Allo, allo, ici le Bucharest du pedigree!

The Nationalization of Women’s Fashion in Interwar Bucharest

The interwar era began as a post-war euphoric world of excess and liberation, curtailed by the Great Depression, and eventually exploded into World War II. Interwar Romanians viewed Paris as the epitome of civilization and style, while they also copied what historian Mary-Louise Roberts termed as French, American or English post-war hedonism. Furthermore, Hollywood glamour was starting to gain momentum, quickly added to the Romanian manual of attitude and style. Even if they adopted Western trends and fashions, they also felt pressure to keep their autochthonous feminine traits. Women’s emancipation and their increasing public participation often connected to the idea of their so-called masculinization. Such views originated from the worldwide traditional patriarchal structures that endeavoured to maintain the pre-war status quo. Even though Romanians did not always reject women’s liberation, many continued to vouch for the established gender roles and safeguarding women’s morality and reputation by staying in the domestic sphere as much as possible.

Like in most developing countries of the time, unprecedented development was accompanied by stringent fiscality and political and social upheavals. The world of fashion and beauty was directly affected in all its aspects by the political, economic and social changes in the era. In fashion’s case, controlling the narrative and practices was a means of assuring the implementation of certain agendas, by influencing women as passive consumers and potential indirect influencers. There were also direct economic advantages of developed textile and leather industries, as they were products that were easily made in Romania, in large quantities for national consumption, but especially for export, and could thus generate enough profit to decrease its national and international debt and import costs. The 1920s were marked by the struggle to pay exorbitant post-war debts, and the need to optimize, and in many cases, create an economic and industrial infrastructure for newly added territories, in what came to be known as Greater Romania. The decade was dominated by the National Liberal Party, a bastion of the Brătianu family since the revolution of 1848. Between 1918 and 1940 there was a succession of 38 governments in most cases following the path set by the first pot-war Liberal doctrines and for most of the 1920s they always had at least 40% of the Parliamentary votes, the majority

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2 Ibidem, p. 16.
threshold. Most of its members were part of the financial bourgeoisie, and they believed that Romania should develop by its own means, through frugality, protectionism and tightly regulated and heavily taxed international commerce. This also mirrored the path chosen by many other Eastern European nations that found themselves in similar circumstances. This culminated with the 1923 Constitution that modernized the 1866 Constitution abrogated with the birth of the Romanian Kingdom and adapted it to the post-war context. Its main prerogative was clarifying the nature, boundaries and composition of the new state. Its modifications directly affected trade, with the introduction of the luxury tax for any product that was not officially deemed as a necessity. Fashion and beauty products were among the most mentioned in the higher taxed categories of the new law. The same modifications, however, also represented a step forward towards at least theoretical gender equality.

In December 1928, after the only arguably free elections in interwar Romania, the Liberals suffered a crushing defeat, and the majority was now held by the main opposition force, the National Peasants Party, led by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod. Their views were more inclined towards capitalism and close relations with foreign countries, especially in the West. While they failed to effect any meaningful change on the policies created by their predecessors, they were heavily invested in the commercial and marketing aspects of Romania’s politics and economics, while, as their name suggested, their chief interest was agriculture.

Carol II secretly returned to Romania in the summer of 1930, aided by a political group lead by the National Peasants Party through Iuliu Maniu with false promises that he would end his relationship with Elena Lupescu, the mistress he was exiled for, and he would be content with the role of regent. Carol was crowned as King two days later after his arrival. Furthermore, Madame Lupescu, as she was known nationally and internationally, returned with him, which led to Maniu’s immediate resignation. He gradually hijacked the parliamentary system, only to completely dissolve it in 1938. His new constitution foregoes liberal principles, putting the duties of the people before their rights. The newly established royal dictatorship not only increased taxes and custom duties for most of foreign trade, but it also more than halved the number of those with voting rights. This was the beginning of the royal dictatorship, that would last until Marshal Ion Antonescu replaced it with his own tyrannical Nazi-friendly regime. This meant that prices for textiles, especially silk varieties, exploded to exorbitant amounts, forcing women to become even more creative and ingenious with their fashions and making cheaper materials appear as their genuine, now unaffordable counterparts. The late 1930s introduced the

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idea of frugal elegance, with the same, or even higher, expectations of sophistication and style for the respectable Bucharesters, while making it increasingly difficult to achieve them.

Interwar Romania was also recovering from the economic upheaval caused by the Great Depression, and thus the governments imposed a so-called ‘curb of sacrifice’ in the early 1930s. Even more, any progress achieved up to that point was cancelled in this way during the critical years after the crisis occurred. High inflation and worldwide collapse of large financial institutions laid an even heavier burden on Romania’s already deficient budget. The merchants’ guild was the most affected in Bucharest, with those trading in clothing and textiles among the most visible cases. Indeed, the first shops to go bankrupt were the shops from Lipsani Street in central Bucharest, a merchant’s street connected to the main commercial, cultural and social Bucharest artery, Calea Victoriei. The everchanging Lipsani was populated with small manufacturers and shops dedicated to all trades from fashion to haberdashery and cosmetics. It was also the location of the first suicide in Romania which occurred against the backdrop of the Great Depression.

The necessity for industrialization in interwar Romania was widely accepted among the economists and politicians of the time. However, where their opinions diverged was the scope of such a plan. In the last years of the interwar era, and using the example of two decades of Greater Romania, the two directions were either full industrialization, promoted by the liberals through Minister of National Economy and National Bank Governor Mitiță Constantinescu, or the path chosen by economist and sociologist Virgil N. Madgearu, a prominent name in the National Peasants Party, towards a partial industrialization with emphasis on the rural. The textile industry, as making up alongside leather and other items, the raw product base for fashion, was part of the essential economic and social aspects to be reformed in interwar Romania. The right-wing nationalism started to gain power through the Iron Guard, in the years preceding World War 2. Politicians and economists alike cried for the encouragement of the so-called Romanian ethnic element to replace most to all foreign (understood as Jewish) business owners in most urban centres. Professional industrial and manufacture associations were sanctioned or formed by the succeeding governments, alongside official schools dedicated to the various trades and occupations that were to be Romanianized, such as tailoring and sowing. These ideas and

their implementation were openly inspired by Nazi ideals of national economic reconstruction. The measures affecting fashion and beauty in the latter part of the 1930s perfectly summed up this phenomenon, and its effects could be easily felt by all citizens.

By the end of the interwar era, the production landscape shifted from workshop-based, to mass industrialization. The first official school for textile practitioners was opened in 1934, which also established clear standards and qualifications in the field. In 1935 textile factories began to use rayon as a replacement for natural silk. Viscofil, situated in Southern Bucharest, was one of the largest such companies and, according to historian Constantin Giurescu, its location was easily found by following the strong hydrogen sulphide smell. Other textile mills and weaving factories, such as Coddington-Lamb exclusively with British capital, Balkan, Dâmboviţa or Dacia, began to appear at this time throughout the capital. The intended outcome was that women would instead frequent stores affiliated or endorsed by larger factories, and render individual merchants obsolete.

Bucharest evolved from a small strategic settlement to a village, merchant town. It then replaced Târgoviște as Wallachia’s capital, to eventually become the Romanian capital. As contrasted to the much slower modernization of the traditional lifestyle, Romanian urban women, especially those in Bucharest, were a regular presence in the public leisure environments, from attending shows, social gatherings, to the daily, and mandatory, promenades. Throughout the interwar era, Bucharesters had perfected the art of blending the latest fashion trends, with notions of aesthetic matching and their own psychological characteristics. Having their pictures taken, either at home, or in seemingly-impromptu street photography, was one of the most common way of immortalizing fashion choices or experiments. Such activities allowed them to display their latest purchases, or, in times of crisis, their ingenuity in creating outfits like high fashion models, but with significantly cheaper materials.

The fashionable Bucharester would find everything she needed and more on Calea Victoriei, and its adjacent streets. The illuminated shop windows displayed anything from clothes, French or English accessories and trinkets said to be of exotic origin, and they had very long opening hours, into the night. The area hosted a vast array of department stores, specialized shops and stores, beauty salons and social gathering spots. Furthermore, Calea Victoriei was the spot for fashion display and parades outside of the shops themselves, as it represented the so-called Korso, where all modern Bucharesters felt the pleasure, and in many ways obligation, to be seen and heard. All central shop windows were decked with the most fashionable and luxurious

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items that translations for materials, accessories or styles, descriptions of outfits and many ads preferred to just create long strings of French words and expressions, with the odd English often misspelled term for specialized item in Italics. This was also possible because, as Romania maintained its Francophone tendency, it was inferred that anybody who could read a Romanian newspaper had a good enough command of French and fashion to be able to create a mental image.would cost a fortune abroad, but were extremely affordable and often tempting for Western civilian or military visitors especially towards and during World War II\textsuperscript{21}. However, there was no established specialized language for fashion terms, and even if there were proper Romanian

Several well-connected stores permeated into social life beyond ads and the actual commercial activities. For example, the \textit{Solavici} chain and \textit{Parisul}, marketed as a fashion salon and the ultimate location for the upper-class women to find the latest Parisian fashions, got involved with the \textit{Realitatea Ilustrată Miss Romania} pageant, and included in the commercial tours for its 1929 \textit{Miss Romania}, Magda Demetrescu. However, for the majority, even though the desire to be in par with the fashion world, ready-made and fashion products were increasingly unattainable. Fashionable interwar Bucharest women, who could not afford haute couture, would buy ready-made clothes and accessories or order them from cheaper dressmakers or milliners. In many cases, however, they would create their garments and accessories at home. A widespread predisposition was that women had to know at least the basics of sewing. This approach was strengthened even more in the 1930s. First it occurred as a reaction to the financial crisis, but it eventually joined forces with the new right-wing and increasingly stern policies and ideas on the role of woman in the society. This phenomenon can be traced through the various memoirs, literary journals, and interwar glossy magazines and newspapers with dedicated women’s sections, or specifically targeted towards a female readership.

\textbf{Beauty, Fashion, Women}

Fashion is an integral part of human life. Its purpose remains widely debated, with three main tendencies to interpret clothing as protective, ethical, or decorative, as a sense of fitting into the environment and culture. The study of fashion has been for most of its theoretical life a collection of accounts on the history of costume. As a social phenomenon, it becomes collective change of taste, often contrasting older models, but also organically adapted by the public. On a personal level, dress can offer clues to one’s relationship with their own body, while outfit choice mistakes could result in feelings of insecurity and shame. Shame, however, is a social construct that depends on the upbringing and culture of the fashion creators and producers, the consumers and the public\textsuperscript{22}. The definition of fashion can be narrowed further to the European or Western succession dress styles, and their production, dissemination, and consumption.

Celebrity culture was slowly approaching Paris in disseminating fashion. While the phenomenon could be traced as far back as the eighteenth century, when most of those who could afford becoming famous, either ridiculed or pastiched, were in some way part of the elite classes. The industrial revolution, culminating with the interwar era, brought about ever improved and faster means of mass transmission and communication\textsuperscript{23}. Celebrities were mostly movie stars, specifically within the scope of Hollywood glamour in the 1930s. A relevant example may be the way in which Joan Crawford may have inadvertently launched the trend for broad shoulders due to a dress she wore in the movie Letty Lynton whose stills were presented in all sorts of publications\textsuperscript{24}. While still mesmerized by the Parisian elegance and the German and English practicality, Romanian women looked towards Hollywood and its representatives as models for both appearance and lifestyle, within the social and moral constraints of the time.

On a superficial level, fashion in interwar Romania was a blend between the strong inclination for anything autochthonous and traditional on one hand, and the ardent passions for everything new and foreign on the other. The two main directions were the modern reinvention of ethnic dress as popularized by women in the royal family and their immediate circles, and following the generalized Western fashion and style trends with Paris and Hollywood as the chief inspiration sources. Romania, however, was not isolated from its multicultural history and neighbours. The complexities of its fashion cannot be understood without considering its equivalents across its borders, namely the trends in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union as its direct neighbours, and the remnants and its continuous interaction with the former Austro-Hungarian and, most notably, the Ottoman Empire, and its cultural influence\textsuperscript{25}. Even after the birth of Greater Romania and its steep climb towards the Western ideal of modernity and industrialization, vivid oriental traces continued in all spaces directly or indirectly part of the Ottoman sphere. Because of this, Romania would still be the Other, albeit slightly more familiar to the Western eye.

Romanian beauty ideals evolved alongside the popular Western types, which in the 1920s revered the Greta Garbo type, or \textit{la garçonne}\textsuperscript{26}. Like their western counterparts, Romanian fashion and women’s magazines in the interwar period published geometrical fashions, which covered slim bodies without visible feminine traits. The cosmetics and fashion choices of Romanian women followed the natural evolution of European fashion. The 1930s lost the enthusiasm and nonchalance, due the Great Depression and its outcomes, including a tendency towards the extreme and militarized right-wing politics. Bucharest also felt the echoes of the

Parisian movement to return to pre-World War One femininity models, with more complicated and uncomfortable long and large dresses. Greta Garbo was still a model, but Marlene Dietrich became the ideal femme fatale, highly popular in România. The bob was replaced by elaborate, longer artificially curled hair, which was often also bleached in the style of Jean Harlow.

The contemporary fashion changes could indeed point towards the society at large. Romanian women, and especially the fashionable Bucharesters, were always abreast with all the news and new fashion and cultural trends from abroad, especially those originating from Paris or the United States. The interwar Romanian press, especially through glossy magazines, was particularly keen on maintaining its feminine readership by providing all the resources they considered a woman would need to be deemed as elegant and proper by the exigent fashion and style critics. As many of the newspapers and magazines would be addressed to families, they generally tried to maintain a balance between gendered and common subjects. Women’s fashion, however occupied at least half of the space dedicated to women. The relatively gendered neutral were the illustrated magazines which offered everything from current news from all parts of society, culture or science, art and literature, to written and illustrated humour. Fashion magazines were often started by specialized organizations or wealthy individuals, with an enthusiastic investment in the initial issues, but were generally short-lived, due to the economic and political upheavals of the time, but also resulting from their direct competition with much better funded foreign publications.

Before the interwar era, Romanian women had access to various fashion magazines stemming from Bucharest, and with a national distribution. These included a one-year publication from 1898, Moda Universului (The Universul Fashion) in 1899; Moda Parisiană. Teatră și Muzică (Parisian Fashion, Theatre, and Music), Moda (Fashion), or its 1905 homonymous free supplement to a sensational novel Mariana about the victims of human trafficking; Moda Ilustrată (The Illustrated Fashion) starting in 1897, which became an Adevărul supplement in 1903, until its demise in 1904; Moda Nouă Ilustrată (The New Illustrated Fashion) for a one-year run from 1904; Moda și Casa. Revista Ilustrată de modă și familie (Fashion and Home. Illustrated Fashion and Family Mag.) between 1910 and 1912, or the ill-timed Moda Șic Ilustrată (The Illustrated Chic Fashion) in 1914.

After World War I, apart from the glossy women’s general magazines and journals, such as Femeia de mâine (The Woman of Tomorrow) between 1930 and 1931, or Femina modernă (The Modern Femina) in 1931, there was also a larger selection of specialized fashion and tailoring publications, also from Bucharest and distributed nationally. Among these, the most notable 1920s examples include Moda (Fashion), between 1925 and 1927, or the short-lived Domnița. Publicațiune feminină săptămânală (The Little Miss. Feminine Weekly Publication) in 1929. For the 1930s, there were Monica Revue. Literatură, modă (Monica Revue. Literature, fashion) with

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27 See Ilustrațiunea Română, III.9, 26 February 1931, p. 5 for a comparison between Marlene Dietrich, “the most sensual woman,” and the “divine” Greta Garbo.

28 See any magazine with a beauty and style advice column, fashion spreads or ads for beauty salons and cosmetic institutes throughout interwar Bucharest.

Several such magazines were lucky enough to stem beyond their decades, likely made possible by their foreign associations. The technical *Academia Internațională de Croitorie și artă. Revistă profesională* (*The International Talirin and Arts Academy. Professional Magazine*) ran from 1926 until 1937, and the more militant *Mariana - Revista de moda* (*Mariana – Fashion Magazine*), the Romanian edition of the homonymous French magazine, published at the end of the interwar Era, in 1939, until the beginnings of Communist Romania, in 1947. The most prominent generalized publications throughout the interwar era were *Magazinul* (*The Magazine*), *Cinci Lei* (*Five Lei*), *Ilustrațiunea Română* (*The Romanian Illustration*), *Realitatea Ilustrată* (*The Illustrated Reality*), or *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* (*Our Illustrated Gazette*). All the above-mentioned publications celebrated this glamorous woman as an ideal, and were a trustworthy source for fashion and style news, as well as for advice and opportunities for women to showcase their own creativity and beauty.

Additionally, Romania was only roughly a generation away from gaining its independence from the Ottoman Empire, resulting in most males of higher status or officials ceasing to don Turkish attires. Even before the 1877 War of Independence, Romanian women did not subscribe to the men’s sartorial preferences or obligations. Women have been following the latest Parisian fashions for centuries and, with certain cosmetic exceptions, would look no different from their French counterparts. In this way, the oriental influence was much subtler, but in no way extinct. Consequently, it could be inferred that interwar Romania was a true heterotopia, both Oriental and Western, but none of the two at the same time. Towards the late 1930s, as Romania was evermore closer to the right-wing, it drew increasingly closer towards the Axis, first quietly, but eventually officially and without much restraint. Germany, Italy and to a certain extent Japan, in its effort of de-Orientalization, were held to a very high regard and viewed as the perfect examples for social, political or economic prosperity. Japan was indeed a fascinating land for interwar Romanians.

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Physical appearance hence becomes an ideal way of understanding the social, political, economic and spiritual mechanics of interwar Romania. The language of fashion is a true semiotic treasure-trove due to its capability to decode and connect information from different, oftentimes unconnected, fields\(^\text{32}\), linking them to themes of morality and social propriety\(^\text{33}\) in an everchanging flow of creativity\(^\text{34}\). This was the best course of action from an Orientalist point of view, as the West represented universal culture and science which represented progress and historically complex nations would thus be welcomed into the world as supposed equals\(^\text{35}\). From a fashion and style perspective, interwar Romania echoed Western spaces in its coherence and women were expected to always dress smart, regardless of circumstance.

**Fashioning Beauty**

The beauty queen, especially through her dual Romanian manifestation, is a perfect example of manufactured beauty, through an almost Darwinian process of selection. The two national Miss Romania pageants were organized by two nationally spread magazines, *Ilustrațiunea Română* and *Realitatea Ilustrată*. They did not acknowledge each other, and were part of two equally rival international Miss Universe managing companies. Her image and communications were closely controlled by the organizers and her chaperones. They would rarely be recorded or filmed, they would only be seen in carefully selected photographs and from afar at designated events, including the pageants. Interviews were exclusively published in their respective magazines in heavily edited form. It could be inferred that the reason beauty contests were so well-received in Europe, especially in England, was due to their close resemblance to long-time traditions of crowning festival queens\(^\text{36}\). These traditions could not be translated word to word in Romanian culture, but they were nonetheless widely accepted and adopted in the growing, westernized urban centres.

Like everywhere else, organizers enticed young women with the Hollywood dream, presented as the only logical next step from winning an important beauty pageant. In this way, like most young women abroad seeking the title of beauty queen, the Romanians were finally allowed to be viewed as experts, still only regarding certain aspects of their physical appearance\(^\text{37}\). Even though the critics mirrored those abroad, accusing them of frivolity and harbingers of moral destruction, Romanian beauty pageants aimed, at least in theory, for social modernization and


\(^{37}\) Ibidem, pp. 2-3.
democratization, and, on a larger scale, nation building. The Romanian organizers enthusiastically copied the reinvention of the debutante ball system as a showcase of young women deemed as fit for marriage.

The idea that a woman’s calendar age was often deemed irrelevant, and it was frequently claimed that only the viability of the spirit, mind and body could determine true age and thus reflect the perfect ideal beauty. Health and athletic skill considered crucial for both men and women as a continuation of the sports culture of the nineteenth century. By the 1930s, women were no longer excluded from so labelled masculine sports, yet ladies were encouraged to avoid such violent sports as football or boxing. They were gradually accepted in sports like tennis, volleyball, horseback riding, swimming or kayaking, sledding or skiing and even participated in professional competitions. Sport was related to fashion not only sartorially, but also as a trendy lifestyle. Its practice also received political implications in the 1930s, with the rise of extreme right government policies, especially in the attempt to introduce public eugenics. Associated with hygiene, sport was a means of selection and building a superior and healthy nation, following German or Italian models, like the method developed by Mussolini in Italy mentioned a sports and physical education published by Nivea and translated into Romanian in the late 1930s.

The reality in women’s life oscillated on the extremes spectrum. As Westernized and modern Bucharest was, olden practices like dowry registries nevertheless survived well into the interwar era. In the late 1920s, Romanians continued bridal goods practices to such an extent that they were included in the Official Gazette. Such an act was signed in 1925, for the marriage Magdalena G. Cordoneanu and Nicolae Manole. Her parents announced her dowry of money deposits, furniture, valuable art and household objects, lingerie and clothes, totalling to 150,000 lei. The fashion trousseau, valued at 20,000 lei, consisted of 24 day shirts, 14 nightdresses, 14 pairs of drawers, 24 handkerchiefs, 6 brassieres, 3 nightshirts, 48 pairs of stockings, 5 silk dresses in various colours, 1 natural fabric dress embroidered with silk, 1 white Holland dress, 2 marquisette dresses, 5 wool fabric dresses in various colours, 6 wool and silk jerseys, 2 silk blouses, 2 wool shawls, 8 bathrobes, 4 winter and summer hats, 6 pairs of boots, 6 pairs of leather shoes.

42 See Beiersdorf & Co., *op cit.*
43 Around $897, $12,619 today. Around 50,029 RON today.
44 Around $120, $1,688 today. Around 6,692 RON today.
The interwar era saw the exacerbation of contrary ideological and political ideologies that affected women’s daily lives by the politicization of notions such as beauty, health and gender. Patriarchal and progressive discourses often clashed. The main reasoning behind keeping women outside significant cultural environments was that they were considered as intellectually inferior to men. Friendship between men and women was anathema, and, was often considered akin to immoral behaviour. This discourse usually stemmed from foreign anti-feminist rhetoric, which was often used verbatim, without considering the regional context. Romanian feminists, however, stressed that the women’s situation in Romania could not be compared to that abroad and that they had already proven those arguments wrong. The situation however was not defined, the two directions often partially or completely blended, and oftentimes its subsections clashed for practical or theoretical reasons.

Fashion can thus prove to be a very intricate and chaotic spectacle, oftentimes highlighting dissonance, addiction, and shock, instead of artistic idealism and purity. Fashion is also heavily dependent on the idea of style, on how the garments are perceived, instead of how they were produced, sold or presented before coming into direct contact with the human body and becomes a living artistic image. Clothes then become a means of highlighting the body and provoking emotional reactions from the viewers, rather than a mere covering based on morality or functionality. As it becomes an art form, fashion cannot be quantified scientifically within clear and unchangeable categories. Interwar Romania was likewise a liminal space of cultures and ideas whose portrait, just as fashion, depends on the viewer’s context and biases.

**Modern Women in the Capitalist City**

The Calea Victoriei daily promenade was part of a chaotic, lively crowd that was anything but stress-free. Apart from the pressure to look the ‘right’ part, the many possibilities were coupled by the responsibility of making the correct choice, which furthered the generalized feeling of anxiety. In a 1931 article describing a day in the life of a proverbial Bucharester on her daily promenade duties, the author only known as X.X.X, identified originated at her favourite clothes store, as another gown displayed in the window has surpassed the evening gown she has hesitantly ordered last week, to become the centre of attention at the next premiere, and she thought the new dress would look better on her. A little further away, she met her best friend, who was undoubtedly a great person, she was wearing the last year’s dress, however accompanied with a white hat that suited her quite well, a shade less from being friends with a woman. The article’s main character has tried the same hat herself at the milliner, but she did not buy it. Her reasoning, according to X.X.X., was that it was not wise to follow every single fashion trend, and that it was silly to wear a hat that looks like a bandage. And, to her dismay, at

46 See Alexandru Bilciurescu, *Femeia din noroiu*, Bucharest: Principele Mircea Publishing House, 1933, for an overt display of such views.
the time of the story, she was meeting all sorts of ladies wearing these so-called bandages, while she just wears her last year’s cloche. So X.X.X. continued by wondering whether there was a chance for a one-year old hat to age her wearer with five years, or was it the trouble she was feeling inside and that he asked her to discard.

Modernity fundamentally rejects past values and culture in the favour of new forms that are either derived from the existent culture, or based on fresh, often ironic and belligerent ideas. Often based on experimentation and innovation, its most obvious markers are globalization, as the world grew increasingly smaller, pluralized as the awareness of interdependent and often contradicting elements, relativized due to its very denial of structure. The idea of ‘modern,’ however, cannot exist in a temporal vacuum. A culture’s understanding of the new connects to its perspective on decadence. Interwar Romania saw such a shift namely in a collective attempt to balance the Christian conservative rhetoric of morality and restrictions towards a potential vague redefining of social morals. Modernity, progress, and decadence are mutually-exclusive only apparently. This relationship, Călinescu added, is complex dialectically, as decadence joins forces with modernity in the struggle to undermine and desacralize autocratic traditionalism.

Even though modernity cannot be traced on a traditional timeline, its coordinates can still be outlined using certain special characteristics and outcomes of implementation. The very lack of clear time and space distinction becomes of the most visible indicators. The modern space was fluid and disorganized, conducive to the creation of what Marc Augé called ‘non-places.’ As opposed to the traditional ethnographic canons, people in modern spaces were no longer locally, culturally, or nationally bound. Following the American model, the hybridized notion of the home space, the modern city dwellers acknowledged and protected their ethnic or national roots culturally, while the state received their full political and economic allegiance. The modern space brought the far and exotic nearer as the distances increasingly shortened. These influences eventually clashed, and the crisis moment was the starting point for supermodernity. Similarly, Romania embraced both the familiar and the other on a smaller scale specific to the region.

The economic aspects of the Romanian textile trade conscribed to the modern capitalist ideals in theory and in its philosophy until the end of the interwar era. It was, nevertheless, greatly hindered by austerity and protectionist measures especially in the latter years of Greater Romania. As opposed to the pre-war system which gave relative freedom to international exchanges, in interwar Romania, both domestic and foreign trade were tightly regulated and heavily taxed. This was the dawn of the era of affluent wholesale dealers, often based in Leipzig, with reliable

50 X.X.X. “Între 11 și 1 pe Calea Victoriei”, in Oglinda Lumii, 4 June 1931, p. 566.  
53 Ibidem, p. 171.  
national and international networks and credit agreements\textsuperscript{56}. This, however, did not deter the continuous flow of merchandise and the high demand and willingness to sacrifice for the best textiles and fashion trends. Advertising was already an established means of disseminating one’s brand. The first successful such firm was \textit{D. Adania}, founded either in 1878 or 1880, differing according to its ads, by David Adania. Towards World War I, other newly formed or older firms began piercing the ad market. In 1913, \textit{Alexandru Bassa} held the exclusivity for the \textit{Univesul} almanac and the \textit{Automobila} magazine, and for posters for C.F.R., the national railway company and on ships. In 1923, however, \textit{Reclama & Co} dedicated for industrialists and traders, replaced it as exclusive ad provider for C.F.R. By 1925, the \textit{Carol Schulder & S. Berger} General Ad Society, already held exclusive ad concessionaire for dailies \textit{Adevărul}, \textit{Dimineața}, and \textit{Argus}, while also providing all the ad posters on tramways, and challenged the C.F.R. exclusivity by displaying ad posters in all stations and wagons, yet by 1929 general concessions for all spaces related to trains and railways remained with \textit{Reclama & Co}, alongside exclusivity on ad display on major driveways around Bucharest. International, especially German, ad agencies, such as \textit{Rudolf Mosse}, also opened branches in Romania, with higher capitals and a wider array of dissemination. This gave them a higher advantage in the race with the Romanian firms, who would increasingly reduce their monopoly with public and private clients. As early as 1929, \textit{Rudolf Mosse} already had concessions with the Bucharest and Cluj city halls for advertising spaces, and offered hundreds of special display spaces in any Romanian city that had relevant networks. In 1937, described itself in its own ads as the largest such firm in Romania, and boasted the vastest international ramifications. Their ads spread throughout the conventional spaces, but also offered display on theatre curtains and programs, as well as offering the possibility to create publicity films or slideshows. One year later, \textit{Orientarea Reclamei} took advantage of the incipient market for radio ads, promising complete satisfaction to their potential clients\textsuperscript{57}.

Fashion creators, manufacturers and merchants were the first ones to use such dissemination methods, understanding that reputation by word of mouth was only one aspect of promoting and extending one’s brand. Even simple stores selling varieties of ready-made clothes and accessories started to adopt French and English fashion jargon, oftentimes without fully understanding the meanings, and thus creating new concepts in the Romanian language. Structural changes in a general systemic unity have often influenced the definitions of modernity in the Central and Eastern European context of the early twentieth century. These changes included the effect of the state’s growing influence over the traditional and the local, political refinement, secularization, industrialization, urbanization, and institutionalization. In this way, modernism could be defined as an attempt to face challenges imposed by the realities created by the modern developmental processes. Romania’s evolution towards a modern capitalist and


democratic state has often been treated in terms of dichotomies, such as backwardness or tradition, versus modernization. Even though the interwar city provided a public platform for all its inhabitants and visitors, gender segregation was yet strictly enforced, albeit invisibly. The masculine space included organizations where important decisions were made, most higher education institutions, while the feminine space was restricted to a few sections of the social, educational, safety and control institutions, several university faculties and respectable social gathering places, such as cafes, restaurants, or cultural spaces. The public space where women functioned was hence still distinct from the serious, major political institutions. Like in all Western industrial cities, women’s so-called ‘offices’ in Bucharest constituted a liminal space between the private and public spheres. Considering the city itself as a reticular space, urban women were delegated to in-between paradigms, which were not defined, neither as public or private. The street was indeed one of the most common space to freely display and observe fashion without the need for justification. Because the street is the space of transit, it often displays a chaotic array of styles that do not always belong with each other, or even on the street. In this way, it can become a fashion photographer’s studio or a disorganized catwalk, both no longer determined by the glamour and exclusivity of the fashion world. The show is free to watch, the models are regular passers-by and the products presented reflect every-day street fashions. Such locations included social gathering establishments (cafes, cake shops or terraces), shops and department stores, parks, and boulevards. Events, such as balls, dances or beauty pageants belonged to the feminine space. The differentiating factor in these spaces was not the individual’s occupation or credentials, but the degree of glamour in behaviour and attire. All national beauty contests were centralized in Bucharest, and the winners of each regional branch competed in the capital for the national title, conscripting to the ‘national’ standards as understood in Bucharest. This continued internationally for Miss Europe (only in the case of the Ilustrațiunea Română pageants), and internationally for Miss Universe. The idea of competing in beauty pageant was hence promoted as an extension of the Romanian woman’s daily practice of personal display, instead of a degradation of womanhood or femininity.

Ever since their bloom in the nineteenth century, department stores remained the ultimate location for displaying, finding and acquiring the latest fashions for the middle classes. In this way, the flaneurs would visit these establishments for an unrivalled, and often false, sense of freedom of choice or lack thereof. Shopping thus became an experience transcending a mere

acquisition of necessary items normally through the filter of a shop clerk. The main fashion display route in interwar Bucharest was Calea Victoriei, the capital’s most important shopping street. It functioned similarly to New York’s Fifth Avenue in highlighting an everchanging display of the latest fashions, which then outflowed in the less privileged neighbourhoods as cheaper, albeit original, imitations. The driving force behind the Calea Victoriei’s glamorous façade was creating an artificial showcase of prosperity to perpetuate and instil national pride. With the considerable number of social, political, economic and cultural radical changes that occurred in the space of a few decades, the 1930s as seen, on Calea Victoriei and the streets surrounding it, such as Lipscani, represented a short-lived plateau of calmness, where all that had occurred could be digested and given an appearance of normality.

Apart from the home-made fashion, small tailor and millinery workshops, which copied chiefly Parisian models or executed orders according to their clients’ wishes, ready-made items could be found in all major department stores, such as the Lafayette Galleries, Vulturul de Mare cu Peștele în Gheare (The Sea Eagle with the Fish in its Claws), La Mișu (At Mike’s), La Marin (At Marin’s), Magasin Universel (Universal Store), or the various stores owned by the Prager family that by the end of the 1930s could be found throughout the city. As everywhere else in Romania, most stores selling fashion items and ready-made products called themselves fashion houses. The creators, from couturiers, milliners or jewellers were still ingrained in the traditional guild system, and they were always ready to work with foreign, mostly Parisian, catalogues, or with the client’s requests.

The fashionable Bucharesters walking on Calea Victoriei could buy the latest Parisian creations from a wide array of stores and shops. Among them Femme Élégante, where one could purchase quality products for any dedicated events, from weddings to banquets at convenient prices, Aristide Spiegler’s Galeria Modernă (Modern Gallery), Tony Fischer’s Palatul Modelelor (Models’ Palace), or Aurelia Andronescu’s Aida. Some of these stores had been opened before the birth of Greater Romania and remained key fashion and style retail institutions throughout the interwar era. A fitting example would be La Pomul de Aur (At the Golden Tree), founded in 1872 by Edgar Fuhn and, by the interwar era, inherited by his son Isidor. Other notable such ‘fashion houses’ that usually had several stores in the same area, were Au Bonheur de Dames (At the Ladies’ Happiness) a satellite of a larger textile store, Au Printemps de Bucarest (At Bucharest’s Spring), or Au Bon Marché (At the Good Market), with the latter promoting itself as the store with most discounts in Bucharest. Very few actual fashion houses existed on Calea Victoriei. One of these was R. Roth’s Maison Suzanne, with the usual high-class clientele and appointment restrictions. Furthermore, Lipscani hosted several tailoring and textile schools and academies. Among these, the Bucharest Textile Academy, was

unambiguously and overtly founded with the specific purpose to produce ethnically Romanian skilled specialists and managers to replace the current systems. All these examples could be found in ads and articles throughout the wide array of magazines, phone books, Bucharest yearly guides and almanacs printed by organizations, press trusts or publishing houses, such as Argus, Universul or Socec, generating a unified, comprehensive image of interwar publicity and ways of dealing with and writing about fashion and tailoring businesses.

Fashion as an urban social, high-end commercial exchange is a relatively new phenomenon. It was the interwar era that saw the explosion of mass-produced and ready-made products, and with it changed the entire landscape of fashion. This was a subtle, yet radical shift that occurred alongside the more obvious, and less covering, styles that were gaining popularity. This brought fashion closer to a much wider gaze, a greater public with much more access to education and opportunities than even their parents\textsuperscript{64}. Disseminating fashion is essentially a communication chain, from the ones handling raw materials, to the designers and producers, to the sellers and advertisers. Its geography has been intrinsically linked with ideas of politics and administration, taking the processes from the home and private to the public spheres and its inclusion in public policy making. As the economic effects of the Great Depression began to be felt across the globe, international trade and product distribution began increasingly costly and restricted as World War II was approaching\textsuperscript{65}. This was greatly felt in Romania both socially and economically, as the rhetoric on the ideal woman morphed from elegant luxury into one of thrifty charm.

Bucharest also became the desired shopping location for visitors or commuters from the province. Traditionally, petty traders and street vendors in interwar Bucharest were peasant-traders from the Olt region in western Wallachia\textsuperscript{66}. A sociological study of such individuals from the town of Bălcești-Vâlcea, during the winter holiday of 1935-1936, concluded that 7% of the total population worked in Bucharest markets. Many of them were in their early twenties, some were married, and worked to earn enough income to be able to build themselves a modern, good life either in Bucharest or back home. When going home, they would bring dresses and fabrics for the women in their lives, along with foods – especially oil and fish – and drinks that were not available in their hometown. Some even brought luxury fashionable fabrics, such as crepe de chine to their wives\textsuperscript{67}. Considering their profits that varied around 3000 lei\textsuperscript{68} per season, it is highly probable that the silks they bought were artificial or of lower quality.

Like all Western and Westernized women, interwar Bucharesters continued to look at Paris as the capital of fashion. While French specialized publications were available in many urban book stores, the Romanian magazines and journals were also abreast with the newest trends. The ones

\textsuperscript{64} Pamela Church-Gibson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 44.


\textsuperscript{66} Hagi Theodoraky, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{67} Magdalena Livezeanu, “‘Oltenii’ dela Bălcești-Vâlcea,” in \textit{Sociologie românească}, no. II.5-6, June 1937, pp. 251-253.

\textsuperscript{68} Around $17, $289 today. Around 1,146 RON today.
who could afford visiting Paris, would have all the means and information ready to plan an itinerary that would include all the leisure and culture must-visit spots, and the best shopping locations. Both the large department stores, and the individual traders prided themselves in selling the finest Parisian items, whether finite products or raw materials.

As a representation of the newly formed Greater Romania, Bucharest could thus be seen, through its women, as an economically and culturally prosperous space, despite the general gloomy character of the era. The voices describing the capital were divided between those who praised its burgeoning modern, urban and cosmopolitan lifestyle, and those who decried the loss of traditional rural value in face of a cold, mechanized modernity. The general feeling, however, was a mixture of progress and conservatism, in variable quantities. The women of Bucharest sought to be beautiful and elegant, which was, considering the crumbling socio-political situation of the latter part of the 1930s, even described as the sacred duty for all women. Even though the strict dressing and behaviour rules of the past centuries were gradually relaxed or even abandoned, elegant women were still expected to know and abide by the appropriate way of dressing for each occasion and time. Women’s magazines habitually educated their readers on fashion, style, and beauty, with suggestions targeted for all the various social, economic and age categories, together with outfit ideas and proposed variations for garments proper for every hour of day and night.

In conclusion, Bucharesters reflected the city’s effervescence with their fashion and beauty practices. The fashionable Bucharest women paraded the latest fashion purchases or creations on the main boulevards of Little Paris. While not necessarily independent and empowered in the present sense, they were free to dream and try to achieve their goals. Like the cultural and artistic trends and movements, the idea of fashion in interwar Romania was therefore mainly based on the adaptation and reinterpretation of Western models. For women, fashion meant more than mere functionality. On the other hand, the working and middle classes experienced great financial difficulties at the wake of the Great Depression. Fashion in interwar Romania could hence be described as a social spectrum between two extremes: luxury and the latest and finest famous brand-specific finite products for the privileged, while the less fortunate were forced to use their skill and creativity to achieve the appearance of high fashion.

**The Bucharester with Pedigree: Frugal Luxury and Elegance**

On a spring afternoon in 1925, the cream of the crop of Bucharest life gathered at the *Tea-Room* café for a charity tea party, where the Queen was also present, organized by a women’s organization to build Romanian schools in Sovata, a salt-water spa town in central Transylvania. Another tea party was to be organized at a later date, also under the patronage of Queen Marie of Romania. A charity event as well, this gathering aimed to raise funds to build a monument for the fallen heroes in the “Regina Maria” Regiment 4. The royal and princely family will also
participate. This type of luxurious social gathering was a common sight throughout interwar Bucharest, even throughout the years following the Great Depression, and into the

In her novel *Stele căzătoare* (Shooting Stars), writer and former Miss Romania 1931 for Ilustrațiunea Română, Erastia Peretz, described the steps in obtaining the perfect outfit to create a glamorous impression for the debut of a stage actress, named Octavia, a name also shared by my great-aunt, former Miss Bistrița, who also competed for Miss Romania in the 1930s. The first step was ordering the dress, in her case an intentionally luscious silk veil dress, with large flower prints, at one of the city’s most prominent tailoring houses. At one of her visits, she brought her friend Tincuța, happy to taste luxuries she could not afford on her own. The house itself had tall stairs, covered in a towelling carpet, and was decorated with Persian rugs, huge mirrors, flowers in crystal vases and furniture dressed in silk. After the chivalrous porter invited the two friends in, they were asked to wait in the grand hallway, joining other clients who carefully studied the continual flow of mannequin parades wearing the requested dresses. The fictional house was so popular that clients needed to make appointments beforehand, and it was a sign of great favour if they could be fitted the same day if they missed their time. The clerk in charge with the schedule was also the one who called the ladies in for their meeting with the couturiers, this way starting a sort of ceremony. The seamstress then arrived with the dress, and the fitting could begin when the owner also arrived and began a hallucinating dance alongside the seamstress and the clerk, while speaking in their jargon. The client could only let herself in their care, convinced that the lines and cuts “rajeunissed” and “amicissed” her. Every single detail was scrutinized, from cuts to how the brassiere accentuated or ruined the body’s natural curvatures. After adjusting all the imperfections, the last crucial detail was choosing the hat from the owner’s preferred collection of elaborate, yet utterly impractical ethereal cartwheels. The baffled client was again assured that the hat was not only “rajeunissing” her outfit like before, but it also “embellissed” it. These hats were genuine works of decorative art, containing everything from sticks, to silk and chiffon veils and flowers, and were crowned by ribbon loops.

Bucharesters enjoyed Hollywood films and avidly read numerous fashion magazines presenting the latest Paris fashions, as well as shopped, or just promenaded in the city centre. As one of the most important commercial and cultural Bucharest meeting points for at least two centuries, Calea Victoriei was an eclectic space. As columnist Ioan Tik described it, it was the most elegant, yet the most unlike everything else in Bucharest. It was like a portal to the West, a street where any Western tourist could almost feel at home. The Avenue was also the meeting point for fashionable women for promenade and parade, or to acquire the up-to-the-minute chic

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69 Social Bucharest news section, in *Adevărul*, 38.12660, 26 March 1925, p. 4.
72 *Ibidem*, p. 312.
products and learn the latest news in fashion and style. Even more, Bucharest mayor and proponent of extreme urbanization, Dem I Dobrescu, nicknamed as “Primarul Târnăcop (Pickaxe Mayor),” equated the civilized street with women’s elegance, which was in his opinion the clearest and most important sign of social progress. According to Dobrescu the Bucharest women’s natural elegance should be easily absorbed within their inherent Balkan spirit. In this way he proposed using this to civilize and raise the capital to the ranks of a Balkan metropolis. Displaying elegant Bucharesters as ladies with pedigree hence became an accepted notion, a phrase coined as a caption for the front cover of a 1934 issue of glossy magazine *Cinci Lei (Five Lei)*, showing the portrait of a glamorous woman smoking a cigarette, would become the best proof of Romania’s modern and prosperous society.

**Nationalizing Little Paris**

Many of the nationalization measures stemmed from the need to mend past economic inefficient or failed phenomena. This was also augmented by the unstable and often disparaging climate of economic growth throughout interwar Europe. Because of the increasing costs of imported goods, authorities constantly sought viable ways to spend the accumulated capital, thus giving the leu more exchange value. Most of the private trade carried through credits that were eventually never repaid and would require state intervention years later. While textiles represented one of the most important imports for Romania since its birth, the highest numbers were registered in 1927, as 41% of the yearly total, amounting to 13,775 billion lei. Protectionist taxes were added to discourage imports. Without an efficient infrastructure and not enough production meeting the consumption demands, the strategy failed to reach its target by the time World War Two broke out. Textile industry was mechanized in the late nineteenth century and it was hardly if ever represented until the interwar era and, as a result, most textiles were imported from Western countries. In the 1930s, however, as the national production was encouraged, and imports were taxed higher. In 1930 there were 517 textile factories, with a 5,798 million lei investment, with 34,882 employees and a profit of 7,506 million lei. By 1939 the number increased to 645 factories, with 8,300 million lei investments, 71,000 employees and a profit of 12,000 million lei. Overall, the investments increased with 2.5 billion lei since 1929.

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76 *Cinci Lei*, no. 2, 3 June 1934, p. 2.
79 Around $82 million, $1,159 million today. Around 4,595 million RON today.
81 Around $35,127, $498,545 today. Around 1,976,532 RON today.
82 Around $45,490, $645,623 today. Around 2,559,637 RON today.
83 Around $41,089, $583,161 today. Around 2,312,000 RON today.
due to the development in textile production, from finite products in the first half of the decade, to the yarn industrialization in the second half\textsuperscript{86}.

The number of textile and confection factories had increased with 86\% in only six years, from 13,891 in 1930, to 26,861 companies in April 1936\textsuperscript{87}. The 1937 Official Gazette\textsuperscript{88} cited at least two industrial girls’ high schools in Bucharest that already had graduates in the textile workforce with departments in dressmaking at the Gheorghe Chițu, and weaving at the Elena Doamnă. The Professional Association of the Textile Industries was formed in 1938, to further the full industrialization plan led by Mitiță Constantinescu\textsuperscript{89}. 1938 brought several new factories. One was the Secerătoarea (The Reaper) flax spinning mill. Others included cloth and fabric factories, such as Postăvăria Română, Mioara, or Saturn. By the end of the year, statistics prove that the textile industry has the most workers in Bucharest, with an advantage of more than 10,000 individuals to any other major industry of the era\textsuperscript{90}. Textile factories continued to hold the majority for individual companies in the clothing and accessory industries with 8.5\%, while confections, raw leather and leather product firms together amounting to almost 7\% of the total\textsuperscript{91}.

The implementation of the policies can be observed when analysing the overall evolution of import taxation, especially for items that were either in raw or minimally processed form and were considered important basic goods. The merchants were already used to taxes exceeding 50\% already in the 1920s, in a succession of apparently chaotic fluctuations, lacking any sense of predictability. The earliest to reach this threshold were wool fabrics in 1921, from 7.27\% the previous year. They reached a minimum of 20\% in 1923, and would then oscillate from the 20s to its highest of 133.49\% in 1936, starting oscillations around 2\% in the early years of Greater Romania. The first item to go over 100\% was artificial silk in 1932, and it began a slight decrease after almost reaching 179\% in 1935. Whitened and printed fabrics also topped the taxation graphs, however to a lesser extent\textsuperscript{92}.

Economists who promoted this process also pointed out that Romania had the potential to produce massive quantities of synthetic fibres, especially rayon. However, this needed a viable wood processing industry, following its success abroad. Constantinescu chastises Interwar Romanian policy makers for only being able to export raw wood, instead of profiting from processed wood products that would have created a much higher profit. This would have minimized the expenses in personal and commercial import of such products in raw form\textsuperscript{93}. Oil-

\textsuperscript{86} Ibidem, pp.15-18.
\textsuperscript{87} Victor Scărlătescu, “Comerțul intern,” in Aspec\textbf{t}e \textbf{a}l\textbf{e} economiei române\textbf{s}ti. Material documentar pentru cuno\textbf{a\textbf{ș}tere} unor probleme în cadrul planului economic, Bucharest: Consiliul Superior Economic. The Studies, Research and Advice Office., 1939, p.187.
\textsuperscript{88} Monitorul Oficial, volume 1, 7 June 1937, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{90} Constantin C. Giurescu, \textit{op. cit.}, p.192.
\textsuperscript{91} Victor Axenciuc, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibidem, pp. 593-594.
\textsuperscript{93} Mitiță Constantinescu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 76.
based products, were in a comparable situation. While oil, alongside cereals and textile fibres, represented the highest exports for Romania\(^{94}\), processed items, such as rubber also lacked a viable industrial alternative to imports\(^{95}\). The lack of interest in maintaining the production and quality in manufacture and industrial production flow throughout the end of the 1930s, rendered such high-valued Romanian shoe exports insignificant\(^{96}\). The overall evolution of Romania’s export personality, only ensured that the interwar era measures managed to partially achieve their goals, even if only to empower the national industry. The Romanian factories, however, continued to use imported half-finished materials, such as cellulose or cotton threads, as the quantities produced nationally could not meet the needs of manufacturers\(^{97}\).

The demographic characteristics of the Bucharest trading world also changed through policies that were increasingly overt of eliminating any competition to the new professionals groomed by official organizations and were deemed of healthy ethnic origin, as a foreshadowing of ideas that would be implemented within a couple of decades. The best example would be Lipscani street, stemming from Calea Victoriei, once the central spot for Western fashions, and as its etymology suggests, its merchandise originated chiefly from Leipzig. The reality in the later 1930s showed a departure from this tradition. Most manufacture shops owners on the great boulevards, including Lipscani and Calea Victoriei, were Jewish, coming from Transylvania or Bucovina\(^{98}\).

Throughout the interwar era, the percent of textile manufacture rose from 10.5% of the total industrial output in 1925, to 18.9% in 1938\(^{99}\). The national textile industrialization process of the 1930s could be divided in two equal phases, before and after 1935. The first one was concentrated around developing raw materials, and generated a great demand for diverse types of threads. These had to be imported as there was no production infrastructure in Romania. In the second half of the decade, factories suddenly started producing the needed threads, which somewhat lessened the import pressure. This also meant that by 1940, there were mills producing both natural and textile threads and fabrics, that had not existed anywhere in Romania prior to 1930\(^{100}\).

Bucharest, on the other hand, was industrialized in three stages. Firstly, before the Great Depression, a period of enthusiastic growth and birth of new companies. The 1920 census found a total of 156 textile factories, 70 for drapery, 34 for cotton tissues, 29 for knitting, 13 for hats, 6 for cordage and 4 for cotton wools. By 1926, the wool industry was in full bloom, with 75,000 pins, alongside 1,400 mechanical looms. There were only two cotton spinning mills amounting to 30,668 pins, with the Bucharest Society for Cotton industry employing 11,000. There were

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\(^{97}\) Victor Axenciuc, *op. cit.*, p. 382.


\(^{100}\) *Contribuțiuni*, p. 18.
3,500 mechanical looms throughout the country. The second half of the decade, marked by the crisis, represented a time of stagnation and some regression\textsuperscript{101}.

With the substantial number of social, political, economic and cultural radical changes that occurred in the space of a few decades, the era represented a short-lived plateau of calmness, when all that has occurred could be digested and given a value of normality, with a return to romanticism\textsuperscript{102}. This situation made way for the third stage of industrialization, in 1933, affected by the accelerating shift towards right-wing theocracy and an increasing accent on militarization. April 1939 sees the dismantling of the Textiles National Institute, which was added as a Ministry of Agriculture and Domains service\textsuperscript{103}. The Romanian Tailoring Academy, however, was flourishing in the 1930s. It held its 25 years jubilee in 1933, hosting lavish events with guests including great Bucharest personalities, with the total cooperation and participation of the government\textsuperscript{104}.

By 1939, economists such as Petre Constantinescu\textsuperscript{105} were convinced that state intervention was not only helpful, but mandatory in controlling standardized items, which also included wrapping. The state, he continued, alongside the recently formed professional associations assured greater income from exports with what he terms as noble products. Ready-made and especially raw products would mostly come from newly created or modernized factories, which included \textit{Industria Lânei}, \textit{Crisalida}, \textit{Iaquard}, the Franco-Romanian and the unnamed official factories. Industrialist D. Mocorniță was the largest name for leather, shoes and travel wear, but many argued the high quality of their products was also matched with soaring prices\textsuperscript{106}. \textit{Pica}, \textit{Ion Torcătoru Țicu}, \textit{P.D. Rădulescu}, or the Franco-Romanian factory, lead in women’s hats. The \textit{Dermata} factory’s main store in Lipscani was one of the most popular stores for working or hiking shoes. For fine shoes, Bucharesters would walk to \textit{Nelu Mihăilescu} or to \textit{Filts}. During the interwar era there was still a considerable number of private shoemakers, with shops spread throughout Bucharest. Shoes were usually made of chevrot or antelope leather, and were very light and soft enough to feel comfortable, even in high heels\textsuperscript{107}.

The high taxation policies did not help the Romanian economy, instead it hurt both its national and international trade flow. The lack of stable and predictable exchanges also negatively affected domestic trade. Romanian merchants had to place their trust in the good faith of the foreign intermediaries, and hoped for the best transport conditions and minimal damages for the merchandise. Legal action was often the only solution to compensate such losses, at least

\textsuperscript{101} C.G. Rommenhoeller, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 301.
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Contribuțiuni}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{105} Petre Constantinescu, “Comerțul exterior și politică valutară (Foreign Trade and the Currency Policy)”, in \textit{Aspecte ale economiei românești. Material documentar pentru cunoașterea unor probleme în cadrul planului economic},” Bucharest: Consiliul Superior Economic. The Studies, Research and Advice Office., 1939, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{107} Graziella Doicescu, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 73-74.
on paper. Such lawsuits abounded throughout the interwar era on issues regarding both foul play and mishandling of goods. One such legal case was the 1920 case against Alfred Hacco from Paris, filed by Bucharest merchants Henry and Netty Maurer and published in the Official Gazette\textsuperscript{108}. Hacco was cited to answer in court to the well-documented proof presented by the plaintiffs against him. Due to the break of several perfumed oil cans irreparably damaged the high-fashion dresses the Maurers imported from Paris. After a list all the dresses destroyed by the spill, with added assurance of physical and legal evidence, the court assessed the damage to 26,950 francs\textsuperscript{109}. In 1930 the Official Gazette\textsuperscript{110} detailed the lawsuit filed by the Cornea Bank on Calea Victoriei against George Lebel from Paris, a French debtor, who failed to present the agreed-upon merchandise by the July 1929 deadline. The damages included 1,453 meters of printed crepe de chine, 49 meters of printed crepe satin and 56 meters of plain crepe de chine. The Bucharest court ordered Lebel to pay 359,781 lei\textsuperscript{111} plus a 24% yearly tax and legal costs. Prices for popular and basic textile products often doubled or even quadrupled in comparison to the prices in the countries of origin, while the lack of an efficient distribution and infrastructure blocked much of the industrial progress. In 1931, traders ardently requested a more logical system, especially when dealing with fabrics that would no longer be considered luxury products. The measures to ease commercial circulation would be reducing the custom duties themselves, relating the luxury tax to a real-average value, and adding categorical classifications for natural and vegetal silk products. This would curtail the many occurrences artificial silk sold as genuine crepe de chine\textsuperscript{112}.

On 21 December 1932, the Romanian parliament gathered with great difficulty (especially hardly reaching the presence quorum) for a morning session that was dedicated to a necessary economic reform. The proceedings were published in January 1933\textsuperscript{113} and were to take effect in forty-eight hours. The significance of this Parliamentary meeting is crucial to fashion: luxury tax was redefined to fit the austerity and penalization measures of the government in congruence with both the international economic crisis and the right-wing ideas that were increasingly popular in Romania and beyond. According to the new laws, silk was no longer exempt from luxury taxation, with certain specific exceptions on the raw materials\textsuperscript{114}. The luxury tax included: all raw materials, in any form, with the mentioned exceptions that are imported, produced in Romania or exported\textsuperscript{115}. These products were divided into five categories of taxation. The highest was group A, taxed with 16.50%, which included any item that is made of or in combination with exotic materials of animal origin, including furs, feathers, leather, bones and

\begin{itemize}
\item romanian parliament, “anunțuri judiciare,” in monitorul oficial al regatului româniei, addendum, no. 13, 21 april 1920, p. 914.
\item around $1,895, $23,193 today. around 91,951 RON today.
\item Romanian parliament, Monitorul Oficial al Regatului României, volume III, no. 91, 26 April 1930, p. 5856.
\item around $2,149, $31,500 today. around 124,885 RON today.
\item L. Petea, “Regimul de import al țesăturilor de mătase. Punctul de vedere al comercianților,” in Adevărul, 44.14702, 3 December 1931, p. 4.
\item Ibidem, Art. 5, p. 709.
\item Ibidem, Art. 1, p. 711.
\end{itemize}
wool; pure silk weighing between 20 to 200 grams per square meter or containing more than
50% silk, including velvety or towelling silk materials, gloves, stockings, ribbons, strings,
buttons, brandenburgs, epaulets, aiguillettes, motifs, lace and any other accessories made of, or
including, silk; any lace made of or with vegetal textiles in all sizes and quantities, especially
if combined with silk; any type of headwear, excluding military hats, but including women’s
hats that are made of or with silk, and garnished with flowers, feathers, or any other material;
ornamental objects, especially metal and coated in gold or silver or with precious stones;
all cosmetic and perfumery products.

Category B, taxed with 11%, listed all items of or with common but expensive furs, leathers,
bones or feathers, including gloves, any type of clothing, footwear; freshly picked plants or
flowers; all plush, velvety cotton and velvet fabrics; all types and materials containing tulle
(ibid); all materials, like fabrics, gloves, stockings, lace, embroideries, ribbons or strings made of
the above-mentioned materials; ornamental pieces, beads or other accessories containing
natural ornamental stones, glass, anything coated in silver or gold and containing bronze, nickel,
aluminium, white or any other types of metal; all natural, essential, cooking or synthetic oils
and chemical products that are used in liquid and solid perfumes, eau de Cologne.

Category C, taxed with 2.5%, includes livestock skins, any type of tanned skin, for gloves,
belts or footwear; any type of footwear that is made of or with tanned skin; products made of or
with towelling, common wool, feathers or bones, with added trimmings except for silk, natural
common wool or recycled wool gloves, shawls, ribbons, strings, buttons, simple felt hats without
decorations, or with common and cheap accessories, made of or with the above-mentioned
materials, tows and silk thread that are prepared for retail, or animal hair except for pig, horse,
bovine, including unprocessed human hair; fabrics, buttons, ribbons or strings made of or with
raw or processed hemp, linen, jute, cotton, raffia, wadding or other common plant textiles,
artificial silk, gauze, tulle, linoleum, wood or cork; any sewn or woven strips used to make
straw hats, single yarn, sewn strips or any other common material, straw or shavings cloches for
women’s hats without ribbons or linings or with one ribbon, like for men’s hats; any product
of or containing rubber; common, rough stones; any type of simple crotchet, hairpin,
braiding needle, needle pin, stitch, buckle used for garments; special chemical substances used in the textile industry; mouthwash, toothpaste, cosmetic powder. Category D, taxed with 1%, included horse or bovine hair; simple hemp, linen, ramie, jute or other vegetal fibres, any recycled fabrics, common, raw pebbles, any type of magnesite or dolomite rocks, zinc, aluminium or old copper wastes. Lastly, category E, which is untaxed, included all the materials that are considered basic and common, from livestock, common vegetables, to ores.

The number of taxes influencing the retail and wholesale prices increased even more in 1937, with a new set of consumption taxes for both domestically produced and imported goods, to take effect on April 1st. The law that was voted by a majority of 92 to 2 votes, applied to imported cotton textiles, alongside all cotton threads and fibre varieties, coffee, beer, silk fibres, artificial silk and several metallurgic varieties. Limited quantities of imported cotton for the household industry was exempt in case it provided full documentation and had the specific approval of the Ministry of Finances. The announcement of these measures justifiably created uproar in the Romanian industrial and commercial circles. The market reacted immediately and the prices for the above-mentioned goods surged to extents comparable to the years following the Great Depression. Cotton prices would increase with 10%, to which merchants will be forced to recover all their custom duty costs, luxury tax, and the recently inflated transport fees added in the same set of modifications. Even more, cotton, slightly marked up in the external markets because Great Britain concentrated its cotton production for national defence, and with the new transport fees, the cost for imported cotton was expected to be poignant. Due to this situation, importers had reservations in selling the already available cotton stocks. In the case of silk products, the prices for the already acquired stocks already increased by 5-7%, and with 20% starting from April.

Even more, towards the end of the 1930s, there was a great discrepancy, especially in most of the country, between the expenses in production and the prices of finite products. By 1936, the imbalance meant a lack of parity between prices for agricultural and industrial products, which, if not addressed, could lead to the lowering of quality standards and hurt producers and traders.
The problems extended beyond official means of regulation and observation. The black market and fake goods sold as genuine items had been plaguing the Romanian trade. Such issues were exacerbated in the 1930s to the dismay of merchants and producers alike as the taxation policies veered towards nationalization and the restriction of both import and luxury. Luxury stores such as *Les Tissus A.G.B.* in 1931, would warn their potential clients to avoid cheap imitations that are sold using the same name as the products they sold. Genuine silk fabrics sold by *A.G.B.* would always contain a tag guaranteeing their origin.

Romania is a complex space of historical upheavals and contradictions, and its capital, reflects its personality and vivid lifestyle. Interwar Bucharest grew from an obscure settlement to a metropolis where the Orient and the Occident coexisted and prospered, in a volatile environment where the inhabitants and the general appearance of the city change constantly. The women of Little Paris further reflected the city’s effervescence with their fashion and beauty practices. They paraded the latest fashions on the main boulevards and were always eager to have their pictures taken. Although they were not necessarily independent and empowered in the present sense, they were free to dream and follow their still limited goals. This freedom was ingrained in the modernist ideas of social and political emancipation, yet it still ascribed to the autochthonist and traditionalist ideals. Even though they rarely occupied the same professional space with men in public spheres, and as the gendered stereotypes stayed active, the interwar Romanian woman was not ashamed of her intellect or her beauty. They were proud of their fashion sense and of their modernity, yet they continually sought inspiration in religion and folk tradition, even if only theoretically.

Despite all the efforts, Paris remained the interwar both high-end and street fashion Mecca, while the Hollywood added an aura of theatrical elegance, both engulfed in the roaring twenties, along with most of the Western and Westernized countries that prospered after the end of World War I. Their identity and development patterns inherently influenced Romanian women. Open-minded, modern Romanians copied and played with this post-war hedonist lifestyle, and by the 1930s, would also embrace the newly created ideal of Hollywood glamour. This cosmopolitanism was embedded in its capital, Bucharest, and most visible through its glamorous, fashionable, yet creatively thrifty women.

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