

# Romanian Dacianism and the production of a “vernacular modernity” in the context of the Europeanization process

Ioana Virginia Brezeanu

Postgraduate student/Université Lumière Lyon2

## Abstract

Romanian Dacianism represents a neo-nationalist movement that experienced in the past years an important raise of popularity in the virtual sphere and it can be seen nowadays as an extension of elder forms of nationalism (notably the development of the “theory of continuity” in second half of the XIX century or the protochronism in the '70s). In this article, I will discuss primarily about the political, economic and cultural changes that allowed the spread of the phenomenon, and I will try to reflect on the production of the dichotomy “east” vs. “west”, employed by the promoters of the movement in the elaboration of public speeches on the social media. Since the fall of communism, in December 1989, Romania passed from a socialist planned-economy to the free-market. The persistence of the period of transition brought to the development of an “identity crisis”. In fact, it is exactly within the effort of integration in the European Union, in the context of the Europeanization process, that a new myth of nation is created by nationalists and it has the role to define a “new national identity”, based on Dacian roots (antic population antiquity that inhabited the territory of nowadays Romania). In this context, the image of the “Occident” has been negatively embodied and then re-interpreted and transformed in a “collective enemy” or a “collective culprit”. The imaginary of “them”, the “occidentals”, is translated by the construction of some myths of conspiracy. The appropriation of a vernacular, non Western model of modernity can be seen in this particular case as a social construction of peripherality. Based on the analysis of articles promoted and discussed on the Facebook page of the movement, I will describe further how the construction of a national imagery and the production of otherness contribute to the creation of a “vernacular modernity”. Two examples will be elaborated for this purpose: the “fear of islamization of Europe”, and the “victory of Conchita Wurst at the European Song Contest in 2014”.

Keywords: Nationalism, Europeanization, post-communism, Orientalism, identity crisis

## Introduction<sup>i</sup>

In this article I would like to draw the attention to the development of a neo-nationalist movement that re-emerged in Romania in the last decade – the Dacianist Movement (making reference to the Dacian population, peoples that inhabited the area of modern Romania during the Ancient Rome’s empire). The supporters of this movement refuse the idea of a Daco-Roman, and other invaders’ ancestry of the Romanian population, pretending that on the present-day territory of Romania lived in the past a population that had been the cradle of “European civilisation”. This appropriation of meaning represents a common status in many societies which practice their ceremonies based on myths of foundation, in the opinion of Eliade<sup>ii</sup> (Elaide,1980).

Having encountered an important success among different virtual communities, this movement is transforming into a concrete phenomenon, interfering in religious, cultural and historical areas with the purpose of resisting globalisation and claiming an authentic and true

'Romanian identity' based on Dacian roots. For my master thesis I elaborated the hypothesis that a process of rewriting the history, together with the re-actualisation and popularisation of 'ancient cultural forms' and the commodification of a Dacian culture, have been set up in order to accomplish this aim. I will try to demonstrate in the following lines how these elements contribute to the creation of a feeling of adhesion to the "national Dacian identity" by drawing boundaries between "self" and "other", between "false" and "authentic" and between "official" and "vernacular".

## Contextualization

### Romania's integration in the European Union

From the fall of communism in December 1989 until the date of European Union (EU) accession (2007), Romania moved from a socialist-planned economy to free-market. The pact that allowed the country to become an EU member was already established in 1995, so the EU pressured the speeding up of the process of transition, democratisation and modernisation. Several programs and strategies meant to prepare the Romanian society for accessing to the European structures have been adopted successively and the enlargement of the European Union has taken over all problems resulting from the disparities between its members. The integration was made in a comparative perspective between the so called "more developed" countries in the "Western Europe" (Bonfiglio, 2006). In fact, the connection established between the two entities is a centre-periphery relationship where the decisions of the centre have an impact on the periphery's economic, political or social development<sup>iii</sup>.

In order to understand better the context in which the neo-nationalist movement was born, I will first provide a larger perspective of the relationship built between the two bodies within an historical approach regarding Romania's position in the European space.

In fact, for a state to be integrated in the EU, its entire development is dependent on capitalistic economic growth. But in its turn is dependent on the formation of a larger economic and therefore political arena than the territory of the state itself. Friedman argues that this process must be considered on three levels: structural changes for urbanization, industrialization, economic development and capitalism; institutional formations: nation-state, democratic institutions, power, capitalist-political economies; and cultural components: education, knowledge, literacy. Modernity is a mythical component of contemporary Europe (Friedman, 2008). Under these circumstances, we should consider that not all the social formations are subjected to the same kind of trajectory.

Under these conditions, Romania is confronting today with an identity crisis that can be due to the failure of integration into the EU and its persistence in a period of transition. Nowadays official statistics show that 1.5 million of Romania's inhabitants live in extreme poverty. Also, in 2004 almost half of the population was employed in the agriculture sector and the rural and urban division has stabilised at numbers similar to those of 1990. Moreover, in 2003 it was reported that 1 out of 10 families had someone working abroad. It is certain that the EU's rules and norms of integration cannot be applied in the current situation. If the model of this modernisation will be achieved only by the strict application of the rules of the European Community, without taking into account the local conditions and historic processes, those putting these decisions into practice can elicit rejection and public reactions. The result is, that

within this context, Dacianism offers another form of Europeanisation, by affiliating Romania within the European space as being a primordial territory of ‘civilisation’ of the entire continent, and on another side, by isolating the ‘national specific’ and developing a ‘common culprit’ in the collective imagery, pictured as the EU.

## The imaginary of “Occident” in the Dacianist context

While I was reflecting on how this failure of reaching all stages of integration has been translated and reproduced in this particular case by Dacianism, observing the permanent comparison in speeches with the “Occident”, my first idea was related in fact, to the effort of recognition of a “Romanian specific”. I first developed the idea that nationalists ‘aim was to show this aspect by a process of reconstruction of the past, by creating a new image of “barbarians”, opposite to the one that has been given to Dacians by the Romans. This is not only about the production of a speech about identity, but also about the effort of nationalists to create a collective adhesion to this discourse and generating this way a sense of belonging in order to establish also another form of adhesion and participation at the European discourse. However, I realized after following in time different articles published by neo-nationalists, that this discourse engages also the production of this specific by opposition to EU’s model.

During the interview, Martin B claimed the importance of “a great history” in a first place for the Romanian people and for their identity, in order “to be in a better relation with the other”, to be able to “highlight Romanian realities when he faces the Occident”(interview with Martin B.). In the past two years where I could observe the production of Dacian literature, I could notice a series of articles that make reference to the relationship of Romania with the European Union. Represented both by an image of a “national culprit” and by the creation of the imagery that surrounds the organism through the development of myths of conspiracy, emphasizing the “Romanian characteristics” in opposition to “another”, seems to be in my opinion a good example of vernacular modernity. The words “barbarian” and “exploitation”, very often employed in the production of narrative, show also very well the two ways of distinction and at the same time desire of integration that I claimed in my hypothesis. Several articles published on Dacian webpages led me to the elaboration of this idea: “*BBC Documentary: Dacians were ‘barbarians, chiefs and rapists’*”<sup>iv</sup>, “*Where Vlachs barbarians? Surprising proofs of civilization for the Romanians of Middle Age*”<sup>v</sup>, “*Dacians, barbarians? You’re wrong: they even had sophisticated surgery instruments*”<sup>vi</sup>, “*EU wants us to be many and fools. Romanian Polenta is made by Romanian corn*”<sup>vii</sup>, “*Does EU targets the disappearance of Romanian traditional seeds?*”<sup>viii</sup>, “*Is it time to exist the EU? Economist Radu Golban published the volume ‘Romania, alternatives to EU’s girdle’*”<sup>ix</sup>, “*German euro-sceptic. Romania, between the exploited countries for the revitalization of other states*”<sup>x</sup>, “*EU means empire. Empire means war*”<sup>xi</sup>.

The “Occident”, as is translated by neo-nationalists, engaged on the other side also the construction of a “culprit” for the collective imagery. When I first started to follow the virtual movement in early 2013, I could notice an important circulation of narrative related to the myth of conspiracy. Many of these myths were already circulating in the virtual space for many years and under different form and, I can affirm, I was already socialized with part of them. Discourses about conspirationism are performed both through literature and everyday life. Verdery and Brubaker and his team, anthropologists that worked on different social situations of post communist Romania, confess in their writings that speeches about conspiracy seem to be a very

common subject of communication between people<sup>xii</sup>.

Adriana Dudas, basing her writing on Tismaneanu's volume, argues that for Romanians, the conspirationism represents one of the basis of nationalism. In her vision, this implies the necessity to search for culprit for all problems and obstacles that Romanians could meet during the centuries. The culprits are many and they often change according to the period and context (Duduas, 2008).

In the interview that I could lead with Martin B., being asked how does he see the changes that developed after '89, he accused the "artisans of globalization" of betraying the country and starting a "process of destruction of identity". He claims that "globalization" is "the most evil enemy for the preservation of national identity"; those "betrayers", are again identified in his speech with the IMF, World Bank (WB), EU and the commission in Brussels.

Two examples of resistance to the "western model of modernity"- "the victory of Conchita Wurst at the Eurovision Song Contest in 2014" and the "Islamisation of Europe"- will supply us some models of the counter-answer provided by Dacianism in relation to the adaptation to norms that seem to be specific to the "Occident".

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<sup>i i</sup> This article represents the result of an interdisciplinary study, combining both historical and anthropological approaches. Being based on a research project on Dacianism conducted between 2013-2015 for my master thesis in Social and Cultural Anthropology, a series of empirical data allowed me to develop the content of this text: interviews, ethnographical description, participant observation, cultural and historical contextualization and analysis of speeches of virtual interaction of actors.

<sup>ii</sup> Some examples of myths of foundation of European Civilization in Dacianist ideology: the development of the first history in the world (Tărtăria's tablets), first 'advanced' Neolithic culture (Cucuteni), first monotheist religion (Zamolxe's cult), born of Aryans and so on. (See more in Brătianu, 2009).

<sup>iii</sup> See more about this notion in Frank, 1978; Wallerstein, 1974; Agnew, 2005; Schifirnet, 2011

<sup>iv</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> march 2013, <http://danielroxin.blogspot.ro/2013/03/scandalos-bbc-ul-pretinde-ca-dacii-erau.htm>-accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>v</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> April 2015 <http://adevaruldespredaci.ro/valahii-erau-barbari-dovezi-uimitoare-de-civilizatie-pentru-romanii-dinevul-mediu/> -accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>vi</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015, <http://adevaruldespredaci.ro/dacii-niste-barbari-va-inselati-aveau-chiar-si-instrumente-chirurgicale> -accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>vii</sup> 27<sup>th</sup> March 2013, <http://danielroxin.blogspot.co.at/2013/03/ue-ne-vrea-multi-si-prosti-mamaliga.html>- accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>viii</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> June 2013, <http://danielroxin.blogspot.ro/2013/06/ue-vizeaza-disparitia-semintelor.html>-accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>ix</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> October 2013, <http://danielroxin.blogspot.ro/2013/10/e-vremea-sa-iesim-din-ue-temerarul.html>-accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>x</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2013, <http://danielroxin.blogspot.ro/2013/08/euro-sceptic-german-romania-printre.html>-accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>xi</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> January 2014, <http://danielroxin.blogspot.ro/2013/01/ue-inseamna-imperiu-imperiu-inseamna.html>-accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

<sup>xii</sup> Verdery, 1996; Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, Grancea, 2006