

Introduction. *Journal of European Studies. Romania 100: Nation, Identity, Global Challenge.*
L. Giukin, A. Gradea, guest editors. Volume 48 (3-4), 2018.

By

Lenuta Giukin
SUNY Oswego

2018 was a significant moment in the history of Romania: it marked one hundred years since the unification of the Romanian Principality with Transylvania and Bessarabia and the coming into existence of the ‘Great Romania.’ Bessarabia, no longer part of Romania since 1944, when reincorporated into the Soviet Union, became a small independent state, the Republic of Moldova (1992), that struggles ever since economically and politically. Intense campaigns and discussions around the concepts of Romanian consciousness have taken place in Romania and the Republic of Moldova contributing in the past two decades to the expansion of the Romanian and Moldovan nationalism. The anthological volume by *Journal of European Studies* (JES), “Romania 100: Nation, Identity, Globalization,” discusses the concepts of Romanian consciousness and identity representative of the nation’s past as well as its present developments in light of the rising of nationalism, return to religious beliefs and intense globalization. A concentrated number of socio-historic conditions - the fall of socialism, the passage to technological capitalism, the European Union integration, the increased migration to other countries, the technological revolution that made long-distance rapid communication possible, the influence of the diasporas through additional economic capital invested in the country - contribute to strong social unrest and calls for reforms.

Romanian identity or consciousness goes through a period of transition and is re-shaped by ongoing events due to transformations around the globe. In spite of national anxieties created by three changes in regime within one century, Romanians achieved two major things (Giukin)¹: the expansion of its national territory and the integration in the European Union. Also, within a century and a half, besides the first unification of the Romanian Principality with Moldova² and the international recognition of a Romanian identity, Romania gained independence from the Ottoman Empire. It is essential to emphasize that although Moldovans speak a Romanian dialect, it has been named either Romanian or Moldovan depending on the pro-Russian or pro-Romanian

¹ See the JES article “Consciousness and Spirituality in the New Romanian Cinema.”

² Moldova was originally a kingdom divided between Russia and The Ottoman Empire. Some scholars use Moldavia (from the French ‘Moldavie’) to designate the territory that united with the Romanian Principality in 1859, and Moldova or Bessarabia for the territory incorporated into Russia. I use Moldova to designate the former state of King Stephen the Great, as well as the territory that united with Romania, and Bessarabia or the Republic of Moldova for the state that became independent of the Soviet Union in 1992.

Bessarabia has at the present a smaller territory than originally under Stephen the Great. The Soviet Union incorporated the southern Bessarabia (Budjak) into Ukraine and that territory remained Ukrainian after the break of the union and the creation of independent republics. Ukraine has been asking for international support in the Donetsk conflict (a region claimed by Russian separatists), however, it never acknowledged that it continues to occupy former Moldovan territories both in the north of Romania (Bukovina) and south of Bessarabia (Budjak), as well as former Polish territories. Selective memory still plays a strong role in regional politics.

elected government. After over four intense decades of Bolshevik russification, the republic of Moldova established new ties with Romania and a romanization process re-started. Today, many Moldovans have Romanian passports and access to the Romanian and European Union labor market. But depending on the family background, they study or look for jobs in Romania or Russia. Defining the national consciousness is a priority in Moldova and since its independence strong voices advocate for the unification of the two countries. This introductory article to JES discusses the Romanian consciousness and identity referring mainly to Romania and to those Moldovans who strongly believe in the common identity of the two countries, in spite of being two separate states.³

Academic literature has extensively discussed the gradual rise in Romanian consciousness with more distinct and /or more rapid developments in the 18th and 19th century under the influence of powerful national states in Western Europe. The public acknowledgment of the Latinity of language and its comparison to other Latin-based languages from Western Europe spread the awareness of ethnic distinction from other ethnicities in the area. This imaginary ethnic distinction, which excluded or ignored race hybridization and was built on language, combined with the reality of being occupied led to the creation of a consciousness that placed itself within a cultural and ideological representation opposite to its Eastern occupier (The Ottoman or Russian Empires). What seemed to be based on some “natural” affinities with some Western countries (a romance language and a past rooted in the Roman Empire), was also an ideology of resistance to colonization, especially linguistic and religious. Although debatable, we could assume the creation of a European consciousness within the larger Romanian psyche earlier than the nineteenth century, even if it may not have been a spread-out phenomenon and did not manifest in openly politicized rhetoric and manifestations. The twentieth century national will to follow Western models and the alliance with the West are more logically understandable under such circumstances. To this, we should include the benefit of being recognized as an independent state within Europe, versus the disadvantage of being an autonomous territory under the Ottoman Empire.

The development of a consciousness as a fully unified state however, took place only within the last century, a period that saw the establishment of a Western-type of democracy in the thirties and forties, and again after the fall of socialism, in 1989. Integration within Europe both at the beginnings of the 20th and 21st centuries created strong national anxieties and raised questions

³ As a Fulbright scholar in Moldova (2013-2014), I had many encounters with students, professors, artists, people in the film industry and intellectuals, and I was very surprised when I discovered that the strong Bolshevik russification did not erase the Latin consciousness of the Moldovan population. As the government in power was pro-Romanian at the time, all state holidays were celebrated with Moldovan and Romanian traditional music, dances, food, and a proud display/wearing of national costumes. The Moldovan (also Romanian) flag was commonly raised on all institutions, not just governmental, on all occasions; all public manifestations displayed a huge flag, people wore clothing in the colors of the flag and benches, children parks and toys, and monuments were painted in the flag colors. Manifestations, exhibits, events celebrating various aspects common with Romania (the language, historic events, national writers, heroes, etc.) took place almost weekly. There was a consistent and very “intense” public manifestation of the belief of being Romanian. As a Romanian, I was surprised by the Moldovan’s population persistent and tireless public display of its Romanian heritage and roots.

related to the fabric of national identity. As Popa⁴ and Giukin mention in *Journal of European Studies. Romania 100: Nation, Identity, Global Challenge*, the pressure to define Romanian identity as distinct from European influences has turned intellectuals' attention to traditionally agricultural structures and a process of mythologizing took place. To this day, all elements associated with the traditional Romanian village continue to remain places of resistance to outside influences and strongholds of cultural identification. Costumes, music and national foods are central to religious and national holidays and are increasingly used in political election and events, either to signify closeness to the people or opposition to government alienation from the common folk. The endorsement of traditional values and the emergence of new mythologizing tendencies coexist with other pursuits for historic truth since Romanians have over one thousand years of unknown history.

Socialism's consistent historic, literary and cinematic romanticizing of political leaders (cf. Popa) and of the past led to the creation of national myths that today's generation of artists and intellectuals try to demystify. In search for new identities, young generations scrutinize the past, question it, seek to rediscover its realities and interpret them in light of contemporary moral values. Popa's article discusses the impact the movie *Aferim!* could have on shaping a new vision of history by relocating the Romanian consciousness outside a constructed deceitful image of the past. Similarly, a film like *Sieranevada* (Cristi Puiu, 2016; cf. Giukin) exposes the past, which is revealed to have been morally and socially corrupt. Unfortunately, aspects of the past still permeate the present, creating a false sense of security and perpetuating misleading values: people choose to believe the past was more orderly than the present ignoring the lies behind an apparent order. Revealing mistaken perceptions and beliefs is key to the social critique of contemporary artists and their efforts to shape an attitude opened to social changes. As Gradea discusses in *West* (Cristian Mungiu, 2007)⁵, some characters take refuge in their childhood and the assurance of a utopian future, while others leave for another utopia, the promising West.

People and, in time, entire nations can take refuge in an imaginary past through nostalgia and processes of selective memory. Deceived by the present, they choose to retain happy past moments, often transformed into idealized events. D'Anca⁶ shows how Doina Rusti, using parallel remembrance to bring into question the work of memory, exposes its unreliability through multiple, dissimilar narratives of the same event. We are reminded that in the reading process of any text of the past, the "reader becomes a participatory member within the process of creation[;] it is unclear with whom the reader participates and interacts," but reading is interpreted and altered in many ways. As a result, Foucault "positions writing as a collective cultural product that evades association with any one figure" (D'Anca 3). Such distortion of past events revealed in several of the volume's articles and discussed works (Rusti's *Phantom in the Mill*; Mungiu's *West* and *Beyond the Hills*; Puiu's *Sierranevada*), open grounds for reflection and possible alternatives, or at least more cautious ways of interpretation and understanding of

⁴ "Narrating the Past: Cultural Memory and Romanianness in *Aferim!*" In *Journal of European Studies. Romania 100: Nation, Identity, Global Challenge*. Lenuta Giukin, Adriana Gradea, guest editors. Vol. 48 (3-4), 2018.

⁵ JES article "The Rhetoric of Leaving or the Mirage of the Fetishized West in Cristian Mungiu's *Occident*."

⁶ JES article "'umbra unei lumi': Mediating a Loss of History in Doina Rusti's *The Phantom in the Mill*."

history. In this sense, Popa insists on how memory is summoned and corrected via intertextual imagery: through deconstructing images reflective of previous cinematic works that romanticize the village and national landscape, Jude (in *Aferim!*) questions the validity of the past. By changing the context of the recreated, yet very similar images, he infuses them purposefully with a different meaning.

D’Anca also shows how “the audience remains a spectator to a systematic loss of history” (7), and reveals the discrediting of memory. Remembrance of the past is a fragmentary experience, a constant alteration of events that starts at its origins and continues as an evolving process of writing and re-writing. D’Anca points out: “History is dependent upon confabulation, altered by time, and by virtue of its existence always already was at a loss” (19). Living in the present requires to be painfully aware of the limitations and fragmentary nature of our world, and also of the utopian make-up of any construction. As a result, confabulations can take place in relationship to the past, the present and the future. A form of such ‘confabulation’ is discussed by Adriana Gradea in her article on processes behind the fetishization of the West and the dynamic between the rhetoric of staying and the rhetoric of leaving (see also Douillet 3, 9⁷), a still unresolved dynamic backing the economic migration of the Romanian population. She believes that “people’s predilection in favoring all things Western is a withdrawal from the aggression of the communist propaganda (which indeed came from the East) rather than a genuine quest for authenticity” (9). Similarly, Douillet, in her interviews with young Moldovans, found that the West is an ideal(ized) alternative to a small country with few opportunities, but also a possible venue for succeeding professionally, especially for the second generation of migrating members.

The West (and its idealization) is deeply engrained in Romanian consciousness, not only for previously mentioned reasons, but also because, as Gradea observes, the political migration of the seventies and eighties to Western European countries were a way to escape socialist Romania: “the rhetoric of leaving should be understood in its historic becoming since, during communism, the population saw emigration to Western Europe or North America as a method to escape the communist regime” (14). Although the West lost some of its utopian aura when people encountered less pleasant realities, it continued to remain a place of heavy migration. Yet the consequences of this economic migration are very different from the migration to the Americas at the beginning of the 20th century. Unlike previous waves of families leaving together to establish themselves in another country, or even compared to situations when the husband migrated first and was joined later by family, the latest economic migration is very unusual, as Douillet and Draga-Alexandru⁸ emphasize. It includes a large migration of women, especially mothers in search for jobs to offer a better life to their children left at home. It is often the mother or wife who leaves first since women’s abilities as caregivers can insure work faster. Although some husbands too join their wives, thousands of children are still left behind with relatives, raising many questions about the future of children and families. Parents, children and society relate differently to this phenomenon, and governments could not find a solution to the new family crisis, which changes the structure of the family and society in several ways. First, it

⁷ JES article “Children of Migration: Hopes and Tensions Over Border Crossing in Moldova.”

⁸ JES article “Care Drain and Substitute Mothering in Women’s Documentary Film: Towards a Transnational Family Model.”

diminishes the (already eroded) authority of the government as economic migration points out to its political inability to govern efficiently and insure sufficient and adequate jobs at home, decent salaries and a secure life for everyone. Secondly, it reveals a crisis of the rhetoric of patriotism and the failure to convince the population to remain at home and eventually sacrifice for the good of the country. The obvious truth is that it would be very difficult for any small-nation to compete with the world's developed economies and the advanced standards of living they offer as models. But, as Douillet mentions, people who migrate do not feel less patriotic about their country: "Young Moldovans seemed to be strongly interested in finding ways to maintain this sense of *patria* despite or through border separations" (18). Migrants often place their birth country within a new idyllic aura through a process of reversed mythologization; other times, they see it as a victim of bad (historic, economic, etc.) circumstances; or they see it both as victim and idyllic place. A new relationship with the birth country is mediated via emotions such as nostalgia, good/bad memories, revolt against a 'corrupt' or 'inefficient' government or a desire to help.

Economic, political and ideological aspects are accompanied by a deeper crisis related to moral values. The degradation of religion's authority was slowly followed by similar processes at other levels; governments, families and the system of education have gradually lost their power of influence. Religion did not and does not seem sufficiently flexible to reform significantly and to adapt to new forms of social consciousness, and the government and its ideological apparatus, including the educational system, prove also unable to advance some other meaningful ideology. As a result, the societal focus moved from spiritual, philosophical and/or utopian models to economic ones. Many observers are surprised by the huge number of malls that continue to open in Romania when people have so little money and the country has one of the lowest living standards in Europe. This explosion of the product and of economic processes are signs of a transformation at spiritual levels too since goods are also cultural objects which, in traveling from one place to another, alter and can be altered by the local cultures. Global commerce becomes the new form of 'colonization' via the product and its impact on the cultures in which it is consumed cannot be denied. The new era of globalization involves consequently a certain type of 'cultural' colonization via the product, manifesting also in a change in living standards expectations.

As result of the collapse of socialism, in Central and Eastern-Europe economic renewal coexists with other forms of ideological revival, such as religion. While the former totalitarian state eroded the authority of the state in general, which diminished, in turn, the respect for the family and education, the religion made some come back as a much more (economically) reachable alternative for the common folk. However, religion remains a limited substitute as proved by large number of working individuals who prefer migration to achieve economic prosperity, even if it means to leave behind their children. Some other times, migration brings divorce and the dissolution of family which may end in shocking individual and/or family drama. In her article, Giukin insists on the cautionary message offered by Mungiu in *Beyond the Hill* and the dangerous consequences of living in a society without alternative ideologies. Puiu (*Sieranevada*), on the other hand, uses the example of religion to emphasize that a society needs hope to carry on.

Romanians are clearly at a crossroad, not only because they follow economically in the steps of the Western world (in which respect, there is no alternative since the East and the rest of the globe also joined the capitalistic world economy); and not only because they lost, to a large extent, their traditional spirituality; but also because they have a lot of skepticism as a result of historic instabilities. Consequently, due to the climate of uncertainty, any ideological alternative is likely to be regarded with suspicion. The violent conflicts in the Balkans, the consistent rejection of other ethnic groups, political fights among parties, radicalism in groups/parties, and the overall instability in the region are manifestations of historically interiorized doubt regarding people and circumstances.

In addition to the erosion of the traditional family, moral values and ideology and long-standing institutions, as well as changes in the roles of gender have created multiple tensions. The political and economic empowerment of women also threatens the traditional patriarchal society and affects the family balance. In her discussion of Mungiu's 4,3,2 Gradea shows how the former socialist system used laws to bring women to the position of 'object' by controlling their sexuality and transforming them into productive bodies within a reproductive bio-economy. Socialism praised and valued women only as obedient citizens. Virginás⁹ also demonstrates how a social glass-ceiling is in place when it comes to women's professional advancement; efficient women are either marginalized, to lower their effectiveness, are "advanced" in positions without consequence, or are simply corrected and put to their place. "[...] female characters," says Virginás, "fit [a] pattern of high hopes and low landing, with a regressive travel back in time, space, or social status [...]" (18). The recurrence of disruptive female characters is a symptom of social tensions and a hint to social practices with roots in underlying cultural models. Negative concerns surround the migrant mother whose children may not get the proper care and education if left behind (*Arrivederci*, Valeriu Jereghi, 2008; the community's view in *Waiting for August* documentary, as discussed by Draga-Alexandru) or may be left with permanent life trauma due to the neglect of the migrant working mother (*If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle*, Florin Serban, 2010). Yet Douillet and Draga-Alexandru, by bringing into discussion the perspective of the children of migrant mothers or parents, reveal another aspect: the economic and social success of the family members takes priority over the stereotypical, idealized image of family happiness in togetherness. While the traditional family has undergone a transformation with the mother taking a decisive role within the traditional patriarchal structures - mothers move(d) in the position of financial provider - it becomes only a substitute function that does not seem to attract significant consequences in governmental politics or function(s). Although women have more access to the political life, social structures have remained largely unchanged, with persistent gender gap discrepancies in terms of job availability, salary levels, and public acceptance or treatment compared to their male counterparts for the same type of job. Underlying cultural and ideological patterns are most difficult to alter, with the economical aspect being the most dynamic and visible.

⁹ JES article "Embodied Memories of Geographical and Social Mobility: White-Collar Women in Postcommunist Films about Romania."

Although there have been less than 30 years since the fall of the Berlin wall, Romania's integration within the world's economy has started to generate visible signs of a social consciousness change, together with a readiness to open to a critical dialogue on the past. In speaking about the Moldovan's success through economic migration, Douillet affirms:

“Moldova may possibly be fostering a new type of nation-building whereby its citizens define their national identity and sense of belonging to their nation no longer through the geopolitical border as the limit of their feeling of belonging, but through the human relationships that connect families and friends together despite and through the seeming dispersal of their population outside the country's borders.” (Douillet 11)

Identity has been analyzed for its complex cultural interactions and influences, for the various processes of métissage that lie beneath, yet, in many situations, its transnational dimension remains to a large extent indefinable. Migration helped Moldovans understand their alterity and find pride in it, but through the experience of geographic and cultural relocation they acquired a more clear and stronger consciousness of belonging to a specific cultural space. In a similar manner, Romania's economic integration within European and global structures activated psychological processes that led to a heightened awareness of the individuals and the nation, a different understanding of one's place within (past and present) history and the desire for exploring other possibilities. Transnationalism often reinforces in the first generation of immigrants their sense of cultural belonging and cultural difference even when the relocation aboard becomes definitive.

The authors of this volume analyze the complex traits and position of Romanian identity and consciousness within the global context, often in relationship with a recent past that altered it in unexpected ways.¹⁰

¹⁰ This is the introduction to the double issue *Journal of European Studies. Romania 100: Nation, Identity, Global Challenge*. Lenuta Giukin, Adriana Gradea, guest editors. Volume 48 (3-4), 2018. It has several additions, but the main text has been published in the JES issue above.