

## History, Mentality and Imagology

### The Otherness in the Mentalities of the Romanian People

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**Abstract:** The hypothesis from which we start our approach is the distinction between *us* (Romanians) and the *other* which is strongly felt, for better or for worse. What we propose in this paper is to perform an analysis of the different values identifiable in the national mythology, such as hospitality, tolerance, and also an analysis of the rejection behavior of the *foreigner*, either in the context of traditional societies and isolated by the historical conditions or in a community open to the world, motivated by the desire to integrate. We also intend to study some of the *other* hypostases outside and inside the "fortress", as friend, as enemy, under an *obsession* of foreignness and a competition of rights. Throughout the paper we argue about the significant role of misinformation and manipulation in building the mythology of the other in the social and historical imaginary of the Romanian people. The bottom line is that it is necessary to achieve a balance and a nuance in the evaluation of the Romanians in relation to others, and also a permanent opening towards a permanent reconfiguration of the relationships between *us* and the *others*.

**Keywords:** otherness; identity; other; us; Romanian

#### 1. Introduction

The identity is based on an assertion of the *I*, on a personality that makes everyone "unique", different from others. On the other hand, it also refers to an *Us*, characterized by a series of determinations that allow each *I* to position in relation to "the same another", "to recognize himself in a range of values, models and ideals spread by a community with which he identifies." (Ferreol & Jucquois, 2003, p. 330) The identity contains a series of features, some stable, others subject to change - that represent the history of the subject. *Otherness* designates the essence of the "other." Latin makes a distinction between *Alius* – the other and *Alter* - Another in relation to each other. The image of the "Other" refers to

otherness, revealing the property of being different from something, but also the relationship itself, which works between different entities. It opposes to identity and it is synonymous with diversity and difference in the most general sense.

## **2. I and the Other**

The identity represents a permanent construction of features and symbolic affiliations that has variable limits between two polarities: *in* and *out*. The identity depends, at the same time, of the self-awareness and the recognition of the *Other*. Any self-image proposed by the subject is subject to the acceptance by the other. Ever since the beginning of its social existence, the subject reaches to *continually discover* “differently” “*the other*”, but *also to look at himself through the eyes of the “other”*. Moreover, the identity is always defined in itself and in the *Other*, building him into both at the same time.

The “Other”, whether individual or group, “*represents the referential instance in the life of every one of us and it represents our immediate companion within a destiny where the meaning of the path and its stake, the intensity of living, the fulfillment and the symbolic rewards are built only in the its presence (real or imaginary)*.” (Gavriliuc, 2006, p. 23)

The report with the other one is built on three different axes (Todorov, 1994, p. 173):

(1) *the axiological axis*, which is based on a value judgment “the other is good or bad, I love him or not, as it was once said is he my equal or he is inferior to me (*as it is understood that most of the tims I am good and I appreciate myself...*)”;

(2) *the praxiological axis*, which implies the action of bringing together or apart from each other: I embrace the values of other, I identify with him; or I assimilate the other with me, I impose my own image; between the submission of the other ad the submission towards the other there is indifference;

(3) *the epistemic axis* at which level it is manifested the knowledge or the ignorance of the other, in an infinite gradation between states of knowledge more or less complex.

According to Las Casas, each is barbaric to the other. “*A man is called, in comparison with another, barbaric, because, by his manner of speaking he is foreigner and because he is pronouncing badly the language of the other.*” (apud

Todorov, 1994, p. 177) So if I do not know the meaning of the language, I am barbarian for the one who speaks it, and the one who speaks it will be barbaric to me. However, the term barbarian has other discursive meanings in different discursive contexts: *barbarus* - which is foreign to the Greeks and Romans; *barbarian* - wild, rude. The other may be a rival or an enemy, being not an *alter* but an *alienus*.

### 3. The Romanian and the Other

To communicate with another culture is to discover the other. The meeting between *I* and the *Other* is also a meeting of two cultures. *The Foreigner* is the representative and the representation of a culture to which *I* do not belong. The *Other* can be designed by *I* either as an abstraction, either as a specific social group of which we do not belong. (Todorov, 1994, p. 7)

A Romanian is the one who speaks Romanian. Romanian language is a significant factor of cohesion, but it cannot be absolute. This is a first and mandatory condition of the Romanian identity, along with the idea that the Roman people was *ab initio* Christian. On the other hand, invoking the origins, the Romanians believe that they affirm their individuality and they defend their rights. (Boia, 2006, p. 211) The Romanian spirit is a structured set of meanings, a system of inherited conceptions historically transmitted and expressed in symbolic forms. Through them, people communicate, perpetuate and enrich their knowledge and attitudes under the conditions of increasing the socio-political life complexity that comes to evolve.

Every nation makes its own vision of the world and of man, depending on the dimension in which it is projected his own existence. Identifying the way of configuring a Romanian collective mentality presupposes, according to Mircea Vulcanescu, “the release of general prejudices with which the Romanian spirit generally questions the existence, in a way that makes it a criterion of judgment and a measurement of the concepts about the existence of other individuals, groups or nations”. (Vulcanescu, 1991, p. 90)

According to the national mythology, the hospitality, kindness, tolerance are elements of the Romanian identity. Hospitality is specific to the Romanian peasant, as a member of a traditional society strongly polarized between rich nobles and submitted peasants. It “reflects attending the foreigner as alien” (Boia, 2006, p. 252). The distinction between *us* (the Romanians) and the *other* is strongly felt, for

good or bad, favorable or unfavorable. Hospitality involves a limitation of time for relating. A guest is someone you attend for a limited time, a person who will depart soon. We encounter in the traditional Romanian culture the discouragement of marriage with someone of another race, and at the extreme, someone from another Romanian community. "The Stranger" is an entity which envisages not only the ethnic composition but a different value system accepted or imposed, causing rejection behaviors.

On the other hand, the "Alien" can acquire a positive connotation, being a role model, a benefactor, an ally. From this perspective the French myth has imposed, which was an important role model. The Greek and oriental costume were abandoned in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century in favor of French and Paris' outfits. Any Romanian intellectual legitimized by fluently speaking French; the Romanian young people studied in Paris; the Romanian structures and political legal and cultural institutions, were achieved according to the French patterns, the Romanian language has evolved under the influence of French, Bucharest was "the Little Paris". France meant the West, "our second homeland, as stated I.C. Bratianu. (apud Boia, 2006, p. 263)

Tolerance may have a positive connotation. However, it is not synonymous with acceptance or fitting in. To tolerate is more synonymous with to bear, to endure. The ability to withstand the alien is promoted as a virtue. The "Other" is tolerated because it brings different and necessary attributes of civilization (Boia, 2006, p. 251), economic and social functions that the "Romanian, peasant or nobleman, did not cover, but to a small extent." (Boia, 2006, p. 252)

When the "other" is inside the community, there may be more worries and more significant than those caused by the outsider "other". Thus, there are complains for the Gypsies, from the destruction of every day safety to the damage the country's image abroad. We may identify here a radical *otherness* that pushes the *Other* beyond the human limits. (Boia, 2000, p. 31) Otherness refers to a whole set of differences: different spaces and landscapes, different beings, different societies. Gypsy's traditional myth expresses a sense of superiority towards a marginal *Other*, different, doubled by a civilizing intention, which is overshadowed by the hostility and fear feelings. The others perceive Romanians as being different, as belonging to a vague and unpredictable space (Boia, 2006, p. 302) Thus, in the view of Paul Morand, the significant features of the Romanian people are optimism, adaptability, indulgence, and also the careless passing through history. (apud Boia, 2006, p. 302)

#### **4. The Exceptional Character - an extreme form of otherness**

Gabriel Tarde argues that although it is said that freedom, unleashing, the absence of obligations are claimed and promoted as major values, “for most people there is an irresistible pleasure, inherent to obedience, credulity, trust quasi-amorous toward an admired master.

What were the defenders of Gallo-Roman cities after the fall of the Empire are now our democratic and revolutionary society’s rescuers, that is the subject of enthusiast idolaters, of a passionate obedience” (apud Moscovici, 1995, p. 25) It is about the charismatic authority, achieved by confirming and affirming personal qualities of the leader. Charismatic leader knew that the mass energy is extracted from the emotions, illusions, beliefs, expectations, ideals and dreams; so energized, people believe that they know who to follow and to whom to be devoted. Charismatic leader acquires much of its power from the fact that it is perceived by many as being simultaneously both *above and such* as others.

Even the most advanced societies provide an important space of exceptional characters, able to mediate between humans and gods, between people and history. The Romanian society throughout its evolution, has cultivated its own heroes and saviors. These people are special, different from ordinary their peers, being part of the mystical sacred structures of imagery.

A history of Romanians without the participation of exceptional personalities is unthinkable. Ștefan cel Mare /Stephen the Great and Mihai Viteazul /Michael the Brave are most often evoked as rulers in textbooks, historical literature, in political discourse. They express the sacrifice and glory of the Ottoman resistance, defending their country and European Christendom. Mircea cel Bătrân, Vlad Țepeș, and also Tudor Vladimirescu, Nicolae Bălcescu are also exceptional character of the Romanian history.

#### **5. Conclusions**

The other, located inside or outside the community, influences the perceptions, shapes images and nuances the reality. Acceptable behavior or, on the contrary, hostile, make from the *Other* a neighbor or enemy, modeling multileveled the otherness.

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