guardists, who had been very successful in the elections were not allowed to govern and were actually persecuted

that prevented the fascist movement from implementing its ideas, the immanence of fascist ideology actually defied the logics of institutionalisation and political action. Codreanu condemned political programs as instruments of the established political classes, and regarded national salvation as not so much dependent on new programs, but on new men (Codreanu 1973: 244). In a similar manner, Moța criticised the corporatist ideas of Manoilescu, not because they were not compatible with the fascist ideology, but because they merely represented technical instruments for national regeneration, whereas in reality Romania needed 'ethnic and spiritual purification' of the nation (Moța 1978: 217). Nevertheless, it seems that from 1938 onwards (after the death of Codreanu), the fascist ideology took on 'more of the developmental features of paradigmatic Fascism' (Gregor 2000: 177-8).

### **The liberal and fascist roads to modernity: commonalities and discontinuities**

Until the middle of the twentieth century, modernity had two faces in Romania. My intention in this paper has been to analyse these two major interpretations of modernity in Romania, with reference to their European counterparts. In Romania, the fascist critique reproached the liberal project primarily for one reason: it did not protect the essential features and aspirations of the nation. Through the prism of 'Romanianess' all things foreign were rejected as being antithetical to the authentic Romanian nature. From such a critique the fascists derived their own interpretation of a modern social order based on the self-imitation of a utopian past. The main pillars of this order were the traditional Romanian peasant and his community, orthodox Christianity and ethnic purity, and the role of the 'căpitan' and his élite. Essentially, the fascists continued a project of national unification and promotion of the native population as started by the liberals, but they envisioned radically different means to achieve these goals. This renewed confrontation of the national question by the fascists was meant to (re-) integrate an increasingly politically and economically marginalised native peasantry into a national project of modernisation, while at the same time reflecting the awkward social situation the leading intellectuals found themselves in.<sup>37</sup> The fascists could justify such a move by invoking a different reading of

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by the Goga government. In early 1938, Carol II installed a royal dictatorship, apparently to stave off the imminent danger of a fascist coup, after the 1937 elections had demonstrated a decisive turn to the right of the electorate (Hitchins 1994: 418-9; Georgescu 1991: 197). Under Carol's dictatorship a large-scale persecution of the Iron Guard began, resulting in the arrest and execution of its leaders, among which Codreanu.

<sup>37</sup> A parallel can be drawn here between the social positions of the 19th century revolutionaries and the fascists of the 1920s. Whereas the former had been designated as the 'proletariat of the pen' (Ștefan Zeletin), the latter were often referred to as the 'intellectual proletariat'; both were engaged in intellectual activities and saw their chances of social mobility blocked. Following Karl Mannheim, we might suggest that generally a moment of crisis comes to the fore when the members of a society are subject to horizontal as well as vertical mobility, i.e., 'rapid movement between strata in the sense of social ascent and descent', creating instability and

history, in which the Western/foreign element was denied, by calling for 'national regeneration' in a historical moment of widespread change and uncertainty, and by invoking the absolute value and authenticity of the traditional community.

Despite the anti-modern aspects of fascism, it is essential to point out the modern elements it had in common with the liberal project. What becomes important here is the nature of contention that informed both projects. Both provided a crisis narrative of the existing order by criticising the subordination of the native population and invoking self-rule instead. In the case of liberalism the foreign, aristocratic rulers were portrayed as oppressing the Romanian nation, in the case of fascism the liberal rulers were depicted as endangering the authentic nation. These critiques led to radically opposed interpretations of modern society, one based on emulation of the West, the other on emulation of the self. At the same time, both interpretations were strongly informed by the *Zeitgeist*, showing the importance of extraneous experiences for the empowerment of local élites in a country such as Romania. The political projects had recourse to analogous ways of invoking meaning and legitimacy for their proposed political power. History and continuity were to underpin arguments for self-rule as well as providing hints for the orientation of the modernisation project. In political terms, both élites claimed a superior capacity to identify the 'right' orientation, the liberals by identifying a superior Western model, the fascists by intimately connecting with traditional values and customs. To conclude, ultimately it was in the identified means and their moral implications that the political projects differed, not in their end-goal, national liberation.

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uncertainty in the ways individuals relate to the world, a phenomenon particularly relevant for intellectuals (Mannheim 1936: 6).

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