

**“ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY OF  
IAȘI**

**Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences  
Doctoral School: Philosophy**

## **Doctoral Thesis**

***The Sensible Critic:  
Constantin Rădulescu-Motru  
and the Crisis of Identity  
in Romanian Interwar Thought***

### **Long Abstract**

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**IAȘI  
2024**

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## Summary

The idea at the heart of this thesis was sparked by an unexpected find in a misplaced bowl on an antique dealer's table. Two coins; both French, and minted in the same year: 1944. One bore the image of an axe with a bundle of fasces and the motto of the Croix-de-Feu, and later of the French Social Party: "Travail, Famille, Patrie" - Work, Family, Fatherland. The other depicted the figure of Marianne, the personified symbol of the French nation, along with the motto: "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" - Liberty, Equality, Fraternity - the unofficial slogan of the French Revolution that became the axiom of the French Republic thereafter. This discovery prompted a more important question: Why has it been possible in history to see the existence of two Frances, both claiming to be the authentic and original, and yet so profoundly different? Vichy France did not emerge out of a vacuum; rather, it was a product of France itself, which only then gained the necessary means to manifest. For its part, Free France freed itself from the shadows of some of the darkest societal pathologies that lingered in its collective consciousness, like the faces of a rigged coin, which, if left unchecked, threatened to cause it to flip. Democracy on the one hand, totalitarianism on the other.

In line with the age-old questions surrounding the rightfulness and truthfulness of other monopolies on morality, economy, and violence, addressed by thinkers such as Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, and Max Weber, this raises an even more pressing concern over who, or what, can lay an exclusive claim to defining an identity. Within the state, the answer lies with the state itself. However, what determines the identity of the state? For there certainly exists a determinant here too. In the contemporary world, political life and all its aspects primarily revolve around a politics

of culture, and only then followed by one of economics. Over time, numerous attempts have been made to identify appropriate answers to these issues, with some anticipating situations that did not yet exist at the time of their formulation.

One such attempt to uncover these underworkings was made by French historian Ernest Renan in a lecture given in 1882 in which he asked the question: “What is a nation?”. Thus debuted in Europe the concern for the discovery of national specificity. Some nations gravitate towards the Romantic notion of ethnicity, regardless of other factors. This was evident in the second part of the 19th century with unification movements like those in Romania, Germany, Italy, and the pan-Slavic movement in the Balkans, which sought to bring together all those individuals sharing a common consciousness of belonging to the same nationality, rather than being separated along religious and political lines.

However, even nations with firmly established identities can collapse, as national objectives may shift as priorities change. This transition can range from all-encompassing and unifying principles emphasizing common traits and fostering a strongly centralized spirit of a nation, to divisive narratives, often driven by sectarian or economic motivations. A nation with well-defined principles onto which to base its national idea carries with it a strong a strong legitimacy over its territory, which is difficult to challenge, and a population which is often willing to fight and defend these principles. Whereas a weak national spirit often leads to being subjected to the dominance of a more powerful nation, resulting in political takeovers, partial or total territorial losses and a diminished claim to sovereignty. In such cases, the subjugated nation must rely exclusively on its culture, and strengthen it, in order that, at some point in the future, to reassert itself and reclaim its losses. Otherwise, its population risks losing its culture and becoming assimilated.

Even a cursory glance over the works of some of the most distinguished Romanian thinkers reveals that the question of identity occupies a fundamental and indispensable position in Romanian thought. One could even go so far as to argue that modern Romanian philosophy is ultimately concerned almost exclusively with this privileged theme. Whether discussing individual identity and the attempt at self-discovery, or exploring collective concepts related to national identity and cultural specificity, there is no Romanian thinker who does not touch, at least in passing, on this matter. One might assume that after over 150 years as a modern nation state and nearly a millennium of written history, the establishment of a Romanian identity would have been settled and exhausted. However, this is not the case. Even at the beginning of the 21st century, Romanian society still struggles with this issue, which continues to stir and divide it, causing it to suffer deep-seated cultural, religious, and especially political fragmentation. Compared to the Kingdom of Romania that existed between the two World Wars, today's Romania has yet to find a stable moral framework and a binding ideal. Therefore, it is from here that we delve into this dilemma and commence our research towards finding that unifying sentiment of substance which lies at the very heart of what allows the emergence of a distinctive and unmistakable Romanian identity. In the words of two great Romanian thinkers, Constantin Noica and Mircea Vulcănescu, we dare to seek out that specific sentiment of being dwelling within our unique dimension of existence.

As was stated at the very beginning of this thesis, the significance of the history of philosophy in understanding philosophy surpasses that of other historical studies in any other discipline, as philosophy is highly depended on its history to define its object and methods. Thus, in our study, likewise relying on the history of philosophy as our framework, we have attempted to

understand in depth the matters of axiology and the theory of values, in particular concerning the moral, political, and ideological aspects within Romanian intellectual life between the two world wars. Therefore, let us briefly trace in broad outlines the path of our investigation.

We commenced by examining the pre-modern Romanian schools of thought, comparing the perspectives of the traditional scholastic school with those of the rising modernist one. Initially, we observed no overt conflict between the two, as both were oriented towards progress, differing only in the pace at which they intended it to occur. It became evident that the ecclesiastical school itself harbored the germinal European currents that contributed to the formation of the Romanian national identity. The tenets of romantic nationalism found their first foothold in Transylvania under Austrian administration, out of a necessity primarily driven by political factors. In 1698, following the Synod of Alba Iulia, a part of the Transylvanian Orthodox Church came into communion with the Rome Catholic Church and became the Greek-Catholic Church, preserving its language of worship and the Byzantine Rite, while acknowledging the supreme authority of the Pope. This allowed the Greek-Catholic Romanians to enjoy greater political, cultural, and social freedoms, including the right to study in the great intellectual centers of the Empire and, with the Pope's blessing, at the Vatican. Influential figures among them, such as Samuil Micu, Gheorghe Șincai, Petru Maior, and Ioan Budai-Deleanu, would found the first authentically Romanian intellectual movement under the inspiration of European Enlightenment; and would thus become the first and strongest bastion of Romanianism in the territory of present-day Romania.

Initially, the aim of the Transylvanian School was to support with historical and philological arguments the direct descent of the Transylvanian Romanians from the Roman settlers of Dacia Felix.

An ethnolinguistic approach that had been extensively theorized by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. This would have elevated Romanians above Hungarians and, at least, on par with the ethnic Germans of the Empire, given the prestige associated with the Roman lineage, as it was among the ancient noble nations of Europe. Nevertheless, despite their efforts, these aspirations were met with indifference. And so, the Romanians in Transylvania ceased their attempts to find a place within the Habsburg monarchy, instead redirecting their focus on advocating for the unification of all Romanian provinces into a singular nation state.

The influence of the Transylvanian School also permeated the other two Romanian Principalities, where it developed deep roots, with the Junimea Society emerging as its spiritual successor, adopting many of its ideas and even including some of its members.

The Junimists, proponents of largely conservative views over Romania's social structure, believed that the nation lacked a sufficiently developed middle class, with the Jewish population often fulfilling this role. Instead, they saw that it as having only a majority of servile, docile, and noble peasantry, and a small minority of educated elites. While they recognized the existence of a Romanian national spirit, which they tried to the best of their ability to cultivate, they viewed it as immature, capable only of imitating older Western cultures, without yet being capable of achieving an original development. Fueled by the spirit of Romanticism, the Romanianism they sought to build found its roots deeply embedded in national history, often using historical figures as exemplars of axiological models; with themes of resilience, courage and honesty commonly used in their speeches as being eminently Romanian. Ultimately, their goal was to nurture a national consciousness, which would later serve as the basis for the union of all Romanians under a single nation state. This was achieved after the Great War and thus the historic role of the



Junimists came to an end, and the movement formally ceased to exist. Nevertheless, its legacy endured in the philosophical orientations of the Interwar period.

The trăirists at first emerged as the inheritors of the Junimists. Having witnessed the realization of their predecessors' vision of a unified Romanian state, they now felt compelled to uphold and perpetuate such a monumental achievement. The majority hailed from the burgeoning middle class, a demographic that had expanded considerably since the Junimist era, but also from the more affluent peasants who had gained access to education through the reforms introduced by the liberal Minister of Public Instruction, Spiru Haret. A considerable number of them congregated at the lectures of Nae Ionescu, who himself was the most beloved pupil of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru. Regardless the movement distanced itself from the Romantic historicism of the Junimists and tried to recreate a Romanian identity in the form of a lived natural experience, rather than as an intellectual abstraction. The conflation of the Romanian sentiment of being with strong Orthodox Christian beliefs led many trăirists to adopt a mystical approach to the problem of national identity; a steep step from the secular rationalism of the Junimists. One of the most pointed criticisms leveled against the old generation of thinkers was that while they claimed to be the sole defenders the Romanian peasant ethos, they were completely disconnected from the everyday realities of the common people whose values they purported to represent. In contrast, the trăirists argued that the masses were now capable of expressing their own interests and did not require an intellectual elite to do so on their behalf. This shift from intellectual elitism to populism became a defining trend in Interwar Romania. However, in both schools of thought, as well as in Romanian culture in general at the time, we discern two manifestations of the national spirit: one indigenous and the other alien.

prevalent influence of German ideals on Romanian thinkers, served to bridge the gap between these expressions. The fact that Romania did not have a strong academic tradition meant that, as personalities such as Titu Maiorescu and Eugen Lovinescu argued, this borrowing of ideas was considered a necessary step for the development of our thought. Yet, this belief in achieving a qualitative leap through quantitative accumulation ultimately proved tragically misguided, as many intellectuals, having stopped at this stage, failed to imbue Romanian nationalism with its own distinct expression, choosing to imitate the German model and merely adorn it with superficial local motifs. Although at first these two systems coexisted harmoniously, with one deriving from the other, over time a strong rift emerged between them. The infiltration of these German influences into Romanian nationalist movements had the effect of polluting them with elements that were alien to our spirit and could not have been organically developed within it. This contamination led to a departure from Romanian ideals, ultimately resulting in their manipulation and subsequent subordination to the politics of the Third Reich. Even in the face of territorial and demographic losses arbitrated by Adolf Hitler himself against Romania's own interests, in the early 1940s nationalist sentiments became increasingly aligned with Germany. Romanian nationalists found more in common with German National Socialists than with their fellow countrymen. The adoption of a negative definition of identity transformed their rhetoric from one that celebrated traditions and the preservation of the past in a constructive manner to one that became a caustic force which sought to preserve itself by eradicating other cultures. Rather than promoting a unified Romanian culture, they became fixated with suppressing everything that did not fit their already narrow definition. This manifestation of the national spirit in its last incarnation which separated Romanians from “true” Romanians

was galvanized by hatred and sustained through incendiary discourses directed against minorities, not only ethnic but also ideological and confessional. Ultimately, this led to the corrosion of its essence and its own eventual downfall with the collapse of the Third Reich. A seismic blow from which Romanian nationalist thought was never to recover to this day.

It should be noted here that not all foreign influences during this period came directly from Germany itself. Romanian nationalist ideologies also exhibited significant Integralist tendencies. The French Integralist movement, organized around Charles Maurras in the late 19th century, presented itself as an alternative to German National Socialism. French nationalism, historically characterized as civic rather than ethnic, emerged in the aftermath of the defeat at the Battle of Sedan in September 1870. However, ironically, French irredentism and Boulangism were modelled on the principles of German Romantic nationalism, despite being directed against it. With France in turn becoming the birthplace of National Socialism. The main ideas promoted by the Maurrasian movement were those of a strong monarchism, the integration of the Church into the life of the state - hence the name integralism, thereby rejecting the principle of separation of church and state, and its vehement opposition to revolutionary ideologies, particularly targeting the socialist percepts of the French Revolution. This proved very popular in countries with a Latin heritage and a strong Catholic influence: Mexico, Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and even Romania.

When it suited us to embrace an Orthodox identity as a defense against potential Catholicization or Islamization, we did so. When that pulled us too tightly into the orbit of the surrounding Slavic nations, we reinforced our Latin heritage. This allowed us to resist further influences from our former overlords, the Ottoman Empire and Russia, and resume our natural course strengthening

the ties with Western Europe. However, this also positioned us in a precarious equilibrium between France and Germany. At first, we welcomed the ideals of the French Revolution, but later tempered them with elements of German high conservatism, and also with those of socialism. Furthermore, in our pursuit of modernity, we introduced intellectual strains that may not have naturally found their way into our cultural landscape, which has resulted in an interweaving of the spiritual with the secular and the rational with the irrational. This outcome inevitably reflected the conclusion of Constantin Noica. We have lived and experienced all the imaginable currents of the age simultaneously. We were at once Eastern and Western, oscillating between tradition and modernity, superstition and science, the peasants and the elites, between democracy and totalitarianism - yet without fully embodying any single identity, only forms thereof. Throughout all of this, one overarching ideal managed to keep all of these disjointed forces together and harness them towards a singular purpose - that of national reunification. Once this was achieved, these energies were released to manifest themselves in diverse directions according to their own trajectories. And from here on began the true crisis of identity that will make itself felt in the Interwar period in Romanian thought.

The new spirit of Europe, which historically had heralded the advancements of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, was now revealing more ominous developments. The advancement of natural philosophy had culminated into the ideology of social Darwinism. While the progress of technology brought with it not only the promise of prosperity, but as was seen in the aftermath of the Great War, its potential for unprecedented death and destruction. Moreover, the affirmation of romantic nationalism, which once fostered the idea of national unity, had now given way to fantasies of degeneration and the pursuit of regeneration through

ethnic cleansing. The theory of the struggle for existence, originally applied to individuals in biology, had expanded to encompass the fears of the extinction of entire cultures and civilizations. All this while the specter of another total war, more terrible than all the others, loomed over.

In this turbulent setting we have introduced our most significant actors who were to emerge during this period. On one hand, we have the representatives of the “critical spirit”, the last of the Junimists, including Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, as well as modernist figures such as Eugen Lovinescu, and more traditionalist ones like Nicolae Iorga. On the other hand, we find the new school of thought: Nae Ionescu, Nichifor Crainic, and Lucian Blaga. Caught in between them, gripped by the “restlessness of creation”, are the younger intellectuals: Mircea Vulcănescu, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, and the others. With this we could observe a three-step Hegelian progression: the old old school, the old new school, and the new old school. A definitive categorization is nonetheless difficult due to the continuous evolution of their positions and opinions throughout their lives and careers. While some have entrenched themselves in the old ideal, others have enthusiastically embraced new ones. Interestingly, there are also those who have ingeniously reintroduced old ideals in new forms. Dividing them into rational and irrational schools is again insufficient, as neither side has denied the existence or necessity of the other. At times, there have been instances of agreement between members of opposing sides, as well as conflicts among those of the same school. Having made this distinction, we then proceeded to analyze the approaches they have taken in their discourses in order to formulate their theories regarding culture, whether as a product of human creation or as a natural phenomenon and the role of the individual as a creator of values within such a socio-cultural context.

But before we could discuss a crisis of identity it was essential to establish what an identity was, especially as part of the human personhood, where one acquires it from, and how one can pass it on, both from the perspective of those of the past, but also from that of some more modern theories. This exploration traversed the works of notable figures from Aristotle to Richard Dawkins, encompassing the philosophical perspectives of René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. Through this, it became evident that identity is a complex system of attributes shaped by the individual's interaction with both its natural and social environments. And of great importance in its formation, however, was the question of the human psyche, the relationship between mind and body, and between mind and a possible soul respectively. Delving deeper into this inquiry, we proceeded to examine the conceptualization of culture as an entity akin to a living organism. This led us through the philosophies of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and, notably, Oswald Spengler. We also explored the evolutionary interpretations of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, which gave rise to Social Darwinism, along with Rudolf Virchow's concept of *Kulturkampf*. Additionally, we revisited the crucial problem articulated by Thomas Malthus – the Malthusian Trap. And the beginning of the pursuit of a science of the soul of the nation - national characterology - through the founding of *Völkerpsychologie* by Wilhelm Wundt. From here we finally arrived to the fundamental issues of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the amalgamation of culture with the “struggle for existence” found in Friedrich Ratzel's principle of *Lebensraum*, and the development of the modern interpretation of geopolitics and biopolitics.

Thus, our study of the crisis proper begins with an exposition of primordialist and constructivist theories on the definition of ethnic identities, the concept of nation and especially

the forms of nationalism derived from them. Primordialist theories argue that ethnic identities, nations, and nationalism are deeply rooted in ties such as ancestry, language, religion, and culture. These are inherent, essential, and enduring aspects of human existence, and have been present since time immemorial. They are not subject to change or manipulation, but rather arise naturally from the shared experiences and collective memories of a particular group. On the other hand, constructivist theories propose that all these are socially constructed phenomena that emerge and evolve over time through human interaction and cultural processes. They are not fixed or predetermined but are shaped by historical circumstances, political ideologies, economic interests, and social dynamics. Language, education, media, and political institutions all play a role in shaping collective identities and fostering a sense of belonging to a particular group or nation. The primordialist perspective has historically been predominant among Romanian thinkers. Constantin Rădulescu-Motru differs and adopts an instrumentalist perspective. He views identities as means, tools or instruments used to achieve certain goals rather than being ends in themselves. They are flexible concepts that can be molded or even discarded based on specific circumstances and desired outcomes. In his case, they served as a starting point in pursuing our own unique Romanian destiny. Transitioning from individual identity to collective identity, we examined how communities influence and sometimes dictate a person's sense of self. Drawing insights from thinkers such as Charles Taylor, Emmanuel Mounier, Georg Simmel, Émile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Max Weber shed some light on this phenomenon.

From this point on, our study mostly focused on the reflections of our indigenous thinkers, who, under the impulse of national characterology, have sought to define the foundational elements of an authentic Romanian identity. Although the

importance of biological factors such as ancestry, ethnicity and even genetics in defining who we are as individuals and as a collectivity was widely recognized, they were considered insufficient to fully encompass the complexity of what it means to be Romanian. A position shared by Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Nae Ionescu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Mircea Eliade and even Nichifor Crainic, albeit with some hesitation. They emphasized the need of Romanianism to transcend beyond ethnicity, advocating for the adoption of a specific cultural, social, and historical way of life, along with a set of values that were not merely hereditary but consciously embraced and integrated into one's identity, eventually evolving into a spirituality. The first step in this direction was determining an apriorism in the Kantian sense, to serve as the principle from which to construct this Romanian dimension of existence. Unlike the Germans, who viewed *Lebensraum* as a territorial expanse awaiting assimilation, Romanians perceived it inversely – as an inner space preserving the archaic traditions and the essence of Romanian culture. The privileged connection with the land extended beyond its role as a mere source of vital resources, it also encompassed a deep psycho-affective imprint. Lucian Blaga argued that the territory bestowed a fundamental stylistic matrix upon its inhabitants. However, Motru countered this notion, asserting that soil alone does not determine the identity of a people, as various populations have inhabited the same territories, each cultivating their distinct cultures and civilizations. However, he concedes that relocating the territory of Romania and displacing its inhabitants elsewhere would indeed erode our identity. Vulcănescu takes a similar stance, portraying the geographical life of a nation as an interpretation of its territory and the possibilities it offers. This experience inevitably links over time a population sharing the same territory. Constantin Noica was of the opinion that this dimension should rather be sought not in the physical, but in



the mental constructs that lay within language. The subsequent discussion revolved around the historical narrative of the nation and its role in justifying the creation of a unified Romanian state. This challenged the prevailing notion of historical determinism, which held that the emergence of Greater Romania was an inevitable consequence of historical forces. Rather, it was argued that the realization of a unified Romanian state was primarily the result of voluntarism - a deliberate and conscious effort by individuals to bring about this outcome. This perspective emphasized the importance of human agency and collective will in shaping historical outcomes, and rejected the notion of passive submission to historical factors. The debate continued over the ideal form of the Romanian state. With arguments ensuing as to the sustainability of democracy, with some advocating for its continued pursuit while others considered a shift towards dictatorship. There were deliberations on the feasibility of maintaining a liberal state versus the establishment of a peasant state. And if it could have been a peasant state, what would have happened to the other social classes and what role would they have played? Additionally, there were proponents of a re-agrarization, but this time a modern, managed one, seeking to strike a balance between tradition and progress. And inevitably the question arose regarding whether Orthodoxy could adequately be the answer to the issue of our national specificity. On the one hand, Dumitru Stăniloae argued that there was no time when the Romanian people was not Orthodox, since it emerged out of its ethnogenesis as fully Christian. On the other side, Motru countered this by asserting that Orthodoxy cannot serve as a distinctively Romanian element, as it is shared by neighboring countries. Associating it solely with one ethnic group would diminish its universal significance within the broader mission of Christianity. Similarly, Lucian Blaga contended that Orthodoxy is not a product of the indigenous Romanian stylistic matrix but rather

originates from the Byzantine Greek one. Therefore, it cannot be confused with Romanian identity, as there are Romanians who do not adhere to it. Or, just as Eugen Lovinescu considered, Orthodoxy appeared as a “ferment of orientalization”, and our greatest vulnerability. The final debate was on the concept of destiny itself and its implications. Nae Ionescu advocated embracing destiny for spiritual and national rejuvenation, while Nichifor Crainic called for the rejection of modernity in favor of an ethno-nationalist and Christian Orthodox worldview - ethnocracy. Various young intellectuals offered their perspectives, ranging from moderate to radical, with some embracing tradition while others rejected it outright. Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran and Mircea Vulcănescu offered nuanced views, contrasting with the extremist views of the Legionary movement. Constantin Rădulescu-Motru proposed reconciling tradition with modernity in order to face the challenges of the time, while honoring the Romanian heritage in a new Romanianism.

Why was this then an identity struggle and not a political conflict? Or a clash of cultures? Or simply a confrontation between competing currents of thought? Because identity is the innermost principle from which all other directions of development, both individual and collective, proceed. The crisis initially debuted as a disruption in the mechanism of generational succession - the youth were eager to live up to the expectations set by their predecessors, yet the elders appeared reluctant to offer them the opportunity to do so. And this, because the stakes involved represented fundamentally different worldviews that could have potentially changed the historical course of Romania. It delved into the very foundations of how individuals perceived reality and their place within it. This entailed a redefinition of universal values and principles that affect all aspects of society, demanding a rejection or revision of the entire framework from which those emerge.

Essentially, this crisis of thought represented a seismic shift in intellectual paradigms and philosophical orientations, with far-reaching implications for how society understands itself. It would be absurd not to recognize, as Motru did, that an excess of rationality, technological reliance, and the abuses of positivism were indeed damaging to social life and inter-human relations. What the younger generation sought was not the eradication of progress. On the contrary, they were not nostalgic for the past, but were deeply invested in shaping the future, both their own and that of their country.

As each generation rediscovers the world not from where their predecessors left it, but from its origins, they must first catch up with their forebearers if they wish to continue in their tradition, or if they are to surpass them. Else they must chart a new path of their own. Unable to conform to the old modes of thought, or outright refusing to do so, the younger generation invented an even older tradition to embrace. Just as the contact with Europe allowed in the past the thinkers of the Transylvanian school to engage with the Enlightenment, similarly, in their search of meaning, the young generation sought solace in German anti-rationalism. A turn initiated at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Johann Georg Hamann's ideas and his translation of David Hume's works, which marked the beginning of a broader movement of anti-Enlightenment. This Counter-Enlightenment, as described by Isaiah Berlin, offered subjectivity in place of total objectivism, celebrated genius over equality, emphasized experiencing instead of reasoning, and prioritized the closeness of humanity to God over material comfort. Above all, it promised that even minor cultures could assert themselves and make meaningful contributions to a universal scale of values. And from this renewed discovery, *trăirism* took shape in Romanian thought. Yet, their challenges were not only rhetorical, as a system of thought encompasses more than mere contemplation

of ideals, but also involves tangible actions. Consequently, Romania, a nation already impoverished and with a destitute population, suffered greatly from the economic crisis of 1929. Disillusioned by the lack of action from the democratic regime, and in search of solutions, the young Romanian generation turned to find new inspiration in the emerging ideologies of postwar Europe: in the first part of the 1920s French Integralism; in the last part of the 1920s and early 1930s Italian Fascism; and finally, initially timid from 1933, and in force after 1938, German National Socialism. However, not all of them were looking to the right. It is worth noting that there was a segment of intellectuals, both older and younger, who aligned themselves with the socialist cause, with some even embracing Communism. In fact, it was the widespread fear of a potential Soviet takeover that roused the right-wing movements, pushing them to the extremes.

The young generation was in no way “paricidal”, as Eugen Ionescu labeled it. On the contrary, they harbored a genuine respect for their predecessors. However, as Motru observed, they ended up feeling “deceived” and betrayed by them, and caught up in the orchestrated conflicts between the elders, who one day feigned hostility only and apparent camaraderie another. Unlike their elders, the younger generation lacked a political cunning and were sincere to the point of being brutal in their expressions. Drawing a comparison to Saturn - a god of the ancient Roman religion analogous with the Greek titan Chronos, who, according to myth, ate his own children for fear of a prophecy that one of them would overthrow him, just as he had overthrown his father, Caelus - the old elites of Interwar Romania squandered the nation’s energies in one of the most crucial moments in its history.

What was the role that Constantin Rădulescu-Motru in this crisis? Throughout his life, he served as a mediator, bridging gaps between social classes, generations, schools of thought, and

ideologies. Given the path that Motru followed in his intellectual and political life, both from the perspective of a former Junimist, and from that of a theoretician of Romanianism, we consider him the most rational and moderate among the thinkers who sought to shape the ideology of the newly reunited Romania. He embodies the continuity of the Romanian critical spirit, inheriting the conservative tradition of his mentor Titu Maiorescu, which he upholds against the new emerging forms manifested by the more extreme movements that were making themselves felt in the rhythms of Romanian thought. Hence, for this we designate him “the sensible critic”, as he stands out among the few Interwar personalities to retain their common sense and resist the allure of radical overtures put forth by those who fancied themselves as messianic saviors of the Romanian nation. In the milieu of Interwar Romania, we find him in a privileged conjuncture to witness the evolution of these dissenting schools that emerged as autochthonous expressions of thought in the aftermath of the Great War, each vying for absolute dominance over the true Romanian identity. A petty landowner, he had immediate contact with the life of the village. While his background as a former Junimist acquainted him with the perspectives of the older generation. As a teacher, he was close to the youth, understanding most their struggles, and being directly responsible for propelling the careers of some of them, most notably those of Nae Ionescu and Mircea Eliade. As a philosopher and pioneer psychologist, he occupied a unique position to reconcile the pursuit of objective knowledge with the spiritual needs of the soul. And as an ideologue, he was a firm advocate of higher conservatism, but gradually drifted towards agrarian socialism. Engaged with the currents of thought of his time, including romanticism, nationalism, idealism and existentialism, and despite often adopting moderate positions and rejecting extremes of any kind, he ultimately became a significant

force in shaping the broader intellectual landscape of Interwar Romania. As one of the dissident theorists of conservatism, opposed to traditionalism, to that of a leading theoretician of țărănism and a key intellectual of the national renaissance during the final years of King Carol II's reign.

In examining the debates of the era, we will reference his works as a cornerstone and underlying standpoint for our position insofar as his polemics with the prominent figures of the time are concerned. This thesis can be therefore imagined as a courtroom proceeding, in which significant personalities of the time are summoned in turn and engaged in dialogue so as to testify to what had transpired within the soul of the Romanian nation in the brief respite in between the World Wars; and to be, consequently, scrutinized, either by their contemporaries or retrospectively by posterity. At the head of this trial we have placed the figure of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, to serve as judge, prosecutor and defendant.

Accordingly, we have attempted to piece together into a coherent narrative Motru's ever evolving philosophy, presented in fragments published at considerable intervals throughout his lifetime. Achieving a continuity of his thoughts has often required bridging gaps in time in order to fully understand the development of his ideas. His efforts were indeed remarkable and groundbreaking when considering the inherent diversity in the mechanisms at work in the formation of nations. Each shaped by its own peculiar processes, that no two nations can be determined by the same elements, and no standardized methodology can be applied to their definition. To this end, he developed an intricately complex philosophical system, integrating his political ideas with a unified metaphysics of energy, a principle of universal evolution culminating with human personality - energetic personalism, a theory of vocation, human subjectivity, and destiny, leading to the

creation of axiological values and culture. All this was aimed at fashioning a new type of individual, as well as a new conception of nationalism, which would resonate with the spirit and demands of the times, without resorting to the doctrine of hate, racist extremism or to anarchist or revolutionary violence. He advocated for a monistic perspective in which physical and psychic energies are unified as the basis of all phenomena. The evolution of these energies culminates in the development of the human personality, which, guided by vocation, generates axiological values enriching culture towards universal ideals. By integrating energetic personalism, vocation, Kantian apriorisms, and psychological elements, his metaphysics emphasizes the inseparable link between human subjectivity and destiny. And, although relativistic and materialistic, this system prioritizes moral altruism and collective betterment over the material dimension in its finality.

The problem of this crisis of identity will not find a resolution. This eminently internal struggle of conflicting narratives had provided a fertile ground for foreign powers to intervene and profit. They exploited the aspirations of the Romanian elite for modernization and the desperate desire to keep our borders intact, these external forces, with their own strategic interests in mind, sought to leverage the vulnerabilities within Romanian society. Thus, a strain of ultranationalism emerged, which, although apparently rooted in indigenous sentiments, ultimately bore the undeniable imprint of foreign influences. The legacy of the Interwar is a reminder of the intricate interplay between indigenous aspirations and foreign interventions in shaping the course of Romanian history. It challenges us to reflect on the authenticity of nationalist movements and their commitment to the genuine interests of the Romanian people amidst the geopolitical adversity and ideological fervor of the era. And it serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the fragility of identity in

the face of external pressures and internal divisions and the need for its vigilant defense.

Thus, with all that being said, our conclusion is that Romania, both past and present, was caught up in a perpetual hesitation. This state of inertia concealed a great host of tensions within our society. Our seeming lack of progress was not, however, an indication of a lack of action. On the contrary, Romania was thoroughly animated by numerous vectors, pulling on it with all their might in all directions. Which regrettably could not reach a consensus on the path ahead. A primordial conservatism born out of a fear of choosing a direction to follow. Therefore, the sum total of all their forces was therefore null. And they exhausted their energies in vain. As such, they held Romania pinned at a standstill. And so, it remains at an eternal crossroads, between cultures, between empires, between ideologies, between times. Perpetuating a cycle of stagnation in which whatever progress was made by one generation was undone by the next.



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