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Books

*The Thought of the Shadow: Feminist Approaches in Contemporary
Philosophy.* Bucharest: Ed. Alternative, 1995

Convenio: On Nature, Women and Morals. Bucharest: Ed. Alternative, 1996

The Retro Society. Bucharest: Ed. Trei, 1999

Philosophy Lessons. Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990

Philosophy, Happiness, Justice and God. Bucharest: Ed. All, 1999

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Sources of Contemporary Romanian Conservatism¹

Foreword

In contemporary Romania, no individual, political party or association is willing to assume the label “conservative”. Whenever I try to classify a political discourse or orientation, I keep facing the same question: conservative to what? A straight answer eludes me. The conservative label encompasses both open aspects of conservatism – legitimating the preservation of the convenient status quo from the past – as well as some aspects rooted in the fear of change – a crypto-conservative fear, the displays of conservatism versus standards of advanced liberal democracies, and subsequently, ideologies that, in spite of proposing emancipating projects, harbor exclusion or social marginalization of certain categories of people.

The fear of left-wing extremism (Communism) and right-wing extremism (nationalism or secessionism) has produced a cocktail of covert conservatisms in Romanian politics and society.

Reparative justice and resentment; poverty (for left-wing conservatism), and elitism (for right-wing conservatism) account for many grounds of the Romanian conservatism.

I. Reparative Justice and Resentment – Roots of Romanian Conservatism

1. Cynicism, Resentment, Grudges, and Forgiveness

Looking for the guilty is still a time-consuming, inefficient “pastime” of the Romanian post-totalitarian society. Under a totalitarian regime, duplicity and complicity are common survival strategies.² Individual seclusion (through cultural resistance) or political dissidence is not a common option. Totalitarian regimes do not allow even embryonic civil societies³. Dissidents are their own representatives, risking only their own

lives and liberties, singular contrasts against an anonymous faceless world of fear manifested in daily duplicity, survival, complicity, or refuge in the "ivory tower".

Who is to blame for the capital evils of a regime: violation of fundamental rights to life, liberty, propriety, and association? According to M. Walzer, the responsibility is to be measured by the criterion of liberty and information.⁴ According to this measure, the guilty of the Romanian totalitarian regime are easy to identify: for the 70's and 80's, the Communist nomenclature and political police; for the 50's the torturers of Communist jails. Their guilt is moral and political: they agreed to be part (as deciders or paid employers) of institutions that violate fundamental human rights. At the individual level, the guilt can also be juridical.

Guilt, along with the obsessive sterile debates emerging from it, has produced a series of counter-productive Manichaeism throughout the society. In the first stage, the power was taken by those who wrapped the guilty in a veil of ignorance, solving the problem through sharing the responsibility equally: we all are to blame – except for those who happened to be members of the Executive Politic Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. Nobody, therefore, is to blame. At the same time, a huge undertaking to expose the guilty was launched, an expression of a discursively consumed reparative spirit, in a rather suppressed and unproductive performance. The public opinion had to be assured that mistakes should ultimately be paid politically, morally, or under the Criminal Code. The groups and factions that adopted this type of discourse inclined towards the symbolic monopolization of the ethical concern of politics. Now, in the second stage, when two years have passed and the illusion of reintegrating ethics into the political realm⁵ has slowly died out, it seems that we have adopted a realpolitik formula. The world is again divided into two factions: the politicians, facing practical problems (the daily management of crisis) and the civil society (a tendency illustrated especially through the discursive claims of *Civic Alliance* and *The Association of the Former Political Prisoners*), which has monopolized the moral position. Both do not seem to understand the intersection between morality and politics, either confounding them in a fundamentalist way or conceiving them hopelessly divorced.

The cynicism of the political class (with no productive consequences) is generated and generates itself as the "cynical citizen",⁶ i.e. the citizen who believes that the government is always in debt to him/her, therefore s/he has the right to keep asking for a piece of public money. The two

parts (the cynical governors and the cynical citizens) are similar in respect to the exoneration of responsibility. The former make promises to win votes, the latter ask for unrealistic shares. Both attitudes nourish cynical conservatism, based on a hedonistic survival: the present moment is the only certain one (politically and economically), one cannot control the future. The individual must take advantage of the present. Political altruism is usually justified through restorative actions (past-oriented) or present-oriented actions, the latter represent in fact a major capitulation under the pressure of the moment.

Under crisis, a responsible government has to undertake drastic options, taking all the chances involved by the moral dilemma: a future good may be rooted in a present evil. This is a minimum prerequisite of rational justice and forgiveness.⁷ If the rulers know they will not be forgiven for the present evil, they are not willing to take the chance of the drastic choices confining themselves to making short-term decisions meant to ensure survival not to induce changes. Sometimes forgiveness is conceived as a Christian command, generating a range of undesirable ends: shortchanging the law, the absence of the reparative justice. Sometimes forgiveness is equal to violating citizenship rights, to the lack of civic self-respect, thus generating passivity, indifferentism, and civic minimalism.⁸ Some political theorists, Hannah Arendt for example, argue that this concept and the attitude emerging from it do not belong to the political realm:

[they] always been deemed unrealistic and inadmissible in the public realm.⁹

The argument is that forgiveness emerging from love, along with feelings, shall not be located in politics. This liberally coherent image does not apply to many societies, especially to the Romanian one, where votes were based on emotions and resentment, as the parties' electoral platforms¹⁰ were quite similarly populist.

Romanians have not punished their rulers in courts of justice (we have not introduced a law of lustration; the law of civil servants or of ministerial responsibility were promulgated just last year) but through elections, voting them out of office, most often for resentful reasons. M. Oakeshott's arguments could apply very well here:¹¹ resentment is unhealthy, corroding trust and the moral power of forgiveness; formally declared forgiveness (when resentment is still active) has no value.¹² He suggests

in fact that a distinction should be made between forgiveness and resentment. One should forgive out of political calculation. The concept of political forgiveness¹³ should be primarily understood in the following terms: the act of forgiveness should recover a broken relationship. Victims are aware of the transgressions, but decide to overcome them. This is not to say that the victims obliterate their feelings, or that the transgressions were compensated for, neither have the citizens-victims developed amnesia. This does mean that a political relationship could be restored, as being the prisoner of a past transgression is counter-productive. Victims (here the political category affected by a bad policy) are not necessarily passive or civically diminished. On the contrary, the act of forgiveness may enhance their value and interests. The victims set the timing and the contents of the restored relationship.

No governor may appeal to the right of being forgiven, as such a right does not exist.¹⁴ One cannot say we have a perfect moral obligation to forgive, as one can say we have a perfect moral obligation not to infringe on the rights of others. One can say that under certain circumstances it is more convenient to forgive. This is more an imperfect moral obligation derived from the consequences the forgiveness could induce.

We often judge the immorality of politicians in terms of their choosing (or being compelled to choose) the “dirty hands” politics¹⁵ (i.e. to do a present evil in the name of a future good), of their using citizens as mere instruments of their own ends. A dictatorial regime is the extreme form of political immorality. But when dealing with such a regime (as Wlatzer puts it), the population, not being informed and free, is not entirely responsible. This is not the case for democracies, where citizens, not just the state actors are responsible (in the same author’s opinion), although the highest responsibility belongs to the best informed and to those who keep the situation under control.¹⁶

When those governing fail, it is citizens’ democratic right to exert pressures: to lobby, to protest, and to be civically disobedient.¹⁷ It is very interesting to note that for us the pressures, protests, civic disobedience have often caused obstruction of the political decisions preventing governments to perform the “drastic choices” in a crisis situation. For the Romanian society, the apparent label of this drastic choice is simply: the Reform (economic, social, institutional, etc.). Instead of protesting against the painful reforms carried out by those governing, making evil hoping to offer at least an outline of good (the classical situation), our protest is merely preventive. *The preventive protest is the protest in which governors*

are threatened with not being forgiven, even before acting. All this civic cynicism plays a key role in Romanian society: the procedural justice is hard to implement, institutions are hard to reform. Instead of promoting coherent projects of social change, we confine ourselves to preserving the present status quo (even if it is damaging to most society members).

2. Reparative Justice and Restorative Justice

For many and (sometimes) paradoxical categories, it has been a post-totalitarian trend to consider themselves victims and claim compensations (reparative justice). Sometimes the government itself proposes nobody-asked-for-reparations. It sold the state apartments for a modicum of the value to the tenants, it repaid the so-called “social parts” (pseudo-shares in state enterprises), it returned the land to the small landowners. Overlooking the “merit” issue, the latter caused grave social problems: the land was returned to many town-living people not interested in using it, but not to other non-owner categories who had been working in agriculture after collectivization, especially the Roma population.

Following this trend for reparative justice in the post-totalitarian society (for the working class but non-owner people), restorative justice claims appeared: after the 1996 elections the government nationalized forests, houses and enterprises expropriated in the inter-war period. In the end, this strategy – although intended to be morally valuable as emerging from respectable deontological principles, that is, to compensate or restore the rights of victims of injustice – ended with unwanted consequences leading to another social problem: injustice for the young generation and the consuming of the future with restorative political strategies, (only partially accomplished, to date).

On the grounds of only reparative justice (restorative justice being included here), every category considers that it is entitled to compensations for being victims of the totalitarian regime. The reparative policies gradually turned into absurd claims, such as being exempt from paying institutional and civil penalties and fines. This is a tendency to establish an unwritten right not to pay for our faults (especially those not covered by the Criminal Code). It is a journey from being asked to forgive (an imperfect obligation) to the pressure of being forgiven (the “costless society” syndrome).

Overly-blamed governments create anxious rulers. Under normal evolutionary circumstances over-blaming does not bear catastrophic consequences for the development of the society, as the choices are most

often questionable, but not tragic or dramatic at least.¹⁸ However, under crisis circumstances, anxious governments, for fear of culpability and preventive threatening can lead the society into sheer catastrophe: economic bankruptcy, anomie, anarchy, and the lack of civil rights. This is a typical scenario when a government tries to reconstruct the authority after the disappearance of authoritarianism. Iliescu's regime, in both formulae, was attacked for its lack of moral authority. Those persons in high positions were not really entitled to oversee the transition from Communism (to which design they contributed) to democratic capitalism. The period from 1996 to the present (1999) has induced a lower anxiety. It is the conservative left now who plays the blaming role, namely, in statistic terms, the majority of the population affected by dis-industrialization, and unemployment.

II. The Fear of Projects as a Fear of Ideologies

During the period of 1990-1996, there were some attempts to build up an official ideological discourse: democratic socialism, social democracy. I consider them (largely) democratic but conservative ideologies. Both were labeled "original democracy", subsequently non-democracy, and its promoters, crypto-communists. Many publicly influential persons treated the ideology itself as a synonym for Communist ideology, in the same manner as secular morality (specific to the secularized heterogeneous societies of modern times) became the synonym for the atheist-communist morality. The proposed ideologies were sometimes considered equal to attempts to reestablish the Communism. The secular-ethic alternatives were rejected as being attacks on the unique real morality: the religious one. Both extremes induced major downfalls: the ideological option (as a set of beliefs in the interests and the justice of a particular category) was discredited, the government was over-blamed or amorality became commonplace in political and public life. In all cases lack of the undertaken ideology, as well as lack of morality in public life, carried over to a lack of sustainable projects for the future and public policies and to institutional collapse.

The fear of left-wing conservatism was counteracted by what is today in western thought right-wing conservatism: a pragmatically oriented libertarianism with two major center obsessions: privatization and non-interventionism. Practically, besides populism and nationalism,¹⁹ the

Romanian post-Communist political offer oscillated mainly between two forms of conservatism: a) The left-wing one, which proposed the organic economic growth of a market-centered economy but which originated in a communist economy, decentralization emanating from centralism, and “collectivist” democracy (i.e. not focused on individual) which grew out of totalitarianism; b) The right-wing conservatism with many faces: traditionalist, paternalist, liberal and even with a “new right” bias.²⁰ The Romanian liberal conservatism is the most interesting form, being in fact an atypical case, too. It is reputed to be an avant-garde of the political avant-garde within the given referential system, with a progressive hyper-reforming orientation. The Romanian forms cannot be approached theoretically in the way that Western forms can. From the point of view of Western doctrines, the Romanian conservatism is rather a crypto-conservatism. It is worthwhile mentioning that each of these orientations (except the nationalist ones) avoids undertaking themselves as ideologies.

In certain intellectual and political environments, liberalism is taken as an epistemology or a purely political pragmatism, the only way of salvation, the unique alternative to Communism. It becomes therefore a reverse of ideology, a theoretical device for social research, an expression of the actions of society; sometimes it is understood as politics itself. Ideologies are positioned elsewhere with different labels, such as communist, socialist, ecologist, feminist approaches.²¹

The family of those rejecting ideologies consists of a large number of persons, not necessarily contemporary to the modern politics. Moreover, its members do not belong to the same political orientation. Engels, for example argues that ideology is a “phony conscience of reality”.²² For M. Oakeshott it is a reductive simplification of social reality,²³ and for Dahrendorf, Arendt, and Popper ideology is a limited and intolerant perspective (in their view the label applies only to the totalitarian, unique, anti-pluralist ideologies: fascism and Communism,²⁴ sheer political monism). Ideologies are resentful and dangerous, in the happiest case they are impractical political ideals. Moreover, in the 1960s the “death (or end) of ideology”²⁵ was celebrated. Lipset argues that:

This very triumph of democratic social revolution of the West ends domestic politics for those intellectuals who must have ideologies or utopias to motivate them to political action. (Lipset, op. cit., p. 20)

Once liberal democracy is instituted and the prosperity of post-industrial nations achieved, ideologies become superfluous. They are useful only for immature societies at the dawn of their development. For the Western societies, they have already become meaningless.

Bell and Lipset's type of arguments are now visibly upset by the Western theory and experience. If they are right, applying their stands to Romanian society we are facing the neat justification of the need of ideology: an ideology assumed by publicly influential persons so that they could attract the other members of the society to their way of thinking, to help them focus on their appropriate ends. Romania is neither a mature democracy, nor a prosperous society, not only a post-industrial, but increasingly dramatic des-industrialized country.²⁶ How could we argue (following the criteria of des-ideologization theoreticians) the rejection of the need of ideology in such a society?

The basic arguments can be found in the USA of the Cold War period: ideologies are attacks on individualism and pluralism, subsequently to liberal democracy. The most famous ideologies (fascism and Communism) produced the worst disasters: labor camps, pogroms and gulags, and genocide. They suspended the individual conscience creating the mass person, either victim of fascism or collectivism. The differences among people became homogeneous equalities, without any individual value. In our case they created the "unique working people", namely an anonymous mass with a broken will that could be manipulated. The fear of ideology reflects mainly a fear of manipulation, a manipulation that can generate, under the best circumstances, the decay of community cohesion, to the "poison of refined splits"²⁷ especially if ideology has theoretical claims.

Such an approach bears two major confusions: a) generally, a confusion among ideologies, particularly a confusion among totalitarian ideologies;²⁸ b) a confusion between ideologies and "truth" (certain forms of conservatism and libertarian liberalism are blamed for this). The totalitarian ideologies concur with closed societies. They become that particular society's "universal truths", usually considered the unique expression of general interest. In open societies, ideologies represent perspective views: liberalism, social democracy, ecology, feminism, and Christian-democracy even conservatism.²⁹

One cannot deny that ideologies are resentful, even demonic in some respects (every one is inimical to something). Resentment and demonization can be dangerous when leading to exclusions, segregation

and sometimes to genocide. The other ideologies do not assume universal Messianism. They have specific purposes: to help a group of people formulating their interests within that particular group and against different or opposed groups, to try to institute them in social projects and practices. Ideologies have multiple functions: to describe reality, to prescribe the good and the justice for the category they represent, to legitimize social practices and to integrate persons into a coherent set of values.³⁰

Conservatism is the ideology of the anti-ideology. As ideology tends to be seen in projective-abstract terms, the conservative denies belonging to a specific ideology, claiming they are connected with experience, with the concrete reality. Many conservatives presented themselves as anti-intellectualists.³¹ Some conservatives agree that their orientation is a theory not an ideology (Russell Kirk: "Conservatism is neither a political system, nor an ideology, it is the negation of ideology"³²).

Oakeshott's arguments are stronger as his debate argues against rationalism in politics, for fear it may bring "social engineering".³³ In fact, the 20th century experienced two such engineering: fascism and Communism. Both of them were ideologies and regimes that programmed and practiced even changes in human nature. Undoubtedly, intellectuals tend to conceive of utopias, an abstract orders to be imposed upon the world as practical projects, a feature, which Oakeshott considers to be unnatural and destructive.³⁴ Natural is nothing but tradition understood as a living and organically changing social practice, it is a vital but non-teleological growth of society, which helps people learn how to fend for themselves during their lifetime.³⁵ Without this "natural" state, ideology, whichever form it may take, is nothing but a distorted image that tends to pull down the bridges connecting to this real state, understood as social practice. The social practices, the institutions that educate us, the laws (divine, natural, or economical) make up together an "extra-mundane order" for which any plan of social change is futile.

In the democratic societies, conservatism is well accounted for and legitimated. Changes occur regardless of governments; they do not represent major lapses in economic growth or in democracy. In my view, taking over and legitimating these ideas into non-modern societies is dangerous. Present Romania is a "survival society", paralyzed by the fear for tomorrow. This immobilization concurs with the scarcity and isolation of modernization projects, even with their rejection as dangerous projects of "social engineering". Changes are only formally endorsed; there are mainly changes in the normative realm, often imposed by foreign pressures. A

hyper-localist discourse (like ours), as well as the idea of having to wait for a change to occur in our mentality, are both consistent with considering, for example, that individual rights and liberties are premature in such a country, being dangerous exotic commodities.

According to Ted Honderich,³⁶ selfishness is the vice of conservatism, as envy is the vice of anarchic radicalism. The issue is not that the conservatives are selfish (as he argues), but they are nothing more than that: “selfishness is the rationale of politics and they have no other rationale”.³⁷ Conservatives are not hostile to changes in general, but to changes that might affect their own interests, they do not oppose any theory or ideology, but the particular ones that do not serve their interests.³⁸ Banners, even if not recognized as such, are just plain banners. “Order”, “continuity”, “stability” concur with rejecting the core ideas of liberal rationality: individuality, responsible power, liberty. Therefore, the extant authority is harmed in the name of a chimera upset by practical knowledge. People cannot ameliorate³⁹ themselves; they remain the prisoners of their own mentality.

East European countries in general, Romania in particular, are vividly experiencing a cocktail of conservatisms, with the left-wing one most manifest. It represents the *institutionalized routine*; the temptations of liberal breaks are happily resisted. A possible reason is that the above-mentioned tentative changes are performed *via* other forms of conservatism: the paternalist-traditionalist, the liberal, the Romanian new right, and the rightist elitism. The conservative character of these ideologies is not obvious in relation to the given reality, a reality that preserves the economic statism and operates with state-oriented (instead of citizen-oriented) structures. Moreover, one could hardly argue that the institutions themselves are so powerful as to produce the resistance to a changing establishment.

III. The Crypto-Conservatism

In the Romanian political arena, organicism is often to be found in the traditionalist left-wing orientation, paternalism in Christian-democratic orientation, while liberal conservatism is a typical for the progressive-intellectual discourse. The Romanian “new-right” is a mixture of libertarianism spiced with family and religious values, as well as reliance on authoritative institutions.⁴⁰ If we heed just two tendencies (the conservative and the modernizing), we face the following situation: the

Romanian liberal conservatives, and those of the new right, are considered to be progressive-modernizers in the East-European reference system. Embracing such a large number of forms, the conservatism is chameleonically hiding among other ideologies, or even despising them. But, as Anthony Quinton points out,⁴¹ there is a family pattern common to all types of conservatisms, consisting of three major features:

1) *Traditionalism*, construed as attachment to familiar institutions, usually hostile to radical changes; 2) *skepticism*, understood as an intellectual instrument used by conservatives to defend the idea of their belonging to any ideology, as well as an instrument of illegitimizing the utility of any social project; 3) the idea that there is no *universal human nature*, delegitimizing thus the various ideological formulae, such as: “natural rights”, “social contract”, and “universal human rights”.

Further on I will deal with the issues of tradition and change⁴². For us, there is now the beginning of a dilemma. What does it mean to be attached to traditional institution? Which are those institutions the attachment converges upon? Practically, in December 1989 the institution of states blew up.

Conservatism does not reject change at any price; on the contrary, there are some reformative components within conservatism. Radical change is seen as altering the fundamentals, while reform is semantically more acceptable. It is an assurance that the status quo is not fundamentally undermined for those persons who are really significant in social decision-making.⁴³ Consequently, radical change is figured as an end of the familiar and therefore a breach of deep attachments:⁴⁴ “The direction of reforms cannot be specified before the event has been produced”.⁴⁵ In Romania, the term itself has acquired mythical connotations. Reform is becoming an aim in itself and citizens the sheer means to achieve it. When reform measures are taken, the resistance is launched in many forms: tacit or overt, moderate or violent.

We need familiar institutions, especially religious or state ones. The religious institutions comfort us when we are afraid of death, they guarantee us that morality does not disappear in the society.⁴⁶ That is why religion has to be linked and protected by state. The will for private-ownership is stronger than the will for liberty, at least if we live in a civilized society.⁴⁷ Those changes that do not fundamentally perturb our identity are necessary.⁴⁸ Under these circumstances, conservatism’s role is to soften the excessively radical elements, to bring the right-wing closer to the left-wing, and vice versa. Its chameleonic character makes it *oscillate*

(contextually, though) between being collectivist in a statist society and being libertarian in a liberal society.

I will offer now a brief typology of Romanian conservatisms, starting from A. Vincent's classification:⁴⁹

- A) Traditionalist conservatism;
 - B) Utopian-romantic conservatism;
 - C) Paternalist conservatism;
 - D) Liberal conservatism;
 - E) New right conservatism and elitism.
-
- A) The **traditionalist conservatism**, focusing on traditions, customs, traditional ways of living, trying to legitimize "naturalness" and perennality. Hierarchy and authority originate from experience, guaranteeing the organicity of the community, as human species is naturally inclined to obey authority,⁵⁰ including here the authority which frees us from being afraid of freedom and being afraid of administering our own freedom. As "Communist tradition" (acting as the sole experience common to most Romanians) has been delegitimized, its place was successfully taken over by the religious tradition.
 - B) The **utopian-romantic conservatism** is maintained by nostalgic past-addicted persons, longing for the golden age's myths, with each category placing them wherever convenient, trying to idealize the past sequence considered an origo-reference point.⁵¹ In our case, for example, this conservatism is usually affiliated with the myths of *voievods'* and legendary outlaws' glory,⁵² promoted by various nationalist orientations.
 - C) The **paternalist conservatism** is supported by various forms of state dirigisme. The government should be benevolent (although elitist) toward its citizens, taken for semi-infantile persons. This type of conservatism features also elements of an assistentialist state (i.e. for Romania a state of minimal but generalized charity), which comforts the poor and encourages (in principle) an illiberal democracy, centered more towards the economic realm than the political one. It can also feature two faces: the right one (enhancing the market) and the left

one (a certain centralization or some forms of decentralization, carried out though in “painless” steps. As Al. Duțu points out:

In fact, nowadays the “conservatives” are those who want to maintain the old institutional structures in order to preserve their privileges, conservatives are those who declare that the “bourgeois-landlord” property cannot be reconstituted after forty years of Communism, or those who submit petitions to the European Council whenever the old Securitate’s people are removed from office.⁵³

This is the classic defense of the haves against the haves not. But Duțu also gives us a hint of the trans-historical meaning of conservatism: conservatism is the display of the attachment for a set of values that does not change with the political regime.⁵⁴

Although, on different political stands, the Romanian Social Democracy Party (RSDP) and the National Peasant-Christian-Democratic Party (NPCDP) are now the most representative political orientations related to traditional-paternalist conservatism, with a collectivist bias (RSDP) and respectively a liberal one (NPCDP). Each of them carries also ideological nostalgia for the type of justice that suits them best (populist-reparative, and restorative justice). Both of them share the same nostalgia for a golden age (the former for the open and “enlightened” Communism of the 1970s, the latter for the prosperous capitalism of the interwar period.

D) The **liberal conservatism’s** major feature is anti-totalitarianism. It declares war to every form of socialism, social-liberalism (the latter is under attack whenever it accepts affirmative policies or approves public money for equal opportunity policies). L. Von Mises and Fr. Hayek’s theoretical works represent the catechism of the liberal conservative. Critics have nevertheless detected crypto-conservative elements.⁵⁵ Hayek does not believe in rational projects, but in equilibrium and the natural evolution of the social order, in natural justice. This order has no common point with human design; it represents a dynamic equilibrium. Progress is a cumulative growth:

what is most urgently needed in most parts of the world is a thorough sweeping-away of the obstacles to free growth, obstacles that mainly emanated from the socialists.

The market is the supreme mechanism for control and self-adjustment. The rule of law is necessary for supporting the exercise of traditional liberties. Any idea conveying to planned use of ration with a view to social progress (coming either from liberals or socialists), any universalization of knowledge instead of socially localizing it, is contrary to the libertarian stand.

The supporters of this orientation manifest an unconditional enthusiasm for free market, state minimalism, decreased taxes. They are openly anti-bureaucracy, anti-plannification, anti-assistive policies, conceiving there is no alternative to a free market, as the latter rules over any offer and demand. Subsequently the solution rests in reducing the state assistance, the taxes, state normative intervention in citizens' life,⁵⁶ privatizing anything, negative liberty, defending person's rights, the rule of law (without preferential policies or positive discriminations). One can hardly label Romanian liberal conservatism under present circumstances. It seems to be a social project, but rather a negating one; it is anti-dirigisme, anti-interventionism, anti-equal opportunities, anti-affirmative as far as minority and marginal groups are concerned. The open question is nevertheless, if in a society like the Romanian one, state minimalism and non-interventionism is really opportune when the reign of planned fatalism has just been dismantled. Hayek's skepticism, commuted into the Romanian society may very well turn into a dangerous socio-economic anarchy. The liberal conservative (here the libertarians) mix and stir up all socialist orientations in the same ideological pot, taking them all for supporters of state interventionism and control, permanent dangers of nationalization, enemies of every individual's effort to progress.⁵⁷ The libertarians' apparent fear of ideology is in fact a fear that the economy might become subordinated by it, and therefore a divorce between the economic realm and the political one is in everybody's interest.

E) The ***New Right's*** ideological manifestations range from anarchic-capitalism to elitism or populism. Those sustaining the latter contain also ethnocentric and racist features, advocating natural inequality among people, acclaiming traditional family, the sovereignty of a single religion, and patriarchal authority. The Romanian New Right (represented now mostly by the Union of Right-wing Forces) shares only one thing with this type of conservatism, namely, the respect for authoritative institutions, the army and the Church, and some other elites.

IV. Poverty – A Ground for Leftist Conservatism

“Whenever I help people, they call me a saint;
Whenever I ask them why they are poor, they
call me a communist.”

(Archbishop Helda Camara)

1. Collectivist Conservatism

It is very difficult to find references on leftist conservatism in Western bibliography. The usually acknowledged taxonomies distinguish between liberal and collectivist conservatism. The latter is seldom mentioned or studied. How could it be an obsession for the theorists of a reality mastered by the liberal or conservative Right? However, in Eastern Europe’s states separating from the past is carried out through a painful decollectivization process.⁵⁸

The Western collectivism is defined as follows:

The creed which advocates increased state ownership or control of property in the interests of a group, groups or society as a whole, and this to the material benefit of the less advantaged.⁵⁹

The option of the collectivist conservative is a paternalist one, especially in those countries which praise more rural values than the values of the industrial or post-industrial society. Its manifestations are antagonistic to economic growth. It enhances a materialist perspective of a state oriented more to needs than to liberties, promotes assistive legislation and political patronage, being encouraged and instrumented by populist politicians and their propaganda. Such type of conservatism highly praises the intelligentsia and the Church, maintaining the separation between the “political elite” and “popular vote”.⁶⁰ It encourages thus a tyranny of the majority, which is later ignored between elections. It accomplishes interventionist policies, strengthening the state and collectivity. It appeals to Christian tradition, power of the masses, propagates philanthropy and charity, and encourages on the one hand the popular culture, on the other the elitist one. The conservative collectivism tenet is seldom framed in terms of groups of interests, society, minority, but mostly in terms of nation, people, homeland. It encourages not the personal state (centered on individuals and their rights) but the “patriotic state”,⁶¹ just because

individualism and personal rights may destroy the social cohesion, leading to disintegration, atomization, civil war, and federalization.⁶²

The Romanian collectivist conservative is not the product of the welfare policies (as might be the case in the West), but the consequence of different circumstances: half a century of a *parental state* oriented to coercion and needs (instead of liberties), followed by a decade of transition when anti-poverty policies were replaced by unintentional anti-poor policies. The state is no longer "assistive" (i.e. distributing the prosperity more equitably, so as to allow a larger number of persons equal opportunities in competition), but rather a pauper "philanthropic" state, consonant with "Homo conservans".⁶³

It could be said that conservatism is more a state of mind than a political ideology. In order to be conservative, one must have something to conserve: propriety, status, power, and a way of life. Conservatives are therefore likely to be those who have power or wealth or status and who simply want to keep things the way they are. Also, a significant number of people – mostly among rural groups, those who live in small towns, the old, and the uneducated – cannot imagine something different, or are afraid of change.⁶⁴

The preservation of the status-quo and convenient circumstances should produce a Romanian society which is (as far as most groups are concerned) a conservative wasteland, here and there a few prosperous oases. One cannot even speak of a decent living in a society with 30% of population in sheer poverty, and 40% in relative poverty, where small towns are des-industrialized and the population has turned into a rural population. As the status of a person is generally very low, cultural commodities are more and more prohibitive in terms of costs, and adult education is in steady decline,⁶⁵ self-respect and respect for others, is consequently extremely low.

In the conservatives' views, people are secondarily interested in freedom. Their main concern is security. Large-scale disturbances lead to physical anxiety, having unforeseeable consequences. One can adapt spontaneously to good-consequence changes in one's personal life.⁶⁶ Great social projects arouse skepticism in people's minds, likewise any other matter that does not depend on our will, estranging us from the familiarity of our habits. But unfortunately, most Romanians have grown familiar with poverty and survival strategies.⁶⁷

Having monitored public interest in Romania, I could argue that, so far, poverty has been confined to the sociological research realm. The political realm has not incorporated it into efficient public policies, and influential intellectuals have occasionally invoked it, focusing their attention on other rather “Western” issues. Therefore, in my opinion, poverty, the major problem of contemporary Romanian, has become an iceberg-like issue: just a small part of it can be seen in researches, the largest part, the hidden one, pulls down the whole society (including its modernization isles).

Anti-poverty, developmental ideologies and projects are the missing components of the Romanian society, a foreseeable consequence as long as our society has been vacillating between various types of conservatism, mightily blocking emancipatory ideologies and policies, including the liberal ones centered on tax paying citizens. As Camara rightly points out, we are afraid that a poverty-oriented ideology might be suspected of Communism, which has a worse reputation in our world than in Western societies, as we experienced it and yielded a far greater poverty.

Should we apply a pure *individualist principle*, we have to admit that poverty is simply our concern, and nobody has the moral obligation to help us. The moral community stretches as far as our door, district, or state (at the most). We have no moral right to ask for help for our own state, since the developed states have no moral obligation to grant it to us. Should we apply a *collectivist- and victimization-oriented principle* we will assert that we are not solely responsible for our present distress, since Communism, the Iron Curtain, the Soviet dictatorship, and national-communist totalitarianism were not our choice. For some of us, the reform was not a choice, either. We are the victims of an unfair history, and that is why Western states are not exonerated from responsibility. Subsequently, if our collective destiny was conceived also in the West, it is there we can find how to change it. We are not solely to blame for our poverty, world politics is, too.

According to the “realpolitik” principles, every state shall be concerned only with its own interests. It may have relationships with any other state in terms of contracts, mutually lucrative negotiations. The global world belongs to economic, politic, and military interests. Morality is a domestic affair, dealing with inter-human relationships, not with state (home or foreign) politics. But this “realpolitik” does not fit any more with the globalization process in which not only goods and commodities are exchanged.

2. Poverty – A Justice-Oriented Approach

The political ethicists⁶⁸ argue that domestic and worldwide poverty should be approached in terms of justice, rather than charity or benevolence. The latter presuppose a self-sacrifice that cannot be requested as a moral duty, they also appeal to compassion, while justice is a rational duty. Charity mostly covers human relationships, while justice refers to general structures, relationships, institutions, or practices that should exist in a society so as to provide chances for a worthy life.

Caring is primarily forward looking in orientation. Alleviating suffering, meeting basic needs, realizing basic rights, implementing the principle of social justice, these are all aspects of the good we can do. Stopping or rectifying injustices done by others 'on our behalf' is only a part of the good. (N. Dower)⁶⁹

The sheer poverty issue is much less stringent in wealthy states as the number of poor people is low. On the other hand, they do possess enough resources to cope with it, without international assistance.⁷⁰ Peter Singers offers more insights into the moral duty to eradicate an extreme evil – absolute poverty:⁷¹ the favorable position in the issue of the developed countries' moral obligation to help the poor countries is known as *developmentalism*. Moral obligations belong to rulers and individuals, as well. The assistance does not only mean food for the starving, but long-term educational and technical assistance, encouraging political changes so that those particular regimes can implement self-development and self-asserting strategies.

Neo-Malthusians disagree with assistance strategies, explaining the causes: poverty is the source of over-population, helping the poor to survive is helping them to alarmingly increase in number. Thus extreme poverty will affect a larger number of people, and more people will starve to death than if they had not been helped and had not increased in number. Thus, it is more useful to cut down the present aid in order to prevent a future of even greater poverty affecting a larger number of people.⁷² This is a cynical argument and was uttered even in Romania by Mircea Ciumara (the former minister of financial affairs): it is better to let one thousand people die now, than one hundred thousand later.

Neo-Malthusian's solution also advocates the selection of groups or states in need: it is no use providing help for resourceful areas and states, or for states experiencing serious political or cultural problems, as the

assistance will be wasted. Only the states with fewer resources, with less corrupt governments that do not encourage the uncontrolled increasing of population ought to be helped, because the wealthy states themselves would be swamped if they tried to support a number of underdeveloped populations.

But Neo-Malthusians could be answered: many countries grew rich and wealthy absorbing the resources in the colonies (i.e. the wealth accumulated by one category results in the pauperization of another). A population is more likely to control its growth proportionally with its level of culture and civilization ("prosperity is the most efficient contraceptive"). A wealthy nation had also been poor once, and it could thus become a very good example. If assistance is denied on the grounds of population growth, then the family planning, health, education, social and political development have to be sustained through social protection programs, at both state and global level.⁷³

United Nations' standards determined that 0.7% of the industrialized countries' GNP should be allotted for the Public Fund for Development, though, the percentage has since gradually been lowered to a current 0.22%. In East-European transition the numbers of the poor has increased from 40 million to 140 million people.⁷⁴

3. Homo Conservans and Survival Strategies – Poverty in Quantitative Terms

Generalized poverty is continuously growing in Romania. According to the World Bank's and the National Commission for Statistics' reports, 22% of households are under the poverty threshold, while 31% are at the limit.

The most "successful" candidates for poverty are the unemployed (66%) and self-employed people (roughly 50% of the total of this category). Peasants follow with 55.07%. In the latter the poverty issue is more debatable, as peasants still live in a self-consumption economy, where incomes are difficult to quantify and therefore to tax. The peasant household is largely an autarchic structure, partly ensuring the food for family members. As far as they are concerned, the statistical data are deaf and dumb. There is another paradoxical category of poor people, the employers', with 8.68%.⁷⁵

The employed are poorer than the retired (42% to 24%)⁷⁶. The households run by women are less poor than those run by men (in financial terms), but poorer in terms of living conditions and the number of home-appliances.⁷⁷ If the family consists of more than four members, the chances are that this family would be rated among the 80% poorest family of this category.

The production specialized for self-consumption indicates how far we are from modernity, as the tendency to consume from our "own resources" is very high (38% of the poor, 31% of the non-poor, 27% of those with decent incomes). People produce for themselves or receive as gifts what they consume. The very poor people are practically living without getting any earnings from sales. They do not manipulate money, either as earnings or as expenses. Their little money is spent for daily surviving (86%).⁷⁸ Their access to education, medical care, clothing is merely a fiction. 72% of their money is spent on food and only 8% on services. The "richer" ones can afford to spend 40% of their income on food, and 14% on services.⁷⁹

Romania is a nation of house proprietors (90% of dwellings are in private ownership). On an average, we have 15 habitable sq. m., even less if we are unemployed (11.5 sq. m.), or more if we retire (19 sq. m.), but anyway on an average we are more than one-person per room. Only 52% of us enjoy hot water, and 61% do not have central heating. More than half of us do not have bathrooms (especially in the countryside).⁸⁰

Poverty is also responsible for the decreasing birth rate and life expectancy. However, of course, if the former increased, it would produce poverty. In 1997, the number of terminated pregnancies was 47% higher compared with full-term deliveries, and induced abortion was still preferred to any other contraceptive means. There is only one category of women in which the birthrate is higher than in the past: teenage girls. They bear children, rear them in poverty, or abandon them. Life expectancy is now lower in men. The researchers of the phenomenon offer a very interesting gendered explanation: "the shock experienced under the new conditions, generated by the insecurity (of) or loosing the job is much alleviated in women's performing domestic activities, while men face an overwhelmingly quasi-total uselessness".⁸¹ Regardless of the state of the economy, there is always something to do for women! Formally employed or unemployed, Romanian women will never be at a loss for "occupations", while men, lacking the education for partnership in private life but enjoying women's double burden, see themselves useless once removed from the

labor market. More die between 20 and 59, and especially because of stress induced illnesses and diseases: stomach ulcers, cirrheses, alcoholic psychoses, but also suicides, accidents, homicides (i.e. the phenomenon of “excessive death rate”).⁸² Transition has produced psychological disturbances. Spouses get divorced, batter each other, and are more inclined to depression than in the tranquil and stable periods of the “egalitarian” society they used to live in. Comparing themselves with other persons living obviously better is also a source of unhappiness.

Restitution of small land properties induces young people to migrate to villages, but prognoses foresee that soon many agricultural workers will be proletarianized and subsequently rejected from the rural world. Nobody can say yet where these young people will go. Meanwhile, they not only have fewer chances, but also lower vocational competence and lower abilities to adjust to a new vocation.

Sociologists draw attention to the vicious circle of underdevelopment binding us in two ways: 1) we produce for only self-consumption; 2) goods and money circulate mainly on the “black market” or in the underground economy. The former source of underdevelopment, the self-consumption, can be quantified: peasants satisfy 50-55% of their needs out of their own production, the unemployed and retired 40%, even employers yield 10% of their necessities. The certain consequences are: the dissolution of specialized production, a much lower productivity, underdeveloped services and exploitation of women’s work for free. If we add the “informal market” (amounting to 10-50% of the total of exchanges) we will have a more accurate picture of what the future has in store for us: a decreasing competitiveness, a flourishing tax evasion and a dramatic cut in public money. Barter is a preferred trade form, in consonance with the close natural economy of the peasant agriculture. However, for the time being, both sources of underdevelopment seem to “help” us, ensuring subsistence, the daily survival.⁸³

Poverty analysts blame the policy of Romania’s governments, but assert also that *this policy was in perfect accordance with the mandates given by a conservative electorate, exhausted by the prolonged crisis undergone by the socialist system in its last decades*. Governments opted for a smooth and slow reform, sustained by measures of social protection. Social assistance (the charity policies) has always taken up a much larger share of the public money than any development assistance.

It is my opinion that a developmental approach of the individual and group strategies is firmly grounded in several implicit suppositions: you

shall acknowledge you are poor and therefore you experience frustration and humiliation; you shall believe there is a way out of your poverty; you shall try to escape from this condition, together with other persons experiencing similar conditions; there shall be development assistance institutions. Interpreting the statistical data is not a very encouraging experience. Roughly 70% of Romanians consider themselves poor, but for them poverty is a “natural condition”. Being asked how they consider themselves compared to the others, only 10% place themselves in the lower class and nearly 70% in middle or lower middle class. Generally, the population, looking for a self-compensating label for an embarrassing and unfavorable state of existence, wrongly apprehends the meaning of “middle class”. But given the actual reference system, the perception is right.

Poverty leads to people’s exclusion and marginalization. Illiteracy, malnutrition, poor health condition, led to apathy towards society and politics. Poverty stands as a direct menace to democracy. Poverty is the ideal ground for extremism’s birth and growth. A poor society is a society in dissolution, where resort to force unfortunately replaces the dialogue. (Kleininger)⁸⁴

Many citizens are still living on unemployment benefits, which will soon be terminated. Then people will find out that nobody pays the 7% of his/her income to the medical assistance fund, and therefore, it will be useless to go to any public hospital, except those for the destitute. Their children will be given an education, but only general compulsory education, which will provide no opportunity to change the status inherited from their parents. The “laissez-faire” state will become a “night watcher” for those who eventually pay taxes. Nobody will dare to withdraw the franchise from the marginalized and excluded, but it will have no other meaning than displaying that we exert equal rights, usually every four years. The politicians of the nationalist-populist opposition may capitalize on the hostility of the expelled poor, watching the minority’s triumphant march, turning it into a mutiny. A hostility resulting from distress and envy. Envy bears resentfulness. And the conservative considers it fundamental for left-wing policies. Looking from the other side, their approach may be seen differently: enhancing the evil produced by the “envious” left-wing is nothing but an ideology derived from the selfishness of “the haves”, those who have status, power, wealth and want to protect themselves from the “haves nots”, from the losers.

Extremism does not necessarily have to be the option of the poor. It might very well be the option of the “better off” who, under certain circumstances (being afraid of anomie not organized mutiny, of robberies not protest movements) would want a more powerful state, maybe more a police state, to protect their “consecrated right to private property” and freedom of movement. Should it be possible, the taxpayers (the honorable citizens) would want more: not to be disturbed by the “pariah citizens”. The vocationally unqualified persons are preferred for their social vulnerability: they do not dare to claim their rights (many of them do not even know they have them), focusing on concrete strategies to survive. Poverty has developed therefore an anomic structure: no law, no norm, no contract, namely no hope for the rights of the poor to be respected (they are taxpayers, too). The liberal principle “no taxation without participation” has not been internalized yet in the political strategy and practice.

The strategies of social democrats are more realist, though more conservative. In their view, the major strategy for alleviating poverty is to create new jobs (it is worthwhile noting that they do not offer practical solutions on how to create new jobs; they probably wait for the liberals to provide them). But the social exclusion of those who are not involved in a paid occupation is a central issue for social democrats:

Losing a job means not only losing a source of income, but also social exclusion... A person is gradually excluded from all communities: the community of work (as s/he becomes unemployed), the social community, as people show (not necessarily overtly) a certain contempt for the unemployed and the smaller community-the family. (Al. Athanasiu)⁸⁵

4. The Limits of the Sociological Discourse

Poverty has been assigned almost exclusively to sociological research. There is the sociologists’ temptation to approach things from a technical-conservative view, as they refuse to ideologize and politicize their analyses, although a social-democrat option can be traced.

Poverty leads to the deterioration of human abilities valuable for socio-economic development, diminishes social cohesion and solidarity, enhances socio-economic polarization, increases social conflicts,

demoralizes and deteriorates the health condition of a collectivity. Poverty, enhanced polarization, demoralization, and alienation are structural vices of democratic mechanisms. (*Strategia Națională de prevenire și combatere a sărăciei*, PNUD, 1998, p. 30)

The authors of the most important strategic study on this subject did not endeavor to analyze the political roots of poverty and pauperization. Instead, they sorted out mainly social and economic features, dealing with them, as they were politically autonomous. Their preference for impersonal verbal nouns such as “motivation”, “use”, “liberalization”, “mobilization”, etc., yields several unintentional consequences. Firstly, it makes readers feel as if they were not subjects of research. We do admit that research is a national issue, we can even describe it statistically, but this does not imperatively call for public policies. Moreover, there might exist an impression that the problem is settled, as long as there is a sociological discourse on it.

There are some traces of utopia also in considering that fighting and preventing poverty consists mainly in setting up an institutional structure “independent of political will”,⁸⁶ a structure that will allow resources to be better used according to a new perspective. It is at least naïve to claim that political forces will suspend their partisanship for the sake of an a priori consensus, as it is also naïve to build a solution *via* “increasing the feeling of social solidarity” (although authors see it conditioned by the “equitable sharing of the transition costs”, namely by the political will of those in office).

The goals of the strategy suggested by the authors can be described by three imperatives: elimination of the extreme poverty has immediate urgency, blocking the processes generating poverty has medium-term urgency, and “reducing the poverty to an acceptable socio-economic and politic level”⁸⁷ — the long term one.

The proposed strategy of prevention and fighting poverty promotes an active society, grounded in the values of labor, highly stimulating for performance, undertaking the risks and promoting social cohesion, solidarity and responsibility. A society converging on investing in its humane capital, providing at the same time appropriate rewards based on every one’s contribution (*Strategia*, p. 5).

One can hardly apprehend what an active society is. It is also doubtful to answer the question related to labor values. Eventually, why should labor be a value, an aim in itself? We do not even know how this society

could stimulate performance (through competition? or maybe the “socialist contest”?). Neither can we figure out how a society (meant to fight poverty) would appropriately reward each person’s contribution. Maybe if it employs the socialist principle “from everybody in accordance with his/her ability, to everybody in accordance with his/her work”? Or the capitalist principle of rewarding everyone proportionately with his/her contribution to the endeavor’s profit? We do not know either if the authors would consider that living on an annuity, inheritance, profit, lottery gains are moral. We do know if work, solidarity, and responsibility are key solutions to prevent and fight poverty!

The “political principles of preventing and fighting the poverty” seem to emanate a similar cryptic aura. Maybe we could try to find an official or normative document endorsing them. We cannot either discriminate between certain types of rights mentioned by the authors (political or moral rights?), “the principle of universal right to support in case of difficulty”,⁸⁸ for example. The whole progression of the discourse on principles might appeal to a general theory on how to fight poverty, rather than a national strategy. The picture seems to portray people activated by mechanisms, activating or blocking structures, rather than interests. The individualist terms as well as the language of interest are completely missing. The needs and collectivity are the conceptual pillars. Consequently, their approach is poorly convincing for a liberal policy, for example. One can find here neither a convincing premise for the interest of the rich to fight poverty, nor strategies to resist anti-poverty social policies, nor groups interested in maintaining the current poverty, the black market, and tax evasion.

However, it is impossible not to notice a specific preference for an excessive economic determinism. At least, collective poverty has economic roots,⁸⁹ and that is all; as if the economy had determined by itself to maintain the small rural land-property (generating a sort of “close natural economy”), not to allow a national policy promoting investments, but rather a policy of perfusing the increasingly lower revenues of the big socialist companies, a “laissez-faire” of generalized industrial failure; as if the economy by itself had been to blame for the deprofessionalization of commercial activities, or for turning entire categories of people into non-tax payers.

Leaving aside these “hard” forms of determinism, there are nevertheless individual causes for which the others cannot be blamed (except for those who encourage them through excessive passivity and tolerance).⁹⁰ Every

cause can be related to the weak relationship with personal merit, i.e. a criterion employed in the ethics and policies coherent with liberalism.

a) Perversion of Poverty

Communism made its start advocating for displayed modesty, and ended with homogenization of the pauper consumption. Its implicit message was: somebody come and release us from poverty! Some people would find out sooner that it was useless to “wait for Godeau”. Some of them had indulged themselves in resignedly waiting for a social or even divine providence (as a possible solution they envisaged a welfare heaven – the polls in May, 1999 reveal that 87% of the population believe in the power of prayers, and 65% in heaven).⁹¹ Communism discouraged hedonism considering it immoral given the utopian project of earthly paradise. Pleasure was also deligitimatized given the lack of congruency with the Code of Socialist Ethics and Equity. Effort and frustration were ranked as aims in themselves.

In the societies where the ethic of work is well respected, as well as its relationship with private ownership and personal income, poverty is embarrassing, as if it were a vice. In our society, on the contrary, people are not ashamed to label themselves as poor.⁹² What passes for a stigmatized phrase in the advanced societies poor is just an ordinary name for us, without any particular moral connotations, vaguely related to personal failure or individual responsibility.

b) Low Aspirations

Self-asserting needs and the need for professional prestige as well were given little attention in communist education. In policies obsessed with basic consumption, equalitarianism deeply harmed humane development and the aspiration to (what is called by ethicists of virtue⁹³) humane fulfillment. Individual achievements grew anonymous and insignificant, as collectivism prevailed. Instead, low or mediocre performances were not considered “major sins” for the working class. On the contrary, they passed for rather normal manifestations of the “new man”, protected against sanctions, unemployment, and marginalization. The society protected its members on social grounds: large families, personal problems. Facilities were granted in the reverse order of professional training or results. This situation was followed by a combination between “jungle competition”

(as called in the *Strategy*) and mistrust in the relationship between professional performance and earnings. The state (still in charge of establishing the incomes of large categories of people) performs an arbitrary privileged policy. Even if someone is a very good professional in a politically unprivileged domain, he or she may reach the top position within the relatively poor category.⁹⁴

c) The Dubious Quality of Success

If you ask anyone in Romania “How can you build up a fortune?” the most frequent answers are: corruption, tax evasion, theft, previous privileges, and mob-type networks. Corruption made the headlines in political and media discourse from ‘95 to ‘97. There were two antagonistic images: on the one hand the foreign investor – honest, smart, well-meaning, more like a “civilizer pioneer”, bringing prosperous capitalism –, on the other hand the Romanian investor – dishonest, dubious, belonging to the Securitate’s structures, most of all pursuing his own ostentatious wealth.⁹⁵ The success in social or professional life has been generally attributed to the clientele-oriented policies, to being one of the members or servants of political forces in office. Success not achieved *via* one of the above “recipes” is hardly known to the public. The majority of people are still imprisoned in the fatalistic poverty camp.

From my point of view the technical-sociologist discourse on poverty, (stripped of its political elements and certain emancipatory ideologies) will further nourish a left-wing conservatism (the conservatism of gradual growth), just a little more humanized by those strategies of “fighting poverty”. There are some suggestions on the most vulnerable political points and on politics, not in *The Strategy*, but in the preliminary researches and volumes.⁹⁶ These articles contain also a critique from a hidden liberal perspective.

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What I tried to present in this article are just some entry points of the analyses of the sources of Romanian conservatism today. The conservatism is not assumed as such. Most political and scientific discourses and most policies, from the traditionalist to the modern-libertarian ones, have the pretense of being progressive. And they are right (with the exception of “retro discourse” and the elitism) if the reference point is the Romanian society. The messages are “slow political,

social and economic changes" (for the leftists) or quick economic changes in terms of ownership (for the rightists). They suggest a slow growth for the majority or a quick growth for a minority. Between these choices and options, most Romanians still live in a "survival society", fighting for self-preservation in state of self-assertion. Parentalist policies and laissez-fair policies had the same results: the lack of coherent emancipatory ideologies and developmental strategies for most social groups.

Notes

- 1 Thanks to the opportunity offered by New Europe College, I developed two strategies, concerning this subject. The aim of the first strategy was this article. Another aim is a book named *Societatea retro. (Retro Society)*. In the framework of the book, there are larger analyses on different aspects of conservatism.
- 2 See the very pertinent analysis of the ethology of totalitarian state done by Gail Kligman in *Politics of Duplicity. Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1998.
- 3 I disagree here with Vladimir Tismăneanu's idea of the existence of a minimal civil society in totalitarian Romania. Dissidents (in such a small number) did not represent group, but individual stands and risks. See V. Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea politicului*, Polirom, Iași, 1993, cap. 4.
- 4 See M. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, New York Basic Books, 1977, p. 298.
- 5 See the research carried out by Vladimir Tismăneanu on the experiences of "de-communization" in *Fantasmeme salvării. Democrație, naționalism și mit în Europa post-comunistă*, Polirom, 1999, chapter 5: "S-a terminat revoluția? Mitul decomunizării și încercarea de a face dreptate în politică".
- 6 See Peter Digeser, "Forgiveness and Politics. Dirty Hands and Imperfect Procedures" in *Political Theory. An International Journal of Political Philosophy*, Sage Publications, vol. 26, no. 5, October 1998, p. 714.
- 7 A recurrent subject kept arising in my talks with colleagues (especially with Cornel Codîță): we are experiencing now a "costless" society, a society in which mistakes may turn into a norm, just because they are not sanctioned, both at individual and institutional level.
- 8 P. Digeser, op. cit., pp. 706-707. The civic minimalism was discussed (in its any forms) in *România. Starea de fapt: Societatea*, authors V. Pasti, M. Miroiu, C. Codita, Nemira, București, 1997.
- 9 See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago University Press, 1958, p. 243.
- 10 Analyzing the electoral programs of the 1996 campaign (in *România. Starea de fapt: Societatea*, cap. "Democrația de vitrină" – "The Shop-Window Democracy"), we realized that, except for the National-Liberal Alliance and the Socialist Party that have coherent programs, all the other parties merely sketched a series of electoral promises based on contradictory programs.
- 11 See M. Oakeshott's book *On Human Conduct*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1975.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 13 See 5, p. 701.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 716.

- 15 The theme of “dirty hands” is central in political ethics. See: M. Walzer: “Political action: the problem of dirty hands” in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, No 2, 1973; Th. Nagel: “Cinismul în viața publică” în *Mortal Questions (Veșnice întrebări)* in Romanian translation, All, București, 1996; C.A.J. Coday, “Politics and the problem of dirty hands”, in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer, Blackwell, 1996.
- 16 See: M. Walzer, *op. cit.*, p. 298.
- 17 See: Dîgeser, *op. cit.*, p. 700.
- 18 In the USA, for example neither the “Watergate” crisis, nor the recent “Sexgate”, nor the wars against Vietnam and Irak represented a menace to the regime or the social condition of citizens. In the Romania of ‘99, the fifth “crusade” of the miners was about to endanger the very existence of the state, not to mention the existence of the democratic regime.
- 19 See: *Doctrină Politică. Concepte și realități românești*. ed. Alina Mungiu Pippidi, Polirom, Iași, 1998.
- 20 See the classification proposed by Andrew Vincent in *Modern Political Ideologies*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.
- 21 Although, H.-R. Patapievici’s position in “Deriva ideologică”, *Revista 22*, nr. 21, was the most categorical, this type of discourse is also practiced by other intellectuals who catechetically undertake the liberalism, especially in Von Mises and Hayek’s direction.
- 22 In K. Marx, Fr. Engels, *Ideologia germană*, Ed. Politică, București, vol 3.
- 23 M. Oakeshott in *Rationalism and Politics and Other Essays*, Routledge Publishing House, 1962. The book was also translated into Romanian: *Raționalismul în politică*, Adrian Paul Iliescu, Ed. All, București, 1995.
- 24 See: Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
- 25 Some of the most famous research in this subject belongs to Seymour Martin Lipset: *Political Man*, Heineman, London, 1969 and Daniel Bell: *The End of Ideology. On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the 1950*, Free Press, New York, 1965.
- 26 See also V. Pasti, *România în tranziție. Căderea în viitor*, Ed. Nemira, București, 1995.
- 27 The phrase belongs to H.-R. Patapievici in the article “Deriva ideologică”, *Revista 22*, nr. 21, 1998.
- 28 See: Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
- 29 Ken Minogue argues (in *Alien Powers, The Pure Theory of Ideology*, 1986) that totalitarian ideologies were the real dragons fighting in the Cold War, excluding the ideologies specific to democracies: liberalism, conservatism and social democracy (See: A. Vincent, p. 10).
- 30 For further details about these functions see A. Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- 31 See Michael Freedon *Ideologies and Political Theory. A Conceptual Approach*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998, pp. 317-318.
- 32 From Ted Honderich, *Conservatism*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p. 17.

- 33 See: M. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p. 116 (also the Romanian translation of Adrian Paul Iliescu, *Raționalismul în politică*, Ed. All, București, 1995).
- 34 Cf. M. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, Oxford, 1975, p. 30.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 36 Honderich, *op. cit.*, 1991, pp. 234-239.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 238.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p.239.
- 39 See Freedden, *op.cit.*, p. 338.
- 40 See for example the political platforms launched in the spring of 1998 by the Union of Right-wing Forces.
- 41 Anthony Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection: The Religious and Secular Traditions of Conservative Thought in England from Hooke to Oakeshott*, London, Faber, 1978, p. 2, 152, 25.
- 42 See Ted Honderich, *Conservatism*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, chapter: „Change”.
- 43 These ideas are often mentioned by Oakeshott, too.
- 44 The theme is unfolded by Noel O’Sullivan in *Conservatism*, London, Dent, 1976, p. 12.
- 45 The problem of justice and rights from a moral point of view was assumed only merely by the conservatives.
- 46 Religion is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education (including upper-secondary education – high schools). The major point at stake here is that only studying religion as a school subject one can apprehend virtues and moral norms.
- 47 See Ted Honderich, *Conservatism*, pp. 49-56.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 49 Vincent, *op. cit.*, pp.63-68.
- 50 See the extraordinary version of Dostoievsky *Karamazov Brothers* in the chapter “The Great Inquisitor”.
- 51 The Romanian nostalgia for “Communism with a human face” has dated from 1970, and has encouraged left-wing conservatism. The nostalgia for patriarchal capitalism has dated from the the 1930s and ’40s, encouraging right-wing conservatism. Many types of romantic nostalgia indulge a great range of political orientation, ranging from innocent conservatism to dangerous propagandistic “outlaw-like” approaches: for example, the exaltation of the voievods and legendary outlaws (symbolically conveyed in the 1996 electoral campaign of the Great Romania Party).
- 52 See for example the analyses of Lucain Boia in *Istorie și mit în constiința românească*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1997.
- 53 See the article “Conservatorism, modernizare și tranziție” by Alexandru Duțu, in *Polis*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1998, p. 7.
- 54 Al. Duțu, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

- 55 See above Vincent, Freedman, Goodwin.
56 For example. Fr. Hayek, *Individualism and Social Order*, London, 1948.
57 Fr. Hayek also in *Individualism*.
58 A thorough discussion of this phenomenon can be read in Katherine Verdery: *What is Socialism and What Comes Next?* Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1996; and Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantasmeme salvării*, Polirom, Iași, 1998.
59 Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
60 Matthew Fforde is the author of the definition, in *Conservatism and Collectivism, 1886-1914*, Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1990.
61 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-17.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 42. It was this type of propaganda employed by PSDR to reconquer the electorate in 1996.
63 The phrase belongs to Roger Scruton (See T. Honderich, *Conservatism*, 1991, p. 60).
64 Roy Macridis & Mark Hulliung, *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, Harper Collins, New York, 1996, p. 79.
65 See further details on this subject in my chapter: "Egalitatea de șanse în educație", in *Invățământul românesc azi* (The Romanian Education Today), A. Miroiu (ed.), Polirom, Iași, 1998.
66 The reaction to change is thoroughly analyzed by Anthony Quinton in the chapter "Conservatism" in *A Companion to Political Philosophy*, Robert Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.), Blackwell, 1993.
67 This theme was thoroughly investigated in *România. Starea de fapt: Societatea*, 1997. We advanced there the phrase "survival society" in order to define the main strategy of the economic and politic behavior in the Romanian transition.
68 See for example Nigel Dower "World Poverty" in *A Companion to Ethics*, Peter Singer (ed.), Blackwell, Oxford, 1996, and *World Poverty Challenge and Response*, York, Ebor Press, 1983; Onora O'Neill, *Faces of Hunger*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1986, etc.
69 Dower, *ibid.*, p 275.
70 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
71 See Peter Singer's article "Famine, Affluence and Morality" in vol. *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, William and La Follette (eds.), Prentice-Hall, N.J., 1977.
72 See McInerney and Rainbolt, *Ethics*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1994, pp. 164-165.
73 *Ibid.*, pp. 165-167.
74 See Thomas Kleininger, "Despre sărăcie", *Revista* 22, nr. 12, 1999.
75 According to data published in the volume *Coordonate ale sărăciei în România. Dimensiuni și factori*, coordinated by V. Dinculescu, C. Chirca, PNUD report, București, 1998, p. 17.

- 76 See Dinculescu and Chirca, p. 18.
 77 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
 78 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
 79 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
 80 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
 81 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
 82 *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79
 83 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-25.
 84 See Kleininger, the above cited article.
 85 This idea was expressed by the Minister of Labor and Social Protection, Alex. Athanasiu, in an interview in the review 22, no. 12, 1999.
 86 *Strategia Națională de Prevenire și Combatere a Sărăciei*, UNDP, 1998, București p. 29.
 87 See *Strategia*, p. 4.
 88 *Strategia*, pp. 35-41.
 89 *Ibid.*, p 7.
 90 *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
 91 *Barometrul de opinie publică*, Metro Media Transilvania, May, 1999, carried out at the request of the Foundation for an Open Society, Bucharest.
 92 In the volume *Sărăcia în România. 1995-1998*, UNDP, București, 1999, in the chapter "Politici sociale de prevenire și reducere a sărăciei", Cătălin Zamfir largely commented this aspect.
 93 The tradition of this ethics was embraced especially by Alisdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, Notre Dame University Press, Indiana USA, 1985.
 94 A RENEL (the state Company for Electricity) genitor's salary has become, both in private and public discussions a reference point for the state employees (mostly in the peripheral public domain of budget).
 95 Even the President of Romania himself supported the idea of a "tax on displayed wealth" following his predecessor's steps. Ion Iliescu depicted himself as a "poor but honest" citizen.
 96 See *Sărăcia în România, 1995, Vol II, Politici de prevenire și reducere a sărăciei*, UNDP, București, 1999, especially "Politici sociale de prevenire și reducere a sărăciei", Cătălin Zamfir and "Tendințe, cauze și consecințe ale sărăciei în România", Vladimir Pasti.