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A MYTHIC-SYMBOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS

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Abstract: In an era of generalized communication, democratic societies cannot escape the radical changes that the development of different types of communication claims. Political communication determines new types of political practice and adhesion. As in the case of postmodern communication in general, in political communication, expressions of symbolic communication characteristic for traditional societies are still being used, even if those expressions are presented as contemporary symbolic constructs, as for example the construct of “postmodern tribes”. This text focuses on how these elements are highlighted in the socio-analysis of Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, one of the most renowned experts in the Romanian political culture. The public space, shaped in the past by the intellectual elite, bearer of values and symbolic conscience, is being seized by television stars, by the online communication specialists. This leads to new fragmentations in and coagulation of political space, and to a prevalence of sentimentalities, mythical stories, and mystical experiences at the expense of rationality, civic involvement and ideologies. The new configuration of political groups of interest and the new ways of adhesion typical for “political followers” belonging to the Facebook generation are regarded from a mythic- symbolic mentality which links them to a behavior and a kind of solidarity characterizing tribal groups which are acting on a postmodern political scene.

Key Words: Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, postmodern tribes, political tribalism, political communication, mythologizing, the Facebook generation, symbolic voices, totemic conscience, marginalization of intellectuals, ideology

The Man and His Book

The end of the 25th year since the Romanian Revolution from December 1989 found me reading *Triburile. O patologie a politicii românești, de la Revoluție la Generația Facebook* by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu.¹ The volume consists in a series of previously published political texts, selected coherently and thoroughly. In his latest publications, the author has accustomed us with the elegance and the quality of the published material. The mentioned volume fulfils the same standards, presenting itself as a collectable item, harmoniously integrated in a library, alluring you to read and enjoy yourself in the presence of books.

Those that closely follow Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's academic activity and his public appearances in the recent years are aware of the appreciation he receives from specialists and professionals. Vasile Sebastian Dâncu is one of the most prestigious personalities in the Romanian academic field. His activity is valued for its didactic, research, and public initiative relevance, as well as his presence in the public sphere. Vasile Sebastian Dâncu is faithful to his belief that a sociologist must act as a critical conscience, involved in the cultural, social and political issues. He chooses to act as a kind of "collective conscience", by developing analysis of Romanian society from various angles, by engaging in analyses of symbolic reality and Romanian mentalities, by doing market research or public discourse analysis, by displaying a conviction that the sociologist is a social actor and a witness whose duty is to express opinions on what happens in the public sphere. In coherence with the ideal of practicing a critical sociology, the author does not forget to always making the difference between his own perspective and the objective data of science.²

Vasile Sebastian Dâncu studied at the Faculty of History and Philosophy, at the Babes – Bolyai University, and was one of the most active and creative members of the academic community. After he transferred from the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance in Cluj³ to the Bucharest University, he continued to maintain the connection with the academic community of Cluj. Cluj has remained for him a place where he would always try to return, a sort of matrix based on which he shapes his inner life and his entire work in connection with others. The journey from Bucharest to Cluj and back is crucial in his desire to eliminate the differences that exist between the centre and the periphery. One of his constant concerns was to consolidate the relationship between the two Universities in order to join common efforts as to propose a coherent model of research approach and of university and public space connection. Beyond these technical aspects concerning the balance between capital city and province, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu feels a religious connection with Transylvania and makes it the privileged space of his

symbolic imaginary, in which the city of Cluj functions as a symbolic heart beating to keep the entire country alive. This way, the author connects emotionally with the soul of his city.⁴

In order to understand this symbolic role, we can assume we are dealing with a concentration of all elements – intellectual, emotional, possessing a religious charge and a paradisiac nostalgia, as well as with a critical evaluation – which the author refers to when he talks about his inner Romania.⁵ For this reason, the statements by an exegete of his text *O Românie interioară* seem relevant also for his volume *Triburile. O patologie a politicii românești, de la Revoluție la Generația Facebook*:

“There is an intelligence that appears from between the lines, sometimes even between words, inconspicuous and therefore more robust (...I could refer to it as a Transylvanian intelligence) which often illuminates the text. The knowledge of which the practicing sociologist benefits is also assumed individually, and has become an element of subjective knowledge”, wrote Alexandru Vlad.⁶

Besides, he noted a common trait in Vasile Sebastian Dâncu’s works. They represent an *opera aperta* in which the reader “has the same importance as the author and is welcome to participate in the dialogue, to express his own book project continuation of his inner Romania”.⁷ This Romania is filtered through a critical and symbolic lucid awareness. Among other tools used, the mythical, magical, and religious thought represents a central analysis chart.

The excellence of his teaching activity, research and evaluation made Vasile Sebastian Dâncu a top social researcher in Romania.⁸ His applied research and theoretical studies have asserted him in the academic field as one of the most relevant voices, an author recognized not only in Romania but also internationally. His published works are reputed for their ability to combine scientific rigor with a remarkable talent for writing, statistical accuracy and creativity in the analysis and understanding of social actions, social phenomena and human condition. Vasile Sebastian Dâncu is known for his refined, objective and exigent capacity to render relevant diagnosis regarding a majority of important aspects of Romanian public life.

More interested in his essays than in his sociology, Irina Petraș notices that:

“with a vague sense of patheticism, enough to sweeten his texts, using small oratorical tricks to attract the audience, with orchestrated scenarios meant to highlight deep and hidden meanings; Vasile Sebastian Dâncu is a writer with whom one would like to chat for a book or more”.⁹

To be in the proximity of Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's books can be a challenging experience, from scientific as well as aesthetic views, given that the author is also a member of the Writers Union, so his qualities are known and acknowledged among those who live their lives in the beautiful world of words and meanings. Not by chance one of his exegetes observes that

“Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's writing is extremely clear and expressive; his statements are always in the vicinity of definition and aphorism and have the terseness of medical diagnosis. In his essays, the lucidity of the sociologist harmoniously meets the clear-sightedness of the poet.”¹⁰

As a keen observer of social and political life, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu found his place in the field of ideas. Also in recent years, he is considered as one of the persons in the academic field who developed a very good relationship with civil society, with the political and economic environment, himself being a model entrepreneur in the media communication and social exploration.¹¹ The media institutions which he helped establish are a very good example of good practice in media communication. The polling institute, RIES to whose development he contributes and coordinates, is distinguished from other similar institutes through its expertise accessibility to the community, through its impartiality and the importance of the data it offers, as well as for the professionalism of those working in the institute. Its success is based on Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's remarkable effort to create institutions that help the community.

One of the most relevant research studies, from the point of view of our interests, is the one regarding Romanians' views on religion, conducted by the RIES (Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy) in partnership with RAES (the Romanian Association for Evaluation and Strategy). As expected, the study shows that Romanians consider religion important from a moral point of view, in terms of family relations, and the ability to intervene in the issues regarding disadvantaged social groups. Unlike politicians' tendency to display, sometimes ostentatiously, their religious beliefs and their relation with the Church, the Romanian people are reserved when it comes to the involvement of the Church in politics. Nevertheless, the population prefers to vote for politicians who have religious beliefs, rather than for those who prefer atheism.¹² In this context it is very easy to understand why politicians chose to play the religiousness card, regardless of the relation between their behavior and the religious values they claim. This is a subject that Vasile Sebastian Dâncu revisits throughout his work.

The volume entitled *Triburile* is yet another proof of the expertise revealed by the author in his previous actions and writings. His presence

in the media is significant in terms of taking position regarding complex issues on the public agenda. The author's expertise in areas such as the relation between religion and politics, the role of myth, ritual and symbolic thought in political communication, political analysis, guidance, media communication, social projection and intervention has become a public asset. His writings, as well as his TV appearances reveal not only a scholar familiar with the topics, but also a social-political analyst with an objective and proper view on the subjects in case. The Romanian society may find in Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's journalistic activity a model that, together with other similar models, can be used as examples of formation and professional practice in the mass media.¹³

Political Tribalism and Political Communication

As the author tells us, the volume entitled *Triburile* offers a sociologic attempt to systematize, explain and understand the current Romanian social environment. The texts in this anthology are intended to function as living texts that evidence Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's vivid presence in the Romanian social environment. Placing his reflections under the sign of socio-analysis, he draws from his own experience of active participant in the social and public life as a starting point and a means of conveying his message. Similarly as a public opinion researcher "buried in piles of data", he uses his right to oppose "the divinatory art based on statistical simulation" and focuses his effort into distinguishing the truth behind social mechanisms.¹⁴

Instead of displaying his philosophical and sociologic erudition, which he undoubtedly holds, the author prefers to communicate in a moral or emotional paradigm, giving his attitude the significance of partaking in a similar phenomenon, used by Michel Maffesoli in describing postmodern tribes.¹⁵ A significant part of the texts in this volume, as well as in other books by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, is influenced by Maffesoli's writings, even if not directly connected to them.

Vasile Sebastian Dâncu warns us that we live in "the times of political tribes". It is a time of radical changes on the political and social scene. In Romania, the author believes that the paradigmatic shift in social action and political communication is influenced by the fact that the political scene has become an extension of the television studios. Taking the place of social space, the TV studio is where the politicians dwell, where they broadcast their campaign messages, it is even the place where symbolic violence is being legitimized. In this process, "the most dangerous aspect is that television replaces public space."¹⁶ It is no longer just about the manipulation of the people through television; it is about the seizure by the television of all the elements that constitute public space. Moreover, we may find this phenomenon present in religious communication long before television. A relevant example is that of fundamentalist religious

groups, who are no longer concerned with preaching their message in the synagogue, church or mosque, but choose instead the radios, the televisions, the internet because these are the media through which their message will reach a larger and more diverse audience.¹⁷ In a world in which communication generates reality¹⁸, the confiscation of politics by communication is an action belonging to the logic on which the system functions.

Moreover, the author reveals the fact that the isolation in the media has generated the segmentation of public space based on group interests of partial communities, be it business, political, cultural, or religious ones, functioning as tribal communities. From the perspective of the dynamics of these new communities, what prevails is the maintenance of the illusion that “media coverage can provide mediation”. The lack of mediation between participants in the construction of public space leads, in the end, to the “extinction of traditional electorates and the creation of political tribes”. This conclusion leads Vasile Sebastian Dâncu to the conclusion that such a way of shaping public space is based on mythologies, idolatries, emotions, phantasms, that replace the information society and eliminate the logic of the argument. So that, in the end, “politics has become a soap opera with endless episodes”.¹⁹

Against such a background, new ways of adhesion typical of postmodern tribalism are described. This predilection for “tribalism” is perceived by the author as a sign of a social crisis and of a paradigmatic change. Such change occurs with the shift from “an unconscious collective dominated by the work-reason-future tirade” to an era “dominated by the dream-imaginary-phantasm tirade”. In this context, reflection as well as action are based more on emotion and sensitivity than on a rational and impersonal analysis. Even in his attempts to social analysis, subjectivity is privileged in relation to the obsession for objectivity, because the author focuses first of all on the Facebook generation. As Vasile Sebastian Dâncu notes, those who belong to this generation “were raised in an era of television and possess a more flexible identity, generated by the avalanche of information”. This is a new type of social interaction which is different from traditional social connections, the preference being for regrouping “into social networks that avoid reciprocity”. Inside these networks, “the individual is besieged by a multitude of affiliations and there are no solid principles capable of forming substantial collective adhesions”.²⁰ Based on this new reality, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu militates for a new type of politics, for a new way to reach the masses of voters, for creating new types of connections with the electorate. He expresses the need for a political reform built on the belief that

“We live in an era of social tribes, we find ourselves in a kind of emotional rationality, where politics are hauled by a street-like affectivity. It is a failure of classical politics”.²¹

Thus, we are reaching the conclusion that new practices of political communication are required. They should take into account that – due to ideological inconsistency as practised by political organizations – the message should not focus on an electorate that has to be won over or made loyal, but on “political fan bases”. Vasile Sebastian Dâncu opts for a change in the way political communication is done due to the emergence of political tribes functioning as carriers and receivers of the political message. Debate, analysis and political communication do not function anymore as ways to evaluate political efficiency, because

“During election campaigns, an effect of seduction which replaces argumentation, values and ideologies intervenes. Seduction generates other types of addiction, other connections and social relations. People experience extreme emotions; emotional politics are based on the ongoing stimulation of voters through images and symbols. The political fans are kept updated at any time, not giving them the opportunity to reflect or to evaluate”.²²

In *Triburile* we discover that the new types of solidarity, cultural contamination, the predominance of feelings, the coagulation of emotions, the vibrations generated by emotional adhesion are elements of social design which the intellectual elite can no longer integrate in the traditional social analysis and explanation. In his social analysis, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu uses an epistemological metaphor which marks a new type of social aggregation: the *flashmob*.

“The *flashmob* is the most volatile organization that society could invent, and at the same time, it is the newest form of organization from a historical point of view, the first flashmob took place in 2003 in the United States of America. The flashmob is a short term gathering, in a highly exposed public space, where participants carry out a surprisingly, special, unusual action for a short time sequence, after which the group spontaneously breaks-up”.²³

The author notices that these type of events – seemingly spontaneous, with a noticeable effort to separate themselves from the context of media, having a reserved attitude in connection to any type of influence coming from political groups – are organized with the intention to generate emotion, to win followers, and to create awareness. As a result,

“This type of spontaneous aggregation, achieved through outreach opportunities offered by the

Internet, has as purpose and motivation the transfer of emotions, the entertainment offered to the passers-by or just to the ones that are involved in the action, the mutual involvement in actions of social synchronicity, meeting new people, or just fighting against everyday routine. In a flashmob, people come from different directions, they follow instructions, and then leave in separate directions, it is a kind of gathering without a specific purpose or ending, a denial of all types of mobilisation and protest known until now.”²⁴

It is the new way in which the Facebook Generation manifests itself.²⁵ Under the aspect of political and civic manifestation, the Facebook Generation is described by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu as a flashmob generation, as a fresh generation which creates a new way of controlling the politic sphere, it is diverse, respects plurality, is able to act punctually when individual rights are not respected, brings with it a new way of conceiving the community in the form of groups united by an emotion and not a long-term contract. The author associates this generation with a strong social dimension and considers it a possible factor of profound social changes. He does not go as far as to say that he expects this generation to reconstruct the democratic left wing. But he lets us understand that the effect of its action under the sign of collective solidarity will lead to a new type of political culture, beyond the stereotypical discourses on common interest, however cherishing the individual interest in the context of a new type of collective responsibility.²⁶

This public spectacle played by the new civic and political communities reminds us of a playful version of a tribal dance, performed by a community who believed in the ritualic aspect of such a performance. Dance could represent a symbol of community celebration, but also a symbol of a preparation for war. These flashing communities, with fluid identities, ideologically inconsistent, can manifest in unexpected ways. As democratic activists it is only natural to believe in their evolution in the sense of the predilection for championing the rights of citizens and social peace. Though, we cannot rule out the possibility that such scattered groups could commit religious intolerance, symbolic violence, even terrorist acts. Under the influence of feelings, of different ecstatic experiences, tribes can resort to irrational and destructive alternatives. This inevitably raises the issue of the relation between freedom and different types of control. This issue will remain open for further discussion.

Symbolic Voices – Between Mythologizing and Marginalizing Intellectuals

An important perspective on Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's writings would be able to reveal the author as a socio-analyst and ideologist of the democratic left wing modernization. Believing in the necessity of the intellectuals' involvement in politics, the author discovers that "nobody cares for intellectuals in politics".²⁷ Thus, they are more a mythic, magic, symbolic or ritual resource than a necessary physical presence. Although everybody is looking for intellectuals to join a political party, they are regarded more as a necessary evil, background images, symbolic resources that can be transformed and used as the mythical symbolism of the scapegoat. They can become totemic figures fuelling the symbolic projections of the party members as long as they do not affect in any way the leader's need to appear as the sole bearer of symbolic attributes. The intellectual should settle with his totemic function in the collective memory, which calls on the mythic function of those who are no longer in the realm of mundane existence.

Participating in such a collective symbolic dimension is, probably, one of the reasons for which, as Vasile Sebastian Dâncu notices, in public debates intellectuals are more likely to intervene so as to support or dispute, rather than to manifest as individualities that plead for a unique cause. The image that the author uses is that of ready-made intellectuals or intellectuals who hide behind a protective political figure. The fact that intellectuals are sought during election campaigns falls within the same mythic-symbolic category.²⁸ Sometimes they are exposed to the public as symbols charged with sacredness in a consumerist environment, carefully displayed besides the porcelains in the glass window, or placed in the spotlight as mannequins dressed in the most representative designs belonging to the political brand they have to represent. Other times, the intellectuals are used as icons embedding sacred values and the imaginary which combines sacred and profane imagery in the visual exposure of the political organization.

But there is another important dimension in which intellectuals can make themselves heard. They can be the bearers of fundamental values and morality. With this statement, we should ask ourselves: is there still a place for ethics in politics? From a theoretical point of view it is obvious that we will argue in favor of the need for ethics, even if we accept that there is a certain relativity and peculiarity in the way ethical principles can become functional in the practice of politics.²⁹ The ethical voice of the intellectuals is, at the same time, a constant argument used to make them silent and to marginalize them inside political organizations. Despite all these mischiefs,

“The number of intellectuals who are involved in politics should increase. Because we are not indifferent to those who make politics and because this would be the only way the left wing could be separated from the right wing, or because this way different values would be applied to politics. Romania won’t stand a chance if only the unconverted communists, the Securitate people, undercover guys, waiters, below average engineers, singers, dancers, accountants at CAP (Collectivized Agricultural Production), currency exchange operators, or other types of adventurers of such kind will act in politics”,³⁰ writes Vasile Sebastian Dâncu.

In order to understand the importance of ethics in political communication, we can recall the importance of ethics in the second round of the Romanian presidential elections on the 16th of December 2014. Apart from the messianic expectations that Klaus Iohannis has generated, from the influence of social networks, from the involvement of the young generation and the negative vote given to the SDP, I personally believe that there is something that voters could not overlook to Victor Ponta. It is about the lack of respect shown in at least three directions of his political communication. Respect, as an ethical value and a behavioral norm, cannot be neglected in political communication. Vasile Sebastian Dâncu has a much broader insight of the phenomenon, with consequences in several aspects of the political communication. In this respect, the text „Dear candidate. Several recipes for losing elections”³¹, written shortly before the second election tour, is very telling.

In this paper I wish to consider only three dimensions concerning respect in public communication:

1) The first dimension on which Victor Ponta’s lack of respect manifested was that he chose to use religious symbolism. I shall not discuss here the unfortunate nature of such a choice, coming from a left wing candidate.³² At the same time, I shall not discuss the poor decision of the Romanian Orthodox Church to support only one candidate, of the Church and of the campaign staff. But these elements are part of the ideological dimension and ideological options, not religious options.³³ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu has also highlighted the connection between religious holidays and the ceremonious politicization in political communication: “religious holidays cannot escape the political dust”, there are “holidays which we can no longer be associated with anything else but a ceremonial politicization”, and the clergy, “together with the politicians are actively attracting politicizing actions”.³⁴

My intention here is to show the importance of the symbolic dimension and of the way in which ethics is affected by it, and vice versa.

In this respect, Victor Ponta's excessive use of religious symbolism seems important. The purpose of this article is not to analyze Victor Ponta's campaign. Although it would be interesting to perceive it through the suggestions made by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu in his emotional description of the presidential campaign when he believes that each candidate should tell "a story which people can retell, a story which is almost entirely honest".³⁵ Instead of analyzing the campaign, I shall exemplify my point of view by referencing the abusive use of religious symbolism. From a press release in which we are told that "The Prime Minister, Victor Ponta, went with his family to pray at the Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery, where the relics of Constantin Brîncoveanu are kept"³⁶, we discover Victor Ponta's special concern for those in distress. The way in which his empathy for the unprivileged ones, for those who are humiliated and in pain, defies the religious common sense. Victor Ponta chooses to portray himself as a healer who alienates the suffering of those who are ill. In order to build his character, he shows himself sitting beside a patient, bedridden for 27 years, and the patient asks for his help. The patient was brought in his bed through the crowd attending the sermon in order to get to the presidential candidate and ask for help. It is obvious for everyone that, through the use of biblical symbolism, we are witnessing a staging of a biblical episode in which a sick person is brought in front of Jesus Christ so that he could relieve him from pain. Victor Ponta doesn't go as far as to tell the sick person "take up thy bed and walk!", but he promises him, in a fatherly way, that his suffering will be lessened by his involvement as a Prime Minister. As one can see in the broadcasted images, the way in which Victor Ponta holds the hand of the patient in his own hands³⁷ is a revealing gesture, even though his savior attributes are not as visible. At the same time, the means chosen to manifest his social-democratic inclinations towards the problems of those facing difficult life situations seems to me as a disrespectful way to persuade voters through religious propaganda.

2) A second unethical dimension of Victor Ponta's campaign was the offensive way in which he treated the Diaspora through administrative decisions that led to the restriction of the right to vote on the 2nd of November 2014, but especially in the second ballot on the 16th of November 2014. Victor Ponta's defeat was analyzed from different perspectives. The role played by young people and the information presented on Facebook were an important aspect of the analysis.³⁸ I want to present another aspect, the one concerning the lack of respect towards the Diaspora. The lack of respect shown by the Romanian authorities responsible with the organization of the elections – identified in the symbolic mentality of the Diaspora with Victor Ponta, presidential candidate, as well as the Prime Minister – was a lack of respect attributed to him. The pressure exerted by the Romanian Diaspora on social networks, and especially on their families back home, led to the

mobilization of a large number of voters and to the channeling of discontent against Victor Ponta. Thus, I believe that we can admit that an important factor in the victory of Klaus Iohannis in the presidential elections was that – due to administrative and communicational errors of the government and of the campaign staff – Victor Ponta was defeated in the elections by none other than Victor Ponta. It is difficult to understand why the intellectuals involved in Victor Ponta’s counseling weren’t able to avoid the actions (before his defeat by Klaus Iohannis) leading to his own defeat.

3) The third dimension where Victor Ponta’s unethical action was manifested was the lack of respect towards the academic community. I will not discuss here the scandal surrounding his doctoral thesis, an issue which he refused to solve in a reasonable manner. I will also not discuss the abuse through which specialized academic committees were dissolved with the purpose of removing from the committees those that could influence the decision in the Prime Minister’s disfavor. I would like to discuss instead an issue at least as important. It is well known that during the election year, the government led by Victor Ponta took a series of populist measures, answering a series of real issues, which according to specialists are not compatible with the economic reality in Romania. The academic field was also exposed to such populist measures. I mention here that between the two election rounds the decision to improve Prime Minister Victor Ponta’s image was taken by supporting professional development programs for teachers and researchers. The fact that this decision was made under the pressure of the election campaign, that the rules of implementing such programs were eluded, makes me believe that the transfer of 700 lei in the bank account of the academic staff (just two days before the end of the election campaign) seems more of an “electoral bribe” than a coherent action performed by the government led by the Romanian presidential candidate. I don’t want to belittle the importance the government gives to the sum of 700 lei for the professional development of a university teacher for one year. At the same time, it is possible that the timing chosen for the announcement of this decision could have been incidental, without any connection with the election campaign. I can even accept that there may be an issue with the way in which this action was perceived. Anyways, if according to Vasile Sebastian Dâncu “we are a nation who sells its votes on oil, sugar, *mici* and beer”³⁹, why won’t politicians try to earn popularity by a financial supplement, even with the risk of losing our vote?

At the same time, I cannot ignore the fact that an e-mail message received from the director of the University’s department of human resources was mentioned that:

“We hereby inform you that in accordance with the stipulations of the NME Order (National Ministry of Education) no. 4871/05.11.2014

concerning the implementation of the systematic project “The teaching staff from the undergraduate and graduate public teaching system – promoter of lifelong learning”, the sum of 700 lei/person was allocated by the NEM, sum which will be transferred during next day, 14.11.2014, in the bank account of every beneficiary (teaching staff and auxiliary teaching staff with an active Individual Employment Contract). Please note that this sum will be justified afterwards by each beneficiary on the basis of supporting documents which will be provided by NME in the following period”.⁴⁰

We leave aside the fact that the money transfer in our accounts was made violates ethical rules of the development and the implementation of European grants, by eluding bureaucratic procedures we must face when we receive money from European funds. I will also ignore the fact that we were not even asked whether we wanted to partake in this program or not, and we were not asked for permission to transfer those money into our personal accounts. The government's decision was implemented with the already known and the usual lack of respect shown by the Head of Government towards intellectuals. It is true that very few intellectuals perceived this action as an electoral gesture. Poor education funding under the Victor Ponta government (as well as in other governments) made any type of funding seem ethical, efficient, and welcomed. As in other circumstances, we may be dealing here with a matter of perceiving the phenomenon.

But we must recall that Mircea Eliade perceived the educational system as one of the remaining areas where, in the existence of the modern man, the mythic and symbolic experience can be found, shaped according to the exemplary models characteristic to the traditional mentality. As a result, the educational system is a guardian of traditional and authentic values of a community. A fact “which can be verified especially when we take into consideration the origin of paradigmatic models proposed by the European education”.⁴¹ An attitude of disrespect in relation to education is an assault on the medium intended to provide authentic models for young people. This lack of respect is accompanied by subordination in favor of personal political purposes of structures aimed at preserving the symbolic values of a community and continuously producing a framework for the manifestation of authenticity. The fact that a political group uses for political purposes the educational system is a violation of the essential respect that each person owes to the institution that represents the backbone of a nation.

It is true that in the weeks that followed after this event, perceived by many as being favorable for the education system, Ponta’s government published, during the winter holidays, an Emergency Ordinance that

shocked academics, because it was an ordinance that would solve the issue concerning Victor Ponta's doctoral thesis. And in order to solve his personal issue, he imposed a provision able to regulate all similar cases. Changing the educational law through an Emergency Ordinance according to the presidential candidate Victor Ponta's own will was just a governmental decision which academicians had to accept. A passive acceptance seemed only natural after they received the "electoral bribe" disguised as a program of professional development. From this symbolic perspective, intellectuals were being neutralized by being reduced to an amorphous mass, leveled through "electoral bribe" transferred to their banking accounts, following a series of governmental administrative decisions in which they did not participate. Intellectuals' revolt did not work this time. They were not able to function as an ethical instance. They were not even able to function as effective lists of support or protest which are mentioned in Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's book, *Triburile*, as representative images for the intellectuals' presence in the public space.

However, apart from this personal perception of the presidential electoral campaign, it is obvious that there is still room for intellectuals. They could launch a debate and a reconstruction inside ideologies. Vasile Sebastian Dâncu believes that

"in a world of crises and rapid change, in an era of information bombardment, people need coherent interpretations, and especially articulate information systems, values, images. Ideologies provide us with simple guidelines, they were part of the education received in schools and at home, we have them in our identity's cultural subconscious, even if we do not realize it. Ideologies concentrate a mythical content, dreams and ideals based on needs, they offer interpretations and guide us towards different types of actions"⁴²

Nowadays, in the Romanian cultural space, it is easier to promote the death of ideologies than to start a process of disproof, of development or of ideological clarification. As a political idealist, as we know him, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu still believes in the viability of ideologies and in a revival of ideologies, for the sake of Romanian political culture. Unfortunately few will follow him. The intellectuals aren't capable any more to gather their mythic and symbolic resources around an ideological project.

Instead of conclusions

Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's discourse has the merit of proposing the necessity of a moment of rupture, of discontinuity "in a society governed by mythologies, hierophanies, decaying ontophanies, by emotions and

phantasms, by idolatry".⁴³ His discourse wants to be one based on solidarity, and togetherness. Communication and collaboration are important. It can be displayed only through fleeting solidarity presented as a flashmob, but all around it the stimulated emotion gives meaning to our lives and helps us find the necessary resources to build something together.

Political tribalism is considered by the author as part of an internal logic of the evolution of relations between public space and virtual space. He reminds us that at the beginning of the internet the world believed it would become an instrument of public participation growth. While acknowledging the mobilizing force of virtual networks, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu pays attention to researches revealing that technology offers the individual the illusion of escaping under the influence of power relations, but in fact he finds himself "more socially isolated and less involved in civil society". However, "Politics on Facebook started to have a life of its own, a certain autonomy".⁴⁴ The sociologist and expert in advertising does not ignore the traditional methods of political communication⁴⁵, that can be associated with this new political reality. It suffices to recall Mircea Muthu's notes on the importance of Vasile Sebastian Dâncu's meditations from the point of view of psychosocial impact of advertising discourse, as well as the advertising messianism that he highlights, seen as a show mimicking a paradisiacal state through simulations of religiousness and the inducement of ideological technologic power.⁴⁶ But the expert in politic communication wants to focus on a paradigmatic shift in political behavior and in politic communication. Thus opens a new political era oriented towards

"a psychedelic politics where we experience an authentic catharsis, an emotional transfer between politicians and fans, during which both sides discover their similarities, discover that they belong in the same world, and they are made as one".⁴⁷

We find that political tribalism manifests itself on the one hand, within political groups, and on the other hand, among followers, the "fans", even if it's only as occasional adhesions and limited actions part of a strategic plan. What we can notice is the fact that seduction relations between political groups and their supporters acquires the dimension of an emotional effusion which can be associated to (camouflaged) mystical initiation. The experience presumed by the interaction between different groups generates a secularized form of religious experience. It is the result of an encounter governed by a diffused totemic conscience, materialized as totemism without totem, in an identification process where identity is marked by an eventful dissolution. But there is a recognition process in which self-identity is enhanced by the proximity of the other, due to the

reciprocal flux of emotional transfer. Vasile Sebastian Dâncu discovers that unable to identify with traditional values and ideologies, the follower of new forms of adhesion, establishes comfortably in the new social and political reality.

Notes

¹ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile. O patologie a politicii românești, de la Revoluție la Generația Facebook*, (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Școala Ardeleană, 2014). The volume mentions Mihaela Orban as supervisor, and Vasile George Dâncu as editor

² Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Patrie de unică folosință*, (București: Editura RAO, 2010). Among the research tools he contributed to for developing we can mention: National Banking Index; NEWS COP Instrument de analiză a știrilor de televiziune; News monitor; Indice reputațional al instituțiilor publice din România; etc.

³ Adrian Dinu Rachieru appreciated that in his time in Cluj, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu was "a beloved and followed coach for the sociology students in Cluj". Adrian Dinu Rachieru, *Despre intelectualii critici (Studiu de caz: Vasile Sebastian Dâncu)*, *Acolada*, no. 4 (april 2014): 21.

⁴ Migrating from the mountain to the city, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu feels that "our cities are cities of sand that can survive the test of time only through apparent materiality. Without our soul and without joint works in which we invest a part of our thoughts and energy, the cities will disintegrate after every generation". Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Poveștile, viața și moartea (50 de texte pentru 50 de ani)*, (Cluj: Ed. Eikon, 2013), 212.

⁵ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *O Românie interioară*, (Cluj: Editura Eikon, 2013).

⁶ Alexandru Vlad, "Sociologie asortată", *Familia*, no. 4 (april 2014).

⁷ Alexandru Vlad, "Sociologie asortată".

⁸ According to Adrian Dinu Rachieru, "Animated by good intentions, with a constructive vision, a lucid and thorough individual, with a touch of irony, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu is a voice deserving to be listened to". See Adrian Dinu Rachieru, "Despre intelectualii critici (Studiu de caz: Vasile Sebastian Dâncu)", *Acolada*, no. 4 (april 2014): 22.

⁹ Irina Petraș, "Poveștile unui sociolog", *Steaua*, no. 5-6 (787-788), (may-june 2014).

¹⁰ Ion Mureșan, "Calea inimii", *Observatorul Cultural*, no. 716 (march 2014).

¹¹ To understand the way Vasile Sebastian Dâncu proposes the merge of theory with practice, the following books are noteworthy: Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Audiența radio în România*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1998); Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Societatea civilă și administrația locală*, (Cluj: Metro Media Press, 1999); Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Comunicarea în managementul instituțional*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Wolphin, 1999).

¹² IRES, *Percepții privind religia și morală. Raport de cercetare, 5-7 august 2013*. <http://www.ires.com.ro/articol/238/august-2013---romania-credincioasa--perceptii-privind-religia-si-morală>. We emphasize that Vasile Sebastian Dâncu contributed – as project manager, independent expert or in his capacity as President of the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy, IRES – to more than 500 national research projects, including both theoretic and applied research. Moreover, he contributed to over 200 public reports. I would only mention a few studies from the social-cultural field: *Percepția publică a școlii*

românești (2010); *Percepții asupra sistemului medical din România* (2010); *Percepții privind examenul de bacalaureat* (2011); *Indicatori de percepție pentru sistemul educațional din România* (2011); *Indicatori de percepție pentru Expoziția din pavilionul României la a 54-a ediție a Bienalei Internaționale de Artă, Veneția 2011 – Performing History* (2011); *Percepții privind rearondările din cadrul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* (2012); *Bacalaureat 2012. Percepția cu privire la rezultatele obținute la examen și asupra sistemului educațional din România* (2012); *Percepții și atitudini ale românilor cu privire la munca în străinătate* (2013); *Atitudini și percepții cu privire la candidatura Clujului la titlul de Capitală Culturală Europeană în 2021; Bacalaureat 2013 – Un nou test de încredere în învățământul românesc* (2013); *România credincioasă. Percepții și atitudini privind religia și morala* (2013); *Percepții cu privire la funcționarea Justiției în România* (2013) etc.

¹³ One of the most important texts concerning the professionalization of journalism is proposed by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, "Ce nu este profesia de jurnalist. Scrisoare deschisă către absolvenții secției de Jurnalistică", in Vasile Sebastian Dâncu *Țara telespectatorilor fericiți. Contraideologii*, (Cluj: Ed. Dacia, 2000), 82-86. Among the research studies on media and mass communication that Vasile Sebastian Dâncu contributed, we can mention: *Barometru de brand* (2009); *Românii și Internetul. Studiu privind utilizarea Internetului în România și comportamentul internautic al românilor* (2011); *Nunta lui Borcea – între notorietate, audiență și percepție* (2011); *Atitudini și obiceiuri de consum media. Percepții privind CNA* (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014); *Evenimente mondene în România – Percepții și interes* (2011); *Cazul Șerban Huidu. Mediatizare și percepție publică* (2011); *Televremea Țiganilor. Percepții și atitudini cu privire la mediatizarea decesului regelui romilor Florin Cioabă* (2013).

¹³ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 7.

¹⁴ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 7.

¹⁵ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu references Michel Maffesoli, *Le temps des tribus. Le déclin de l'individualisme dans les sociétés postmodernes*, (Le Livre de Poche, 1991).

¹⁶ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 227.

¹⁷ Marty E. Martin, R. Scott Appleby, "Conclusion: An Interim Report on a Hypothetical Family", in Marty E. Martin and R. Scott Appleby, (eds.), *Fundamentalism Observed*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 814-833.

¹⁸ Aurel Codoban, „Comunicarea construiește realitatea”, Interview conducted by Timotei Nădășan, in Timotei Nădășan (coord.), *Comunicarea construiește realitatea. Aurel Codoban la 60 de ani*, (Cluj: Ideea Design & Print, 2009).

¹⁹ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 283.

²⁰ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 8-9.

²¹ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 13.

²² Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 280.

²³ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 10.

²⁴ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 11.

²⁵ As for the general characteristics of the Facebook Generation, Vasile Sebastian Dâncu notes: "it is disappointed, it no longer respects the old ways of legitimation, it opposes any type of authority and oscillates between apathy and street riots. From a sociological point of view, it is characterized by an intermittent political commitment, a frustrated emotional reaction". Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 13.

²⁶ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 15-16.

²⁷ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 91.

²⁸ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 92.

²⁹ See Adrian – Paul Iliescu, *Etică socială și politică*, (București: Ars Docendi, Universitatea din București, 2007), 139 and the following. One of the discouraging arguments made by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, in *Triburile*, page 153, is that in the Romanian political space “Nobody needs either a fair left or an honest right”. Nevertheless, “People need to believe in the honesty of politicians and in the uplifting spirit of the elected ones”, p. 287.

³⁰ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 92

³¹ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 289-294.

³² Ovidiu Voicu, „Pelerinajul lui Ponta”

<http://lacoltulstrazii.ro/2014/08/17/pelerinajul-lui-ponta/>

³³ Sandu Frunză, “Political Communication and the Median Space of Religious Experience”, *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, vol. 39 (2012): 176-186. See also Sandu Frunză, Mihaela Frunză, Claudiu Herteliu, “Philosophy, Ideology, Religion. An attempt to Understand What is Going on with Philosophy in the Romanian Educational System,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 8 issue 22 (2009): 129-149.

³⁴ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 210.

³⁵ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 293.

³⁶ G.S, “Apel disperat la Victor Ponta de la un bolnav țintuit la pat”, 05 Oct 2014, <http://www.antena3.ro/politica/apel-disperat-la-victor-ponta-de-la-un-bolnav-tintuit-la-pat-269032.html>

³⁷ G.S, “Apel disperat la Victor Ponta de la un bolnav țintuit la pat”, 05 Oct 2014.

³⁸ I do not wish to diminish the importance that various participants from the virtual world have granted to the involvement of Facebook activists in the electoral campaign. Communication in the virtual space becomes successful in various areas, from domestic challenges to church mission and catechization. A nuanced approach, from the religious perspective, belongs to Liviu Vidican Mancî. He argues that „for the parish priest and the parish, there is the possibility to use virtual space for a positive purpose”. See Liviu Vidican Mancî, “Facebook” în catehizare. Pledoarie pentru depășirea imobilității pastorale!”, <http://miculcatehet.blogspot.ro/2014/11/facebook-in-catehizare-pledoarie-pentru.html?pref=fb> To understand media impact on youth identity, see Damiana Gibbons, “Developing an Ethics of Youth Media Production Using Media Literacy, Identity, & Modality”, *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 4:3 (2012): 256-265.

³⁹ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 153.

⁴⁰ E-mail message received on November 13, 2014.

⁴¹ Mircea Eliade, *Eseuri. Mitul eternei reînnoțiri. Mituri, vise și mistere*, trans. by Maria Ivănescu and Cezar Ivănescu, (București: Editura Științifică, 1991), 134.

⁴² Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 201.

⁴³ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 11. See also Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Mitologii, fantasmе și idolatrie. Meditații și flashmob-uri*, (București: Editura RAO, 2011).

⁴⁴ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 285. This novelty becomes natural when we recall that one of the perspectives from the volume *Politica inutilă*, by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu was that politics and politicians must answer to public expectations.

⁴⁵ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Comunicarea simbolică. Arhitectura discursului publicitar*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1999).

⁴⁶ Mircea Muthu, "Imaginea publicitară", *Cultura*, nr. 460, (martie 2014). I have discussed on these interferences with religious imaginary in Sandu Frunză, *Advertising constructs reality. Religion and advertising in the consumer society*, (București: Tritonic, 2014). See also Ioan Hosu, „The Empire of Communication: Body, Image and Relation”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol. 11 Issue 31 (2012): 198-205.; Antonio Sandu, "Seductive Logos and Construction of Reality. A Semiotic Reading on the Volume: Symbolic Communication and Seduction, Author Sandu Frunza, Tritonic Publishing 2014", *Postmodern Openings*, Volume 5, Issue 4, (December 2014): 173-177; Iulia Grad, "Sandu Frunză - Symbolic communication and seduction", *Philobiblon*, Vol. XX, No. 1 (January-June 2015).

⁴⁷ Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile*, 286.

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