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CONSTRUCTIONS AND DECONSTRUCTIONS
OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN GREATER ROMANIA.
B. FUNDOIANU AND THE SELF-COLONIZING METAPHOR

INTRODUCTION

After World War I, Romania achieved the most significant territory in its history. Due to the arrangements of the Treaty of Trianon from 1920, the Kingdom of Romania (the United Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, united in 1859–1861, became a kingdom formally in 1881) received the provinces of Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina and Bessarabia, thanks to which the country enlarged its area more than twice, from 130,177 square kilometers in 1913 to 295,049 square kilometers in 1920. Also, the number of inhabitants increased – from 7,160,000 in 1912 to 15,541,000 in 1920.¹ The character of the country remained predominantly rural and agricultural, although the industry slowly started to develop. Furthermore, a remarkable number of ethnic minorities inhabited the newly annexed territories, and the majority of them represented urban elites (mostly Magyars, Germans and Jews), very well educated and professing modern values.² Irina Livezeanu remarks, basing her research on data from the Romanian Institute of Statistics from the 1930s, that “whereas fewer than 8 percent of old Romania’s population had been members of minority groups, the largest of these

¹ Carol Iancu, *Evrei din România. De la emancipare la marginalizare 1919–1938* (București: Hasefer, 2000), 23.

² For better understanding of multinational and complicated aspect of nation-building situation in the cultural and literary world of Transylvania, see Adrian Tudurachi, “Réprimer le multilinguisme: la naissance d’un grand écrivain national dans les ruines de l’Empire,” *Neohelicon* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-018-0425-1>. The author argues that the literary beginnings of Liviu Rebreanu (1885–1944), considered one of the greatest and important Romanian novelists of interwar Romania, should be actually related to German and Hungarian languages, which shaped his literary sensibility and influenced his writing. Tudurachi reveals how the reinvention of Rebreanu as “national writer” implied to re-define his multilingual inheritance. Rebreanu’s dilemmas are particularly visible in his best-known novel *Pădurea spânzuraților* [*The Forest of the Hanged* (1922)], which narrates the story of a Romanian soldier, who, during World War I, was forced to turn against his own people as a member of the Austro-Hungarian army. When he tries to flee, he is caught and hanged as a deserter. The novel contains autobiographical elements – its tragic plot was inspired by the fate of Rebreanu’s brother.

being Jews, new Romania had a non-Romanian population of close to 30 percent.”³ As a result of all of the changes mentioned above, the government from Bucharest initiated a nationally oriented cultural politics, which aimed to support the problematic and turbulent processes of nation-building and consolidation of newly gained territories. However, we agree with Livizeanu’s opinion that we cannot forget that “the difficulties of state and nation building in Romania (and elsewhere) did not result solely from the presence of the ethnic minorities but also from the diverse identities and aspirations of the Romanians themselves.”⁴

It is worth noting that with the incorporation of Transylvania and Bucovina, Romania entered the geographical and imaginary space of Central Europe, which put it in a bravely new cultural and ideological context.⁵ The annexation also helped to feed one of the essential myths which shaped the Romanian national identity starting from the 19th century: the Dacian descent of Romanians. This idea, indispensable for keeping autochthonous continuity, led to considering Transylvania as “the cradle of Romanian identity,” thus the “return” of “eternally Romanian” territories within the new boundaries legitimated the project of (re)Romanization and the national identity’s reconstitution.

Moreover, while Europe was healing the wounds of the most massive military disaster so far, and the Treaty of Trianon sealed the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian power, Romanians got the chance to create the largest nation-state in their history. To emphasize the uniqueness of this situation, they started using the symbolical term of Greater Romania (in Romanian, *România Mare*) in order to describe the new political organism. This concept put accent on the national idea dominating in public discourse in the interwar period, according to which all inhabitants should be unified in language, tradition and culture. Erwin Kessler summarizes very clearly these historical circumstances: “Catastrophic as it was, World War I was consistently invoked as a turning point, and also as a cathartic and foundational moment for all the future developments of the Romanian civilization.”⁶ Hereby, after 1918, Romanian intellectuals, placed before the need of self-determination, received from history all the necessary tools to build the national myths,⁷ which has had its ideological and cultural consequences until nowadays.

The chief concern of this article is thus to present a brief sketch of the central assumptions of the most influential opposite tendencies that marked Romanian

³ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 9.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 25.

⁵ As Lucian Boia, a Romanian renowned historian, emphasizes – Transylvania did not contribute to the history of Balkans or the East – just like Țara Românească, that is Oltenia, Muntenia (Greater Wallachia) and Dobruja or historical Moldavia (a part of modern Romania and situated beyond its current borders, Bucovina and Bessarabia). Transylvania made, however, the history of Central Europe, first with Hungary, then with the Habsburg Empire (cf. Lucian Boia, *România, țară de frontieră a Europei* (București: Humanitas, 2012), 22–23.

⁶ Erwin Kessler, “Ideas and Ideology in Interwar Romania,” *Plural. Identity and Destiny: Ideas and Ideologies in Interwar Romania*, no. 29 (1) (2007): 15.

⁷ Romanian national myths are the subject of the most famous Boia’s book, which aroused many controversies in Romanian intellectual milieu: Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (București: Humanitas, 1997).

intellectual landscape after 1918. Such an introduction should help to clarify the disagreements between proponents of different paths of evolution. The critical point of references in our study is represented by some chosen essays written in the early 1920s by a young Jewish Romanian author B. Fundoianu. In his texts, the author deconstructs main ideas circulating in interwar intellectual milieu. Hence, the analysis of Fundoianu's counter-narrative will reveal the most important dilemmas in the cultural identity debates at the beginnings of the existence of Greater Romania.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES

The polemics over the national essence and the Romanian national character occupied the majority of intellectual debates in Greater Romania.⁸ The unification of Wallachia and Moldavia with Transylvania and Bessarabia after the World War I undoubtedly influenced the development of national-centric thought, aroused national consciousness and encouraged the creation of national myths. Intellectual elites were primarily occupied with the "Romanization" of the country, discovering and nurturing the so-called specific național (national specificity) and the identity myth built around the Dacian and Roman past. Such an atmosphere was the basis for the development of all extreme ideologies in a young, multinational state obsessed with its history. As the literary historian Monica Spiridon argues, from the very beginning the signposts of Romanian national identity are the generic categories of European/non-European, where "Europe" means "Occident." Such a perspective introduces a whole series of polarities to the discussion: cosmopolitanism vs. autochthonism, innovation vs. tradition, criticism vs. imitation.⁹ The dilemma mentioned above can be consolidated in two main ideas: "Romania belongs to the East" and "Romania belongs to the West."¹⁰ We borrowed such a division from chapter titles used in a particular issue of the Romanian Cultural Institute magazine *Plural*, which undertook the thematic ideas and ideologies in interwar Romania and represented an anthology of the most significant texts from the interwar period.

⁸ For a general overview of intellectual currents in interwar Romania, see Zigu Ornea, *Tradiționalism și modernitate în deceniul al treilea* (București: Editura Eminescu, 1980) and *Anii treizeci: Extrema dreaptă românească* (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1995); Keith Hitchins, *A Concise History of Romania* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); "Identity and Destiny: Idea and Ideology in Interwar Romania," *Plural* 29 (1) (Romanian Cultural Institute, 2007); Marta Petreu, *De la Junimea la Noica. Studii de cultură românească* (Iași: Polirom, 2011).

⁹ Cf. Monica Spiridon, "Literature and the Symbolic Engineering of the European Self," in *Literature for Europe?*, ed. Theo D'haen, Iannis Goerlandt (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2009), 418.

¹⁰ *Plural. Identity and Destiny: Ideas and Ideologies in Interwar Romania*, no. 29 (1) (2007).

EASTERN ECHOS

The first title, “Romania belongs to the East,” refers to the traditional wing in the Romanian debate. One of the most influential conservative Romanian cultural currents was *sămănătorism* (gathered around the magazine *Sămănătorul* [The Sower]) formed at the beginning of the 20th century and represented, among others, by Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940), George Coșbuc (1866–1918) and Mihail Sadoveanu (1880–1961). They believed that the only depositary of permanent national values were Romanian peasants, and the cause of social problems and peasant uprisings was the borrowing of foreign customs, not resulting from the Romanian tradition. It is worth emphasizing the fact that Nicolae Iorga, the leading ideologist of the “sower movement,” opponent of the Westernization of Romania, eagerly reached for the Byzantine tradition, paying attention to its continuous presence in Romanian history, culture and, above all, religion. According to his approach, Byzantium plays the role of a second great cultural mirror for the newly created nation. Iorga, for whom the religion of Romanians is an inseparable part of the Eastern tradition, acknowledges its eastern roots while calling Romania itself *Byzantium after Byzantium*. In his work from 1935, he develops the idea that Byzantium did not fall in the 15th century, with the Turks conquering Constantinople, Mystras and Trebizond since its legacy found refuge in the Danubian principalities. It could continue then to develop thanks to the Romanian rulers, whom Iorga gave the status of “continutors of the Byzantine Empire.”¹¹ Thus, only at the beginning of the 19th century, with the entry of Europe into the era of modernity came the end of Byzantine civilization. Romanian Orthodoxy played a vital role in prolonging the Byzantine tradition as a natural carrier of Oriental thought. Iorga also draws attention to the relations of the Wallachian and Moldovan families with Fanar, the Greek district of Constantinople, which housed the seat of the patriarch of Constantinople. The vision of the Romanian historian is thus an extreme development of the reference in national mythology to the heritage of the Byzantine Empire, making Romania a direct continuator of Byzantium, and therefore one of the leading centers of survival of Eastern Christianity after the fall of Constantinople. According to this vision, Orthodoxy was to help the Romanians to maintain national consciousness and put effective resistance to the Islamic invaders.

Autochthonism characterized by higher level of spirituality, with its inclinations to religious and mystical experiences, was developed within an ideological framework of the movement called Orthodoxism, led by Nichifor Crainic (1889–1972) and gathered around the monthly *Gândirea* [Thought] (it was founded in 1921; Crainic became its director and ideological guide in 1928). This current of thought placed Eastern Orthodoxy in the center of its reflection, rejecting values and ideas identified with Occident – like positivism, rationalism, capitalism, urban development. They saw the essence of Romanian soul in Romanian countryside, Eastern Orthodox mentality and agrarian character of society:

¹¹ Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance. Continuation de l'Histoire de la vie byzantine* (Bucarest: L'Institut d'Études Byzantines, 1935), 134. All quotations from French and Romanian are translated into English by the author, unless stated otherwise.

The Orthodoxists, as they were known, insisted that only a return to ancestral, Orthodox spiritual values could relieve the century-long malaise which had weighed down upon Romanian society and had brought it to the brink of “chaos.” They turned to the village as the locus of true spirituality and to the tillers of the soil as the preservers of ancient ethnic traditions. Not surprisingly, they condemned all the hallmarks of modern European society – its embrace of positivism in philosophy, its reliance upon science and the scientific method as means to knowledge, its great urban centers, its heavy industry, its secular spirit, and its capitalist mentality – as destructive of the Romanian’s primordial Eastern heritage.¹²

On the spiritual background of Gândirea circle, some thinkers, among whom was the most influential Lucian Blaga, poet and philosopher (1895–1961), will look “beyond Eastern Orthodoxy in their search for the deeper sources of the native tradition and the proper path of national development.”¹³ Inspired by Spengler’s philosophy, Blaga assumed that history is not a linear progression but a flourishing of several independent cultures. Each of these cultures had a characteristic spiritual climate, defined by the space in which it functioned. For the Romanians, this space is called *spațiul mioritic*¹⁴ (Mioritic space), where the primary national specificity has been preserved intact. According to the philosopher, one can find the purest Romanian spirituality in the village, in the rural world, which offers a deep connection with the universe.

WESTERN ECHOS

Thinkers who opposed this conservative intellectuals movements were the so-called Westerners or Europeanists,¹⁵ supporters of the modernization of the country in a Western manner. The leading voice of this option belongs to Eugen Lovinescu (1881–1943), known otherwise as the “pope of modernism.” In his *Istoria civilizației române moderne* [History of modern Romanian civilization] (1924–1925), he presents *inter alia* the theory of synchronism, which proposes a development of Romanian society and culture according to the “spirit of the age” and the “law of simulation-stimulation,” positioning the source of imitation in West, emphasizing the importance of Occidental influences and believing in a revolutionary development of Romanian civilization:

This process by which we have imported all the structures of Western civilization, with the implied contrast between form and essence, noticed by all researches into Romanian civilization, and criticized by the junimiști,¹⁶ has also been dealt with by Marxists who, believing that all

¹² Keith Hitchins, “Religion and Identity in Interwar Romania: Orthodoxism,” *Plural. Identity and Destiny: Ideas and Ideologies in Interwar Romania*, no. 29 (1) (2007): 25–26.

¹³ Hitchins, *A Concise History of Romania*, 163.

¹⁴ Cf. Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii* [1944] (București: Humanitas, 2011). Describing Romanian specificity, Blaga is inspired by the old Romanian pastoral ballad “Miorița” [The Little Ewe], considered as one of the fundamentals of Romanian folklore (and, consequently, of Romanian soul).

¹⁵ Cf. Hitchins, “Religion and Identity in Interwar Romania: Orthodoxism,” 25.

¹⁶ The cultural and literary society Junimea (Youth), the most influential intellectual association from Romania in the 19th century founded in 1863 by Titu Maiorescu (1840–1917) and other foreign-educated personalities, launched a critique of the superficial import of occidental models in the 19th century, denounced as “forms without substance” (forme fără fond, Titu Maiorescu, *În contra direcției de astăzi în cultura română* [1868]). The expression, used by Maiorescu, a literary

political and social structures are creations of an economic structure, are, essentially, also evolutionists. In reality, the development of our civilization is not evolutionary, but revolutionary, like that of all other nations suddenly coming into contact and solidarity with a highly developed country. [...] The principle may be gathered under the term of synchronicity of modern life, which synchronicity, with all its apparent faults, is the current spirit, while the belief in the possibility of evolution against the spirit of the age is nothing but the starting point of temporary disturbances. Like other underdeveloped countries (and we have studied the case of Russia and Japan), our civilization could not have been formed in any other way except by revolution, that is, suddenly, by full import and without going through the intermediary stages of countries that had developed organically.¹⁷

Although our presentation might be accused of excessive generality, because it does not introduce all the voices which were taking part in ideological debates in Greater Romania, it outlined very clearly the principal object of the central dispute of the time: as we have argued, the cultural identity's construction was seen either as a process based on autochthonous elements (which are non-Occidental), or as a long-term process of full importation of political, cultural, social, and literary structures from "the most developed countries" (which is synonymous with the term of "Western countries"). The traditionalists wanted to prove then by all means that "Romania is herself"¹⁸ and its cultural identity should be built on Orthodox moral values and folkloric heritage, while the modernists were conscious about the necessity of joining the European community through the law of imitation. They believed that once the political and cultural framework will be imposed, it will help to change the local landscape, eventually contributing to the birth of a critical spirit in Romanian society.

Therefore, the presence of an empire is necessary for both – modernist and traditionalistic discourse. Whether it is a synchronous (Lovinescu) or a diachronic (Iorga) approach, in consequence both look for Romania's legitimate presence among European countries, which aims to have a therapeutic effect for the (un)conscious peripheral complexity of the young state. Mythical Rome or mythical Constantinople – these are the two cities with which the ideologues of the young Romanian state identify themselves, trying to find and prove its cultural continuity. Instead, for the followers of the modern paradigm, Paris will become such a "contemporary mythical capital."

DECONSTRUCTIONS OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES – B. FUNDOIANU
AND SELF-COLONIZING METAPHOR

The controversy over the question "what path of modernization should our country follow?" in post-World War I Romania started already in the wake of

critique and a prominent politician, who was the proponent of a "traditional" and "organic" development of Romanian culture and civilization, is still deeply ingrained in different intellectual debates in contemporary Romania [O.B.].

¹⁷ Eugen Lovinescu, *History of Romanian Modern Civilization [1934–1925]*, trans. Andreea Diaconu, *Plural. Identity and Destiny: Ideas and Ideologies in Interwar Romania*, no. 29 (1) (2007): 141.

¹⁸ *Plural. Identity and Destiny: Ideas and Ideologies in Interwar Romania*, no. 29 (1) (2007): 5.

1848,¹⁹ representing a fundamental dilemma for a new-born state, which already by its definition needs some reference point for self-determination. However, after 1918, all these debates became even more alive, because the emergence of Greater Romania immediately created a new founding myth²⁰ and was considered as “a major event, perceived as a culmination of Romanian existence.”²¹ However, besides the great ideologies which were looking to consolidate the cultural identity and which dominated the intellectual scene, there were a few thinkers who tried to de-construct the central ideological endeavors, criticizing them and describing, deliberately, their weaknesses. One of them was B. Fundoianu²² (1898–1944; born Benjamin Wechsler), a Romanian Ashkenazi Jewish poet, publicist, critic, essay writer, philosopher, playwright, theater director and an avant-garde filmmaker.

In this study, we have decided to choose his essays as a main critical point of reference for two reasons. Firstly – because he is not a canonical writer, while arguments coming from outside the dominant discourse are often invigorating, allowing new interpretations and solutions. With his deconstructing writing, he wants to show that each ideology is dangerous and full of thinking traps, which one should avoid through critical sense. Secondly – a fact that a young, inexperienced writer with a Jewish background, which in a way doubly excluded him from the dominant discourse at that time,²³ participated in the crucial debate

¹⁹ 1848 is considered as a symbolic year which represents an important turning point in Romanian history and in development of national ideologies. As Monica Spiridon claims, “In 1848, no more than two dozen of the bourgeoisie, nicknamed *les bonjouristes*, most of them writers, philosophers and journalists, turned the national identity project into an issue of the largest public interest” (Spiridon, “Literature and the Symbolic Engineering of the European Self,” 418). The historian, novelist and politician Mihai Kogălniceanu, following the Romantic ideology in Herderian terms, founded a literary magazine which aimed to institutionalize Romanian literature and Romanian as a national language and which was entitled *Dacia literară* (Literary Dacia – the land inhabited by the Dacians). After 1848, the Romanian language, written before in Cyrillic alphabet, was consequently subjected to the essential changes, by the introduction of Latin alphabet (officially introduced after 1860 by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Domnitor (Ruler) of the Romanian Principalities, united in 1859) and a massive import of French neologisms.

²⁰ Until today, the interwar period has functioned uncritically in popular consciousness as the most favorable for Romanian economics, politics and culture, it is viewed by many as a kind of “golden era” in the history of Romania.

²¹ Alexandru George, “E. Lovinescu and the Modernization of Romania,” trans. Adrian Solomon, *Plural. Identity and Destiny: Ideas and Ideologies in Interwar Romania*, no. 29 (1) (2007): 143.

²² B. Fundoianu emigrated in 1923 to Paris and became a French artist (he started to write almost only in French), known under the name Benjamin Fondane. He became one of the most outstanding heirs of the Russian Jewish existentialist Lev Shestov. His most important texts, like existentially oriented poems collected in a volume *Le mal des fantômes* (1933–1944), *Rimbaud le voyou* [Rimbaud the Hoodlum] (1933), *La Conscience malheureuse* [The unhappy consciousness] (1936), *Faux traité d'esthétique* [False treatise of aesthetics] (1938) and *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* [Baudelaire and the experience of the abyss] (1947, ed. posthumously), were deeply inspired by Shestov's existential philosophy.

²³ For a general overview of the situation of Jews in Greater Romania, see Iancu Carol, *Evrei din România. De la emancipare la marginalizare. 1919–1938* (Bucureșt: Hasefer 2000); Leon Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă și “problemă evreiască.” Eșeu despre formele antisemitismului intelectual în România anilor '30* (București: Humanitas 1995); Lucian Nastasă, *Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919–1939). Mărturii documentare*, ed. Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale (Cluj-Napoca: Kriterion, 2011).

for modern Romanian identity is not so obvious, and, thanks to this, gives him possibility to achieve a precious external point of view. Thus, the writer feels empowered to take a position at the breakthrough moment of Romanian history when the state faces national self- and cultural identification, pointing out some controversial arguments. In the “Prefață” [“Preface”] to his *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [Images and books from France] and other essays published in many reviews of the time (like *Rampa* [The Ramp], *Sburătorul literar* [The literary winged spirit]), he emphasizes almost colonial dependence on French culture and too fast pace of “transplanting” Western European political, literary, and historical ideas to the local territory. In this article, we will focus mainly on the ideas presented in his “Prefață” to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* and in his essay entitled “Spiritul critic în cultura românească” [Critical spirit in Romanian culture].

The volume *Imagini și cărți din Franța* appeared in 1922 in Bucharest, and it includes a series of mini-essays that outline the literary profile of some French authors (Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, André Gide, Jules Gautier, Marcel Proust, Francis Jammes). It is worth noting that the young essayist’s ambition is not to describe and to approach the French authors to the Romanian public, but rather to create a direct dialogue between him and the French critics. Fundoianu considered from the very beginning that he was part of the French culture: “I had, by writing the book, the impression that I was publishing the articles in France in a French magazine and that my purpose was to contribute something modest, but mine.”²⁴ The starting point is thus significant and unequivocal – the critic places himself consciously outside the Romanian cultural environment, which he considers and criticizes in the “Preface.” His identification with the Romanian literary world is thus mediated by the French one, which remains a constant point of references. With this gesture, he seems to anchor his identity in the center of the French literary tradition.

Moreover, the year 1922, in which the Fundoianu’s debut was made loud, is a particular date for the history of Greater Romania. This year, King Ferdinand I of Romania and Queen Maria were crowned as heads of the newly formed state in the specially built for this occasion cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Transylvania in Alba Iulia – a symbolic city, the capital of the Great Union of December 1, 1918, of all three regions: Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania. In the context of a state in which, according to officially applicable ideology, Romanians are direct heirs of Dacians and ancient Romans, which testifies to their cultural power and uniqueness on a European scale, the “Prefață” to *Imagini și cărți*. may have seemed all the more insolent and shocking. From the very beginning of his text, Fundoianu proceeds to severe criticism of Romanian culture, accusing it of promoting imitation, parochialism, intellectual narrowness, and narrow-mindedness. He calls Romania a French colony, which seems to be involved in the process of Westernization, and in fact promotes only political and cultural parasitism: “Our culture has evolved, has acquired a particular figure and a specific status – it has turned into a colony, a colony of French culture.”²⁵

²⁴ B. Fundoianu, “Prefața la *Imagini și cărți din Franța*” [1922], in *Imagini și cărți*, ed. Mircea Martin (București: Minerva, 1980), 27.

²⁵ Fundoianu, “Prefața la *Imagini și cărți din Franța*,” 25.

Fundoianu uses the concept of a colony, which leads us to the renowned contemporary idea of self-colonization of a Bulgarian historian Alexander Kiossev, created in 1995 and reformulated in 2008:²⁶

The approach is used for cultures having succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the west without having been invaded and turned into colonies in actual fact. Historical circumstances transformed them into an extracolonial “periphery,” lateral viewers who have not been directly affected either by important colonial conflicts or by the techniques of colonial rule. The same circumstances however put them in a situation where they had to recognize self-evidently foreign cultural supremacy and voluntarily absorb the basic values and categories of colonial Europe. The result might be named “hegemony without domination.”²⁷

The prefix “self” therefore emphasizes the lack of coercion from the outside, the lack of direct force acting on the part of “hegemon,” which is inscribed in the essence of the colonial project.

Although Fundoianu notices the self-colonizing character of Romanian culture, yet he does not have the tools to demystify this discourse and falls victim to it himself entirely; he describes Romanian culture by applying a measure of “normality” to it, which is represented by Western countries (in this case France). To illustrate the relation of Romanian dependence on France, he also applies spatial categories:

We are dependent on French literature because of our bilingualism – at least insofar as the upper-class is concerned [in Romania, as well in 19th century, as later, in interwar period, intellectual elites are using French language even during some personal conversations – O.B.]. We cannot write in French, even though this would be the only logical thing to do. And, writing in Romanian, we are consequently imitating in “our narrow circle,” so we can hardly contribute anything to world culture, to which we are useless. As separate literature, we cannot be of interest to anyone. We will have to convince France that we are, intellectually speaking, a province of its broader geography, and that, in its most significant achievements, our literature is a contribution to French literature.²⁸

He regrets that Romanian artists create in their native language, which immediately puts them “in a subordinate position towards French artists.”²⁹ Also, at the same time, the writer places Romania at the lowest level in “the classification of civilizations,”³⁰ considering that it has a lower status on the scale of development. Fundoianu notes the central problem of the so-called minor literature – it occupies a relatively small geographic and cultural territory.

Therefore, speaking about Romanian literature, Fundoianu defines it as a parasite, which imitates the French model. The orientation and essence of the Romanian literary landscape refer to the themes and the aesthetic solutions used

²⁶ In his article from 2008, Kiossev tries to restrict the emotional load of the self-colonization idea, positioning it in a broader context, in the global colonial condition of the 19th century.

²⁷ Alexander Kiossev, “The Self-Colonizing Metaphor,” *Atlas of Transformation* (2008). Accessed June 20, 2018. <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html>.

²⁸ Fundoianu, “Prefața la Imagini și cărți din Franța,” 26.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Cf. Kiossev, “The Self-Colonizing Metaphor.”

by Mérimée, Musset, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Laforgue,³¹ yet, as Fundoianu claims, they remain only a fair copy of them.

He explains the creation of his book as follows:

When we were born to literary life, its landscape has long been established. Our cultural heritage can be exhausted until the fourth grade of high school. Then we start looking for a new tradition, maybe artificial, but logical. Because everyone needs it. We weave a new tradition next to the old one, as one can weave two separate carpets and see continuity in what is different, thanks to partial amnesia. So we read French as our national writers, seeing in them a valid part of our tradition.³²

Hence, Fundoianu explains the individual stages of self-colonization: he realizes the lack of tradition (which is achieved by comparing to the centuries-old tradition of Western European culture) and the status of “a culture of absences” or “a culture of backwardness.” At the same time, he expresses the need to join this “old, good tradition” (Europe will always be here, as Kiossev explains, the “starting point” in the reference system associated with the most positive values). Finally, he achieves the self-determination in the context of the “empire” culture, that is, following Fundoianu’s metaphor, found in a hand-woven rug continuation of a hegemon carpet pattern. The collective imagination, due to Kiossev’s theory, plays a key role in this process. Fundoianu himself will finally decide to leave his homeland, because “it was logical that as a Romanian author he would rather live in the capital than in the provinces.”³³ It means that Paris is the real capital of Romania.

In fact, Fundoianu believes that Romania’s existence on the map of Europe is the result of a “fecund error, in the service of the conservation instinct, a fixed idea: it is the idea of our Latin origin.”³⁴ According to the essayist, without this cultural mirage, the inhabitants of the Romanian provinces would remain an incoherent and Balkan mass.³⁵ Thus, the author also refers to another cultural identity of the Romanians – the Oriental one, mediated by the Balkans. In his approach, the cultural dimension of the Balkan space receives a negative rating and must be rejected in favor of the Western one. The essay is part of a pro-occidental tendency placed by Vintilă Mihăilescu, a contemporary Romanian sociologist, at the time of the beginning of the Romanian processes of nation-building, “during the constitutional overthrow of the reference from the Orient to the Occident”³⁶ and which is self-defining in terms of Western values, it places them at the center of any activity:

³¹ Cf. Fundoianu, “Prefața la Imagini și cărți din Franța,” 25.

³² Ibidem, 26.

³³ Michael Finkenthal, “M. Sebastian și B. Fondane: despre identități și opțiuni literare,” *Observator Cultural*, no. 393 (2007).

³⁴ B. Fundoianu, “Spiritul critic în cultura românească I și II” [1922], in *Imagini și cărți*, ed. Mircea Martin (București: Minerva, 1980), 201.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Vintilă Mihăilescu, ed., *De ce este România astfel? Avatarurile excepționalismului românesc* (Iași: Polirom, 2017), 57.

This relatively late and intriguing entry into the reference sphere of a significant other from West led, on the one hand, to the suppression of the Oriental (Byzantine, Ottoman, Balkan) reference, and, on the other hand, to overpayment, sometimes compulsive, of the Western reference.³⁷

At the same time, Fundoianu supports a very courageous sentence, considering that Romania's entire political and cultural history is based on the illusion that Romanians are the followers of Roman tradition. His boldness lies precisely in the idea of considering the Roman beginning an illusion. Inspired by Jules Gautier's philosophy, the essayist defines this phenomenon as an act of Bovarism. The young writer notes that this kind of psycho-historical intoxication has become the *spiritus movens* of the whole culture; a mechanism of illusion and lies that gave a newly-formed nation a sense of belonging to European culture due to a collective past. The amplification and distortion of a historical fact, such as the occupation of the Romanian territory by the Romans, allowed the Romanian intellectuals to create a megalomania speech aimed at homogenizing the Romanians' hybrid identity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Fundoianu, however, does not criticize the very entry of Romania on the path of imitation. He even believes that this was the only solution that could accelerate the natural evolution of the new state – all the more so because they were mostly European models mediated by France, which for the author, who in the same text admits that he was not so much acquainted with French literature, what he lived through it,³⁸ was probably not without significance. Fundoianu, just like Titu Maiorescu some decades before, is concerned only by the dizzying tempo of “transplantation” of political and cultural values and the lack of criticism that should accompany this process: “we bring culture without any control”.³⁹ According to the young essayist, only a broader, critical view of the whole culture allows understanding of the imitative mechanisms present in it, adapting them to local conditions and mentalities. The primary sin of literary criticism in Romania is combining aesthetic and ethnic categories, which leads to a situation in which writers or poets regarded as significant from the aesthetic point of view almost immediately become representatives of national specificity. The obsessive search for this closes the Romanian elite in the vicious circle of dilemmas of countries with a self-colonial character, leading to many misunderstandings and bringing Romanian critics (and, consequently, also readers) to interpretative misleading.

The intellectual profile of our author seems then to differ from Lovinescu's options that argue that only a direct imitation of the Western model creates a solid skeleton on which one should build a native culture. However, his point of view was undoubtedly closer to Lovinescu's understanding of modernization

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Cf. Fundoianu, “Prefața la Imagini și cărți din Franța,” 26–27.

³⁹ Fundoianu, “Spiritul critic în cultura românească I și II,” 197.

(nevertheless, Fundoianu participated in meetings organized by Lovinescu's intellectual circle, *Sburătorul!*) than to the ideology promoted by conservative movements. Hence, the latter used identity strategies that aimed to emphasize the uniqueness of the newly created state (but with a nation with centuries-old traditions within its borders) and to defend culture and national consciousness. At the same time, these strategies should provide the intellectuals who created them with the role of guarantors of such comprehended culture. Fundoianu wants to diverge from the dominant tendencies focused on the nation and ethics (which represents the legacy of the romantic paradigm), and he understands the importance of development in aesthetic terms. Greater Romania will not escape the influence of the rest of the homogenized world, but instead of closing itself in an ideological bubble, it can, through the critical sense, use these influences with positive effects both in literature and in the space of social and political life.

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CONSTRUCTIONS AND DECONSTRUCTIONS OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES
IN GREATER ROMANIA.
B. FUNDOIANU AND THE SELF-COLONIZING METAPHOR

Summary

The article "Constructions and Deconstructions of Cultural Identities in Greater Romania. B. Fundoianu and the Self-Colonizing Metaphor" proposes a general overview of two dominant narratives in cultural identity discourse in Greater Romania: the traditionalist and the modernist one. Even though the proponents of each of the tendencies have a different vision of constitutive elements which Romanian identity consists of their aspirations are similar: they want to define Romania's place in the changed political system in Europe after World War I. Furthermore, they attempt to answer the following question: what path of evolution should the new-born country follow?

However, the article also presents a critical approach to the ideas and myths circulating in intellectual milieus after 1918. Hence, the second part of the study analyzes two essays: "Preface" to *Images and Books from France* and "Critical Spirit in Romanian Culture," published by a Romanian Jewish author B. Fundoianu (1898–1944). Through his texts, the young essayist builds a counter-narrative which exposes the danger of blind search for national specificity and encourages Romanian intellectuals to use the "critical spirit" as the main tool in the processes of modernization. Denominating Romania "a French cultural colony," Fundoianu draws attention to the dilemmas discussed in the article through the prism of the category of "self-colonization," introduced to the discourse about Central and South-Eastern Europe by the contemporary Bulgarian historian Alexander Kiossev.

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