

LEGITIMATION CRISIS OF CAPITALISM IN ROMANIA: SOCIAL DYNAMICS AND IDEOLOGIZED KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT. This paper aims to investigate the discrepancy between the disaffected public perception of capitalism in Romania, as it emerges from past and current sociological survey data, and the construction of Romanian society as a social totality within mass media, the political sphere, and the social sciences. My argument is that these three spaces of knowledge production function according to ideologized criteria meant to stabilize capitalism in Romania and generate a distorted framework of understanding past and current social dynamics².

Keywords: capitalism, legitimation crisis, knowledge production, ideology, political system, mass-media, social sciences

In the last decade, a series of studies have been published that critically analyse the specificity of capitalist transformations in Romania in relation to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Ban 2014, 2016; Gabor 2010, 2012; Adăscăliței and Guga 2020). Romania is highlighted as one of the countries in the region where radical forms of neo-liberalism and extensive austerity reforms have been articulated (Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Bohle 2018). These economic transformations have generated profound discontent at the level of the Romanian society, starting from the social impact of these reforms on the general population (Adăscăliței 2017, Stoiciu 2012), and on workers' rights (Guga 2016), the limitation

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² This text has been elaborated and presented within the Socialist Vision Group, a network of public intellectuals focusing on researching capitalist transformations in Romania and articulating critical insights into social, political and economic processes.



of social dialogue and trade union activity (Trif 2013, 2016, 2016b; Adăscăliței and Muntean 2019; Stoiciu 2016), and the dislocation of the welfare state (Popescu, Ivan, and Raț 2016, 2019; Adăscăliței 2012), to the housing conditions and the transformation of housing from a social right into a profit-generating commodity for the growing real estate industry (Vincze 2017; Popovici 2020; Florea, Gagyi and Jacobsson 2018). Last but not least, they showed the impact these reforms had on vulnerable groups, which has led to a dramatic precariousness of their living conditions (Vincze, Petrovici, Raț and Pickler 2018; Vincze and Zamfir 2019; Raț 2005, 2013, Vincze, Ban, Gog and Friberg 2024).

However, there are still very few studies that explore the reactions to these economic transformations and how forms of critical contestation of these capitalist reforms were embedded within Romanian society (Gog, Braniște, and Turcus 2021; Cistelean 2019, Trifan 2016, 2019, Gog and Simionca 2020). To what extent did the protests that took place in Romania in recent decades have an anti-systemic social component that could politically mobilize an anti-austerity discourse (Gubernat and Rammelt 2012; Stoiciu 2021) and demand the adoption of social protection measures? What forms of social criticism have developed in Romania in recent decades that question capitalist transformations and suggest alternative forms of societal transformation (Bogdan 2021, Sandu 2021, Mihai 2021, Cistelean 2020, Poenaru 2017, Sîrbu and Polgar 2009)? Perhaps the most important theme that has remained relatively under-researched is how the population in Romania relates to these capitalist transformations and to the overall systemic changes that have taken place, not just to some specific processes that these changes have generated. To what extent are the neo-liberal reforms and projects that are still being promoted by various political forces, new and old, legitimized or contested by the Romanian society?

The three decades of post-socialist social and political sciences have generated very few critical studies on how the economic and social transformations underpinning the transition from a communist to a capitalist system were perceived at the level of the Romanian society. The rare references to the sporadic questions in sociological surveys that capture various aspects of the relationship to the economic transition are thematized in a caricatured logic, meant to ridicule 'retrograde mentalities' and the respondents who allegedly have 'communist nostalgia' and 'wish' for a return to a dictatorial regime. The critical issue to which social sciences have paid relatively limited attention is how we can sociologically explain the fact that there is a fairly common belief among the general population that the period before 1989 was better in many ways than the present one. To what extent should we see in these assessments a form of uncritical nostalgia for totalitarianism, rather than, instead, a form of contestation of the economic and social dysfunctions of the Romanian capitalist system?

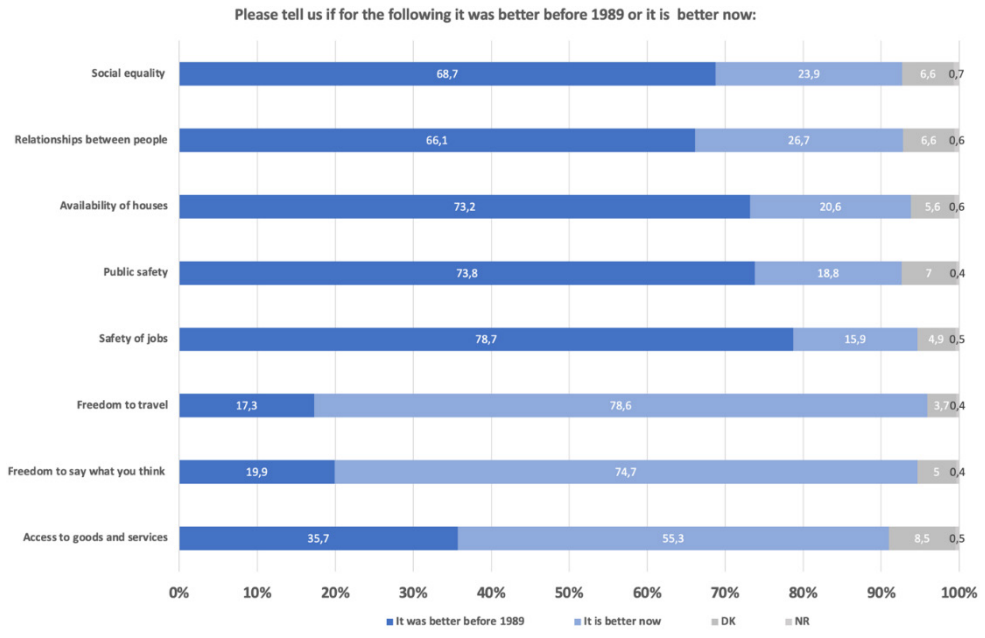
After more than three decades of capitalist transformations, there is a deep dissatisfaction within Romanian society with the social and economic transformations that have taken place. This state of affairs is not something new; various opinion polls conducted repeatedly in the 1990s highlighted the dominant belief within Romanian society that the direction we are headed is wrong (see Zamfir 2004:36 for a brief overview of the period 1996 - 2003). In 2010, an opinion poll conducted by IRES showed that 57% of the population believed they had a better life before 1989, compared to 21% who believed they fared worse and 15% who thought it was the same. 68% agreed with the statement that “the communist regime was a good idea, but poorly implemented”, compared to 21% who disagreed with this statement (IRES 2010). In 2013, an opinion poll conducted by INSCOP revealed that 44.4% of the population believed that life was better before 1989 than today, compared to 33.6% who thought that life was worse. 44.7% felt that the communist regime was a good thing for Romania, compared to 45.5% who saw the communist regime as a bad thing³. In 2023, in an INSCOP survey, the share of those who considered that the communist regime was good for Romania increased to 48.1%, while the share of those who thought that it was bad for Romanian society decreased to 42.2% (INSCOP 2023).

The FES survey - ‘Progressive Attitudes and Values in Romania’, conducted in 2022, confirms these data but allows us to analyse how Romanian society relates to the period before 1989 according to several dimensions⁴. These are reproduced in Graph 1. We can observe that, when it comes to social and economic aspects, such as access to housing, job security, public safety, relationships between people, or equality, an overwhelming majority consider that before 1989 it was better. For example, regarding job security, 78% believe it was better before 1989. On the other hand, regarding values related to freedom of movement and freedom of expression, the majority think it was better after 1989. The percentages are also very high, varying between 74 and 78%. What is important to highlight is that the data shows, in fact, that the population relates to the communist period in a reflexive manner, which generates nuanced positions that differ from those of many political scientists and public intellectuals who thematize the two periods in an antagonistic and radically contrasting way.

³ In 2023, when INSCOP, repeated this survey and presented the results in comparative perspective with the data from 2013, it presented these results the other way around. The differences are not significant and reveal the fact that there is no majority in the Romanian society that believes that the capitalist period is better than the socialist one. See INSCOP 2023.

⁴ This analysis uses a sociological survey conducted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Romania, based on a representative sample of 3666 respondents. For a detailed presentation of this data please see Bădescu G., Gog S., Tufis C. (2022) - Progressive attitudes and values in Romania, FES.

Graphic 1. Public perception of before and after 1989 period



Source of data: FES Survey - Progressive Attitudes and Values in Romania

The FES sociological survey clarifies which components are assessed positively (the socio-economic dimension) and which are perceived as being worse (the restriction of freedom of expression, thought, and movement). In previous ethnographic studies (Gog, 2024), we have shown that these perceptions have a real foundation and that for specific socio-demographic segments, such as workers active during the socialist period in industrial sectors, we can highlight the salary, housing, living standards, etc. -advantages they had during the socialist period and which, as a result of the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s, deteriorated dramatically, generating a broad process of downward social mobility. The perception of the socialist period varies greatly depending on the class position of the respondents. In previous analyses of the results of this sociological survey, we have highlighted the fact that people with high incomes and a high educational level tend to see the period after 1989 as better (Bădescu, Gog, Tufiş 2022:21). The same can be said if we analyse these perceptions according to age generations. Older people who lived during both periods tend to see the period before 1989 more favourably. However, despite these differences, still most people with higher education believe that from a socio-economic point

of view, it was better before 1989, and similarly when it comes to the younger generations who were socialized predominantly before 1989 (Bădescu, Gog, Tufiş 2022: 18-21). These valuations are extremely plausible considering that the period 1959 – 1973 was the period with the highest economic growth in Romania, with industrial GDP recording an increase of over 500% with direct consequences on the improvement of living conditions (Voinea et al. 2018:37). Murgescu (2010:352) shows that the urbanization process that took place during the communist period generated a considerable improvement in living conditions, both from the perspective of housing conditions (compared to rural areas) and from that of equipping these homes with the electrical household appliances necessary for a decent life.

It is important to emphasize that how the pre-1989 period is remembered is firmly anchored in the class position that the respondents have. We will approximate this class structure starting from the respondents' estimates regarding their income and the declared educational level - which influences the professional and occupational path of the respondents. We can observe from the analysis that the perception that the pre-1989 period was better from a socio-economic point of view is stronger in those social strata that are currently struggling the most. From the tables below, we can see how people who declare that their income is not enough for the bare necessities or is enough just for the bare necessities have significantly higher rates of favourable perception of the pre-1989 period (as being better from a socio-economic point of view than the present) than those who declare that their income is enough for a decent or comfortable life. Although this variable does not measure the actual incomes that respondents have or the material situation of the respondents (what constitutes a decent living or not varies from one person to another and is thus a relative indicator), it allows us to approximate the social categories that are currently experiencing economic difficulties.

We can notice a similar pattern in the case of the education dimension, where we observe that people with secondary and vocational education tend to see the period before 1989 as being better to a greater extent than people with higher education do. This is also visible in how the professional position of the respondents structures these perceptions. Pensioners, employees, and housewives generally consider that the period before 1989 (the socio-economic dimension) was better than the present, to a greater extent than students, freelancers, employers, and entrepreneurs ($p = .001$).

Tabel 1. Percentage of people who believe that before 1989 it was better in regards to various dimensions based on perceived income (non-responses excluded)

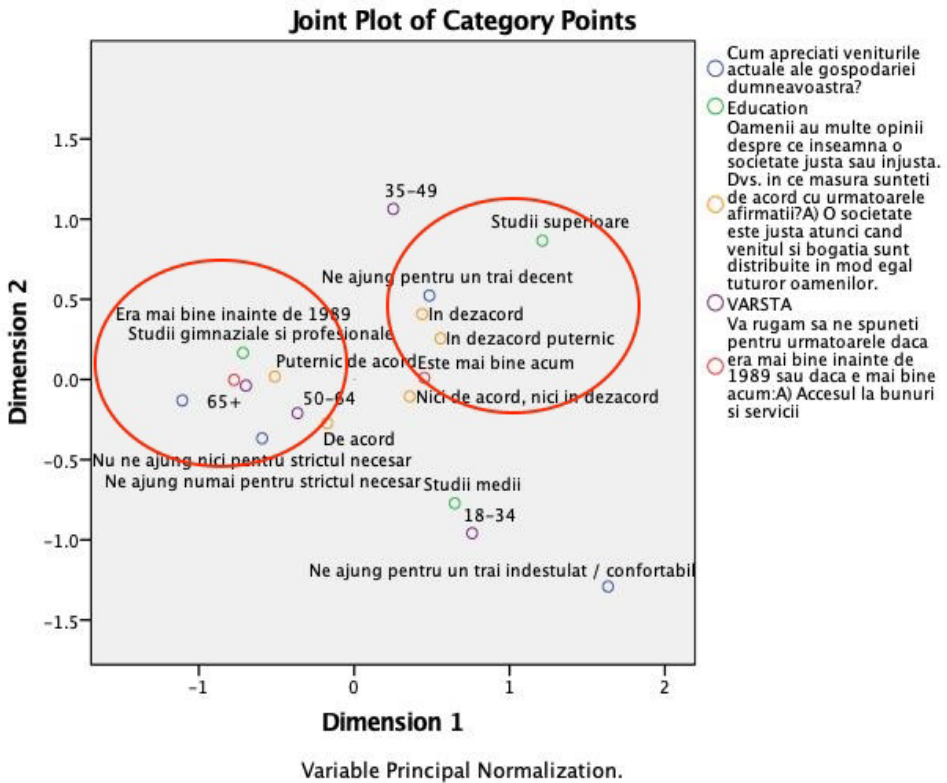
| | Income not enough for bare minimum | Income enough only for bare minimum | Income enough for a decent living | Income enough for a comfortable living |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Access to goods and services | 65.2% | 45.7% | 32.3% | 14.9% |
| Freedom to say what you think | 44.7% | 24.5% | 15.1% | 10.1% |
| Freedom to travel | 41.7% | 21.9% | 11.7% | 6.8% |
| Safety of jobs | 93.7% | 86.4% | 80.7% | 69.9% |
| Public safety | 89.9% | 83.9% | 77.5% | 54.4% |
| Availability of houses | 89.0% | 80.4% | 75.9% | 61.1% |
| Relationships between people | 82.5% | 77.3% | 66.5% | 52.2% |
| Social quality | 89.1% | 77.6% | 71.5% | 51.4% |

Source of data: FES Survey - Progressive Attitudes and Values in Romania

With the help of a multiple correspondence analysis, we can better visualize these class dynamics. There is a relatively high association between socio-economic status (measured here by education, age, and subjective assessment of one's income) and the perception of the socialist period (the dimension of access to goods and services). A solution with two dimensions explains approximately 62% of variance; the first dimension measured the perception of the period before and after 1989 and the egalitarian distribution of resources (Cronbach's Alpha.606); the second dimension measures the class positions (Cronbach's Alpha of .208) We also introduced into the analysis a variable related to the perception of what social justice means, in this case, the positions towards the equal distribution of income and wealth. The socialist period is generally remembered as relatively egalitarian compared to the post-December period, in which social inequalities increased dramatically.

We can notice that the socialist period is generally seen as better among people with low and medium levels of education who have difficulty managing their income. They constitute the majority within the Romanian society. The perception that the period after 1989 and the disagreement regarding the fact that a just society means an egalitarian distribution of resources is generally associated with people with a suitable material situation and higher education.

Graphic 2. Multiple correspondence analysis focusing on perception on living conditions before and after 1989 period

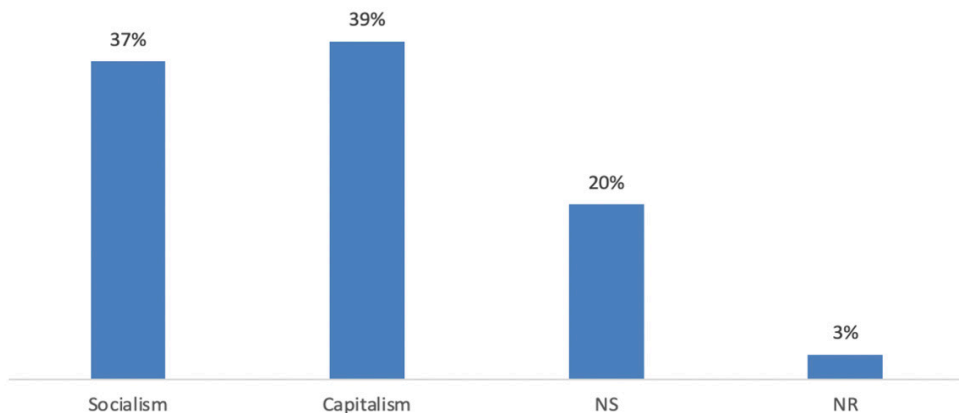


Another important dimension that enables us to highlight the crisis of legitimation of capitalism is the analysis of the actual support for this political system. This clearly shows the fact that a capitalist society does not have such great support and legitimation within the Romanian society. When asked about the option for socialism and capitalism, only 39% would opt for capitalism, 37% would opt for socialism, and 20% would not know which to choose. In 2018,

the IRES study ‘Capitalism and Society: Romanians’ Perceptions of Capitalism’ showed that 50% of people who were adults during the communist period would choose socialism, compared to 44% who would choose capitalism. In 2019, in a sociological survey conducted by the Bureau for Social Research, to the question ‘What is better for Romania now?’ obtained the following frequency distribution: a capitalist market economy (41%), a socialist economy directed by state structures (13%) and a mixed economy, capitalist-socialist (26%). 20% of respondents did not know what to answer. A year later (2020), the same research institute measured the cumulative opinion towards two ideological blocs: socialism and social democracy, on the one hand, and capitalism and Christian democracy, on the other. 58% of respondents had a favourable attitude towards socialism and social democracy, while 30% had an unfavourable attitude. For capitalism and Christian democracy, the frequency distributions were 56% of respondents having a favourable attitude while 30% had an unfavourable attitude. The survey also consistently shows that a favourable attitude towards socialism and social democracy is associated primarily with voting for PSD (Social Democratic Party) and Pro Romania. In contrast, a favourable option for capitalism and Christian democracy is associated with the Green Party, PMP (People’s Movement Party), and PNL (National Liberal Party). Voting dynamics highlight in this case plausible political vectorizations.

Graphic 3. Option for socialism or capitalism in contemporary Romanian society

**If you could, what would you choose between
socialism and capitalism?**



Source of data: FES Survey - Progressive Attitudes and Values in Romania

There is, of course, a need for a more precise methodology that would allow a more accurate operationalization of socialism and capitalism, depending on economic social dimensions, political values, etc., but what appears very clearly in these sociological surveys is the fact that the Romanian capitalist system is far from having a strong legitimation within Romanian society. Romanian society's perception is that capitalism has failed to generate the economic and social well-being it promised and that a large segment of the population believes that they had a better life before 1989. These dynamics regarding the memory of the past are also reflected in how future political alternatives and options are imagined. The data is plausible and consistent with previous research.

With the help of a homogeneity analysis, we can draw a clearer picture of the fact that support for capitalism is associated with how competitiveness is valued or not, how entrepreneurs are represented, and whether they consider that access to health services should be differentiated according to each person's contribution (in a meritocratic sense). A solution with two dimensions explains approximately 60% of the variance (Cronbach's Alpha .455 and .386). We also introduced the self-perception of adequate/ inadequate of income into the analysis. From the graph below, positions in favour of capitalism are associated with a positive attitude towards entrepreneurs, a positive valuation of competition and the perception that this is beneficial for society, and last but not least, with meritocratic attitudes regarding accessing healthcare. These positions are expressed mainly by people who consider their income enough for a good and good life. Conversely, the option for socialism is associated with the dominant perception that competition is harmful, with a negative perception towards entrepreneurs, and with the desire that access to the health system should not be differentiated according to contribution. Most of these people come from the categories that consider their income sufficient only for the bare necessities.

An interesting aspect to note is that the percentage of 'do not know' answers to the socialist/capitalist question increases among people who have less education (Table 2) and are struggling financially. The people most marginalized and disconnected from the opportunity structures of contemporary society are also the people whose political beliefs are least crystallized in this regard. They are also the least interested in politics and do not intend to vote in the next elections.

Graphic 4. Multiple correspondence analysis focusing on socialism/capitalism option

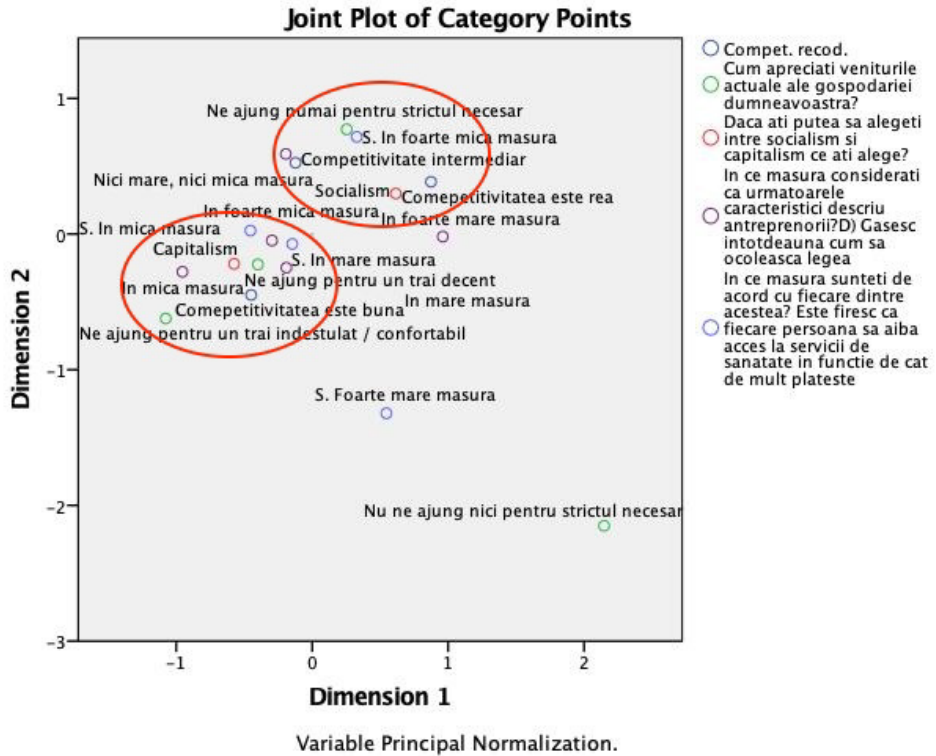


Table 2. Support for socialism or capitalism according to levels of education

| | Pre-High School Education | High School and Post-High-School Education | University and Postgraduate Education | Total |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Socialism | 41.1% | 35.6% | 26.7% | 37.8% |
| Capitalism | 33.6% | 42.8% | 52.9% | 39.6% |
| Don't know | 22.2% | 20.0% | 15.7% | 19.9% |
| No reply | 3.1% | 1.7% | 4.7% | 2.7% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Source of data: FES Survey - Progressive Attitudes and Values in Romania

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This contestation of capitalism should not be necessary understood as a support for left-wing positions or parties. This is visible if we analyse the options of the segment of the population that feels closer to the AUR party (Alliance for the Union of Romanians, the acronym means ‘Gold’ in Romanian). Although most who would opt for socialism do not feel close to this political formation, we can still see among them a slightly more significant association than the population segment that opts for capitalism. 19% of people who would choose socialism feel very close to this political formation compared to only 11.3% of those who choose capitalism.

Table 3. How close do you feel you are to AUR party based on socialist or capitalist option?

| | Very close | Close | Somewhat close | Not close at all | NR | TOTAL |
|-------------------|------------|-------|----------------|------------------|-----|-------|
| Socialism | 7.1 | 11.9 | 23.6 | 56.4 | 1 | 100 |
| Capitalism | 2.7 | 8.6 | 19.2 | 69.3 | 0.2 | 100 |

Source of data: FES Survey - Progressive Attitudes and Values in Romania

We can see the same dynamics if we analyse support for a military regime in relation to the option for socialism and capitalism. It is important to mention that the data was collected before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. 33% of those who opted for socialism believe that it is good and very good for Romania to be led by a military regime, while only 25% of those who opted for capitalism support this. Both camps have high values, but the order of magnitude is significantly higher among people who would opt for socialism. Structural dissatisfaction with capitalist transformations and the option for socialism do not automatically translate into democratic left-wing options. A significantly large segment of Romanian society opts for authoritarian regimes, which present potential proximity to non-democratic political regimes.

Table 4. How good do you think it is for Romania to have a ruling military regime?

| | Very good | Good | Neither good, but not bad either | Bad | Very bad | Don't know | NR | TOTAL |
|-------------------|-----------|------|----------------------------------|------|----------|------------|-----|-------|
| Socialism | 13.4 | 19.9 | 8.5 | 21.2 | 28.8 | 7.8 | 0.4 | 100 |
| Capitalism | 14.5 | 10.7 | 8.6 | 26.1 | 35.8 | 4.2 | 0 | 100 |

Source of data: FES Survey - Progressive Attitudes and Values in Romania

Right-wing populist parties capitalize on this popular dissatisfaction with economic transformations and channel anti-system sentiments towards a nationalist and quasi-fascist agenda. This was also clearly observed in the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections, when the far-right candidate, Călin Georgescu, and AUR, mobilized many people with a precarious financial situation. The IRES study conducted in December 2024 regarding the hypothetical voting intention in the second round, annulled by the Constitutional Court, shows that Călin Georgescu would have won the elections by a wide margin and would have been supported predominantly by people with low educational levels, people living in rural areas and the younger generations (IRES 2024).

The emergence of the far right and neo-legionarism in Romania and its relation to structural dissatisfaction with capitalist transformations and the social dislocations they produced is not new. Tudor Bugnariu documented in his research on workers in Cluj during the interwar period how the fascistization of certain factions of workers took place against the backdrop of crises of capitalism (Bugnariu, 2013). In the 1980s, when brutal forms of ethnonationalism and protochronism were reasserting themselves under Romanian communism, rhetorically diminishing the role that fascism played in Romania, Bugnariu reminded sociologists of the formation dynamics of the Legionary Movement and how they sometimes capitalized on an emerging ‘incipient anti-capitalism’ among social categories affected by the crisis after the first world war (Bugnariu, 2013b).

In Polanyian tradition, we must understand the emergence of radical right-wing movements as a result of the dysfunctions of the market economy (Polanyi, 2001, p. 248) and the crises that capitalism generated (Dale, Homes, and Markantonatou 2019:163). However, the role of these movements is not to dislocate capitalism but to stabilize it in an anti-democratic way (Lim, 2023; the same argument is also developed in Bugnariu, 2023b). The criticism in Romania of multinational corporations and ‘globalist’ values in favour of indigenous capitalism, accompanied by corporatization, mysticism, and nationalism, represents a fascist reiteration not only of processes triggered by past systemic crises but also of what is happening in other illiberal countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Kalb, 2019; Antal, 2019; Scheiring, 2020). Polanyi articulated this dynamic very clearly in ‘The Essence of Fascism’:

“By denouncing Socialism and Capitalism alike as the common offspring of Individualism, it enables Fascism to pose before the masses as the sworn enemy of both. The popular resentment against Liberal Capitalism is thus turned most effectively against Socialism without any reflection on Capitalism in its non-Liberal, i.e. corporative, forms. [...] First Liberalism is identified with Capitalism; then Liberalism is made to walk the plank; but Capitalism is no worse for the dip, and continues its existence unscathed under a new alias.” (Polanyi 1935:367)

Ideological obstructions and the spaces of knowledge production on the Romanian society

Given the massive social impact that the economic reforms of the last 30 years have had on Romanian society, the results revealed by the FES sociological survey should not generate surprises. As we have shown, they are consistent with other sociological research conducted in recent years, which highlights the deep dissatisfaction with the capitalist transformations in Romania and the dislocations that it has produced. In this context, an important question we must address is the following: Why is there so little notice of these critical positions regarding the capitalist transformations, and the way in which the transition was experienced at a societal level? How can we explain the fact that in a democratic society, political positions regarding the social effects generated by the capitalist political economy are not more readily discussed and debated in the public space?

A hypothesis would be to analyse the spaces in which society as a whole is symbolically mediated and to interrogate the dynamics and mechanisms that structure the representational policies and knowledge production regarding the Romanian society. To what extent are they explicitly or implicitly regulated ideologically (Horkheimer, 2014; Cook, 2001; Bogdan, 2019), a fact that can obstruct the coagulation and public manifestation of the dissatisfactions with the capitalist transformations in Romania? Here, we refer primarily to those social spaces that generate representations of a social totality and discursively make explicit the everyday instantiations of the existing socio-economic order. For example, and this often happens in public space, when dissatisfaction is expressed with the economic effects of the transition, numerous experts classify these 'opinions' as a form of nostalgia or as the expression of retrograde positions. In this case, we are talking about how scientific expertise calibrates segments of social reality and ideologically re-scales them in accordance with its own political positions. Another way of ideologically re-inscribing the representations of society is to identify wrong causalities for the studied dysfunctions. An example in this sense is the massive migration from Romania which was rarely thematized in the first two decades as a direct consequence of capitalist reforms. The role of the examination below is to circumscribe the main social spaces in which Romanian society is discursively constructed and to articulate research hypotheses in relation to what Althusser called the 'ideological apparatuses of the state' and their multiple instantiations at the educational, cultural, political, legal, etc. levels. (Althusser 2014:242)

First, the extent to which this ideological obstruction occurs at the level of the mass media should be explored. The Romanian mass media often reflects the socio-economic problems faced by the population but rarely critically associates them with capitalist transformations per se. Romanian journalism and editorial policies are almost entirely pro-capitalist and tend to support a project of 'reforming' society in the sense of a liberalization aimed at consolidating the market economy. It is interesting to follow the various media monitoring reports that constantly signal political influence on editorial policies, the absence of transparency, the threat to journalistic freedom, the importance of media pluralism, etc., all objective and important problems, but these reports discuss very little about how much of the written and audio-visual mass-media has been monopolized by capital. The advertising industry market in Romania, for example, reached a fabulous figure - 683 million euros in 2023 (Newman et al., 2024: 100). The report 'The State of the Romanian Media in the Super-Election Year 2024' written by the Centre for Independent Journalism estimates that of the commercial revenues collected, only *"less than 1% goes to editorial projects that also perform a public service (surveys, investigations, coverage of the political, social and economic agenda, etc.)"* (Lupu, 2024, p. 13). The primary stake is to make profits. We have detailed studies on the consumption dynamics of different types of media, types of shows or articles, the target audience according to generation, area of residence, etc., and the capacity of these media niches to constitute markets for the advertising industry⁵. The primary role of the media is to produce a flow of consumers and generate profit from these niches. For the capitalist mass-media the goal cannot be to challenge the market economy and the dysfunctions it generates, since making a profit from media production is precisely its main function.

Because of this, the Romanian media has become an important target for foreign direct investment (FDI) in the last three decades. A relevant example is the Ringier Media Trust, which owns hundreds of newspapers, televisions, and radios worldwide. In Romania, some media brands managed by this corporation are Avantaje, Elle, Unica, Viva!, TV Satelit, Libertatea, eJobs, imobiliare.ro, Stiri curate, etc⁶. Another example is Central European Media Enterprise, boasting 43 regional television channels. According to their estimates, this consortium has a total audience of 49 million people in 6 Central and Eastern European countries. In Romania, for example, they have the following investments⁷: Pro TV, Pro Cinema, Acasa, etc.

⁵ <https://mediafactbook.ro/media-market/sectors>, Last accessed on 29 December 2024

⁶ <https://digital.ringier.ro>, Last accessed on 29 December 2024

⁷ <https://www.cetv-net.com/countries/romania>, Last accessed on 29 December 2024

My argument here is undoubtedly not that foreign corporations control the reality of Romanian media. There are also important media companies with Romanian capital, e.g., Intact Media Group or Realitatea Media, with large turnovers. What is important to highlight, however, is that, for the most part, the media is not publicly owned and does not have a public function. Therefore, the primary stake of the media is not to defend the public interest or to reflect public dissatisfaction with the capitalist status quo. In the report prepared by the CNA (National Audiovisual Council) for 2023, most audiovisual licenses granted until that date are owned by private commercial companies⁸. Public audiovisual licenses are an insignificant minority. In this regard, we can also analyse the audiences provided by BRAT (Romanian Audit Bureau of Circulation). It can be easily observed that these private commercial companies hold the absolute majority in producing Romanian media realities⁹. This is true not only in the television and radio segments where we find control of capital but also in the written press, in the digital press, and, of course, in the area of websites. The primary stake of these private media companies is to make a profit in relation to the investments made, as Adrian Sârbu, the president of one of the largest local media corporations, says in an interview:

“In the last 25 years, I have had the chance, the power, and the talent to build private institutions of public stature, PRO TV, CME, Mediapro, Mediafax, etc., which have employed tens of thousands of Romanians, offering them the opportunity for a career. I have respected this country’s laws, promoted strict principles of corporate governance, and never encouraged the criminal spirit in my companies. I have created generations of professionals. I have worked simultaneously with hundreds of managers, delegating and sharing my ideas and what I have gained with them. I was the only Romanian to advance to the position of CEO of a public American company. **I have created hundreds of millions of dollars of value for my shareholders and myself.** The companies under my control or management have paid hundreds of millions of euros in taxes to the Romanian state in the last ten years alone.”¹⁰ (emphasis mine)

The mass-media’s function of representing society has been deeply captured in the last three years by a capitalist logic whose aim is the ideological reproduction of the system and, indeed, not to challenge it. The population’s dissatisfaction

⁸ <https://www.cna.ro/Situa-ii-privind-licen-ele,6771.html>, Last accessed on 29 December 2024

⁹ Internet traffic: <https://www.brat.ro/sati/rezultate/type/site/page/1/c/all>,
Newspaper circulation: <https://www.brat.ro/audit-tiraje/cifre-de-difuzare>, radio audience:
<http://www.audienta-radio.ro/userfiles/items/Audienta%20radio%20-%20Valul%20de%20vara%202022.pdf> TV audience https://www.arma.org.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ARMA-2022_11.xlsx, Last accessed on 29 December 2024

¹⁰ <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/adrian-sarbu-a-fost-retinut-pentru-24-de-ore-cazul-mediafax-fabricat-la-comanda-lui-pontaghita-13799960>, Last accessed on 29 December 2024

with the capitalist system is recoded through an ideological filter and re-articulated as dissatisfaction with the corruption of the system, the inability of the political class to pursue the interests of society, or the lack of professionals and experts in key positions to ensure the proper functioning of administrative structures, as it happens in the West etc. The fundamental assumption behind this ideological recoding is that solving these problems will improve the entire system's functioning. However, in the view of the vast majority of the private media in Romania, this system, a capitalist one, is intrinsically good. The idea that a vast part of these dysfunctions are generated by the processes of capitalist accumulation or by how the interests of capital constantly lead to a dislocation of the welfare state are systematically evaded. There is, therefore, a significant gap between how the media represents Romanian society and the real and deep dissatisfactions that exist at the level of the Romanian society. The mediating function of representing society is ideologically distorted; the screen through which society sees itself in the mass-media is deeply colonized by the interests of capital and capital investors, for which the media must generate profits and defend an implicit political economy that can guarantee the return on investments.

Table 5. If next Sunday general elections would take place, with what party would you vote?

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| PSD | 20.7 |
| PNL | 7.2 |
| USRPLUS | 4.7 |
| AUR | 6.2 |
| UDMR | 1.5 |
| PMP | .6 |
| Other | 2.7 |
| I would not vote | 22.8 |
| Don't' know | 26.6 |
| NR | 7.0 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Source of data: FES Survey - Progressive Attitudes and Values in Romania

Another important space where an ideological blockage of representing society occurs is the political one. Previous studies (Badescu, Gog, Tufis, 2022) have highlighted that we have an electorate open to left-wing policies in Romania. However, we do not have political parties that represent this electorate. The data from the FES survey highlight the fact that in Romania, there is a large segment of the population that does not feel represented by any existing party. 22% would not vote, and 26% do not know who to vote for. Almost half of the population feels not represented by existing parties.

These dissatisfactions occur in the context in which, since the 1990s, a right-wing political hegemony has emerged in Romania, largely reproduced within the parties that claimed to be left-wing as well. Vladimir Borțun (2024) highlights in his analyses how PSD, for example, has consolidated in Romania the interests of local capital and an economic agenda aimed at supporting private initiatives, as well as public policies that have led to the weakening of the welfare state. An analysis of the new socialist parties points out that they are frozen in an irrelevant neo-Ceausescu-alike project or have a deeply diluted left-wing message without the capacity to mobilize the masses. Diana Mărgărit (2021) follows the evolution of the parties that declare themselves left-wing - the Social Democratic Party, the Romanian Workers' Party, the Socialist Labor Party, and the micro-parties that emerged from them, the United Socialist Party, the Romanian Workers' Party, etc. and shows the fact that they have been a failure in terms of addressing the dysfunctions generated by capitalist structural reforms. Those that came to power (PSD) have failed to generate an alternative to the neo-liberal development model, to reduce social inequalities, or to promote comprehensive social policies; those that remained extra-parliamentary have been entirely irrelevant and sometimes inadequate in mobilizing social discontent.

Political parties are one of the primary sources of generating an image of the Romanian society as a whole, and they have, of course, multiple territorial and national institutional levers to amplify these political discourses that imagine societal dynamics of development. It is important in this context to point out the vast amounts that parliamentary parties receive from the state budget (253 million lei in 2021, 234 million lei in 2021, 256 million lei in 2022, 227 million lei in 2023 (Pârveu & Vasiliu, 2023) and an absolute record figure in 2024 of 386 million lei (Pârveu, 2024). It is also important to mention that, by far, the parties' most significant category of expenses is what the Permanent Electoral Authority calls 'press and propaganda.' In 2024 alone, 214 million lei were spent on this category (without counting the extra-budgetary sources that parties have), which does not include the amounts spent on public opinion polls, production and dissemination of electoral videos, events, etc. The discursive capacity of political parties to produce an image of Romanian society, as well as the resources they

have at their disposal to institutionalize such an image, explains why within the current parliamentary party system we encounter so few critical interrogations of the capitalist political economy in Romania.

Another important space where we should investigate the existence or not of an ideological blockage in the future is that of the social sciences in Romania. In the last 30 years, this field has generated the most projections regarding what Romanian society is as a totality, what the main directions of transformation are, and how dysfunctions and broad social discontents should be interpreted. Particular attention should be paid in future studies to the 'transitology' that marked especially the first two decades of research and scientific production in the social sciences, within which we can observe a relative absence of connecting the segments investigated to the new broader political economy.

Academic spaces are primarily professionally formative spaces that prepare and consecrate individuals who will occupy important leadership positions in Romania's political, economic, and administrative apparatuses. To what extent do these spaces ideologically reproduce the capitalist system? Do they generate forms of knowledge that critically interrogate the political economy that structures the professional fields for which it prepares students? Here, we should analyse the study programs, the curricula used, the course materials, the recommended bibliography, the scientific production of the teaching staff, etc., and interrogate to what extent this develops a critical perspective on the capitalist political economy.

Academic spaces (universities, academic societies, institutes, research and social intervention centres) are also relevant because this is where a good part of the expertise, reports, and recommendations for public policies are produced. It is already a common practice for the local state and national governance structures to base their development strategies and policies on academic expertise or NGOs in which people with academic training work. The important research question that we need to address in analysing these productions of expertise that are being provided to governance structures is what types of problems they address, and what is the broader framework in which they place the recommendations they develop? For example, given the housing crises that local administrations face and the numerous development strategies produced by the academic environment which is the dominant perspective - that of urban regeneration through stimulating the real estate industry and selling houses for profit or encouraging investments in public housing or cap on the rents? Do the recommended public policies reproduce the interests of capital and try to generate new investment spaces to generate profit, or do they aim to improve the population's living conditions instead?

Expertise is never strictly technical; it is embedded in ideological options, and its implementation presupposes specific political economy decisions.

Last but not least, academic spaces in Romania are important because fundamental social research is produced here focusing on the problems facing Romanian society, and therefore, they are a significant source of narratives on how society is represented as totality. Looking back at how the social sciences (sociology, economics, political science, social work, administrative sciences, psychology, etc.) developed in post-socialist Romania, it is essential to analyse the extent to which they were marked by an ideological obstruction in the analysis of the adverse effects that the transition had on the population of Romania. To the extent that it managed to inventory these dysfunctions, to which systemic factors did it predominantly attribute their emergence? To the communist legacy, Balkan Romanianness, insufficient modernization, global gaps, the new capitalist political economy, etc.? In what type of epistemology are embedded the research questions and the analyses carried out?

In many of the studies produced in the first two decades of transition, the capitalist economy and the consolidation of a capitalist statehood have not been methodologically taken into account as variables that can structure the social processes studied. There are, of course, notable exceptions, such as the studies of Vladimir Pasti in the 1990s, however, overall, the critical analysis of the transition that N.N. Constantinescu made so remarkably in the 1990s has been too little continued and deepened. We now have the critical distance necessary to problematize the ideological assumptions that structured the social sciences field's genesis in post-socialist Romania.

The field of political economy from Romania was one of the main spaces that analysed and guided the transition. A large part of this field's scientific and academic production generated explanations regarding social dysfunctions in terms of an insufficiently well-implemented capitalism. We can see this both in the transition economists and contemporary economists concerned with the successful integration of Romanian capitalism into global capitalism. Ulm Spineanu, for example, known to the general public for his portfolio as Minister of Reforms in Victor Ciorbea's cabinet, had in the first post-1989 decade a prolific publishing and teaching activity regarding how the transition should unfold (Spineanu 1995, 1996, 1999). Spineanu was a university professor specializing in macroeconomics. Still, he also held important positions in the expertise of emerging capitalist entrepreneurship in Romania; for example, he was the president of the General Union of Industrialists of Romania (employers' confederation). Also, in the area of economic expertise, he was a member of the leadership of the Romanian Society of Economists (SOREC). He wrote numerous books on transition (mainly - "Transition: let us stop spreading illusions, 1999), and

through his institutional positions, he played an important role in generalizing his vision of the trajectory that Romanian society must follow to become a 'functional' one.

The macroeconomic texts written by Ulm Spineanu have a strong poetic and ideological cadence; the constant impression you get is that he recites economic truths, he does not perform actual analyses. The conclusion of each section is always the same - the need to achieve capitalism at all costs and to hasten the 'rehabilitation' of the Romanian economy. The structural solution to the economic difficulties that Romania was facing was primarily aimed at transferring a significant part of state property to the private sector and the active involvement of the state in creating markets and stabilizing them. In order to generate this process of transferring public property to private entrepreneurs, the state could, within this vision, even pay money by covering the outstanding debts of some enterprises in order to facilitate their privatization (Spineanu 1999:35). One of the important problems that the reformers of the system had to avoid, according to him, was that of not carrying out a simple reform of socialism, the objective was pure capitalism, and for this, it was important to completely dislocate state property, to achieve a thorough restructuring of the economy and 'complete liberalization' (Spineanu 1999:37). It is very easy to see how these texts articulated a new social ontology - one in which society had to be reformed alongside with the economy, the market had to become the full test of any public policy, and everything had to be adapted around values that stimulate competition and market competitiveness (Spineanu 1999:72).

In retrospect, we know what an economic and social disaster the neo-liberal reforms implemented by the CDR government between 1996 and 2000 generated (Ban 2014:160-167), when Ulm Spineanu was writing these texts to support them. It is important to emphasize that this economic collapse with tremendous inter-generational effects was a calculated and assumed decision. Spineanu spoke at this time of the need for a profound shock therapy that must be implemented quickly and 'multi-factorially' (Spineanu 1999:271), even if it will bring about a significant social impact and economic depression (Spineanu 1999:72). The social costs were understood as secondary to the historical necessity of implementing capitalism. What is very clear from these programmatic texts is that the need of creative destruction and professional reconversion of workers (Spineanu 1999:72) are inscribed in the firm conviction, a-la-Fukuyama, that we are passing through an end of history and that the total implementation of capitalism is a technocratic truth that cannot be contested.

We see the same type of ideological understanding of economic expertise later on; it is not the prerogative of a lack of experience in the early post-socialist economic field. Lucian Croitoru, for example, researcher, professor,

expert of the International Monetary Fund, and advisor to the Romanian National Bank, argues in his studies ('The End of Regulation and the Last Regulator', published in 2013 and 'In Defence of Markets', published in 2012) that a capitalist society is actually in line with human nature. Private property ensures the proper functioning of free markets, allowing for the articulation of competitiveness between free agents, leading to innovation and productivity. Of course, this facilitates a true democracy (Croitoru 2013:98). This type of ultra-liberalism is constituted as an epistemological device that views with scepticism state regulations, which are seen as exogenous to the free market economy (Croitoru 2013:20). This approach is very critical of the budget deficits generated by the expenses that the state registers and of the social policies that it implements. Moreover, here we can see again how the analysis of the transition in Romania is inscribed in the same philosophy of history inspired by the writings of Fukuyama (Croitoru 2013:39) that sees capitalism and the deregulated free market as a quasi-implacable direction of development, regardless of the social violence it produces.

What is problematic in this type of expertise is that it embeds a political and ideological option in a scientific language that had major effects on the entire Romanian society. The series of economic arguments compels the authors to infer how society should be rescaled (in a register of competitive adversity and not of social solidarity) and also about what human nature is (freedom, competition, and resilience and not social and material security). The deep dissatisfaction that Romanian society experienced regarding the economic transformations in the first two decades of transition was de-legitimized by an expertise that presented itself as scientific and closed the possibility of an honest political debate on redistribution and rescaling of the economy. We see precisely the same types of reactions and expertise today whenever proposals for progressive taxation of capital or an increase in the minimum wage appear in the public space. The argument that dominates the media and the positions of the vast majority of the economic establishment is that this would generate an economic catastrophe and that companies would leave Romania.

My argument here is not that Romanian economists do not develop anti-capitalist positions but that they do not articulate forms of reflexivity in economics that would allow the inclusion of various perceived dysfunctions at the societal level in an alternative political economy model. The crises that capitalism generates are understood paradoxically, but ideologically coherently, as the result of insufficient capitalism. A counter-example to this ideological closure is perhaps the writings of Daniel Dăianu, university professor, former minister of finance, former MEP, BNR advisor, and member of numerous economic academies. Unlike mainstream Romanian economic thinking, Dăianu has a

significantly more complex positioning in the first two decades of transition (Dăianu 2000, 2004, 2006, 2009). He knows that the integration into the European Union is not automatically a good thing and, therefore, cannot be presented as a messianic answer to the problems that Romanian society is experiencing; he understands very well the existence of varieties of capitalism and critically interrogates the type of capitalism that is implemented in our country (Dăianu 2009:127-128). He is also one of the few Romanian economists who states that the past communist society cannot be held responsible for all the dysfunctions generated by capitalism today (Dăianu 2009:131) and that there is a fundamental need for public goods that markets cannot provide. In the debate surrounding 'Letter to my Romanian friends',¹¹ in which G.M Tamas criticizes from leftist positions the similarities in Romania between middle-class Romanian liberalism and rising xenophobic nationalism, Dăianu showed that a post-capitalist critique is welcome for consolidating democracy. Dăianu's positions are certainly pro-capitalist, but he discusses the possibility of a multi-linear, non-Manichean history in which the practical contingencies of how capitalism is configured in Romania can be debated and criticized. It is a relatively different approach from the ideological unilinearity in which the Romanian political economy inscribed its extensive expertise and shaped public policies.

I bring up Dăianu's positions to highlight a type of nuance that has not existed for a long time in the radical pro-capitalist imaginary of the Romanian political economy. However, of course, Dăianu's expertise also reproduces, in many cases, common ideological premises. For example, he is convinced that the rentier capitalism that has taken shape in Romania can be overcome by articulating an ethical capitalism. The economy's invisible hand cannot function without an ethical component, he says, that can substantiate a genuine transformation of Romanian society and a will to generate transparent and solid institutional mechanisms to reduce economic gaps in relation to the West (Dăianu 2004:157). That is why Dăianu believes we must implement a 'capitalism with a soul' (Dăianu 2009:130). However, if we look at the economic content of this ethical self-determination, we can notice the same policies of austerity, financial discipline, and continued privatizations (Dăianu 2004:160-161). Capitalism with a soul implemented after the integration into the European Union has not significantly diminished the vast social inequalities and territorial gaps. The poverty rate (Ban and Buciu 2025) continues to be critical. The references to Max Weber, who is often mentioned by the supporters of capitalism in Romania, and also by Dăianu, to highlight the need for an ethical dimension of capitalism,

¹¹ <https://www.criticatac.ro/scrisoare-catre-prietenii-mei-romani/> Last accessed on 29 December 2024

are problematic because they ignore both the distancing that Weber had from the formal ethics of Protestantism, and the harsh criticism of the excessive rationalization that capitalism generates, to the point that it turns into an 'iron cage' (Weber 2003:190). Weber was not a supporter of 'ethical capitalism', as Dăianu believes, the role that ethics and a 'practical and rational way of life' (Weber 2003:17) had in the institutionalization of capitalist enterprises, should not be confused with the real stake of a Weberian analyses of capitalism, namely to highlight the dysfunctions that the autonomization of the capitalist system and bureaucratic hyper-rationalization generated.

Romanian political science has also often generated uni-linear capitalist narratives. Let us look, for example, at one of the most influential local political scientists - Cristian Preda, professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Bucharest, former dean, department director, and doctoral supervisor. The epistemological filter for interpreting the political transformations generated by the post-socialist transition is firmly anchored around liberal-capitalist values, which credited private property and the market economy as the only solution for the moral reestablishment of Romanian society. Socialism and its obsession with ethical policies, consistent with a practice of social justice and capable of generating social solidarity, are constantly discredited (Preda 2001:34-35). Analysis of the dysfunctions registered in Romanian society is linked to the absence of a minimal state and a recurring criticism of the 'socialist' parties that want statism (Preda 2001:37-42). There is here a liberal vision present which considers that European social democracy (of the Swedish type) has exhausted itself. In his writings there is a profound ideological deformation that does not understand the fundamental nature of the policies of the first two post-socialist decades, which were in fact profoundly neo-liberal and constantly dislocated the welfare state (Preda 2001:150). This analytical framework is so deeply soaked in an anti-communist ideology that even the dynamics of the parties in Romania are marked in this analysis by a communist political mentality; this takes place in a context in which all parliamentary parties have contributed massively to the implementation of a capitalist political economy in Romania.

However, perhaps the most problematic is how sociology, as a science of Romanian society, has contributed to the consolidation of transitology as an academic field of pro-capitalist expertise. Perhaps nowhere in Romanian sociology do we encounter a more openly capitalist vision of transition than in the studies of Professor Lazăr Vlăsceanu, who devoted extremely professional and well-argued extensive monographs and articles written on this topic (Vlăsceanu 2001, 2007, 1995). Vlăsceanu formalized a systemic and comparative discipline in the Romanian academic field focusing on the transition the Romanian society was going through in the 1990s. His institutionalist perspective was intended to give social and economic policies rigor and depth and to anchor them in global and post-modern

social-economic realities. His vision, however, was deeply inspired by the Washington Consensus, a defining political project for the neo-liberal structural reforms implemented by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The main problem that Vlăsceanu identifies is that macroeconomic policies aimed at establishing a new capitalist economy are insufficient if they are not firmly anchored in political, societal, and cultural structures (Vlăsceanu 2001: 119, 126). The minimal state must not be weak, which cannot impose the legislative frameworks for the functioning of economic and social reforms, but must be “a strong and efficient rule of law” (Vlăsceanu 2001: 116, 113). This is a commonplace in many global neo-liberal transformations. Loic Wacquant (2011) identified in this type of reasoning the strong right arm of the neo-liberal state that develops precisely when social policies weaken. This is also valid for the transitological expertise that Vlăsceanu elaborates on. The state and its capacity to generate and stabilize institutions must become a force that can consistently materialize the macroeconomic policies proposed by the Washington Consensus:

“There is an urgent need to create a strong, stable, competitive, and efficient private sector in which the role of the state consists only in functioning as a catalyst, which permanently fixes the legal, institutional framework of the competition, the communication infrastructure, the macroeconomic stability and especially of the financial system” (Vlăsceanu 2001:137)

The role of this sociological expertise is the quasi-implacable affirmation of the liberal economy and liberal values as the fundamental project of the country (Vlăsceanu 2001:129), a vision that again bears the mark of Fukuyama’s philosophy of uni-linear history (Vlăsceanu 2001:111). This goes hand in hand with the socio-cultural promotion of the cultivation of personal values centred on entrepreneurship and creativity (Vlăsceanu 2001:136) as well as a stronger integration with the organizational culture of companies (Vlăsceanu 2001:134). For Vlăsceanu, the post-socialist ‘new modernity’ means the necessity of complete adherence to ‘liberal democracy and the capitalist market’ (Vlăsceanu 2001: 88, 124). It is important to note that the sociological analysis does not bypasses the extensive social dysfunctions of the transition (Vlăsceanu 2001: 14-15). However, it attributes them to the fact that the capitalist economy was not more adequately institutionalized and embedded in Romanian culture and society. The development policies that Vlăsceanu supports are intended to generate the institutional framework for the implementation of solid capitalist mechanisms: *“In the absence of competitive market institutions, privatization is [...] meaningless” (2001: 127).*

A similar statement can be made about the sociology developed by Dumitru Sandu, another prominent figure in post-socialist Romanian sociology. In the volumes 'Sociology of Transition: Values and Social Typologies in Romania' (1996) or 'The Social Space of Transition' (1999), as well as numerous articles, Sandu carries out extremely elaborate statistical analyses and problematizes in a very rigorous manner the social dynamics of the transition from a communist to a capitalist society. In opposition to the institutional analyses of Lazăr Vlăsceanu, the author of these studies is rather interested in the value structures and behaviours that support what he calls the 'cultural complex of reform' (Sandu 1996:77, Sandu 1999: 33,40).

At the beginning of the 1990s, many Western analysts were unsure that Eastern European societies' transition would generate a liberal democracy and a functioning market economy, similar to the Western model (Firebaugh and Sandu 1998:522). In this context, the important question to investigate was related to which social categories could carry out this project and support the fundamental modernization of Romania. If we define social classes not in terms of hierarchies and socio-economic dynamics but according to "beliefs, values and cultural models" (Sandu 1999:97), then the stake becomes the sociological identification of those axiological vectors that can support a so-called 'individual modernity' in opposition to a traditional vision (Sandu 1999:34). Risk-taking, optimism, resilience, openness to new experiences, capitalizing on new opportunity structures become defining elements for a successful transition to a market economy and liberal democracy. From here, identifying entrepreneurs as "*an elite, because of its creativity, resources, and productive performance*" (Sandu 1999:98) as a vector of democratization is only a step away. They are the ones who understand how important it is to be able to take risks in new, unpredictable market conditions. Also, they become analytically the social categories that institutionalize a meritocratic vision of life and express confidence in the individualistic values and in success through personal effort and hard work (Sandu 1999:104). Of course, they also support the importance of privatization (Sandu 1999:106) and vote for those political formations that promised a relaunch of the Romanian economy through de-regulation and insertion into the capitalist market. For Dumitru Sandu, capitalist enterprise is an important factor of social innovation and privatization, and the transition to a market economy is an essential factor for poverty reduction (Sandu 1993). Sociology operates here in a genuine neo-liberal key - in fact, the elimination of poverty, says Dumitru Sandu, "*is not done with passive social protection measures, but, above all, through active measures to promote income-generating activities, by stimulating social, economic and political participation processes. At the centre of these processes must be precisely the private initiative, risk-taking, social creativity*" (Sandu 1999:32).

What is striking again in these studies is their historical uni-linearity. Dumitru Sandu embeds his analyses in a philosophy of history that documents the emancipatory potential of moving from a 'latent' or 'counterfeit' modernity (Sandu 1996:258), understood here in terms of adherence to a set of values existing during the communist period only within restricted social groups, to "an active modernity of capitalism." (Sandu 1999:99 1996:13). All the economic and social turbulence generated by the capitalist reforms taking place in the 1990s are understood as the necessary transition to a new stage in which risk-taking, liberalism, and support for the market economy allow the manifestation of the achievement of genuine modernity in terms of lifestyles and value structures. The adherence to a radical reformist position, in the sense of a faster transition to a capitalist market economy, is understood as a 'rationalist value orientation' (Sandu 1993:39) and is considered a component of 'universalist' values, which are recurrently opposed to traditional mentalities. Capitalism thus becomes here the exit from the local and provincial and the entrance on a bright and universal future.

The problem with communist societies, according to this expertise, is that this experience shows that they significantly diminished the destabilizing experimentation of risk, specific to capitalist societies, through social protection measures and did not expose populations to a dynamic economy based on resilience, competition between individuals, and meritocracy; the problem of post-communist societies is that they desire Western well-being without assuming the values necessary for such a capitalist economy to function (Firebaugh and Sandu 1998:527). Thinking about the transition in terms of how social typologies, axiological orientations, and life projects are defined (Sandu 1999:115) and not so much in terms of reconfiguration of property relations and class, generates in this type of sociological analysis a genuine support for neo-liberal reforms. The sociological expertise that Sandu provides is ideologically and explicitly pro-capitalist. It is interesting to observe how the sociological research carried out in these books notices the societal discontent with the capitalist transition and opposition to the privatization of large state enterprises (Sandu 1999:42-44, Firebaugh and Sandu 1998:523), but it endorses explicitly the intrinsically good capitalist reforms.

Conclusion: a critical agenda for social-sciences in Romania

Why was it so challenging to develop a critique of capitalist transformations in Romania? A common answer to these questions is that critical elaborations on the type of capitalism developed in post-socialist countries were exogenous

and emerged only later on due to the connections of academic networks with Western centres that developed a tradition of criticism (social-democratic or socialist-democratic) against Western capitalism. These analyses highlight global research networks and their role in shaping a local critique of capitalist transformations. Thus, the gap is explained by how these critical theories were 'imported' to Romania.

Contrary to these explanations, it is important to point out that there is a tradition in the post-socialist political economy, relatively forgotten, that aimed at a critique of capitalism that was being reinstated in Romania. This tradition has argued in the 1990s in favour of a mixed economy in which public ownership would continue to play an important role. Their position was anti-Ceaușescu and anti-totalitarian, but it did not align with the Keynesian critique of the neo-liberal reforms that dominated the left then. We can mention here N.N. Constantinescu and the economists who grouped around AGER, an association with several branches in the country. University professor at the ASE in Bucharest, since 1990, a full member and secretary general of the Romanian Academy, founder of the General Association of Economists of Romania, author of dozens of studies on economic history, N.N. Constantinescu was one of the few intellectuals in Romania in the 90s who remained consistent with his leftist principles, in a period when most intellectuals were becoming convinced supporters of capitalism. His critical positions on capitalist reforms spanned a decade in which he carefully followed draft laws, parliamentary debates, and the expertise of international economists who promoted shock therapies in order to achieve a rapid transition to a market economy. From the point of view of Romanian critical theories, there are no clearer positioners in the 90s than N.N. Constantinescu, who connected a theory of primitive accumulation of capital with a careful analysis of the social and economic realities of post-socialist Romania. These studies and articles published in various periodicals of the time constituted the themes of analysis of the books: 'Dilemmas of the Transition to a Market Economy (1992), 'Economic Reform, for Whose Benefit?' (1993), 'Economic reform and recovery' (1995), 'Lessons of the transition in Romania (1997)'.

In 1991, N.N. Constantinescu published 'Primitive Capital Accumulation in Romania'. The study aimed at the history of the formation of capitalism in Romania throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. This was not a purely historical approach; N. N Constantinescu saw very clearly that the same process of primitive accumulation was being reactivated in the post-socialist period (Constantinescu, 1991:402). What is fascinating, however, in the texts Constantinescu wrote in the 1990s is the critical and clear awareness of the capitalist reforms in full swing. In this context, he shows how the MEBO

privatization method will practically lead to disposing of workers from their shares through the legal possibility of accumulating them against rising inflation and deteriorating living conditions (Constantinescu, 1993:93). The process of returning employees' shares from companies also generated a dislocation of democratic control over the way companies functioned and removed them from the influence of workers.

N.N. Constantinescu also had a clear understanding of how these neo-liberal economic reforms would radically alter the class structure of Romanian society (Constantinescu, 1993:64). In an analysis of the governing strategy adopted by the Romanian parliament after the CDR won the elections, he pointed out that the much-invoked 'middle-class was, in fact, an electoral illusion and that what was happening in Romania at that time amounted to the establishment of a broad process of dispossession of large social categories: "*the predominant class in society will not be the 'class of small owners' announced as the 'middle class,' but the class of those deprived or almost deprived of property, which constitutes a great social danger*" (Constantinescu, 1997:87). For N.N. Constantinescu, this broad class polarization was well-known from his studies of the history of class dynamics, which he had carried out over many decades. In the early 1990s, he saw social processes unfolding under his eyes, similar to those generated by the crises of the capitalist system in the pre-socialist period. In 1966, he published one of the most substantial analyses of the formation of social classes in Romania in the interwar period, entitled 'The Situation of the Working Class in Romania 1914-1944'. In terms of the history of the dynamics of class formation in Romania, this volume still constitutes one of the best-documented analyses of capitalist industrial relations in Romania. The book analyses the structural conditions that led to the working classes' pauperization and the capitalist stabilization of the mechanisms of surplus value extraction by concentrating production in the hands of an economic elite. Starting from a documentation of the specific way in which the emergence of the industrialization process took place in Romania and how the agrarian reform of 1923 produced a large surplus of precarious population in the rural area, this study highlighted the polarization of social classes and the precarious situation of industrial and rural workers. Analysing the dynamics of real wages, unemployment rates, and living and housing conditions, N.N. Constantinescu and his collaborators documented the massive dislocations that capital accumulation had generated in Romania. In this vein, his criticism of the post-socialist neo-liberal reforms targeted similar processes - the deterioration of labour relations and the re-iteration of a large class polarization - phenomena that he directly associated with the new capitalist transformations.

At a time when the historical parties of the 1990s promoted a return to the 'beautiful' and 'democratic' interwar world, N.N. Constantinescu highlighted in his numerous studies and articles the fact that the post-socialist period triggered the emergence of wild capitalism that resumed the same processes of capital accumulation and dispossession of workers from the past: *"Also for reassurance, they (the broad masses of the population) were told that they were being led towards a new society, unknown to them, and under the shelter of these words the advance would be towards a backward, semi-colonial, peripheral and dependent capitalism, in which the majority of the population lives much worse than before and which people knew well from the interwar period"* (Constantinescu, 1997:88)

His analyses of the agricultural reforms are also highly relevant to the critical theories he developed in the first half of the 1990s (Constantinescu, 1997:71). N.N. Constantinescu is sceptical of the general support for the restitution of agricultural properties, showing how the fragmentation of agricultural property takes us to the level of the end of the interwar period in terms of land division and has dramatic consequences for domestic food production, which will generate dependence on exports for agricultural materials (Constantinescu, 1992:82). A third of the people who became owners of agricultural land after 1989 did not live in the countryside and, under the existing conditions, could hardly cultivate that land. Rural households could not effectively be called small farms, as the legislative foundations represented them because they effectively operated in a subsistence regime. In this context, he advocates the formation of associations to pool agricultural land for technologization and professional socialization and real support for agricultural production by the state (Constantinescu, 1992).

Another important field of reflection we see clearly articulated in N.N. Constantinescu's work in the 1990s is ecology and how economic activities can lead to environmental pollution and the depletion of natural resources. In this context, he advocates for a sustainable economy that leaves the paradigm of an anthropocentric organization of nature (Constantinescu 2000: 507). He argues why environmental costs should be passed on to economic polluters, not society (Constantinescu 2000: 509). He shows how sustainable economic growth must be connected to a non-conflictual way of organizing the social structure and to a state capable of implementing social justice (Constantinescu 2000:509). He also warns about the danger of forest privatization in post-socialist Romania and how an ecological asset was to become an important commodity for the private forestry industry in the context of the emergence of the market economy (Constantinescu 2000: 498).

The critique that the current Romanian political economy is beginning to thematize after three decades of neo-liberal reforms (Georgescu 2018, 2021) is clearly articulated by N.N. Constantinescu already in the early 1990s, but with

critical positions against capitalism, not just neo-liberalism. This type of critique was not imported into Romania, but has existed since the 1990s. However, it faded away due to an ideological turn in the social sciences and its agenda to produce knowledge necessary for capital development. In most of the expertise produced within the social sciences in the first two decades, capitalism became a quasi-historical destiny that could guarantee economic and social prosperity. In the context of current growing socio-economic popular dissatisfactions, Romanian sociology must return to a substantial project of interrogating critically the capitalist political economy and the social crises that it cyclically generates (Burawoy 2003, 2005; Burawoy & Wright, 2002).

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