*Wege in die Moderne: Entwicklungsstrategien rumänischer Ökonomen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert.*

*Paths through Modernity: Development Strategies in the Romanian Economy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*

Angela Harre

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In this thought provoking monograph, Angela Harre sheds new light on major problems in Romanian historiography. What impact did the Phanariot regime have on the politics of the Romanian elites who took its place? Why did the landed gentry oppose A. I. Cuza even though he had established the first Romanian nation-state? Why did the dominance of the National Liberal Party suddenly collapse after decades in power? Why did an electorate that had overwhelmingly endorsed the National Peasant Party in 1928 turn against it so quickly afterwards? Why did Peasantist politicians such as Virgil Madgearu support industrialization? Why did Romanian democracy succumb to fascism and authoritarianism? Why did economists such as Mihai Manoilescu abandon dependency theory during the late 1930s and instead seek an alliance with Nazi Germany? Historians have looked to political rivalries, nationalism, ethnic conflict, or opportunism for answers to such questions, but Harre grounds her interpretations on a history of Romanian economic theory. Juxtaposing debates over industrialization versus a peasant economy, liberalism and authoritarianism, capitalism and corporatism, and free trade versus protectionism, Harre explains that many of the ostensibly strange choices made by Romanian politicians and intellectuals just made good economic sense.

This history of ideas owes as much to Michel Foucault as it does to Quentin Skinner. Harre demonstrates that Romanian intellectuals struggled for power as bitterly as they fought over ideas, and philosophical approaches lived or died according to the political alliances formed by their exponents. Rather than following a single idea through time, Harre is concerned with “the analysis of the connection between academic conflicts, their social contexts, and the battle for social power.” (19) Although she spends almost no time on things like the complicated politics of academic appointments, the problems of obtaining funding for cultural publications, or the personal quarrels between editors and writers, Harre does show how important debate was for refining intellectual positions. Her accounts of Constantin Stere’s polemics with Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea over how to apply Marxist critiques of capitalism to the Romanian context or Virgil Madgearu’s disputes with Ştefan Zeletin over land redistribution emphasize the diversity within major Romanian economic schools and the historically contingent nature of their conclusions. Harre’s approach to the history of ideas is also entangled and transnational, emphasizing that Romanian boyars learned about free trade from the Phanariots, the Poporanists derived their ideas about the peasantry from Russian Slavophiles, and that the corporatism of King Carol II’s royal dictatorship drew as much from the “organized capitalism” of Walter Rathenau (Germany) or Jean Gad (France) as it did from autochthonous sources.

Readers familiar with the history of Romanian politics between 1840 and 1940 will know how intellectually vacuous it was seen to be. The major political parties such as the National Liberal Party or the National Peasant Party were famous for opportunism and corruption and their power bases rested on backroom deals with the king or unscrupulous alliances with major industrialists. What is remarkable about Harre’s account is her insistence that many of their political platforms were actually realistic and thoughtful approaches to serious economic problems. She explains that the liberals of 1848 opposed feudalism because a more liberal economy was a precondition of free trade in Europe, and interprets the clash between A. I. Cuza and his opponents as a dispute over the supporters of industrialization and feudalism respectively. Keeping global markets in mind she also argues that industrialization became an economic necessity between 1850 and 1870 once the United States, Canada, and Australia began exporting grain to Europe. Similarly, she argues that the Soviet Union’s ability to “dump” agricultural goods on Europe during the Great Depression and the “parallel trade network” with Italy and Japan that emerged as a result of Germany’s quick economic recovery in 1933 rendered Mihai Manoilescu’s dependency theory irrelevant. Whereas Romanian economists had clung to dependency theory throughout the 1920s, they abandoned it wholesale in the late 1930s in favor of closer economic ties with Germany. Most historians have interpreted Manoilescu’s sudden shift toward a pro-German policy in 1938 as shameless opportunism, but Harre shows that it was Romania’s only sensible option given the novel international context of the late 1930s.