



ORIGINAL PAPER

Boosting the Social Structures in Modern Romania: A Historiographical Perspective in the Post-Communist Era

Florin Nacu*

Abstract

The communist regime in Romania has strongly influenced the historiography. A theme as that of the social structures was preferred by the communist ideologists for justifying the superiority of the communist organisation model over the other periods and for searching common features between the Romanian society and the communist ideology from the earliest periods. The modern age was surely “the test field” of the communists, because all the great events and reforms of the modern era had a strong social pattern. It is the reason for which the party ideology and the issue of the social structures should be presented by true specialists. After 1989, in the conditions of democracy, this theme was presented according to the European context. In the last 25 years, the historians have analysed this problem, starting from the principles used by the social history, sociology and even political sciences.

Keywords: *social structures, historiography, modern age, Romania, society*

* PhD, „CS Nicolăescu Plopor” Social Humanistic Research Institute, Craiova, Phone: 0040761617067, Email: florin_nacu@yahoo.com

Introduction

Our study intends to present the evolution of the historical context on addressing the social structures in Romania, after 1989. In the last 25 years Romanian historians have tried a re-evaluation of this historical subject because of the strong politicization of it, prior to 1989. In this study we have tried to present the main historical works divided in the next categories: memoirs, studies of historical and institutional law, the general history of the Romanians, political thinking and enforcement of the reforms and the impact over the local communities (Hitchins, 1994: 363-364). The communist regime wanted, above all, a justification of its ideology as being deeply rooted in the historical past of Romania. The modern age is, essentially, the historical period in which the Romanian state was unified and, therefore, modernized. The main consequence of the unification and modernization was its independence, after which, naturally, the national reunification emerged. The way in which the ideology can be legitimised, represented the juxtaposition of the "social struggle" to the national way of modernization (Nacu, 2013: 8). Whether we refer to the revolution led by Tudor Vladimirescu or the Revolution of 1848-1849, the watchword in historiography before 1989 was the peasantry and the working class' struggle for social justice, having the alliance of the intellectuals (Berindei, 2003: 56).

The historical background

After the Union of 1859, the extensive reform programme, imposed by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, was also discussed as a consequence of increasing social inequality and the fight for its elimination. The period 1877-1907 was a historic era of modernization and development for the independent Romanian society. However, this modernization was carried out at the top of the social hierarchy (Nacu, 2013: 9). The population of Romania, during 1859-1918, was being concentrated, in its vast majority, in rural areas. The urban environment, where the elements of modern life were introduced, was marked by the growth of the population once with the settlement of people from rural areas, attracted by the possibility of paid work in workshops, factories, construction sites (Iosa, Lungu, 1977: 243).

The social and political status of Romania, in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century, show that the concentration of political power is in the hands of large landowners, followed by bourgeois and wealthy peasants, a large gap from the general population, to bear taxation regime compacts, military obligations, living in poor conditions with limited literacy education. The exponents, which are currently conservative (especially Constantin Argetoianu), continue to be redundant in the sense that they require „educating peasants” and agrarian reform and election, while the Liberals, from 1913, considered in their political program that it was necessary to reduce this gap. It is in this context that the National Liberal Party took the initiative of constitutional revision in 1914, the purpose of the expropriation of landowners, within certain limits and adopting the single Electoral College (Scurtu, 2001:55). The initiative was designed to bring new doctrinal clarifications to the Conservative Party and a tough political battle in the Parliament, press, public meetings. If all politicians recognized the need to amend the disparity between the high and the low property and improve the situation of the peasantry by assignment, differences arise in how to achieve them (Nacu, 2013: 10). Liberals were the advocates of the expropriation of landowners, specifically the large land properties, the compensation limits agreed with the opinion of the Conservatives and Democrats (Maciu, 1973: 343). The conservative Party's traditional

supporters considered to be sufficient the allotment lands, which were in the possession of the state, the purchase of the Rural House, the expropriation was illegitimate, unnecessary and dangerous for the condition of the Romanian society. Apart from the principle of the unique college, supported by the liberals, the conservative democrats thought more suitable the system of two colleges, and the traditional conservatives preferred the already existing system, of three electoral colleges. With the outbreak of World War I, the reforms were left aside. In 1917, when two-thirds of the national territory was occupied by the enemy, the government, the army and some people were in Moldova, the Parliament of Iasi, due to the need to ensure the participation enlivened the last resistance of the peasants, which was dangerous because the spectrum order of destabilization caused by the socialist revolution from Russia, and decided to resume the project of reforms in a more extensive manner. They considered the expropriation of more than 2 million ha and the universal suffrage (Nacu, 2013: 11). Despite the continuing political confrontations and differences, the results exceeded the expectations. The Romanian society, in addition to the need for democratization, had to face the possibility of materializing the national aspirations of unity of all Romanians that, at the end of the war, became a reality. If the representatives of the National Liberal Party found the possibility to adapt to the conditions, through these reforms, the Conservative leaders were aware that the struggle for survival, which in the early interwar period became impossible, and due to the label of „collaborationist” given to the Marghiloman government, they remained in Bucharest (Iosa, Lungu, 1977: 243).

The expropriation decrees from the 15th and 16th of December 1918 (followed by the agrarian reform laws on the 17th and 30th of July 1921) and the organization, in November 1919, of the first parliamentary general elections based on the universal suffrage, represented the end of a political process started in 1864. The need to strengthen the Romanian national state imposed a new Constitution with strong democratic principles, on the 29th of March 1923. Basically, we believe that the principles of the Constitution of 1866 dominated the Basic Law of 1923 that was, in fact, only an improved version, driven by new social and political- territorial configuration of Romania (Berindei, 2003: 59).

In 1921, Romania knew the most significant reform from its entire history. There were expropriated properties bigger than 250 ha, in plain, 100 ha of the properties rented at the date the law was enforced. Until 1937, in Romania, there were expropriated 4 million ha. In Romania, only 2700 properties had more than 500 ha, and 9,500 properties under 100 ha (Hitchins, 1994: 363-364). This was, generally speaking, the situation of the land property until the end of the democracy in 1945. Ultimately, the Romanian modern world was a polarized one. At the upper limit there were the great landowners, and industrialists, traders, bankers, self-employed, while, on the opposite position, there were the peasants, the workers and the small craftsmen (Nacu, 2013: 10). The voting system was one based on qualification, organized, according to the Electoral Law and the Constitution of 1866, in four colleges, subsequently reduced in 1884 to three. Principally, even though they were the main workforce, obliged to pay taxes, obligations to the state, the workers and the peasants had no right to vote. They did not have access to education, health and other elements of modernity. However, the historiography before 1989, strongly influenced by the party ideology, held that the decisive role in the socio-political changes was constituted by fighting peasants, workers, intellectuals, allied together, from those social groups. Basically both the social status and the boyar origins, iconic figures of the modern times, were somehow left into the background. First of all, the party

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historiography insisted on their relation to "the masses". The official ideology had tried to minimize the influence on the evolution of modern Western thought. The only accepted theses were those of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, combined with Lenin's thinking (Axenciuc, 1997: 18).

The climax of "reorientation" of the Stalinist Romanian historiography is the work of Mihai Roller. Romania was artificially adjoining modern ideological reform movements of socialist orientation. There were brought forward important works by authors of socialist orientation, as it was Constantin Dobrogeanu Gherea, author of the concept of "neo-serfdom". According to this author, between the producers and the owners, the tenants were interposed, along with the brokers, interested in bringing progress to the extent that they help to make a profit quickly. They managed to have elected political leadership structures to represent their interests. They were not interested to introduce the much needed reforms, expected by the majority of the population: the land reform and electoral reform. In addition, there was a sensitive category, the foreigners who did not belong to any state, most of which were represented by the Jews. The solution found for their individual naturalization was a cumbersome and, practically, impossible to accept, for many of them. The legislation in the trades and occupations was not likely to favour them. Being an ideological regime based on "the ratio of the productive forces and means of production" the communism encouraged the historiography to show only the "social side". Therefore, since 1989, there have been many attempts for the reassessment of this area. A major shortcoming is the failure of the historical use for the non-disciplinary studies. Statistics, sociology, law provide sufficient quantitative tools for making solid historical judgments.

Historiographical overview

The period bounded by two important events of our modern history - the Romanian revolution of 1848 and the proclamation of independence of the Romanian state - represented years of profound changes in the social-economic, political and moral consistency in the development of the society, as a whole. A first sign of progress was given by the numerical increase of population, which has suffered a layering element, evident during Cuza's reforms, and the first consequences of the application of the Constitution from 1866. The census of population in the years 1859 to 1860 showed a population of 4.424.961 in the principalities. Dimitrie Frunzescu, in his work entitled *Topographical and Statistical Dictionary of Romania*, published in 1872 in Bucharest and M. G. Obedenaru in the work *La Roumanie economique d'apres les donnees les plus recentes*, published in Paris in 1876, estimated the number of inhabitants around 5,000,000. The census of 1899 recorded 5,956,690 inhabitants, the density being 45.3 people per sq km. In 1912, the population reached to 7.160.782 inhabitants (Berindei, 2003: 56). The natural increase of births was possible after the annihilation of angina diphtheria and cholera epidemics and the small proportion of the natural disasters from that time. Once with the growth of the population, it should be noted that the population's density and the uneven distribution in the territory, remained low. In the three decades of the second half of the nineteenth century one-fifth of the population (17, 6%) was living in the urban area, while in rural areas there were four fifths (82.4%) of the residents. Most inhabitants of the country, both in the rural and urban areas, practiced the agriculture (Axenciuc, 1997: 199). However the Romanian society experienced the phenomenon of the structural change during the early nineteenth century. A number of social categories experienced the changing of their status. It is the stage where the nobility "practically

ceased existence to the privileged social policy". The peasantry without rights (serves) improved the situation with the land reform of 1864 and the bourgeoisie increased its economic and political role. After the Organic Regulations and the Paris Convention of 1858, the noblemen became landowners, and underwent a process of transition for reaching the status of bourgeoisie with conservative and liberal positions (Creangă, 1907: 26).

On the whole, we are witnessing an increasingly growing economy, along with the significant number of employees, whether they were in agriculture as labourers or employees, the exploitation and processing of oil, mines or as workers in small workshops and factories emerged, particularly in Bucharest and in Iasi, Craiova and the Danube ports. According to the 1860 and 1912 censuses, the active population, highlighted the non-agricultural population increases and the developments. In 1860, 1,871,800 people were working in agriculture which represented 86.2% of the total population, 114,900 in industry (5.3%), transport 2,000 (0.1%), commerce and credit 44,900 (2, 1%), education, religious affairs, culture 8,300 (0.4%) in health care administration and army 600 in 24,400 (0.1%). In 1912, working in the same field parallels 3,193,400, representing 79.5% of the population, 8,200 in industry, 1,900 in transport, trade and credit in 3100, in education, religious affairs, culture 800, 300 health care, government, army 3,500 (Constantinescu, 1957: 88). Although the data above does not include the Crown domains and the state lands, we can still conclude that 957, 257 (99.1%) of the owners of properties between 1 and 50 ha, owned 3,849,508 ha (40, 18%), while 7,790 owners (0.9%) owned 3,977,198 ha (50, 82%). It is obvious disadvantaging of the peasants, regarded as the country's social spectators. At the beginning of the twentieth century, according to the archives' data, there were 408,502 families (48, 27%) of taxpayers, settled in the rural communities, who owned land. Referring to the social stratification and the role of the peasantry in the state, Radu Rosetti note, at the beginning of the twentieth century: "Our state is a plutocratic structure; the peasants rule it; when the poor hear formal advice, they listen to it again." (Rosetti, 1907: 588). The restoration of law, the market economy and the private property ownership were particularly important in Romania, especially after the abolition of collective farms and state farms extensive process for restitution of the nationalized houses. The reassessment of the role of the key social groups in history was represented by works such as those of the academician Alexandru Florin Platon and Gheorghe Platon. The academician Dinu C. Giurescu wrote several works of memoirs about those moments in history that we eyewitness.

The communist regime in Romania was analysed both based on the ideology and way of taking power seizing and the social structures, as Vasile Dobrescu and Lucian Giura presented in their study "prevailing the orientation studies for the political and ideological side or revealing the repressive nature of the communist regime, revealed the socio-economic structures of the regime. Or, the communist regime had reported itself in a new property, organizational and economic development, based on nationalized property and centralized management of business processes. On the other hand, the socialist economic system sought to be legitimized in the politics of the communist political parties as the regime that has to ensure the general welfare by eliminating disparities in wealth, hitherto existing between different social groups" (Dobrescu, Giura, 2004: 299). One of the historians who tried to answer to issues of social the structures is Cezar Avram. Under the title "An exceptional approach of the researcher Avram Cezar", Preda has made the following assessments on the paper "The agricultural Policy in Oltenia between 1949-1962" as follows: "the volume of the researcher Cezar Avram passed almost unnoticed,

entitled "Agricultural Policy in Oltenia between 1949-1962 (socio-economic changes in the Romanian village) "written with sobriety and conciseness, with scientific accuracy, can be considered a publishing event". Dinu C. Giurescu, PhD, welcomes the emergence of the book: "agrarian Policies in Oltenia in 1949-1962 (socio-economic changes in the Romanian village)": it represents a new chapter in the contemporary history of Romania. The historian Cezar Avram monitors and demonstrates the objectivity and the professionalism, obtaining what Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, in 1949, called consensus (Constantin Romulus Preda, 2010: 1). The 1866 Constitution intended to preserve Romania's social status. Article 7 shall deprive the Hebrew citizenship and Article 12 prohibited any change in the property ownership, except for expropriation in the public interest for infrastructure projects. This is the paradox of the Romanian society, a country governed by the few in their interest, while most of the population was at subsistence level. A special category that could counter the financial impact of the ruling minority was kept away from political power. The lack of land remained a constant of the nineteenth century, partly mitigated by the agrarian reform of 1864 (Osia, 1999: 306). We can observe that the historical writings present the evolution of Romania, according to the problem of the social structures. The monumental dictionary of localities of Oltenia is structured in a fine investigation of each locality. The main purpose is that of presenting the evolution of the property structure from the Middle Age, continuing in the Modern Age and the Contemporary Age. The work insists on the reforms made after 1990 in the social dynamics and local history. We display a list of the main historiographical contributions after 1990, in the evolution of social structures.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, according to the archive data, there were 408,502 families (48, 27%) of taxpayers settled in the rural communities, who owned land. On counties, the largest number of peasants deprived of land were in Dolj 30,130; 26,361 Ilfov-, Teleorman- 62,319 (Aurelian, 1880: XIX). Referring to the social stratification and the role of the peasantry in the state, Radu Rosetti note at the beginning of the twentieth century: "Our state is a plutocratic structure; the peasants rule it; when the poor hear formal advice, they listen to it again" (Rosetti, 1907:588). The situation of the Romanian village that was completed by 4,171 great owners having up to 100 hectares of which 66 hectares with over 5,000 had the highest percentage of arable land, having decision-making power by the Conservative Party, still subjected to limitation by the bourgeoisie class, which led the modernization and the national reunification. The lack of the agricultural inventory, the price increase for grazing, the lease in tithes increasingly larger, the agricultural work set out in the compacts price decreasing in most estates, the abusive authorities, tenants and landowners led to the extremism of the peasantry which have escalated to the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. A form of struggle of the peasantry, manifested after the war of independence, was the leaving of the villagers and setting their native places in other parts of the country or emigration to other countries. The information in the period 1878-1888, records many instances where peasants made their own decisions. The officers punished lessees, tenants, mayors, notaries, pub-owners (Cârțână, 2001: 317-345). The causes of violent behaviour of the peasantry, can be found in the ways in which reforms were implemented in 1864 and 1879. The agrarian reform of 1864, despite all the shortcomings, favoured, to some extent, the agricultural modernization. The weather statistics recorded "trade refreshing" 22 internal and external products. The agricultural engineering has improved the late nineteenth century unlike the culture which remained under extensive cultivation of land parameters. The cultivated land increased every year since 1865. For example, if in 1865 there were

2,221,862 ha in the principalities, in 1874, 3,303,205 ha, in 1906 reached 3,914,306 ha of farming surface (Poni, 1966:18). A worrying phenomenon was the evolution of livestock. In the last decades of the nineteenth century the number of animals decreased, as a result of crop expansion and the impoverishment of the Romanian village. The modernization of the State was, however, in progress, if we consider the new form of coexistence between "the large and small private property and state property" involved in cereal production, the use of cars, obviously differentiated from the existing gap between state ownership, great landowners property, the peasant private property (Cârțână, 2001: 317-345). The second half of the nineteenth century was the beginning of introducing industrial machinery after a revolution marked by "small industry". PS Aurelian speaks for an industry "exercised especially in the family", a city not lacking "tailors, shoemakers, skinners, wheelwrights, coopers, masons, carpenters, coppersmiths, locksmiths", a threefold increase number of craftsmen, only in Bucharest between 1832-1860 (Aurelian, 1880: XIX).

We organised our scientific presentation using certain main categories. We will start with the memoirs, which represent the main source of contemporary ideas of the people directly involved in the process of the evolution of the social structures during the Modern Age. In the memoirs, each author tries to present himself as a political statesman with the best intentions. Even if this is a subjective way, the memoirs presented problems which were clarified only after the access to the archive documents. Another group of works are represented by the general works of the Romanian History, in which the problem of the social structures represents a very important chapter and subject of analytical examination. Moreover, there are presented the main works on the juridical evolution of the social structures. The modern history of Romania, especially during the period 1821-1877, represents half of century of the most radical changes in the political, economic, social reforms. In half of a century, Romania succeeded to recover centuries of political and institutional crisis. The international context of the evolution of social structures in Romania also represents a very important direction for the historiography of Romania after 1990. The reforms were influenced by the contemporary European ways of thinking. Also, we presented the most important works of political thinking, theory and history of the political parties and their ideology. The 1848-1849 Revolution and the Peace Treaty of Paris from 1856 offered the political background of the social and institutional reforms, made during the seven years ruling of Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859-1866). He gave a constitutional bill in 1864 and the first major rural reform which was the milestone of the modernization of the social structures: the medieval relations had entered in the history, as parts of the past. Finally, another aspect of our historiographical investigation presents the works about the modernization of the Romanian structures. There are both works and studies which present the general overview of Romania and also the local evolution of social structures and the impact of the reforms over the local communities in 1864, and after that time until 1918.

The land reform of Alexandru Ioan Cuza and the electoral law were followed by other measures which tried to optimize the impact of the initial reforms. The electoral and land crisis were the background of some important social uprisings at the end of the 19th century and in the first decade of the 20th century, in Romania. The political authorities had understood that the clarification of these two issues is very important. The reform of 1864 had no modern means to accomplish its purpose, a lot of peasant remaining without land because of the lack of modern means of measurement and bad intentions of the local authorities. A half century later, in 1914, the Romanian statesmen tried to present a new

land reform and electoral law, but the start of the First World War had imposed these issues after the end of the war, after 1918.

All the writings concerning the problem of social structures started from the same general idea: the social structures in the modern history of Romania are the milestone of the social, economic, cultural and political evolution. In 1918, Romania became the 8th state of Europe, as surface and population. The new provinces, united with Romania had merged with their specific issues: minorities which were privileged in the former imperial era and their economic status (new resources, new industries, new economical categories). Immediately after the war, in 1919, there was introduced the election based on the universal vote, that changed completely the political configuration of Romania, by the means of the social structures. The political parties needed to reconfigure their political views. The Conservatory Party collapsed politically after the 1922 elections. In the same time, Romanian electors started to believe in the "man of the day", a category of political statesmen as Alexandru Averescu, Iuliu Maniu, Ion Mihalache which had a personality able to convince the people, after the end of the Bratianu dynasty. In 1921, it was enforced the most important agricultural reform from the entire South-Eastern Europe. In 1923 it was enforced the new Constitution of the Romanian state, the most important constitutional act from that moment.

Conclusion

25 years after the Revolution of 1989, the Romanian historians succeeded in offering an objective overview of the great historical problem of social structures. They had a very difficult mission in separating the political influence from the reality of the sources, many of them ignored by the political history, imposed by the communists, between 1944 and 1989. The Romanian historians managed to reintegrate the evolution of the Romanian social structures in the large context of the European social history. Our historical investigation insisted on four great delimitations of the historical works: memoirs, works about the international context, works about the evolution of the reforms and works about the general modern history of Romania. The last 25 years represented a period of major works, which were conducted on the principle of objectivity, and analytical thinking. A lot of works were published by foreign authors interested in the Romanian modern history, which shows that our history, and especially the history of the social structures, are very important fields of research for the European and Romanian historians. The problem of the social structures in the modern Romania appears nowadays as one of the major fields in the Romanian historical research.

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