BUCHAREST - BETWEEN EUROPEAN MODERNITY
AND THE OTTOMAN EAST

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Motto: "No city can offer a downcast, hopeless and miserable impression like Bucharest."
Sir James Bailie Frase – 1836

“When I’m coming back from abroad, what impresses me are the beggars, the gypsies and the haggling, the absence of people’s urbanity.”
Petru Comarmescu – 1936

This essay could be considered a response of Larry Wolff’s book: “Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment”.

Besides, the essay is a comparative perspective between Romanian modern society (XIXth century) and Romanian contemporary society; but also, it could be a comparative description between the mentioned book’s themes and the main cohabits which compose the Romanian society today. In this essay, I define “cohabit” as an unsuccessful joining between the people’s way of life, of Oriental type, and the European cultural values.

The “cohabit” was determining for the great conflict between two types of civilization: The Orient – as the older form of civilization in Bucharest and Wallachia, and the Occident, only as a modernization tendency.1 The modernization trend between 1830/1940 was supported by small intellectual groups composed especially of the older boyar families and the immigrants.

At the beginning of the 18th century and until 1940, various ethnic communities appeared in Bucharest, that lived in ethnic quarters (see annex no.1). Finally, I’ll present some contemporary points of view about this very actual contrast, Orient versus Occident in Bucharest, within which the presence of the Orient is very strong.

In my short presentation, I selected some subtitles of Larry Woolf’s book and these subtitles are discussed.

1 The complex issue of “form without foundation” is a situation determined by the transformation which Bucharest society suffered on the road to modernisation. The contribution of the immigrant population to this constant confrontation between form and foundation leans more towards “form”. They were the ones who brought in the content of modernity, who upheld the “new” and re-captured for Europe a cultural and social entity which it had lost in the 16th century.
Orient versus Occident or “Eastern habits.”
The foreigner enters “into an unknown country, disconcert” but often adapts himself to this new world. The foreigners made a modern and new society.

The transition from old to new happening inside Bucharest’s society was clearly evident in the daily existence of its inhabitants and within the confines of private life.

In early 19th century, in Bucharest, a great “divergence of contrasts” was at play, such that each family or professional group was conscious of making the leap from old to new and, of course, of the financial possibilities of each to enable them to achieve this. For visitors from outside, who were not really familiar with this situation Bucharest seemed amazing in its discordant juxtaposition of wealth and luxury on one hand, poverty and squalor on the other.

This “contrast saw Asia and Europe” (Asia and Europe like cultural models) locked together in turbulent social conflict. In Bucharest “palaces, clubs, theatres, couturiers and tailors, newspapers and coachmen” could be found, although as soon as one “set foot outside” into the city, one was engulfed “by the wilderness.”

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2 This is underlined by all the travellers who visited or lived for some time in Bucharest:

“[…] In Bucharest one can see the most miserable shacks side by side with palaces in the most modern style and with Byzantine churches; the most dreadful poverty next to the most triumphant luxury, Asia and Europe seem to touch in this city.” [Helmuth von Moltke, noiembrie 1835, quoted in Constantin Giurescu, Istoria Bucureștilor, (History of Bucharest) Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1976, p. 126]

“[…] What assaults the eye of the stranger in Bucharest is the curious contrast between dwellings. Imagine for yourself several of our most tumbledown shacks and in the middle of them, a shining palace, with not a single building making the transition between them; it looks like a village and a capital city at the same time: that’s what Bucharest is. Shacks in the most deteriorated condition are propped against the finest houses: step outside from a house which reminds you of the palaces in Paris and Vienna, and you come up against a wooden hut, go along the street paved with wooden blocks and the mud or dust will rise up above your ankles. […] In Bucharest nobody walks, they go only by carriage, the opportunity to walk is a luxury: the carriages by contrast are indispensable. I do not joke: carriages are the only means in which to escape from the dreadful piles of mud in winter and the accumulated dust in the summer; riding in a carriage is the mark of a man of some status.” [Saint Marc Girardin, 1836, quoted in Neagu Djuvara, Într-o Orient și Occident. Țările Române la începutul epocii moderne 1800-1830, (Between Orient and Occident. The Romanian Countries at the beginning to modern period 1800-1830), Humanitas, 1995, pp. 166-167]

3 Constantin Giurescu, Istoria Bucureștilor, p. 126.
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However, the town pulsed swiftly towards change in a radical and sweeping manner. By the middle of the 19th century the old “boyar” town “ostensibly becomes a scene from modern day Paris” although deep in its interior urban structure a “harsh barbarianism” continued to stir, accompanied by an “unspoken immorality” and many “other monstrosities” such as an almost total lack of “gravity towards life”.4

The severing of “form from foundation” progressed unremittingly as an incessant confrontation between modern life and unchanging attitudes, accompanied by ideological and cultural debate constantly circulating in Romanian society.5

This rapid appropriation of the modern Western way of life brought about a considerable measure of superficiality, of clumsy imitation, of awkwardness, frustration and repression. Bucharest society offered in the 19th century, a rare spectacle for foreign visitors, since elements from the old style of Ottoman dress were worn simultaneously with new European garments.6

In some cases two extremes of clothing, along with all the intermediary stages, could be observed in one single family. This diversity and mixture resulted from the preference of the younger generation for the new as well as the skill of the Wallachian craftsmen who “out of indifference and poverty” were very “ingenious” at inventing their own urban style of dress.7

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5 The complex issue of “form without foundation” is a situation determined by the transformation which Bucharest society suffered on the road to modernisation. The contribution of the immigrant population to this constant confrontation between form and foundation leans more towards “form”. They were the ones who brought in the content of modernity, who upheld the “new” and re-captured for Europe a cultural and social entity which it had lost in the 16th century.
6 “[…] Iasi society, like that of Bucharest offered a rare sight: men wore long coats, long beards and on their heads they wore a hat named “calpac”, with the turban or a cotton nightcap such as that worn by our children; they were dressed in the most costly materials, wore Turkish slippers on their feel and overall looked like Turks; with all this they were people set marked out by their European education and bearing, most of them speaking accomplished French with the most elevated expressions; only the way in which they walked revealed something of the laziness of the Turks, a characteristic which was not at all theirs, […] the ladies followed the newest fashions from Paris and Vienna both in the clothing they wore which no longer had any hint of the Asiatic, and in the manner in which they furnished and decorated their apartments.” [Generalul conte de Rochechouart, apud. Neagu Djuvara, quoted in, Orient and Occident…. , pp. 103-104]
7 Regarding the adoption of elements of European dress foreign visitors have left us much evidence: “[…] Some men have kept the Eastern dress; others go around dressed in the European style; but these two styles can be seen in the same family; the father dressed as a boyar, the son in the French style; I haven't seen anybody younger than 40 years old wearing Turkish dress. For a long time the women were dressed in European clothing.” [Saint Marc
For those of the boyar class accustomed to specific modes of dress, thinking, behaviour and environment, the adoption of new European fashions posed major problems. Circumstances, not only history, forced their re-orientation towards a lifestyle completely alien to that which they had known before. In less than one generation they had to accept new styles of clothing, which in themselves imposed different behavioural codes in both the public and private spheres, styles which signified a pattern of daily life undergoing continuous, galloping change. Evidence for this can be found in the brief notes of the painter Barabas Miklos from Ardeal who visited Bucharest between 1831-1833.8

Luxury, the emblem of the cream of Bucharest society, the huge expenses required to maintain it and the armies of servants attending to each petty and insignificant personal need demonstrate an interesting compromise between old ways which had been retained and the new ones which were vigorously applied in all aspects of Bucharest life.

8 Barabas Miklos summaried in his journal many details regarding the transition from 'old' to 'new' in the costumes and habits of daily life:

"[...] Obedenaru, a friend of mine who had begun to wear trousers, boots and a cap at the insistence of his friends, wishing to modernise his appearance completely, ordered a tail coat of the finest cloth and I ordered a top hat from Sibiu for him from the well know maker Bayer. Trying out his new dress and with the top hat on his head, he felt so strange in front of the mirror in this modern suit that he threw the top hat to the ground and could not bring himself to wearing it, in this way revealing himself to be a rather conservative friend.

[...] It was also European fashion which brought about the sacrifice of the beautiful black beard of Cantacuzeno, who I knew well. This boyar had a head of a rare handsomeness and it broke my heart when he had to shave his beard to match his French suit. Belonging to high Romanian aristocracy it was necessary for him to adopt the European style and since his house was often visited by Russian generals he had filled it with modern furniture because European dress did not really fit with the wide Turkish divans on which people spread themselves barefoot. On a visit to him after this metamorphosis I could hardly contain my laughter as I entered his drawing room where I saw about ten boyars smoking long pipes, each one sitting on the floor in the Turkish style alongside a chair; but with their top hats on their heads and the tails of their jackets spread out on the floor of the room! Cantacuzino himself was sitting on the sofa whilst the other boyars felt more comfortable staying on the ground with their feet crossed in their habitual manner and because at that time it was not normal to take off their turbans, they had forgotten to take off their top hats. This sight was so ridiculous that it deserved to be drawn." [Andrei Veres, Pictorul Barabas şi Românii, (The painter Barabas and the Romanians), Cultura Naţională, Academia Română, Memoriile Secţiunii Literare, seria III, tomul IV, M.E.M. 8, Bucureşti, 1930, pp. 379-381]because it did.
The contrast was noted with astonishment by numerous state diplomats based in Bucharest as well as by travellers who passed through or lived in the town for a while.

The elegance of the carriages and coachmen, their presence in very large numbers in comparison with other European towns and the expensive jewelry which formed an essential accessory for any lady of society who aspired to follow fashion are repeatedly mentioned in the journal of contemporaries.⁹

In contrast to “the tediousness of other towns in the Ottoman Empire”, Bucharest was the most important centre of attraction within reach of the Turkish border. At the beginning of the 19th century its aspect was that of a town full of life, “a place of relaxation and pleasure”, a real “arena of Hetaires”, a veritable “Hilariopolis - city of joys” with an undeniable cosmopolitan character.

Bucharest was situated at the crossing of the principle commercial routes linking Southeastern Europe to the centre of the continent. It was near to the Ottoman world (a huge market, greater than that of Russia) and to the economic and cultural vitality of central Europe through which it found itself linked organically to the West. It was a melting pot for elements of all the civilisations existing in this wide cultural expanse. At the end of the 18th century merchants, craftsmen, professional classes and others of different ethnic groups and confessions arrived in successive waves with the Austrian and Russian armies, introducing an increasingly multicultural atmosphere to Bucharest. Whilst these communities settled down and established a distinct identity, in time the elite of Bucharest society formed a numerous and homogenous central social group with an urban mentality in the modern sense.

By the middle of the 19th century Bucharest society had become very diverse. This social diversity could be found even at the margins of the town. Raoul

⁹ Exaggerated lavishness contrasted strikingly with the poverty in its immediate vicinity. The foreign traveller noticed this discrepancy above all in the architecture and in the public spaces of 19th century Bucharest:

“[…] Before anything else the thing which struck me on the street was the multitude of shining coachmen who were running in all directions or waiting in front of the gates, the new and beautiful carriages varnished and decorated with gold. There was something completely new to me who had not seen for a long time anything but the ‘arouba’ passing from time to time along the streets of Pera. The boyars enjoyed immensely showing off these things for which they payed large sums; because they got broken more money must be spent on new ones.” [Robert Walsh, quoted in Neagu Djuvara, Orient and Occident…, p.111]

“[…] You can imagine that in a country where people use carriages instead of their own feet these same people use servants instead of using their own arms. Nobody has less than six or seven servants, male and female, and this is in the most modest of houses. The number of servants retained by the rich boyars is almost limitless.” [Saint Marc Girardin, quoted in, pp. 176-177]
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Perrin described the human mosaic of the Bucharest streets as being “at once interesting as well as disgusting because of the poverty and squalor”. He continued “there are all races: Wallachians, Moldavians, Turks, Rumelians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Bosnians, Greeks, Armenians, Russians, Crimeans, Transylvanians, Basarabians, Hungarians, Italians, Germans and of course Jews. This race is to be found everywhere and in the East it is distinguished by a degree of disorder and filth which could not be more disgraceful or revolting”.  

De Giers described in amazement the “variety of costumes” he encountered in Bucharest where “all the races of the East and West dressed in the widest range of garments”.

What was the day to day life of a bourgeois family in Bucharest like at the beginning of the 19th century? What were the daily private and public activities of a newly settled family, which adhered in all its details to a clearly defined urban culture, living in a town in the course of modernisation and urbanisation?

We can reconstruct this kind of environment from the description of the Transylvanian painter Barabas Miklos. The family which the artist visited most often was that of a barber-pharmacist of Italian origin named Raimondi. The entire family “was very cultivated”, the two girls, Cecilia and Giuseppina, together with their mother “spoke Romanian and Greek, the latter being the language of the Romanian aristocratic salon. They also spoke French and Italian fluently, and even Hungarian fairly well, that language having been learned from their Hungarian servants and wet nurses” who came from the Sekler area of south-east Transylvania and were well paid. Cecilia, the youngest of the family was taking painting lessons with Barabas while Giuseppina “occupied her time with music, playing the piano well.”

In the circle of the Raimondi family we discover through Barabas’ stories a Greek “by the name of Breton” who had studied in Paris and “spoke Greek, French and Romanian” whilst the wife was “a Hungarian from Brasov” who painted.

On another occasion the artist took part in an interesting discussion with the barber Raimondi’s daughters, to whose home had also been invited a Romanian bishop. The conversation being in Romanian, “one of the young ladies announced that instead of Hungarian she would prefer to learn English because that language is more beautiful. I who had heard plenty of English conversations contradicted her claiming that this was not true, although would the young lady propose that English literature interested her more I would not make any comment, except that I doubt that English is more beautiful than

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10 Ibidem, p. 168.
Hungarian! How amazed I was when the Romanian bishop sided with me, praising the Hungarian language and proving his point by reciting 'Hopes,' an ode of the poet Csokonai, with an accent so pure that you could not expect better even from a Hungarian poet.\(^{12}\)

This short reference is an indication that there were many families of mixed ethnic origin - if not in the first generation, at least in the following ones - whose culture was very rich and diversified. Their knowledge of foreign languages ranged from the most widely used languages in Europe to Romanian and Greek in current use in the Wallachian region, with the latter gradually being replaced at the beginning of the 19th century with French.

Ionescu-Gion wrote in 1899 about the extraordinary "energy of Bucharest life" and about the "overwhelming" preponderance of foreigners. The town "crawls with people, peasants, Romanian and Greek merchants; then, there are the foreigners who have settled for good in Bucharest" alongside "a few scattered French and Italians."\(^ {13}\)

How impressive was this process of immigration of foreigners to Bucharest in the modern era is illustrated in a work edited by two police officers in 1923. They recall the numerous "newcomers" who "begin to settle down" within the city limits, including Jews, Albanians, Turks, Germans, Hungarians, Serbs, Bulgarians and even Italians and French. Of all these foreigners, Bucharest is most sought after by the Greeks."\(^ {14}\)

The introduction of modernity as an institutional, social, cultural model came about not only through adoption and imitation but also as a result of the stable co-existence of many ethnic groups in a multi-cultural Bucharest society. Without these preconditions post-1900 Bucharest would not have had the aspect of a cosmopolitan city.

Being tied neither to the Ottoman Empire nor to Europe Bucharest attracted merchants, craftsmen, specialised tradesmen and independent professionals from all over Europe. These newcomers eventually became residents of the town and in the long term would determine the particular role of Bucharest in tying together West and the East, those two great cultural spheres which continuously rubbed together in this restricted space. On one hand, in 19th century, in Bucharest, there were the aristocracy (especially the younger elements) and many immigrants from Central Europe or Occident (French, German, Italian, Hungarian, Austrian and Transilvanian) which advocated modernity. At the other hand, there were the common people, the


\(^{13}\) Ionescu Gion, *History of Bucharest,* p. 80.

Balkan elements, very numerous, which were anchored in the Orient values. On the Bucharest streets at the beginning the 19th century, people talked using words from different languages such as Romanian, Turkish, Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek or Albanian and after 1850, the French language influence was definite. In other words, Bucharest was absorbing social elements of great ethnic, religious and cultural diversity.

In Bucharest there were some ethnic mahale, in the 18th and the 19th centuries. After the fall of the Balkan peninsula under the Ottoman domination, but especially in the 18th and the 19th centuries, the North of the Danube area, the Romanian countries (Moldavia and Walachia), became a refuge area for the Christian people of the Balkan Peninsula. Besides, the Romanian Principalities became a favorable place for economic, commercial, cultural activities, and, in the 19th century, for political ones.

The emigration from the Ottoman Empire brought into the Romanian countries hundred of thousands up to millions of Balkan people of diverse origins: Bulgarian, Greek, Albanian, Serbian, Jewish, Armenian.

In the Romanian territories, these ethnic groups founded “Balkan” centres. Greek, Bulgarian, Albanian or Serbian compact communities ethnic microcosmes appeared as quarters (“mahale”) in Romanian cities and in Basarabia’s rural area as “colonies”. Bucharest is the greatest center with Balkan population.

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“ceaprazari” (craftsmen of buttons), spareman’s, wheelers, soap makers, “simigii” (baker of crackels), tinkers, glaziers, “tufeccii” (mercenaries in princiar arms), “toptangii” (merchants of trifles and old things), tobacconists, “arnauti” (soldiers). Besides these, there came a lot of clergymen, priests, teachers, printing workers and even bishops.17

Moreover, Bucharest became one of the printing and editorial Balkan centres; many of the emigrate teachers taught in Romanian schools at college level (“Academiile Domnesti”). Shops were built, also haberdasheries, churches, bakeries, workshops, inns, banks, commercial companies and then, step by step, schools, printing works, publishing houses, clubs for conferences or reading, sponsoring committees, cultural and political committees, secret revolutionary or radical committees.

The Balkan ethnic communities of Bucharest had an intense economic, cultural and political life. Their areas were quarters such as: Dudesti-Cioplea, Udricani, Cauzasi, Sarbi, Curtea Veche, Coltea, Tirgul de Afara, and professional streets like: Lipsani, Gabroveni, Cavafii Vechi, Coltea, Covaci, Selari, Armeneasca. (Figure number one).

This Balkan world, of compact ethnic communities, implanted here a veritable “Balkan civilisation,” made of new trades, types of clothing, words in the local parlance, habits, rituals and customs, mentalities, behaviours and attitudes, types of building or architecture styles (houses, inns, churches and synagogues) also new types of domestic objects or weapons, interior ambient, and ideas or political programs.

This situation, together with the presence of the political, intellectual and financial elite contributed substantially to the modernisation of the Bucharest society in particular, and that of Romania in general. 18 Walachian society rapidly assimilated elements of modernity, which at the beginning were taken on by the aristocratic classes through cohabitation with newcomers, an occurrence frequently noted by numerous foreign visitors. 19

Generally the new was introduced with awkwardness and in an inappropriate hurry, which created numerous paradoxes as the old and modern combined to create a hybrid form. To this phenomenon were referring Raoul Perrin and Saint Marc in their memoirs written between 1830 and 1831. 20

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17 see The Statistic Year-Book of Bucharest, 1901 and 1931-1936.
18 Nicolae Iorga, History of Bucharest, pp.249-250.
19 “[…] Discovering that in civilised countries it suited women to have a lover, the ladies in Moldova took two, in order to be more up to date. Some young people began to wear tail coats; whereas the elderly and the working men continued to wear beards and a long cape falling to the ankles.” [Langeron, 1806, quoted in Neagu Djuvara, Orient and Occident…, p. 102]
Despite all these, the process of modernisation of Bucharest society was one of historical continuity over a period of 150 years although from 1800 the rhythm of this process accelerated. The interchange between "the centre and the periphery" took on another dimension. The periphery was transformed from an exclusively marginal space to that of a transitory one, from a sub-urban space to a pre-urban one where modernity made its presence felt, even if less obviously, and for which the centre became the determining model of conduct.

A vertical urban hierarchy headed by professional and economic influence emerged as the central model. This constantly underwent transformation and renewal, and was imitated and adopted by the periphery, often with success. Following these changes the periphery experienced a process of urbanisation, of modernisation, whereby the inhabitants of the fringes, swallowed over time by the city, adopted an urban consciousness. Those who came into the city complied with its behavioural codes as far as materially possible. They wore a suit with white shirt and handkerchief in the breast pocket or at least one of these accessories, they used censored vocabulary, participated in new activities such as attending the theatre, cinemas, education in high school or university, they used libraries, strolled in the park or along the boulevards, visited clubs, cafes and restaurants, attended to personal hygiene and so on.

Women gained much greater liberty almost attaining equality in the domestic sphere, participating in the decisions and occupying a more central position in public life where she was admired, courted and offered attention. Actually this situation occurred only in the urban environment, being encountered very rarely in the periphery.

This change in the basic values of daily life also disrupted the intimacy of family life. "In order to turn themselves into civilised Europeans" the husbands of ladies tried very hard not to appear jealous as they "against their will and inherent social convention allowed the ladies unconditional liberty" an act which "tried them severely." In other words Bucharest came to know liberty on a scale comparable to the Capua of ancient Rome.  

Deep erosion of the sanctity of intimate life led to an acute crisis within the family. Brusque and radical emancipation of the young wives and daughters of city dwellers and of the boyar class compounded by the acceptance of divorce by the Orthodox Church undermined the traditional coherence of the family. Adultery was transformed into "an element of progress" and "a first step to health" for Romanian society.

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21 Ibidem, p. 104.
22 Ibidem, pp. 116-117 
"[...] In this world which for such a long time has been devoid of pleasures Russian officers bring with them two plagues, two illnesses which from now onwards
Flirting, courting, marital or other kinds of infidelity led to another outburst with social repercussions for the collective consciousness that of the race for extravagance and the frenzy to keep up with the latest fashions under the guise of modernity. The motivating force in this race was not taste and refinement in costume or behaviour but the desire to show off in public with the latest carriage or dress ordered from Paris or Vienna and adorned with the newest and most expensive jewelry. Today, more than a hundred years later, numerous people exhibit the same behaviour by making use of exactly those accessories to which they add a mobile phone and a gaze of arrogant indifference.

Snobbism and superficiality became common characteristics of daily Bucharest life, although that does not necessarily mean that the price of ostentation entailed the squandering of money devoid of all judgement. The cost of adultery as an essential element of lavish living could not be ignored, the lover once "seduced" being even more difficult to keep.  

Many young English governesses working for the Romanian "upper crust" considered that they served "part-civilised aristocrats who paid them extremely well, in a country of "white niggers".

The lavishness of dress and its immense costs coupled with lack of good taste assaulted the eye of any visitor from abroad. Nobody from the higher echelons of society or those who aspired to it would even think of walking, they always travelled by carriage, and the latest fashion accessories were paraded without any understanding or appreciation of their real value as symbols of modernity.

For example wearing clothing ordered in Paris or Vienna implied a certain degree of attention to daily personal hygiene (underwear, perfumed bathing lotions, rooms dedicated to washing which were very rarely found in 19th century Bucharest. Public toilets appeared in rudimentary form only after 1880, underground toilets only after 1926, and the clearing of mud, dust, garbage etc from the street of Bucharest was only introduced very late towards the middle of the 20th century). Today these standards are in irretrievable decline.

In the middle of the 19th century Sandor Verres, a Bucharest visitor tells of evening strolls on the Mogoșoaia Bridge (today’s Calea Victoriei): “Evening have to become endemic: card playing and adultery. […] Those women who at a party meet the first two or three men, are on the arms of the fourth and smile when the fifth one approaches them.”

23 Radu Cosmin, Babilon, Ed. Rampa, București, 1921.
25 Neagu Djuvara, Orient and Occident…, p. 164-166.
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after evening the high society of the town and all the beautiful women come here accompanied by their courtiers and handsome officers. Here too one can see street women who with great pomposity mingle with women of the highest class. It is most regrettable that this equality is accompanied by many undesirable aspects, not only here but everywhere in the world, such that we have arrived at the stage where no difference can be discerned between unmarried girls and women, between honest ladies and ladies of pleasure..."  

Gradually Bucharest fell into 'sweet decadence', a 'pseudo-Western sophistication which led to that controversially famous claim as the Paris of the Balkans'.

Through the force of its own character Bucharest society at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th immediately absorbed any other cultural individuality. This was because the lifestyle and fluidity of society lacked "any concern for past or future - for it had neither".

For example balls were one of the daily pastimes which had the greatest impact on upper and middle class layers of society. Around 1874 young people of all kinds without a care for tomorrow could be observed attending balls "to educate the eye". At these balls "side by side with professional companions, prostitutes by trade, you can see children brought there "to learn how to dance" and also a youngster of 10 or 11 years old who probably hasn't even finished primary school, curious to join in the waltz and to initiate himself in what is known as the polite world of the salons".

The lack of seriousness with regard to daily life and the insecurity of its intimate side became permanent conditions for the majority of Bucharest's social classes. In the almanacs of the period ["Realitatea Ilustrată", "Ghimpele", etc] satirical tales predominate, epigrammes with clear insinuation of infidelity and adultery everywhere.

In 1913 Mrs. Carp the wife of the Conservative party leader Petre P. Carp tried to explain "the cause of our decline", finding the answer in " an

26 Lajos Demeny, “Sándor Verres despre Bucureștiul de altă dată” (Sándor Verres about the older Bucharest), extras din volumul (quoted in) ‘In honorem Paul Cernovodeanu’, Kriterion, București, pp.404-405
See also Adrian Marino, Pentru Europa. Integrarea României. Aspecte ideologice și culturale (For Europe: The Romanians integrate Cultural and Ideological Aspects), Polirom, Iași, 1995, pp. 9-88.
29 G. Dém. Teodorescu, Încercări critice asupra unor Credințe, Datine și Moravuri ale Poporului Român (Critical attempts about Romanians' faiths, traditions and customs) București, Tipografia Petrescu-Condratu, 1874, p. 42.

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almost total lack of moral character, coupled with a complete absence of general culture. These qualities are in fact two of those which form the foundations of a modern society: education and trust, elements still missing from Bucharest society today.

On the other hand, in the Bucharest of this period ethnic and multicultural diversity survived because of prevailing social and religious tolerance - somewhat reduced in the case of Jews. However, the city remained fundamentally the same in character due to its Ottoman foundations laid down 200 years before the modernisation process started.

This was an enduring reality in the history of Bucharest. Despite all the moves towards urbanisation and modernisation, those citizens with a sense of the modern, with new styles of clothing, controlled behaviour and enriched vocabulary, and with their updated domestic interior and architecture, could not change - they remained deeply attached to the 'values' of the East.

Let us remind ourselves of the boyer Obedeanu who, in 1831, felt so uncomfortable in his European clothes that when he caught sight of himself in the mirror he flung the top hat from his head.

"All is as before" - wrote the author Cezar Petrescu in 1921 - nothing has changed. Only the peoples' expressions are more vulgar and their pleasures more indulgent.

Hilariopolis or "an illusory city".

Its cohabitants unchanged for three hundred years. Palaces and huts; people and garbage on the streets "after the Turk custom"; luxury and poverty; no elementary hygiene - Bucharest is the only one European capital where

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30 Doamna Carp, Canzle decăderii noastre (The our's decline cause), 'Adeverit', an. 26, no. 8522, 5 06 1913, p. 1.
31 Cezar Petrescu, The Victory's road, p. 58.
32 Hilariopolis is another name for Bucharest which appeared in the 18th century. This name created by a Greek which visited Bucharest. Hilariopolis was an illusory city: far away, Bucharest shows as a beautiful place with many gardens, greens and sumptuous churches. When you enter in the city can see the contrast between difference. At a closer inspection, the city looks different: streets covered with dust, garbage or mud; miserable houses or simple imitation after palaces of Venice, Vienna, Paris and Berlin. There is an extended bibliography about this subject such as: Comte De Salaberry, Essai sur la Valachie et la Moldavie theatre de l'insurrection dite Ypsilanti, Paris, 1821; W. Wilkinson, Tableau historique, geographique et politique de la Moldavie et dela Valachie, Paris, 1824; Pois de la MoldoValachie dans la question d'Orient, par M.O. agent diplomatique, Paris, 1838; Raoul Perrin, Coup D'oeil sur la Valachie et la Moldavie, Paris, 1839; De la situation de la Valachie sous L'administration D'Alexandre Ghika, Bruxelles, 1842; M.Hippolyte Desprez, Les peuples de L'Autriche et de la Turquie, Paris, 1850; Notes sur les Principautés Unies de la Moldavie et de Valachie', Paris, 1864; G. Le Cler, La MoldoValachie, Paris, 1866; Keith Hitchins, Romania 1866-1947, Bucuresti, 1996.
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there aren’t public toilets; modern and very expensive cars near carriage and sheep herds. The most original cohabit is between people and dogs; this cohabit created the “community dog” concept. The dogs are living on the streets into a simultaneous existence with the people. The people and the dogs are two parallel worlds.33

Franco Sivori in 1585 said that the Bucharest “couldn’t be a city”34; at the same in 1828 when Alexander Danilevski met in Bucharest “people with Asian faces and they were talking a language imposibile to understand.”35 For Radivitz, “the illusion was disapearing when you entered in the city,”36 and the “strange city, nearly primitive” is almost “a great village of Mauretania.”37 Today, “only during the night can one ignore history because the darkness is blurring the terrible reality.”38 {{{{This actual felling was couching by Camil Petrescu during the interwar period: “At my wish to absolute live (Occident), it’s putting up an absolute reality(Orient).”}}}}

“The geography’s progress” - a new country is born

The Romanian countries were named during the medieval times and the pre-modern period, Walachia and Moldavia. In 1859, those two countries were united and thus appeared a new country and a new name: Romania. Till 1839, on the maps of Europe, Walachia and Moldavia appeared as component parts of the Ottoman Empire although they weren’t made pashalik. After 1859 and indeed after 1878, on the European maps, the old names, Walachia and Moldavia were still present beside the new name, Romania. European Geography assimilated with difficulty the new name of this new country (see the maps no 2 and 3).

“What is in fact Romania?” Ulisse de Marsillac asked himself in 1869. He answered thus: “Well, here is a name that appears neither in a dictionary nor on a geographical map and the diplomatic language didn’t assimilate yet.”39 After 1900, Romania’s high life society circulated expressions such as: “Don’t you know that the English and the French do not have any idea what Romania means? What do we say about Americans? Si juret dja mibalaque? You are

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33 At the same in the 19th century. See Raoul Perrin, Coup d’oeil sur la Valachie….
34 Franco Sivori, quoted in Paul Cernovodeanu, Foreign travel in Bucharest, MS, p. 55.
35 Alexandr Mihaliovski Danilevski, 1828, quoted in Paul Cernovodeanu, Foreign…, p. 474.
36 Radivitz, 1789-1791, quoted in ibidem, p. 422.
37 Stanislas Bellanger, 1836 quoted in ibidem, p. 474. The president of Romania, Ion Iliescu, said that “there are African countries where people are gaining more than Romanian”
38 Octavian Paier, De la micul Paris la micul Stambul (From the little Paris of the little Stambul), Romania Libera, 1999, p.1.
39 Ulysse de Marsillac, From Pesta to Bucharest. Noting of travel quoted in Bucurestiul in veacul al XIX-lea (Bucharest in the 19th century).
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too Moldo-Walachian, sir, small country, small problems, interests reduced.
Nothing to do. Whisky and then the family’s tomb."\(^{40}\)

“Small country, small problems...” This was a reality for the Romanian intellectuals after 1900, especially during the interwar period.\(^{41}\) Today, Bucharest is seldom mistaken for Budapest - Javier Solana made this mistake, for example. For the Occidental world, geography’s progress is still a problem, especially as far as Eastern and South-Eastern Europe are concerned.

“I am Punkitititi.” I really am!

Now, I’ll present an interesting custom in Bucharest’s naming habits. Although the usual Romanian surnames are Elena, Constantin, Gheorghe, Ana, Maria, or another Christian surname, in Bucharest’s society, in the 18\(^{th}\) century, many names had various oriental influences such as: Kalmuca, Ghiptana, Haita, Ardelia, Sephora, Zafbeta, Zaneptu.\(^{42}\)

After European influence started in the 19\(^{th}\) century, the same women adopted new surnames like: Nina, Dolly, Mary, Jane, Renne, Elisabeth. The writer Cezar Petrescu wrote in 1930: “the modernization is only varnish; it changed the Podul Mogosoaiei street into the Victory Road. There are the same kiramelele (ladies) from another time, Arghira, Rozalina, but they are named Dolly or Mary. All is as before.”\(^{43}\)

Today, a lot of people from Bucharest adopt actors’ names or soup opera characters’ names like: Elvis, Esmeralda, Osama, Greta Garbo.\(^{44}\)

This custom was originally typical for the ordinary people, a custom for enrapture but for the last 60 years, it became a custom for the ruling elite, too.

“European countries without European morals” or “What could be to hope?”\(^{45}\)

“I asked my fellow-traveller, What distance is between Paris and Bucharest? Three centuries, sir! was his answer,” narrated Ulysse de Marsillac in 1869. On the other hand, “the nature made Romania a superb country. People

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\(^{40}\) Petru Dumitriu, Chronicle…, p. 272.

\(^{41}\) see Emil Cioran, Tara mea (My country), Humanitas, Bucharest, 2000; Mircea Eliade, Huligani (The hooligans), Humanitas, Bucharest, 1999; Dinu Pillat, Tinerete ciudata (The oddly youth), Albatros, Bucharest, 1982.


\(^{43}\) Cezar Petrescu, The Victory Road p. 59.

\(^{44}\) “Thousands Romanians are suffering because of their family surnames”, National, year II, no.437, 17.XI.1998, p. 6.

\(^{45}\) “What could be to hope?”, National, year V, no.1141, 5. 03. 2001, p.1.

“it’s sad. The uncertainty and the absence long-term was unleashing a sick.”
spoil it a lot.”46 This feeling was persisting in time. Thus, for Paul de Alep, Walachia was “a misfortunes’ country”47 where “the people are alike with cattle” and they are eternally dissatisfied wherever they are living.”48

Romanians are “inconsistent, hot-blooded and brutal characters”49 and their elites have an “absolute repulsion for movement.”50 In the middle to the 19th century, in Bucharest one could see a prince without palace, clergy without morality, an Academy without members, a library without readers, immense streets without houses, splendid palaces near awful hovels, superb boulevards and horrible cloaca; everywhere water and never fountain, a municipality without head, a police without policeman, a law court without justice, divorces without limits, husbands without wives, wifes without husbands...” 50

Yesterday, “here everything is in a primitive state”51 and today, “here everithing is jerk, nudge, interjection, snarling, slap in the face, shot, resentment, charge, sourness...”52

Are we a damned country? In 1852 Bucharest was “the most corrupt city from Europe”53 and an embodiment of human dissolution. Thus, one who had lived here (in Bucharest), couldn’t be again what one was before.” So, “are we a damned country? In Romania, for the common people, the human ideal is almost a selfconceit. One doesn’t live decently. For hundred years we had a major torture: worry for the morrow.”54

The general feeling is that everything is a “useless faith,” suicidal ideas are frequent among the youth generations. “Is this life? I asked myself, why don’t I commit suicide soon?”55 "{{And than, “what is it doing here? You haven’t medium, that’s all, absence of understanding and livelihood. . .”56}} There is “an uncertain sentiment” for your life, for your future. And then, there

46 Ulysse de Marsillac, Bucharest in the 19th Century, p. 73.
47 Paul from Alep (16th century) quoted in Paul Cernovodeanu, Foreign traders..., p. 127.
48 Michael Bocignoli quoted in Daniel Barbu, Fenomenul romanesc (The Romanian’s manners), Nemira, Bucharest, 2000, p. 15.
49 Federigo Veterani – 1688 quoted in Paul Cernovodeanu, Foreign traders..., p. 128.
50 D.Draghicescu, Dimineata populului roman (From Romanian’s people psychology), Albatros, Bucharest, 1997, p.75
51 Anonymous person, 1828, quoted in Paul Cernovodeanu, Foreign traders..., p. 449.
52 Cornel Nistorescu, Delirele demnii (The meek’s paralyse), Evenimentul Zilei, no.2619, 3.01.2001, p.1
55 Dinul Pillat, Martedici din (Daily dead), Albatros, Bucharest, 1984, p. 90.
56 Mircea Eliade, The holigans, p. 137.
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is an inversion of values so that “if you are more beastly and more rude, you can become more multi-millionaire.”

To conclude, in the Romanian society, a confrontation for the first place continues between cultural European values and at the Oriental values and the border that separates them is still tender and unstable.

* “mahala” (is a Turkish word) = quarter, in urban area

** In 1876 Mihail Kogalniceanu confirmed for Moldavia and Walachia the existence of over 700,000 Bulgarian refugees; the Bulgarian historiography for the 19th century one million Bulgarian refugees in the same area; the Alexandria city in Walachia was founded in 1830 by a great Bulgarian emigration.

*** In cities such as Turnu Severin, Oltenita, Giurgiu, Braila, Galati, along the Danube river, or as Ploesti, Buzau, Craiova and especially in Bucharest and in the Southern part of Basarabia.

58 For example, “maneaua”, an Anatolyan type of music is more popular than European music.
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ȘCOALĂ PRIMARĂ „ÎN AER LIBER” LA BUCUREȘTI, PE LA 1863.
Crescută în lemn, 11×22 cm, a fost desenată după măsură de Ch. Dousaude și publicată în „L’Illustration” în 1863.
Ecole publique „en plein air”, à Bucarest, vers 1863. Gravure sur bois d'après Ch. Dousaude.
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