



A.C. POPOVICI AND HIS INTERPRETATION OF NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY

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Abstract: *THIS PAPER WILL PORTRAY SOME OF THE FUNDAMENTAL TRAITS ENCOUNTERED IN THE WORK OF A. C. POPOVICI REGARDING THE TENSIONS BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY. CULTURED, CONTROVERSIAL, RELENTLESS, AND HIGHLY COMBATIVE IN HIS CONDUCT THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, POPOVICI WAS, AT THE SAME TIME, A COMPLEX THINKER, WHO SOUGHT TO PROMOTE A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COUNTER-MODEL THAT WOULD PREVENT WHAT HE SAW AS THE LEVELLING INFLUENCE OF DEMOCRATIC MASS POLITICS, AS WELL AS THE ULTIMATE COLLAPSE OF THE NATION. THIS PAPER WILL FIRSTLY EXPLORE THE RECEPTION OF HIS SECOND MAJOR WORK, NATIONALISM OR DEMOCRACY, BOTH DURING HIS LIFETIME AND FURTHER ON. SECONDLY, THE PAPER WILL DEPICT THE IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF POPOVICI'S WORK, IDENTIFYING SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES OF HIS THOUGHT. THIRDLY, THE PAPER WILL ALSO CONSIDER THE IDEOLOGICAL OPPOSITES TO POPOVICI'S VISION, WHICH FUELLED HIS PERSISTENT ATTEMPTS TO SET HIMSELF AGAINST THE INCREASINGLY DEMOCRATIC CURRENTS OF HIS TIME. THE PAPER WILL THUS SHOW HOW POPOVICI REPRESENTED MORE THAN A SIMPLY REACTIONARY TAKE ON THE CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY ITSELF, BUT ALSO A REPRESENTATIVE OF A WIDER CURRENT WHICH SOUGHT TO MAKE SENSE OF THE LEVELLING TENDENCIES THAT WERE TEARING DOWN EXISTING REALITIES AND ELITES, AND, AT THE SAME TIME, CREATING NEW ONES.*

Keywords: *A.C. POPOVICI, DEMOCRACY, NATIONALISM, MODERNITY.*

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INTRODUCTION

The case of Aurel C. Popovici, who has remained known as a complex, critical, and at times contradictory figure, represents the chance for a look at a specific kind of early 20th century socio-political visions. Relatively unknown and certainly underresearched, these visions, critiquing what



they saw as the levelling nature of their contemporary democracies, and the soteriological role of nationalism. That this particular perspective has certain similarities with current nativist critiques of globalism is not coincidental. The works authored by Popovici are not well-covered outside of the Romanian space, even if his famous book on the proposed United States of Austria was not without strong, and, in certain respects, quite enduring echoes (Murariu, 2020). Thus, aside from the Romanian cultural space, Popovici has been discussed in English by a few authors who explore various facets of his ideas and projects (Neumann, 2002; Turda, 1997; 1999; 2016), with his work on the proposed federalisation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy drawing the most attention. This paper will focus mostly on the second major work written by Popovici, the book called *Nationalism or Democracy. A Critique of Modern Civilisation* [*Naționalism sau democrație. O critică a civilizațiunii moderne*]. Published in 1910, the work's very title implies a dichotomous approach, pitting nationalism against democracy. In Popovici's view, this dichotomy represented one of the fundamental struggles and dilemmas of modern European civilisation.

THE RECEPTION OF NATIONALISM OR DEMOCRACY

The first volume in a planned trilogy – which was meant to highlight his political thought – is formed of articles published in “Sămănătorul” (March, 1908 – April, 1909) and of other texts divided into three parts: I. *The Critique of Cosmopolitan Civilisation*, II. *The Critique of the Culture without Ideals*, and III. *The Fundamental Character of Nationality*. In a brief preface, the author explained that there are several reasons for the book's existence. The first reason invoked is that of his “duty” to speak up and fix the mistake which others had committed – namely, “indoctrinating” a generation of Romanians with “dangerous, democratic ideas” and for a universal suffrage which would be, Popovici believes, indirectly harmful to the Romanian state (Popovici, 1910, p. VI). The second reason was the necessity to combat the influence of “universal, social democracy” and those who, by pushing for these ideals, “systematically weaken the spiritual unity of the whole Romanian people” (Popovici, 1910, p. VIII).

In his self-understanding, Popovici was defending nothing less than a fundamental truth, which, true to his personality, was prepared to defend even against a seemingly unstoppable tide. This would contribute to his somewhat weakened public position. Thus, if the 1906 work had brought Popovici prestige in the Romanian cultural space, and farther afield in the European one, the work he published in 1910 saw the light of day in the context of an overall deteriorated image for the author. This was due to his penchant for getting involved in harsh polemics, which lost him friends and admirers alike. By the end of the year, the book had only been mentioned in notes rather than in articles, a fact which is lamented by Ioan Scurtu (1910, p. 1), arguing that the book was (unjustly) ignored by the “men of the pen” since they could not hope to match its author in erudition and argumentation on “real nationalism and utopian democracy”.

Later, after the Great Union, the Romanian political climate is gradually faced with unprecedented chaos, involving changes of position, subversion, assassinations and terror attacks. In such a volatile context, focusing on the unpredictable present, A.C. Popovici seemed like an already forgotten political thinker less than a decade from his death. Nevertheless, Lucian Blaga wrote in 1926 that even though his political predictions had been superseded by European events, his second book pitting nationalism against democracy was extremely relevant due to the crises faced by democracy worldwide at the time (Blaga, 1926, p. 5). Blaga actually explains that Popovici's integralist nationalism and his instinctive dread of democracy came from his reliance on intellectually aristocratic writers which used the theory of the races, such as Chamberlain and Landgbehn (Blaga, 1926, p. 5). In a work published that same year, Eugen Lovinescu (1973, pp. 42-46) argues that Popovici represents a cultured, yet reactionary viewpoint and critique of modern civilisation. In any case, throughout the



interwar period, *Nationalism or Democracy*, steadily found a place in a number of works on Romanian culture and civilisation, with most of the being banned in 1948 – such as *Eminescu's Nationalism* by Dumitru Murărașu (1994), *The Dialectic of Nationalism* by Nicolae Roșu (1936) or *Romanian Spiritualities* by Ion Zamfirescu (1941). Also, the press associated with the Legion of the Archangel Michael sporadically revisited some of the book's ideas, either during the interwar period or later on. In 1937, Grigore Nandriș would write that Popovici's ideas were “prophetic truths” (Nandriș, 1937, p. 37), which had either occurred or were about to do so, as the “disaster of the Marxist democracy” (Nandriș, 1937, p. 21) with its liberty-killing egalitarianism. Moreover, he would defend Popovici from accusations of being a regressive xenophobe, arguing that his views had been used out of context, and praise him as a ceaseless fighter against utopias dangerous for the Romanian people (Nandriș, 1937, p. 21). In a work published in 1941, Bagdasar, Herseni and Bârsănescu link Popovici's separation of nationalism from democracy as a sort of prelude to the German and Italian thinkers of the 1930s (Bagdasar, Herseni, and Bârsănescu, 1941). Yet another very positive perspective is encountered in the work of Mihail Manoilescu, who links Popovici to Mihai Eminescu as a great and passionate thinker (Manoilescu, 2002, p. 5).

The Communist period naturally meant that Popovici's work was rarely mentioned. Nonetheless, one may point out Damian Hurezeanu's presentation, where the early stage of Popovici's thought was judged as being widely democratic on occasion, but with a subsequent metamorphosis which made him unrecognisable (Hurezeanu, 1980, 48-50). Further on, in 1989, Popovici's second book was considered by Virgil Nemoianu as an important work, but marred by stylistic violence and radical phrases, with Nemoianu (2016, pp. 123-126) highlighting several important elements of the book – the attraction towards racism, organic decentralisation, and strong governmental authority along with high esteem for the American model, starting with Washington. The use of Washington was not accidental, for it represented for Popovici a link to other great historical figures such as Caesar, Cromwell, and Bismarck, and, to his mind, pointed to the defeated Tudor Vladimirescu, the forerunner of an aristocracy of character represented by conservatives (Nemoianu, 2016, pp. 126-128).

The re-editing of *Nationalism or Democracy* in 1997 prompted Zigu Ornea's reaction, who stated that although Popovici was very knowledgeable with regards to the massive bibliography of the problem, the entirety of his point was disproven by historical reality, thus remaining isolated in a “strange, illusionary enclave” of a hopeless reactionarism (Ornea, 2001, p. 340). Andrei Roth also replied to the work, considering that one must indeed choose between nationalism and “democratism”. By choosing nationalism, Popovici was obligated to combat democratism as an idea and democracy as a political solution, a choice which was not by any means limited to Popovici, but which made a large impact throughout the 20th century in Romanian society (Roth, 1999, p. 11). At the same time, Popovici himself is considered one of the first important authors with a distinctly ethnocentric perspective (Roth, 1999, p. 106). Victor Neumann has sharply criticised the book for its conflict potential, for instance, due to Popovici's statements that democracy cannot be national due to its nature, which is based on numbers and is thus changing and internationalist – with similar viewpoints held among Popovici's contemporaries throughout Eastern Europe (Neumann, 2008, p. 78-79). Vasile Crișan has also systematically approached the ideas from *Nationalism or Democracy*, pointing out that Popovici's ideology is essentially “nationalist, conservative, traditionalist, and antidemocratic”, as well as the fact that it “works with white and black, clear and obscure, rarely with intermediary nuances, as a reflex of his pedagogical exercise and his fiery temper” (Crișan, 2008, pp. 160-162).



IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS

The ideas in *Nationalism or Democracy* are the expression of a complex process of intellectual evolution. The son of a furrier, A.C. Popovici did not wish to continue in his father's footsteps as a craftsman, but instead showed great interest in learning the Romanian language, foreign languages and various scientific subjects. As his father was cousin to Coriolan Brediceanu and his mother also lived in the house of Lugoj's mayor, the child grew up in an environment which was familiar with the social and national emancipation movement of the Romanians, promoted, among others, by figures such as Eftimie Murgu (1805-1870), Emanuil Gojdu (1802-1870), or Alexandru Mocioni (1841-1909). The intellectual evolution of the young Popovici was strongly influenced by the activity of some of his professors in Lugoj, as well as by the political atmosphere in Transylvania, which had worsened the status of Romanians through the coming of Austro-Hungarian Dualism. Maturing in an environment which saw the Romanian nation and community as being in danger, Popovici represented the switch of the Romanian youth from political passivity to activism. His involvement in this political movement was wholehearted, influencing not only his ideology but his entire life. Aged 29, his political culture was beyond relying only on the café debates so fashionable at the time, but also used systematic study and – as became his signature – a large bibliography.

An important model – which most certainly loomed large in Popovici's mind until the end of his life – was Mihai Eminescu, with the latter's political thought still influential several decades after his own death. After all, Eminescu and Popovici were only thirteen years apart in age and shared a number of experiences, including studies in the German cultural space, membership in Romanian student society in Vienna, and even debuting in Iosif Vulcan's "Familia" magazine. One must also mention here that, although both positioned themselves in the conservative camp, they were never politically affiliated, thus enjoying a larger degree of freedom with regards to their writings on the subject. Considering Eminescu a sort of embodiment of the national spirit (Popovici, 1910, p. 73), Popovici was enthusiastic concerning his political imagination, as well concerning Eminescu's courage of writing in a Christian Orthodox country that the spread of modern civilisation had occurred with the help of Catholicism (Popovici, 1910, p. 87). He is also favourably seen for preferring a national, organically developed civilisation instead of foreign, levelling theories, with Popovici describing him as follows:

Eminescu was the greatest and most committed "reactionary" of the Romanians in Romania. Because he hated political shareholders. Because he would not admit that a nation would be a company with shares, with directors responsible to an anonymous crowd. Because he was outraged by the sight of the "upper plebs" allying with the lower plebs, purposefully deceiving the people, compromising its national existence (Popovici, 1910, pp. 72-73).

Impressed by Eminescu's writing and passionate style, Popovici considers him "an idealist on the peaks of reality" (Popovici, 1910, p. 90). In writing thusly about Eminescu, it is possible that A.C. Popovici also sought to characterise himself as an ideological conservative who – to his mind – represented the ultimate dedication to truth and the nation. Along with the decisive role played by Eminescu, Popovici also mentions other figures from the Romanian cultural space, such as Titu Maiorescu (Popovici, 1910, p. 71). This was mostly due to Maiorescu's famous theory on forms without foundations, that drew attention to the way in which Romania sought its path towards modernisation through a wide variety of institutional imports, which were not adapted to the specific national context.

Strongly involved in the ideological debates of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Popovici's ideas were profoundly marked by his positioning in the camp of the nationalists,



among which he names Joseph de Maistre, Bismarck, the Count of Cavour, Burke, Taine, Heinrich von Treitschke, Chamberlain, and Wilhelm II (Popovici, 1910, p. 18). He goes further, calling them reactionaries for “they reacted against the tendencies of cosmopolitan levelling, cultural equalisation, and destruction of national entities” (Popovici, 1910, p. 18). Unsurprisingly, and in accordance with organicist principles, Popovici makes an analogy about gardening when speaking of the relationship between national character and culture. He argues that Bismarck, Goethe, or Luther took the best from foreign influences without altering their fundamental German nature, thereby representing cases of successful “grafting” (Popovici, 1910, p. 355). Moreover, Popovici studied the polemics centred on the concept of race by focusing on the works of authors such as Gobineau, Woltmann, Ammon, Lapouge, and Chamberlain. In doing so, Popovici came to the conclusion that “race is the most important factor in human culture” (Popovici, 1910, p. 358), yet, at the same time, he considered the concept “excessively vague” (Popovici, 1910, p. 358), preferring to use it to mean nationality instead (Popovici, 1910, p. 359). Edmund Burke (1729-1797) represented another major influence for Popovici’s thought, who saw him as “the wisest of all political thinkers” (Popovici, 1910, p. 32), and someone who had remained until that point in time the greatest opponent of French revolutionary politics and civilisation (Popovici, 1910, p. 33). Indeed, in following Burke or building upon his argumentation, Popovici warns of reckless the passions – for liberty – which bind people in chains (Popovici, 1910, p. 101), and for the tendency of democratic individuals to be so absorbed in human rights theories so as to forget their own nature (Popovici, 1910, p. 119).

THE MODELS OF THE ANTAGONISTS

Popovici was also very familiar with the writings of the opposite side, beginning with the figures of the Enlightenment, which he furiously criticised. Interestingly, he makes an argument which is similar to those of later conservative writers and intellectuals describing the nature of totalitarianism in the early and middle of the 20th century. Namely, he grants the ideology of the French Revolution and that of the Marxists a religious aura, associating it with a very specific vocabulary:

To the French demagogic divinities which showed themselves in the 18th century, one finds today, especially in the Marxist temple, a new nation of apostles and theologians, worshipping them. Tying economic and “social” interests and concepts to Gallo-Greek humanitarian and sophist theories, they preach a new religion, without the idealism of the Christian one, without the idealism of any religion, yet with all the brutal materialism of primitive man (Popovici, 1910, p. 285).

This perspective is interesting not because it is an accurate portrayal of what Popovici’s ideological opposites truly represented, but because it points to a powerful trend which made itself particularly felt later in the 20th century, when a series of thinkers – from Voegelin to Löwith – sought to make sense of the great revolutions and upheavals affecting their societies. They did so by applying familiar models and analogies, thus leading to the somewhat problematic idea that the new movements of the 19th and 20th centuries were essentially born out the human need for the sacred, a need which could no longer be fulfilled in quite the same way in an apparently disenchanted world. Moreover, they contributed to the eventual popularity of the concept of political religion, which sought to study the commonalities in totalitarian movements. In any case, Popovici also criticises the French model for the way in which its followers used the lessons of Antiquity in constructing it, namely:

[...] they did not take these studies and doctrines from Greek or Roman writers from at least the Republican eras, but from much later writers, from pedantic moralists who wrote long after the total



extinguishing of ancient liberty. The French did not follow, for instance, Thucydides, but Plutarch's stories (Popovici, 1910, p. 116).

In other words, Popovici accuses such writers to have preferred the expressiveness of a perspective filled with fictional insertions rather than Thucydides' view, who famously argued in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* that his historical work was not meant to be artistic, pleasing, or moral, but to show what human nature is capable, and to remain as a possession for all time. Moreover, he argues that French thinkers, in not experiencing liberty, had chosen writers similar to them, who – living in the time of Caesars – had not known or never truly understood liberty aside of an imaginative, exaggerated portrayal (Popovici, 1910, p. 116). Popovici's vision, that the French model led straight into the abyss, was greatly criticised by many of his contemporaries – who were often pro-French culturally and politically. Popovici (1910, p. 138) observed that the French model has generated an overproduction of reformers on a European model, something which he links to increased superficiality in various fields and a vulgarisation of politics. The popular involvement in politics is thus responsible for the changing fortunes of the traditional elites, and for the far too easy collapse of certain values – such as honesty and good faith – in favour of the power of the law and the “gospel” of human rights, which enables anyone, no matter their capabilities, to ascend to the highest position, thus replacing “people of true value” and subjugating the lower classes by doctrinaire demagogues (Popovici, 1910, p. 143). To this, Popovici adds what he considers the French propensity for projecting a certain erroneous orderliness and symmetry over nature, as if it belonged to Cartesian doctrines, thus leading to the propagation abstract doctrines as natural law (Popovici, 1910, p. 160).

Religion also makes its mark as fundamental in Popovici's vision of political and cultural war. French atheism is seen as nothing less than a death sentence for a people, as it means abandoning the “secular mind” which ensures its survival throughout the ages – a secular mind which is protected by God. By turning back on God, a people turns its back on itself, and opening the door to its own self-dissolution as a nation (Popovici, 1910, p. 222). He continues, arguing that “after almost a century of continuous democratisation and vulgarisation of <<the truth>> against <<the lie>>, - France is the most atheist country in Europe, where the “cultured” class, especially from Jules Simon and Paul Bert onwards, is engulfed in a blind hatred, not only against the Catholic Church, but against any form of belief in God”, which is why he sees France as “the country most threatened today by the antipatriotic and even amoral current” (Popovici, 1910, p. 229). As a result, only those intellectuals who think like “waiters” may speak of a “progressive” evolution of mankind, for in abandoning God, the civilisational accomplishments of Europe would return to animalism, dust and ash (Popovici, 1910, p. 161).

Starting from the idea that the state must “give to its people or peoples the freedom they need in order to develop themselves naturally, in their national and individual spirit, according to their past and special nature” (Popovici, 1910, p. 127), Popovici warns against democratic theories of the state when employed by demagogues. In contrast to the mission of the state as Popovici sees it, for a democratic individual “the state is a temporary association with a commercial character”, and even a “joint-stock company” or, “at most, a charity association” (Popovici, 1910, p. 129-130). To the egalitarian French model, Popovici opposes the more hierarchical Anglo-Saxon model, which he saw as based on experience and practicality, encouraging a system ruled by the few the best.

In this respect, Popovici taps into an ancient and very durable tradition, which had lauded the virtues of hierarchical mixed government and skepticism towards mass politics, going back all the way to Antiquity – whether it was the Laconophilia of Greek intellectuals who admired the virtues of the mixed constitutional order of the Spartans, or the Romans during the Republic. After all, a thinker as important and cultured as Polybius, in describing the state of Carthage during the Third Punic War, writes that both states were at their opposite point in terms of political virtue. The open maritime polity



of Carthage, who had by then abandoned imperial pretensions and returned to a focus on trade, was governed by the masses, whereas by contrast, the Roman Republic – for whose elites Polybius wrote – was led by the few and the best. (Polybius, 6.51). Despite some appearances to the contrary, there is more here than merely the importance of power dynamics, for Polybius would not stop short of criticising the failings of Rome in other contexts.

Popovici would go on to draw attention to the fact that “aristocracy” when used in the present did not mean a titled, privileged, propertied and moneyed class, linking it instead to its Greek etymology, that is *aristos*, the best. As he argued:

The aristocracy is thus a class made of a group of people who are the elite of a nation. Today, there are no more classes by law. The French Revolution has abolished them, in theory. And thus, in all “democracies” influenced by French doctrine, the laws “do not allow” the existence of classes. Even so, the classes exist. There is no state in Europe where they do not. And they will exist, as long as there will be civilised nations in the world (Popovici, 1910, p. 171).

The importance of the role of the few, and that of the oligarchy had been expanded upon from another perspective by one of Popovici’s contemporaries, Robert Michels, whose famous “iron law” of oligarchy (Michels, 1911) was theorised in his 1911 work. The role of the school is also considered essential in the formation of moral, patriotic individuals, who are also typically financially stable due to the nature of the English school system, and, being taught to work since their youth, such individuals are not at the mercy of the ruling party and its ability to distribute resources when in government (Popovici, 1910, pp. 371-373). Interestingly, despite a generally positive outlook towards it, Popovici does not insist in the book on the German cultural model, even though it was one he was certainly familiar with. Indeed, if the middle of the 19th century had been one which stressed the cultural supremacy of Paris, many Romanian intellectuals – even if Francophone – would begin their long, gradual turn towards Vienna and Berlin.

Popovici believes that valuable individuals are pushed aside in democratic eras due to the new nature of the state whose decadence means that resources are increasingly open to theft by the unworthy. He likens the situation to that of “<<a fallen tree out of which all may chop wood>>” (Popovici, 1910, p. 143). Another important argument in Popovici’s view was the following – a decision taken by a majority of votes might not actually correspond to the true interests of the country and a majority might not make the right choice to begin with (Popovici, 1910, p. 11).

After more than a century after first being published, Popovici’s texts in *Nationalism or Democracy* can be jarring for the contemporary reader – ideological perspectives and sensitivities aside – due to the mixture of various bibliographic and even stylistic resources, with great names of Western high culture being combined with folk wisdom, the latter expressed through an impressive number of proverbs. Moreover, Popovici went as far as proposing that city-dwellers would adopt stylised rural dress, in a way which further strengthens his organicist take on the role of the community and the nation:

In today’s public administration, in the army, in the schools for girls and schools for boys, at the Universities even, in the magistrature, everywhere one might have seen the national dress in different forms, after all typically Romanian. In the upper, cultured classes, the clothes might have become true works of art, the world in a contemporary concert would be today like a national extravaganza, the artistic expression of a people, the likes of which no one could find today in the “social” decomposition of Central Europe. The urban dress would be art instead of today’s caricature (Popovici, 1910, p. 36).



For Popovici, the proverbs and other aspects of Romanian literary folklores were true sources of wisdom, on the basis of which one could obtain essential syntheses of morals, political economy, art, or philosophy, due to their nature as expressions of an ancient collective experience. Nonetheless, from the second part of the book, the numerous quotes illustrating Romanian popular wisdom are replaced with examples from European literature, with the proverbs of Iulia A. Zane or the sayings of Iordache Golescu being generally abandoned in favour of quotes from Goethe, Schiller, Kant or other cultural or political figures.

At the same time, in spite of his support for certain rural models, Popovici never argues from a truly antimodernist position seeking to pull back the life of the community to the certainties of the premodern existence. Instead, he argues for an organic, gradual development of the new along with the old, with the stakes always being the survival of what he considered the essential features of the national community. This was evident even in his distinction between liberalism and democracy, arguing that “in the public life of a modern nation, the natural and necessary parties can only be two: a conservative party and a moderately liberal one” (Popovici, 1910, p. 290). Thus, the conservative party must strive to maintain and conserve the past heritage as well as historical continuity, or “the whole national healthy character of the people” (Popovici, 1910, p. 292). By comparison, his vision of a liberal party should “represent the necessary changes according to the times, but always with the thought of deepening and strengthening the national character”, instead of “weakening and obliterating it through democratism” (Popovici, 1910, p. 292). The “patriotic struggle” between these two parties would thus ensure a harmony between the continuous adoption of new, necessary ideas to the old substratum (Popovici, 1910, p. 292).

Caught between the frontlines of antagonistic theories, expressions of a seemingly conflictual epoch, Popovici chose to fully commit to the cause of nationalism. As a result, he would become a fierce critic of democracy, seeing it as an unacceptable path for the Romanian and East-European context of his time. This fuelled his ceaseless fight against what he saw as the decadence and decomposition brought about by democratic mass politics, affecting not only the state but the people as a whole (Popovici, 1910, p. 112).

CONCLUSION

A number of features stand out in Popovici’s perspective on contemporary European affairs and dilemmas. Firstly, there is his clear rejection of any real working relationship between nationalism and democracy, and, what is more, of the assurance that the phenomenon of mass politics associated with democracy must necessarily represent the decadence and, ultimately, the death of the nation. Secondly, there is his use of religious analogies to discredit rival ideological currents, with the main point being that these adversaries shared a form of *Ersatzreligion* without possessing the content which made religion valuable to Popovici. Thirdly, one may identify his overall perspective, namely, of an intellectual raised in what was – at least to some extent – an increasingly marginal culture of honour and relatively stable hierarchies faced with the increasingly accelerating impact of a new culture of law, with its new values and hierarchies.

Like other deep crises of their kind, the modernisation waves meant not only the great transformation of pre-existing structures, but also their subjecting to tremendous pressures, born of new ideas, technologies, and political and economic realities. These ideas and realities, regardless of their original purpose and that of their proponents, would often have a profoundly disruptive effect wherever they were implemented or where they were developed – either autonomously or by force. Yet, despite certain voices who longed for a long-gone, mostly imaginary rural world and its purity, the general feeling throughout Europe would still be one of there being no turning back from the great Project of Modernity. As focussed on defending organic national and rural realities as he was, Popovici



was nonetheless no anti-modern. Indeed, all of the points mentioned above lead more to his focus for an alternative form of modernity. In other words, this was not necessarily a return to premodern patterns, but a reshaping of the order which had been slowly gaining dominance for the past century, and granting a role to those premodern qualities he held to be the most valuable and endangered.

At the same time, whether on the right or the left, some took a more extreme approach and reacted aggressively to the fundamental contradictions facing their worlds and worldviews. Especially when pursuing a totalist vision, these movements heralded the great struggle for a different kind of society, one that would make use of all the fruits of technology, but without those features which had – in their view – negatively impacted, or even destroyed other Western countries.



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