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THE EASTERN MARGINS OF EMPIRE

Coloniality in 19th Century Romania

Throughout the history of the modern world-system, its economic and political peripheries have consistently faced the charge of either a lack of modernity or a 'lag' in achieving it. The need to rethink modernity and to question its uniqueness has therefore often been the result of being defined along the lines of this deficit as 'less than', 'not yet', or simply 'non-'modern. As such, it has recurrently surfaced in peripheral locations, which thus became the privileged loci of enunciation (Mignolo 2000) of theories critical of modernity and the philosophy of history inherent to it. Latin American dependency theory, emerged in response to the developmentalist perspective advocated by U.S. theorists of modernization in the 1950s and 1960s, is in this respect the best-known, but by no means the only example. The metaphors of core and periphery, initially conceptualized in this context, have long informed social scientific thinking and have as such taken a variety of forms (center-periphery, metropolis-satellite, North-South). In most cases, they are however used without reference to a particular theoretical framework or are not even explicitly stated.

Yet it is precisely the existence of an economic, social, political, and not least intellectual core-periphery division that we have in mind when critiquing the uniqueness of modernity and examining its current 'global' character. Taking as a point of departure an heir of dependency theory, Immanuel Wallerstein's model of a world-system (Wallerstein 1974), I will therefore argue that what Aníbal Quijano has termed the 'European patent on modernity' (Quijano 2001, p. 543) is the result of a series of subsequent ideological projects mandating the Westernization of peripheral regions as a means of attaining world modernity. An assessment of how this exportation of the modernity paradigm has operated in an historical Eastern European periphery, nineteenth century Romania, as well as of this operation's present-day relevance, will provide a case study for the larger context in which such processes have been occurring.

Primacy as the last privilege or: how many modernities are there?

Ever since the Enlightenment, modernity as emancipation — i.e., as the attempt to exit mankind's self-incurred immaturity by appealing to Reason, in

Kant's famous formulation — has been depicted as a critical project having its cultural roots in the Italian Renaissance, the Protestant Reform, and the philosophy of Continental Rationalism, as well as finding its first social, political and institutional reflection in the British Parliament and the French Revolution (Dussel 2000, p. 469). Modernity was thus conceptualized as originating in Europe and as necessitating only the study of the inner-European processes of secularization, industrialization, urbanization, nation-state formation, democracy building, and capitalism in order to understand and predict further developments. This perspective has not only informed and accordingly shaped the classical nineteenth century sociological approaches to the emergence of modernity and the rise of capitalism as formulated by Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Sombart, but also the twentieth century US modernization theories and the more recent discourse on globalization. Although the growing empirical evidence has rendered the underlying convergence thesis — gradual Westernization as the non-Western societies' only path to modernization — increasingly implausible, the modifications that the dominant concept of modernity underwent in order to rise to the challenge of empirical reality proved insubstantial to the core of the matter: Hailed as a theoretical turnaround within Western social science, the merely numerical proliferation of modernity in approaches dealing with the emergence of 'other' (Rofel 1999), 'alternative' (Beck *et al.* 2001) or 'multiple' (Eisenstadt 2000) modernities in the non-Western world leaves both the chronological primacy and the exemplary character of Western modernity with respect to these divergent developments unaltered (Randeria *et al.* 2004, p. 15).

This enduring view has recently been criticized by Argentinean philosopher Enrique Dussel as being not only Eurocentric, but at the same time provincial and fragmentary (Dussel 2000, p. 470). According to him, the universal claim of European modernity is grounded in the central part that the economy, the states, and consequently the intellectual production of successive European locations played in world history from 1492 on (Dussel 2002). This coincides with Wallerstein's periodization of the emergence of the modern world-system as a single division of labor encompassing multiple political systems (Wallerstein 2000, p. 75f.), in which the accumulated surplus is unequally redistributed through the market to the benefit of the respective hegemon. The Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the Americas in the 'long sixteenth century' had marked the beginning of the displacement of earlier world-systems by a capitalist world-economy having Western Europe as its core. In economic terms, these conquests represented the 'comparative advantage' (Dussel 2002, p. 223)¹ that allowed successive European hegemonies — Spain and Portugal were followed by the Netherlands and then Britain — a temporary monopoly in the world-market at the expense of (1) colonized regions as well as of (2) competitors still outside the world-system. With the incorporation of the Russian and Ottoman empires into the capitalist

world-system during the nineteenth century and the subsequent 'scramble for Africa' among European powers, modern Europe as the core of world history became the first geopolitical location ever to successfully englobe all other cultures as its periphery or semiperiphery (Wallerstein 2000, p. 140).

Eurocentrism, both as a general framework of knowledge and as a particular conception of modernity, was the result of the establishment of Western hegemony as a global model of military, economic, and epistemic power. The ongoing colonization of new areas enforced a classification of the planet with respect to its degree of Occidentalism, whose aim, as Walter Mignolo has put it, was 'to transform differences into values' (Mignolo 2000, p. 13), such that, of the various ethnocentrisms making up the vast array of coexisting cultures, European ethnocentrism alone claimed and imposed universal validity for its economic and cultural precepts. Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano identified the foundational myths behind the propagation of Eurocentrism in *evolutionism* — the notion that human civilization proceeded in a linear and unidirectional way from an initial state of nature through successive stages leading to Western civilization — and *dualism* — the view that differences between Europeans and non-Europeans can be accounted for in terms of insuperable natural categories such as primitive-civilized, irrational-rational, traditional-modern (Quijano 2001, p. 543). With their help, the 'European patent on modernity' was thus constructed in colonial times as a consequence of the redrawing of geographical borders and their simultaneous transformation into temporal stages of rationality and modernity: 'The Europeans generated a new temporal perspective of history and relocated the colonized population, along with their respective histories and cultures, in the past of a historical trajectory whose culmination was Europe. From then on, there were inferior races, capable only of producing inferior cultures [...] From then on, they were the past' (Quijano 2001, pp. 543; 552). Modernization theory, mandating a specific type of economic and social development after the US model, was only the twentieth century embodiment of a long series of 'global designs' conceived and enacted from the particular local history of the Euro-American core, that had begun with Christianization in the sixteenth century and had been followed by the civilizing mission in the nineteenth, developmentalism in the twentieth and the neoliberal global market of the present (Mignolo 2000, p. 301). Allegedly universal knowledge therefore is never neutral or unpositioned, but reproduces the particular epistemological perspective of a local history that it subsequently does or does not manage to establish to the detriment of other local histories. Critical theories attacking modernity from within fail to pinpoint this additional dimension pertaining to coloniality,² and thereby become complicitous with the criticized global design, whose premises they unwillingly reproduce. Thus, throughout the history of the modern/colonial world-system, 'the construction of "pathological" regions in the periphery as opposed to the so-called

“normal” development patterns of the “West” justified an even more intense political and economic intervention from imperial powers. By treating the “Other” as “underdeveloped”, as “backward”, metropolitan exploitation and domination were justified in the name of the “civilizing mission” (Grosfoguel 2002, p. 221).

In his criticism of Establishment social science as a product of Eurocentric liberalist thought, Wallerstein had emphasized the geopolitical distribution of cultures of scholarship, by noting that from 1850 to 1914, and probably 1945, most of the scholarship had originated in, and was about, five countries: France, Great Britain, the Germanies, the Italies, and the United States. ‘This is partly pragmatic, partly social pressure, and partly ideological: these are the important countries, this is what matters, this is what we should study in order to learn how the world operates’ (Wallerstein 1996, p. 3). This, then, was to be the domain of sociologists, political scientists, and economists. In terms of fields of study, the rest of the world was relegated to either anthropology or Oriental studies – the disciplines meant to arrive at an explanation as to why the non-Western countries were not or could not become modern. After 1945, the ‘non-West’ was handed over to the new discipline of area studies, which in turn undermined the traditional disciplinary boundaries. This kind of epistemological North-South divide amounts to establishing a fixed relation between the scientists’ place of origin and the validity of their theories, or, in Mignolo’s words, ‘between knowing *about* and knowing *from*’ (Mignolo 2000, p. 309). Consequently, the distribution of scientific and cultural production in First, Second, and Third Worlds mandates that someone originating *from* an economically and technologically underdeveloped country does not have the necessary frame of mind and culture of scholarship which would allow them to study other civilizations, and therefore cannot produce any kind of significant theoretical thinking because theory is defined according to First World standards. In line with this logic, valid knowledge is produced in First World countries where there are no ideological obstructions to scientific and theoretical thinking. Thus, the global design of the ‘civilizing mission’ is still at work in the distribution of scientific labor between the three worlds and continues to shape our understanding of modernity and the modern.

This is to say that, to the extent that the world-system became modern, it also became increasingly colonial, articulating ‘colonial differences’ such as racial, ethnic and class hierarchies as part of its self-definition. The resulting international division of labor between core and periphery was, then, not only of an economic and political nature, but of a cultural and epistemological one as well: while the core became the location of *modernity*, from where the world started being classified, described, and studied, the periphery engendered *coloniality*, where the modern world’s definition power could be wielded. Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, South Asia or the Middle East thus did not enter the modern world-system as part of ‘modernity’, but as its obverse

(or dark side) — coloniality — as the violently and illegitimately subdued, economically exploited, and culturally silenced ‘Other’. Critical theoretical accounts produced within these local histories that have, at various moments in history, attempted to unveil the global designs behind the project of modernity from Renaissance Christianity to the contemporary global market have tended to remain silent in the world intellectual community both because of the lack of prestige of their epistemological location and for not having been articulated in a ‘modern’ language.

Nineteenth century modernity: export and trade of a scarce good

Placing itself on a scale measuring degrees of rationality, modernity, and civilization as defined by and from the hegemonic location of the Western core was a dare Romania first faced in mid-nineteenth century. Situated at the periphery of the emerging modern world-system in the ‘long sixteenth century’, the three Romanian Principalities, Transylvania, Walachia, and Moldavia had long made the bone of contention between the Habsburg, Ottoman and Tsarist Empires surrounding them. With the end of Ottoman domination in 1821, the Romanian Principalities faced the passage from a protocolonial system, in which their economic surplus was used to finance the luxuries of the politically dominant metropole (Chirot 1976, p. 10), to a neocolonial regime as Western Europe’s agrarian province. Hardly amounting to liberation, this was rather a new form of dependency, closely resembling the one experienced by classical colonies after political independence. In the particular geopolitical context of the region, this reshuffling of powers essentially entailed a shift of Romania’s ‘peripheral axis’ away from the domination of an Eastern Empire and toward that of the Western core (Bădescu 2004, p. 82ff.)

Thus, although never formally colonized, nineteenth century Romania had entered European modernity through its back door — coloniality, and as such was subjected to the economical, political, but also epistemological redistribution of power that the modern world-system had put into effect. If race was not a prominent criterion of differentiation within Europe itself, unlike in its ‘official’ colonies overseas, the negative term of opposing pairs such as ‘civilized — barbarian’, ‘rational — irrational’, ‘developed — underdeveloped’ applied to its eastern regions nonetheless. Hence, the systematic process of constructing inferior ‘Others’ as a core mechanism of legitimation for political intervention in, economic exploitation and epistemological patronage of the periphery had also led to the emergence of ‘pathological regions’ in that area of the modern world-system whose ‘North’ was its West.

It was against this background of Western Europe's ambivalent relationship with its 'Other within', the lesser European East, that Romania had to position itself in the second half of the nineteenth century. As the Ottoman economic pressure was loosening, the Western, and particularly French, cultural influence gained ever more ground in the Principalities. Westernization, civilization, and economic progress were viewed as closely related and mutually reinforcing processes (Love 1996, p. 26). A French-inspired, liberal revolution in 1848 laying claim to national independence for all Romanians and stifled that same year by Russian and Turkish intervention had also addressed issues such as serf emancipation, abolition of the Belgian-inspired constitution and the privileges it warranted to the land-controlling class, equality of civic and political rights, freedom of speech and of the press, and the creation of a national army. Yet, unlike in the West, obstacles to cultural, political and economic modernization in the European periphery were, first, imperial military domination, and second, the expansion of international capital. This meant that, once politically independent, Romania had to resist economic conquest in order to safeguard its national identity. Development issues could therefore only be formulated in terms of the foreign domination to which the country was subjected at that time, such that incipient sociological concerns were aimed less at 'global designs' – i.e., at abstract evolutionary models applicable across space and time – and much more interested in the historical analysis of the nation – i.e., in 'local history'.

The Western war for men's minds on the Eastern margins of empire

The 1848 revolutionaries, for their most part young intellectuals educated in Western universities, had advocated reforms in keeping with the country's traditions as well as the need for critical evaluation of the cultural imports. But their social thought, however concerned with the nation's wellbeing, was deeply rooted in the liberal ideology underlying their revolutionary activities, in their firm belief in progress as mankind's universal law and in civilization (chiefly understood in a Western European sense) as a superior stage of social evolution. Conservative thought, on the other hand, with its emphasis on organicity, tradition, collective values, and gradual change, was in itself critical of modernity. The acceptance it gained in Romania, where the awareness of peripherality invited critical rethinking, amounted to what has elsewhere been called a 'double critique' or 'border thinking' – i.e., a critical attitude toward two traditions that implies thinking from both, and at the same time from neither (Mignolo 2000, p. 67). By undertaking a critique from within modernity through the use of central elements of Western conservatism, and at the same time from its exteriority as an intellectual stance prompted by the

social realities of the system's periphery, Romanian conservative thought as first illustrated by the literary critic Titu Maiorescu, founder and leader of the most influential cultural society of the time, *Junimea (The Youth)*, postulated the borderline between the Western core and the Eastern European periphery as a new locus of enunciation from which it was possible to rethink modernity.

In order to ensure that the benefits of Western culture could be appropriated in a country situated at the border between barbarianism and civilization, as he put it, a critical view of the modernizing process was necessary, Maiorescu argued. Given Romania's exposure to an array of proximate foreign powers, thorough social change — as it resulted from the economic and cultural opening toward the West of Europe and the corresponding adoption of modern institutional structures — represented a new kind of aggression, one on which the nation's survival came to depend. Dealing with the issue of the culture change in 'primitive areas' in the 1960s, evolutionary anthropologists critical of the US modernization school would similarly refer to the importation of Western ideology and political institutions by former European colonies lacking the corresponding technological and economical foundation as 'a war for men's minds' (Sahlins/ Service 1960, p. 117f.) waged by the West in the attempt to preserve world dominance after formal decolonization. One hundred years earlier, Maiorescu warned that, in the absence of constructive criticism, evolution — viewed not so much as a teleological process, but as the gradual development of given potentialities — could easily fail to result in the progress advocated by Enlightenment philosophy and the liberal doctrine in its wake.

His classically conservative stance on the positive function of criticism and of the continuity of traditions in times of disruptive social change delivered the means for framing his analysis of Romania's hasty modernization in terms of what would become a highly consequential approach, the theory of forms without substance (Boatcă 2003). A peasant country like Romania, he argued, had not been prepared by anything in its history to receive all the 'outer forms' of civilization in the absence of 'the deeper historical foundations which with necessity produced' (Maiorescu 1973a, p. 164) them and it lacked the means to support them — industrial production and a middle class. Contrary to the liberals' claims, imported superstructural forms did not foster progress, but only concealed the power structures inherent in the relationship between Western and Eastern Europe (Maiorescu 1973b, p. 239), the better to exploit the latter. Consequently, Romania's sole possibility of preserving national independence throughout the process of modernization depended on her providing a specific — cultural, economic, and political — foundation to match and sustain the adopted forms, a conclusion that evolutionary anthropology would reach with respect to the all the new states exposed to the ideological domination of the system's core powers after World War II (Sahlins/Service 1960, p. 119). Although he mainly referred to cultural and political

superstructural elements, Maiorescu clearly viewed both intellectual and economic progress as determining the issue of national sovereignty in the context of cultural dominance, thus warning against the dangers inherent in the 'modernization theory' of his own time. Much like the policy prescriptions of twentieth century US modernizationists, the liberal reforms implemented in mid-nineteenth century Romania disregarded the power structures within Europe, and placed the country in a dependency situation. 'As soon as a higher culture is located in the vicinity of a people, it is bound to have some bearing on it. [...] One cannot resist this call: union in terms of cultural principles is the necessary fate of every European people. The question is only whether one can accomplish it as an equal companion or as an obedient slave; whether by preserving and strengthening one's national independence or by submitting to the foreign power. And this question can only be solved by the vitality of the people's economic and intellectual life' (Maiorescu 1973, p. 239). The costs of 'modernization', Maiorescu noted one century in advance of Celso Furtado and Andre Gunder Frank, can only be assessed by considering both terms of the relationship, not by mandating modernity in self-contained societies. In the following decades, an amazing variety of sociological and economic theories of social development would use Titu Maiorescu's model in order to define a proper evolutionary path along the lines of either 'form' or 'substance'.

On the conservative side, it was the writer and columnist Mihai Eminescu who continued and expanded Maiorescu's approach into a coherent socio-political theory of Romania's dependency status. For him, the mechanisms of the country's renewed peripheralization — and as such, the means by which the 'war for men's minds' was waged — were not only economic, but also ideological. These, in his view, operated through the agency of a 'cosmopolitan element', first represented by *Christianity* (more particularly Catholicism) and later on, after the Enlightenment and the advent of the secular world-view, by internationally active *economic agents*. Cosmopolitanism — understood as 'an unseen power, alien everywhere and at home everywhere, trying to realize the ideal of a universal empire' (Eminescu 1876, p. 45) — provided both the ideological cohesiveness and a motive force for the imperial projects of European powers, of which Austria-Hungary, posing the most direct threat to the Romanian provinces, was Eminescu's main point of reference. In twenty-first century parlance, Eminescu therefore denounced the capitalist system's reliance on successive ideological strategies acting as 'global designs' and intent on providing a common identity to the otherwise historically and structurally heterogeneous (Quijano 2000) world-system in expansion during the nineteenth century.

Cosmopolitanism's emphasis on individualism, free trade, rational social organization based on universal and impersonal norms, and egalitarianism had found a well-suited agent in Romania's liberal government, Eminescu argued. Although they stood in sharp contrast to Romania's existing class structure,

social mobility, and economic level, most 'cosmopolitan principles' had already been forced upon Romanian society as part of the institutional reforms following the 1848 liberal revolution. Far from inducing development, these legislative changes wrought a serious breach in Romania's organic evolution: they disintegrated the traditional class system by displacing the indigenous bourgeoisie, destabilized the economy by enhancing consumption levels while diminishing production, and created gaps in the opportunity structure later to be filled by foreign economic agents. The Romanian Constitution, which, unlike its Belgian counterpart, from which it had heavily borrowed, failed to represent precisely the largest segment of the population, the peasantry, was symptomatic for this mechanical adoption of foreign institutions lacking in local social substance:

'Every constitution, as a state's fundamental law, has as its correlate a particular class on which it is based. The correlate of the Western states' constitutions is a rich and cultivated middle class, a class of patricians, of industrial manufacturers — who see in the constitution the means of representing their interests in line with their significance [. . .] Where are *our* positive classes? The historical aristocracy [...] has almost disappeared, there is no positive middle class, the gaps are filled by foreigners, the peasantry is too uncultivated, and, although it is the only positive class, no one understands it, no one represents it, no one cares about it'.

(Eminescu 1876, p. 59)

For Eminescu, then, cosmopolitanism (in its liberal variant), although acting as a global design, was rooted in the local history of the Western societies that elaborated it. The ideology it sought to export to underdeveloped countries by means of rational models of capitalist organization was a success story, but one that consciously ignored the historical realities which it confronted in the Eastern European periphery. Social revolutions such as had taken place in 1848 all over Europe were a 'luxury' which small states, whose political or economic independence was constantly threatened, could not afford. Hence, advocating individual liberties in such a context could only act, as it already had, to the detriment of state power. Eminescu thus pleaded against a contractualist state, against individualism, free trade, and strictly formal modernization, and for a state representing the entire nation (instead of just separate individuals), for safeguarding nationality, and for protectionism.

Consequently, in the context of peripheral development, Romanian liberalism was not even a valid doctrine in need of revamping, but just 'pseudo-liberalism' (Eminescu 1879a, p. 301) — i.e., a form without substance, while 'true liberalism', like 'true liberty', the very basis of which was 'a middle class that produces something' (Eminescu 1877, p. 18),

represented the outgrowth of Western economic and social circumstances that found their formal expression in the state constitution. The absence of these economic correlates in Romania thus explained why the implementation of a liberal constitution and of democratic principles could not benefit Romanian society and instead ended up serving the interests of the geohistorical location that had engendered and propagated them – Western Europe:

‘So we allowed foreign legislations? Well, we did not allow them for Romanians, the needs of whom they did not match, but for economic elements that they did match and that know how to put them to use. We created a public atmosphere for exotic plants which proves lethal to the indigenous one. For today we have the most advanced liberal institutions. Control, people’s sovereignty, French codes, departmental and communal councils. Are we better off because of them? No, we are ten times worse off, for the new institutions did not match our degree of culture, the sum of work power available to us, the quality of our work, so we have to exhaust all these in order to sustain the modern state’s costly and useless apparatus’.

(Eminescu 1877, p. 20)

The main factors responsible for the increasing access foreigners gained to Romania’s visibly growing state machinery had been, in Eminescu’s view, the emergence of a favorable climate for social mobility and the creation of new socioeconomic positions especially in urban areas in the context of the rise of political liberalism. They, too, accounted for the resulting polarization of the country’s class structure into a foreign urban minority and a large rural, native majority financing the former’s consumerist habits. Eminescu explained the functioning of this mechanism by means of a three-layered model: the ‘real land’ – the large mass of the peasantry (four-fifths of the population), the country’s sole productive force; the liberal institutions – the ‘legal land’ – providing the juridical apparatus needed for creating and justifying both the polarized structure and the economic exploitation; and, finally, the ‘superimposed layer’ of parasitical elements, rendered indispensable to the mass of the population by usurious practices (Eminescu 1881a, p. 75). The social and economic function of the superimposed layer turned out to be the creation of a structure of fiscal exploitation sheltered by Romanian legislation at the expense of Romanian economy. By labeling the foreign elite a ‘xenocracy’ (Eminescu 1881b, p. 323) in charge of the social and economic dimensions of the transition from a protocolonial to a neocolonial society, and further distinguishing between a ‘xenocracy by conquest’, i.e., a political one, as in the case of the Ottoman rule, and a ‘xenocracy by insidiousness’ – i.e., one employing ideological and economic mechanisms characteristic of a neocolonial model, Eminescu thus captured one of the most significant aspects of the

phenomenon of ‘coloniality of power’ – the contribution of neocolonial elites to peripheralization after formal juridical decolonization.

Not only was the country not approaching the Western standards of civilization, Eminescu claimed, but the very use of the notion of progress in Romania’s current economic state was proof of the practical limitations and ideological sterility of imported political doctrines based on this notion – which, alongside liberalism, also included socialism. Since Romania’s economic and social state could be placed nowhere on the alleged continuum leading from barbarism to civilization, Eminescu dubbed it ‘semibarbarism’, ‘this state a hundred times worse than barbarism, not to speak of its detriment in relation to true civilization’ (Eminescu 1881c, p. 375), thus questioning both Western ideology’s postulate of progress and that of the unidirectionality of evolution. His theoretical model therefore transcended the single-country level of analysis and became a starting point for understanding peripheral evolution in general: as it diagnosed a ‘pathological’ condition with respect to organic evolution, it explained it within the larger context of the power relations embedded in the international division of labor and hence as an instance of the ‘development of underdevelopment’ (Frank 1966).

Eminescu’s conservative solution to semibarbarism involved a recuperation of the potentialities inherent in the borrowed forms, and a bridging of the gaps created in the process. If an evolution from forms to substance was possible, it had to proceed from a national and historical basis, whose reproduction had been stunted by the exploitative action of the superimposed layer:

‘A people’s true civilization does not consist in heedless borrowing of foreign laws, forms, institutions, labels, clothes. It consists in the organic, natural development of its own powers, of its own faculties. There is no general human civilization, accessible to all people to the same degree and in the same way, but every people has its own civilization, although a lot of elements common to other peoples go into it as well’

(Eminescu 1881d, p. 379).

This argument, serving both as a premise and as a conclusion to Eminescu’s approach to social evolution, is above all further evidence of the remarkable productivity of the subaltern perspective. If theorists from the world system’s periphery managed to identify and admit the failure of unilinear evolutionism in explaining underdevelopment in the periphery so much earlier than Western theorists, it was mainly because theirs was the local history overrun by global designs, not the one disseminating them. Theorizing *about* and *from* that local history, they were more sensitive to the spatial confrontation between a prescribed, uniformitarian evolutionary model and the social reality of the periphery than Western scientists, for whom the periphery was a mere object of study, if oftentimes a deviant one.

Against this background, insistence on the primacy of a peripheral country's national interest was a plea for the divergent character of evolution in general, for an acknowledgment of specific evolution in particular, and at the same time a form of resistance to the imposition of the global design of the 'civilizing mission', according to which the one general human civilization toward which evolution proceeded was European modernity. Thus, for Eminescu, the decision on whether or not industrialization was a choice for an agricultural country was not the predetermined result of a rigid sequence of stages, but the logical consequence of the advantages entailed by an industrialized country's relation to capital. Therefore, if Romania should industrialize, it was not because this was the inevitable evolutionary path, but because this particular form of internal organization of work would allow it to participate in the productivity of foreign capital, as opposed to being exploited by it.

Romanian conservatism as border thinking

Even more than Maiorescu's, the type of conservatism Eminescu embraced represents one of the clearest instances in which a Western political doctrine was resignified according to the historical realities of the world-system's periphery. By criticizing modernity from its exteriority, i.e., from the perspective of coloniality inscribed in Romanian local history, he thus discarded the reproductibility of Western modernity as a myth.

Consequently, to rule that the common denominator of such substantially different thinkers as Charles Maurras, the Slavophiles, Mihai Eminescu, and the 'agrarian' school of writers in the US South was 'the view that the foreigner was bad, modern society was bad, industry was bad, the soil was good, the past was noble, the nation had to be saved' (Chirot 1978, p. 36), as Daniel Chirot did in a sweeping survey of conservative reactions to orthogenetic evolutionism, is to wrongly equate Western conservatism with its reinterpretation outside the Euro-American core. This attitude, however, illustrates only too well the previously discussed Eurocentrism of critical approaches enunciated from within modernity, and their subsequent blindness to its obverse, coloniality.

That Chirot's reference to Eminescu's socio-political writings as the expression of a type of obscurantism rooted in the rejection of 'modernism and industrial society' (idem) is badly misplaced, clearly ensues from the preceding discussion on the Romanian writer's views on industrialization. The point to be made is that it is precisely subalternization of knowledge as a consequence of coloniality which renders particular ideologies not only politically, but also epistemologically functional. This was the case with the conservative doctrine in the East European periphery, transformed into a form of cultural and

ideological resistance to global designs, particularly liberalism. As in its Western variant, the emphasis conservatism placed on organic evolution was the counterpart of both liberalism's and Marxism's view of human history as essentially progressive, as already pointed out in the discussion of Titu Maiorescu's conservative sociology. Yet in addition to it, peripheral conservatism, present as well in Maiorescu's work, but more clearly in Eminescu's political articles, provided an account of organic evolution with respect to local histories rather than to the universal(izing) history which Western modernity postulated. It thereby not only identified the different logic of a particular *regional* history, but, more importantly, it analyzed the effects produced in peripheral areas by the tension between subaltern and hegemonic concepts of history, or between local histories and global designs. Briefly, while the 'tradition' and the 'evolution' advocated by Western conservatism were still rooted in modernity, the 'tradition' promoted by peripheral conservatism was located in time before modernity/coloniality, i.e., before the beginning of peripheralization through the encroachment of global designs.

Therein lies the decisive difference between Western conservatism and its reformulation in the Eastern European periphery. The former clung to tradition as a repository of feudal privileges whose disappearance in the course of the transition to capitalism it considered prejudicial to social evolution. In short, it was reactionary by virtue of its response to liberal ideology. In contrast, Eminescu pointed out that the very premises for a reactionary movement were absent in Romania, and that the meaning of 'conservative' was therefore lopsided (Eminescu 1879b, p. 165).

The conservatism, nationalism, and antiuniformitarianism along whose lines Chirot³ and other Western critics defined Eminescu's work were categories of a Western culture of scholarship arisen in response to the needs of a particular geohistorical location, namely, Western Europe. Educated in the West, but theorizing about the East European periphery, the nineteenth century Romanian conservatives discussed above realized that Western cultural categories cannot be 'exported' uncritically without risking that the subalternization of knowledge be added to the economic peripheralization. They therefore were among the first Romanian thinkers to resignify the method of Western cultures of scholarship — in this case, conservatism and its evolutionary doctrine — precisely as a response to the uncritical borrowing of formal institutions, doctrines, and development policies by the liberal regime. In particular Mihai Eminescu, who made this perspective the very center of his theorizing, became the mouthpiece of what has elsewhere been called 'subaltern knowledges situated at the historical intersection of the traditional and the modern' (Grosfoguel 2002, p. 221) in the particular context of nineteenth century Romania.

Writing *from* the periphery, and not ‘only’ *about* it, both Maiorescu and Eminescu thus made an epistemological claim to the theoretization of social reality that would be both echoed and independently discovered in those peripheral regions of the world-system – most notably Latin America, but also China and Russia – which faced similar dependency contexts in the decades to come (see Love 1996). Concepts like Maiorescu’s ‘forms without substance’ or Eminescu’s ‘superimposed layer’ and ‘xenocracy’ – reminiscent of both Celso Furtado’s ‘myth of economic development’ (Furtado 1974) and Andre Gunder Frank’s ‘lumpenbourgeoisie’ (Frank 1974) – all represent attempts to outline specific realities of the modern world-system’s periphery for which hegemonic social science, centered around European experience and its claim to universal truth, had no labels. This consistent groping for conceptual clarity on the part of theorists writing from colonial perspectives only goes to show that, since many of the concepts relevant to our analysis of modernity were coined in and about the core, their explanatory and predictive power should be assessed differently depending on the structural location of their origin.

During the following sequence of imperial control of Eastern Europe, the Communist one, these and related theoretical approaches were condemned precisely along the lines of their national dimension, which stood in disagreement with the internationalism that Communism propagated, as well as their conservative dimension, whose underlying evolutionism and advocacy of organicity blatantly contradicted the official government doctrine of revolutionary transformation. Accordingly, the works of Titu Maiorescu were banned for his alleged anti-progressivism, Eminescu’s for nationalism and ‘proto-fascism’, and the political implications of the theory of ‘forms without substance’ silenced under the guise of applying solely to the field of literary criticism. Recuperation of this theoretical tradition still proves problematic in the post-Communist era, when political, economic, and intellectual alignment with the Western European norms, entailing the (however vague) promise of European integration, dictates the dismissal of approaches critical of globalization, wholesale Westernization, and cultural leveling out and therefore makes epistemic oblivion a prerequisite for political and economic acknowledgment.

The shift of axis that Romania once again faced with the Communist demise at the end of the twentieth century thus represents both a chance and a risk: On the one hand, a rich theoretical heritage tackling the issue of peripheralization in the face of economic and political dominance could prove invaluable when confronted with a novel modernization theory once again professing the adoption of forms without substance in the shape of IMF provisions and EU regulations. On the other hand, what Immanuel Wallerstein has termed the ‘gigantic liberal-Marxist consensus’ (Wallerstein 1991, p. 182), and which Eminescu had viewed as responsible for the importation of forms without substance in nineteenth-century Romania, is still very much active in

the region in the shape of a concerted Communist-cum-neoliberal epistemic control of knowledge production by old and new elites judging the intellectual production of the periphery in terms of categories – such as progress, development, modernity, globalization – created in the core. The chance to reassess and promote old solutions to a recurrent problem in the context of a vacuum of – or at least a shift in – political hegemony in post-Communist Eastern Europe is thus stunted by the continued epistemic discredit of forms of resistance containing a national component, accordingly denounced as dubious scholarship and political dynamite. This lack of definition power could not only become the new geohistorical edge deciding this – and other – colonized regions' renewed drift into the periphery, but also a further missed opportunity to shape modernity from its borders.

Phrasing the issue in terms of one or several modernities, therefore, is asking the wrong question. The modernity that Western social sciences were called upon to analyze, but also to imagine, is a Western macronarrative, to be understood against the background of the history, cultural traditions and economic development of its place of origin – Western Europe. A bird's eye view of world modernity in turn requires taking into account the hitherto silent knowledges speaking from coloniality and able to translate between epistemological locations on account of having been trained in modern thought while living under (neo)colonial realities. The resulting picture will probably be neither modern nor colonial, neither postmodern nor postcolonial, but a synthesis incorporating both experiences while presupposing neither.

Notes

- 1 Unlike David Ricardo, with whom the theory of 'comparative advantage' originated, Dussel does not apply the term to the sphere of economic production, but, following Wallerstein's analysis, to the entire complex leading to 'the rise of the West' to hegemonic positions within the world-system: '[...] the great scientific discoveries, precious metals (silver and gold), the new labor force incorporated into the system (Indians and, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, African slaves in the Americas), the new comestibles (the Inca potato, corn, the Mexican *tomatl* and *chocolatl*, etc.), the millions of kilometers incorporated by the conquest into European colonial agriculture, and the invention of new economic instruments. All of this allowed Europe to triumph in its competition with the Islamic world, Hindustan, Southeast Asia, and China (Dussel 2002, p. 223).
- 2 More generous than 'colonialism', the term *coloniality* as proposed by Aníbal Quijano for Latin America and now widely used in works dealing with all peripheral zones in the world-economy refers to a threefold process of classification gradually established since the beginning of the European colonial expansion in the sixteenth century and collateral to the emergence of modernity in Europe: in relations of exploitation between capital and

- labor; in relations of domination between metropolitan and peripheral states; and last, but not least, in the production of subjectivities and knowledges (Quijano 2001, p. 553).
- 3 'This type of opposition to uniformitarian theories of change produced a great deal of anti-modern, nostalgic literature and some powerful rightist and nationalist political movements, but it produced very little reputable social science' (Chirot 1978, p. 36)

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