



CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDY SOFIA

CAS WORKING PAPER SERIES

Issue 1

Sofia 2007

This publication presents part of the research outcome of a project carried out at the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia under the title

Sofia Academic NEXUS

How to Think about the Balkans: Culture, Region, Identity

*Available in electronic form at
www.cas.bg*



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AUTOCHTHONISM AND NATIONAL ETHNOLOGY IN ROMANIA

1. What object for what history?

What are we referring to when we speak about the history of Romanian ethnology or anthropology? It seems easy, even obvious, but the very field(s) of what we are referring to by these academic labels do not just exist “out there” waiting to be approached and understood. As a matter of fact, „ethnology” was a term used only incidentally in Romanian professional jargon before 1990, whereas the term „anthropology” found use alone in the field of physical anthropology. What is more: beyond the institutional borders (which took time to emerge and achieve legitimacy), one might question where the limits of „ethnological thinking” lie in the broad context of the social thinking of early modern times, where the involved elites shared an interest in „the being of the people” and most approaches were conceived as „national sciences”?

Contrary to what one might think, there is not an easy and ready-made answer to this question. Let us then ask what we *should* refer to when we speak about the history of Romanian ethnology?

We might begin with the classical couple of folklore studies and ethnography, which both have a long and rich tradition in Romanian modern culture. The next step would be to link them in a mutually comprehensive approach, despite the general practice of presenting them independently in specific histories. In doing so, we could adopt the recommendation of an international conference of European “folk ethnographers” held in 1955 in Arnhem to use the general term of “national ethnology” when referring to all kinds of scholars of “folk culture” within a national realm (see Tamás, 1968).

But to frame the question in this fashion would be misleading to some extent. Folk studies and ethnography transcend the “academic” realm in their claim to have the last word on “the being of the people”, as Pârvan explicitly states when defining ethnography. Folkloric species and categories, as defined by

the different schools and approaches, have as their only common point “their documentary value, all the goods of the field [of folk studies, n.n.] being documents of popular mentality” (Bîrlea, 1969:7). Thus, the two disciplines share, in fact, their object of interest; but in doing so, they also share it with many other disciplines and approaches. Indeed, “the being of the people” is a general concern of the national elites during this entire period, most of them contributing in a more or less specialized way to its investigation. From philosophers to geographers, all have something to say on this core issue, and most have “trans-disciplinary” affiliations as philologists *and* folklorists, geographers *and* ethnographers, and so on. Should then “national ethnology” be a kind of over-arching concept, including all these discourses on “the being of the people”?

This conclusion would lead us into an opposite trap: the corpus of texts one would be required to consider would be almost unlimited. In fact, it would tend to cover the whole space of identity-building discourses. The history of Romanian ethnology would thus almost turn into a history of Romanian nation-building!

In attempt to narrow down the field of investigation to the appropriate texts, one could use a heuristic framework of the following kind: (Romanian) national ethnology is the empirical study of the present cultural expressions of the “being of the people”. Being but a poor definition of what national ethnology actually is, it may nevertheless help to state what it is not. National ethnology is not – or it should not include - philosophy and philosophical reflections about the “being of the people”; nor should it include a history of the people, even if it can be used to trace the historical development of a people; nor is it philology in its historical and/or exegetic tradition, even if deeply influenced by it. A history of Romanian national ethnology thus addresses the works and scholars inquiring into, presenting, and interpreting the “knowledge of the people” or “traditions preserved by the people”¹, which are considered to be representative of or just informative about the “being” of the people.

The second part of our definition of national ethnology requires further clarification. Here, we must shift our focus from *what* to *why* national ethnology was structured this way.

1 “As we know for sure now, the real definition of *Volkskunde* refers, since the XVIIIth century when the word appeared for the first time in the context of administrative statistics, to the ‘knowledge about the people’ (*Kentnisse über das Volk*) and not to ‘traditions preserved by the people’ (*Überlieferungen im Volk*)” (Brückner, 1987: 228). The last meaning appeared only later on and became mainstream thinking under the influence of “romantic literary ambitions and the emergence of a national historiography” (idem). From this point of view, sociology is interested in the „knowledge about the people”, starting with early „sociography”, while ethnology focuses mainly on the „traditions preserved by the people”.

We made Italy, now we have to make the Italians! This often quoted statement was true to a large extent in the Romanian case as well, and ethnology was called upon to assist in this process. It also helped to adopt and adapt – and was part and parcel of – a broader ideological view about humankind, history and society for the emerging Romanian nation. In doing so, it was fully what Stocking (1982) calls a “nation-building ethnology”.

This constitutive ideological commitment is different, however, from what Stocking calls “the lowest ideological common denominator of Euro-American anthropology”. “The ultimate basis for this common denominator of Euro-American anthropology– and by extension, of ‘international anthropology’ – is with all likelihood what Kenelm Burridge terms the ‘reach into otherness’ (Burridge 1973:6). This reflects a fascination with the external ‘other’ encountered during the expansion of modern Europe that has provided historically the lowest common denominator of Euro-American anthropology. (...) Serving as the ‘bad conscience’ of European colonialism, it has defended the capacities and the cultures of native peoples and called into question many unexamined ethnocentric assumptions of European ‘civilization’ – without, however, fundamentally questioning the fact of European domination, and perhaps in some ways functioning to sustain it.” (Stocking, op. cit.: 173-174)

When compared with this picture (of mainly an „empire-building anthropology”), Romanian nation-building ethnology proves to have gone in rather different directions. First, Romanian ethnology has never shared “the common denominator of otherness”; it is even misleading to speak about an “inner other”: the ethnologist and informant were not only of the same folk, but both also made claims to share the same cultural unity. With respect to the “ideological common denominator”, peasants were considered to be to some extent and for some time the “primitive within” of national ethnologies, as is the case for instance in France. Yet this was only true as an exception in the case of Romania. Ethnology in Romania almost never assumed a “physical and cultural inferiority” of the peasantry. This explains why Romanian ethnology never had a “bad conscience”: on the contrary, she loved and defended her native people from the beginning. Maybe this is one of the main reasons also why Romanian national ethnology never has questioned its epistemological and methodological foundations or was tormented by the political or ethical implications of its doings: it had a good conscience from the very beginning – and still has. What is more, the peasants loved her too – and still do.

These characteristics are deeply rooted in its nation-building status. Thus, *continuity* of the Romanian people and the *unity* of its culture were two main *political* goals brought together in and by the *scientific* idea of *tradition*, ethnology working at their *défense et illustration*. Observers and observed were sharing the value and legitimacy of this enterprise and became equally proud of its successes.

But in order for all these to be true and legitimate, an underlying ideology of the autochthonous had to be created and to be implicitly or explicitly shared by practitioner ethnologists. I would suggest to call this worldview, largely *Volksggeist* rooted, the *autochthonist ideology*. As underlying nation-building ethnological thinking and practice, it is largely complementary to what Françoise Paul-Lévy (1986) called the *primitivist ideology*, which informs early anthropological thinking and practice and, more generally, most of the dominant theories of modernity.

We can now formulate the following assumptions:

1. Romanian ethnology was born as a „nation-building ethnology” and for nation-building reasons. As such, its main political goals were a *défense et illustration* of the *continuity* of the Romanian people and the *unity* of its culture
2. In doing so, this „national ethnology” shared a (more or less) common *autochthonist ideology* with the other „national” sciences or academic approaches, at least in their early common history
3. The main theoretical and methodological vehicle to achieve its goal and build a disciplinary identity was the invention of *tradition*
4. *Autochthonism* and *tradition* thus mutually reinforce each other in the pursuit of a common national goal.

In discussing the history of the Romanian ethnology, one should thus start by investigating what was the (more or less) underlying “ideology”² these “ethnologists” shared with other “nation-builders” when framing their discourse, and how they built and used their disciplinary concern about tradition. The need to begin with this larger ideological and methodological question is also due to the fact that this has never been done. As Maria Todorova points out, in the entire Balkan area there was never really a post-national critique similar to the post-colonial critique the Occident experienced (Todorova, 1997).

Instead of tracing the history of the discipline(s), the methodological and theoretical developments and conflicts, the thematic diversity or convergences, etc., we will be interested in the underlying ideology and its disciplinary implications, explicitly or implicitly shared by most of the leading authors of Romanian “national ethnology” from its beginnings up to the present day

2 We are using the term “ideology” rather in the sense of what Mary Douglas (1986) refers to as the *cognitive* dimension of institutions or what Andre Petitat (1998) calls the “transcendence of the conventional”, i.e. the (system of) final principles, in which the legitimacy of social life – or of a given society – is rooted.

2. The Primitive and the Autochthonous

*He who gave man the gift of thinking had done so
together with the gift of language*

Herder

*We have not truly got rid of God if we still believe in
grammar*

Nietzsche

The *autochthonist ideology* is not a Romanian invention, but just one of the “alternative modernities” of Europe. Before trying to address the Romanian *autochthonist ideology*, let me then briefly sketch the broader story of the *autochthonous* and his playmate, the *primitive*.

The Primitive and the Primitivist Ideology

“Time’ as ‘time-in-itself’ has played a decisive role in laying the basis of sociology, providing the essential and privileged way of differentiating societies. (...) More precisely, we will show how sociology, at its very inception, needs the establishment and development of what I would like to call ‘a primitivist ideology’. This primitivist ideology is more the work of ethnologists than that of sociologists, given the disciplinary cleavage operative at the beginning of the 19th century, when the ‘primitives’ and not only the ‘savages’ became the object of a discipline in itself, that is, ethnology, replacing the debates over the state of society with an array of issues linked to the hierarchical classification of societies, based on a position related to the moment and the state of the origin and defined with respect to that particular moment or state.” (Paul-Lévy, 1985: 302-303) Nevertheless, the primitivist ideology also became the focus of sociologists through Auguste Comte and the construction of sociology as a science of “the most recent society of evolution” with an equivalence sign placed between “evolution” and “improvement”.

The organization of (social, cultural, political) differences on “the arrow of time” allows for their ordering without remainder according to the degree of closeness or remoteness to that origin of mankind, which is *the primitive*. It is the solution arising from a double, or a complementary tension: *Who are They* (the peoples of the New World who have most significantly fired the imagination and thinking of the old Europe)? And *who are We* (the modern Western, bourgeois, industrial society, unique in our resolve to be different)? After centuries of debate (and bloody in-fighting...), *They* ceased to be “savages”, that is, actually non-Us, or even non/sub-humans, and have become “primitives”: *They are Our* ancestors! The differences coexisting in

space are thus organized as a succession in *time*, which offers a solution to understand both *Them* and *Us* (and perhaps, more important, to legitimize *Our* uniqueness and superiority without excluding *Them* from the thus unified world of humanity).

Therefore, this evolutionary-historical vision, which we would rather broadly approach as a “primitivist ideology”, succeeds in achieving two master-strokes at once. Treating the differences among societies across the world as “ages of mankind” means: a) *to assert the unity of mankind* (all are human beings – there are no more “savages” or non-humans – and as such they all have the same “natural” rights as we do) and b) *to assert a common “growth” ideal* that is intrinsic to this humankind (if the differences are “ages of mankind”, this means that any component of humankind – any society – can “grow” according to its very “natural” law, the differences being only transitory, larger or smaller, steps towards the “maturity” of civilization, i.e., *Our* modern society, which thus becomes *Their* ideal).

The invention of *the primitive* and the “primitivist ideology” designed around it have thus become, to a certain extent, the Archimedean point of modernity, offering *coherence* and a *direction* specific to the social life of mankind as a whole. To various degrees, all classical theories of modernization share this ideology.

The Autochthonous and the Autochthonist Ideology

Although, with its countless variations and successive elaborations, this seems to have been a winning solution, it was not the only one. In a complementary – and to a great extent reactive – way, the same modernity also elaborated another way of thinking the difference, by ordering dissimilarities, we might say, according to the criterion of *space as space-in-itself*. From this perspective, the differences among human societies do not follow one another on the axis of time, but are arranged side by side along the coordinate of space. And this is so because, in one way or another, it has been so from the very “beginning”.

This is the most important “invention” of Herder, who shifted the problem from the realm of geography or biology to that of philosophy. Arguing against his master, Kant, and the entire Enlightenment school of thought, he postulated in his treaty on the origins of language that *He who gave man the gift of thinking had done so together with the gift of language* (Herder, 1772/1977). Diversity is thus original, placed by God in the diversity of languages and entailing, by virtue of the postulated simultaneity of language and thought, a diversity of human reason: each population speaking a given language will thus *ab initio* also be endowed with its peculiar reason, the famous *Volksgeist*. Translated into the proper terms of linguistics by Humboldt and later developed by Neo-Humboldtians, this idea will nourish *sui generis*

the origins of American anthropology through Boas and the “emic” study of American-Indian languages (Bunzl, 1996), up until the famous cultural relativism of Sapir or Whorf.

Language thus becomes the *consecrated* space of difference, which only later finds a territorial determination through the mapping of linguistic spaces, with the area of dissemination of a language or of an idiom forming the design criterion of the first “ethnographic atlases”.

The geographical space, the people inhabiting it and the language they speak will combine in various ways and to various degrees, to define and describe the spaces of difference – or rather a kind of *topos* or *topoi*, in the more ancient Greek meaning of *belonging to a “there”*. For Adolf Bastian, for instance, the founder of German ethnology, the particular *Völkergedanken* were the outcome of an interaction between universal *Elementargedanken* and local “geographical provinces”. In the same spirit – although different in certain respects -, Ratzel will propose in 1882 the concept of “ethnographic region” (*Ethnographisches Land*) and in 1898, his disciple, Frobenius, will launch on a brilliant career the concept of “cultural circle” (*Kulturkreis*). Developed by Schurtz, Graebner and the Vienna school, this idea will then cross the Atlantic, where in 1917 Clark Wissler will classify American Indian cultures into geo-cultural areas as well as propose the concept of “cultural pattern”, which in turn will witness a long history in American anthropology.

After its days of glory, the idea of cultural space will be discarded in Western Europe and the United States. In eastern and northern Europe, however, it will be used in drafting of national ethnographic atlases that will see the nation as a specific cultural space.

One can speak, I believe, in all these instances, of an *autochthonist*³ ideology, which regards spatial differences as many “spatial” individualities. Each space is organically linked to a generic and original space, which is endowed in different ways and to different extents with the defining characteristics of the environment, race and language. Yet this kind of spiritual geography is possible only under a specific understanding of history: instead of a sacred origin of the world, as was the case with all pre-modern societies, a human origin of history is set up; social life flows from this historical origin, thus becoming unhistorical. With a play on Weber, one could say that a *verzauberte Geschichte* takes the place of a relatively *entzauberte Welt*, where mastering of God is not entirely ruled out: this human origin of history is usually a divine

3 While the primitive is a modern invention, the autochthonous is not. Starting with the Giants/*Gegeneis* – „born from the Earth” – or Erechthe, the famous king of Athens that Homer presents as coming out of earth without any human genitors, ancient Greek mythology offers a whole repertoire of autochthonism and its political usages (see Detienne, 2003). Nevertheless, modern autochthonism cannot be considered as just a reiteration of the ancient Greek one.

gift⁴. The autochthonous space is thus constitutively a mystical time.⁵

The *primitive* and the *autochthonous* emerged as the main eponymous heroes of *difference* in modern European thought. Both stand for an origin, each thus founding a distinct series of ordering the differences: in the first case, a “weak” origin, placed at the beginning of humankind, from which the latter can and must distance itself consciously and militantly through its progressive evolution, gradually absorbing the differences into a unity at the “end of history”; in the second case, a “strong” origin of each separate social individuality, which each of them can and must re-produce, perpetuating the human socio-diversity Herder envisaged under the sign of Proteus. Social changes on the scale of mankind are also seen differently from these two opposing perspectives: either they fall within an entropic process of homogenization, as in the first case, or constitute a recurrent process of heterogenization, as in the second.

Behind the two generic ideologies of difference obviously lie fundamental and opposed political goals. Both are also embedded, of course, in larger legitimating power discourses. The “primitivistic” one founds the uniqueness in time of the western world– or, to be more precise, of its most “civilized” part. It sets itself as the finishing-line of human evolution. Primitivism presupposes the messianic pride and responsibility of the “civilized world” for being the ideal of the Other, and for promoting this ideal worldwide, until existing differences dissolve in the earthly paradise of the capitalist market or communist society. Autochthonism amends this hegemonic grandeur in the name of marginal or marginalized cultures, which are postulated as equi-valent, therefore, as equal in rights on the world stage. It thus promotes the complementary pride and responsibility of the ideal of the Self and of a perpetual plural world. Promoting uniqueness in space, autochthonism opposes the equality of co-existing cultures to the hierarchical vision of societies different in time, with Herder already tracing, in this respect and as pointed out by Louis Dumont (1983), the future rights of peoples and/or cultures.

4 There is a recurrent temptation in Romanian historiography – and historical imagery – to think that Romanians (as a people/nation) were born Christians, thus equating a political and a religious origin. Orthodoxy will accompany the definition of the nation till the present day.

5 The highly influential case of the brothers Grimm is instructive in this respect: „...the nostalgia of the brothers Grimm was oriented toward the origins of history. (...) Used in this sense, ‚historic‘ almost means ‚out of history‘. (...) It is obvious that this theory could be put to practice only by adoption or reduction. It became indispensable to ‚place‘ in a certain way this origin: in fact, Jacob Grimm was not interested just in myth, but in German mythology” (Bausinger, 1993: 41). Under these circumstances it is not surprising that „the work that played a primordial role in the development of *Volkskunde* was not entitled ‚History‘ (...) but *Mythology*.” (idem: 39)

3. *Autochthonism* in Romanian Culture

...disregarding the place and willing to start with a universal science is a wrong way.

Ernest Bernea (1937: 389)

Focusing on Romanian *autochthonism* does not suggest: 1) that there were not also other “worldviews”, more or less elaborated; 2) that there was just one homogeneous and permanent type of *autochthonism*. Nevertheless, for our purposes, the present essay will consider only the expressions of this dominant ideology.

a) A Historical Hypostasis: Nicolae Iorga

Iorga, who was also a powerful orator, formulated the idea of *autochthonism* in a concise way when speaking about the “sovereign land” (*p mîntul suveran*). As one of the three main factors explaining historical continuity, the *land* or *place* has nothing to do with what he calls “historical climatology”; nor is it reduced to economic resources. Its causal power is rather open and flexible, working through the directions of contact (mainly commerce) it promotes and its general “orientation” rather than “position”. Nevertheless, it is a lasting and defining influence: “the way of life of every people must be entirely harmonious with the supreme decisions of land. This land will impose the way to build, the lines and quality of traditional costume; due to its influences upon the organ of speech, it will modify sounds and contribute to the appearance of new dialects; a conduct, a local *habitus* will come out of all this, lasting through the hazardous and capricious vagabondage of races. Because the sovereign land, with its vicinities and its horizon, will have its will done.” (Iorga, 1944, quoted in Pop, 1999:220-221). The personality of a land thus hosts a diversity of historical facts that prove to be linked to each other in a historical continuity. From this vantage point, the Romania of his time is considered to be “just the re-embodiment, due to the will of the Carpathians and the Danube, of the imperial monarchy of the Dacians” (Ibid.). Place is thus a way of placing continuity, a way to trace the *longues durées*⁶ of history, and as such, a factor in-between ontology and methodology.

6 It is risky, I believe, to think that Iorga’s views anticipated in a way Braudel’s conception about the *longues durées* of history – as suggested by Adrian Pop (op. cit.) –, his approach being rather rooted in the 19th century claims of *continuity*.

In a quite *rationalist*⁷ approach, Iorga also stresses the determining role of *ideas*, “that infinitely complicated thing from which perpetual movement starts and which is called human thinking: idea, feeling and instinct all together” (Ibid.:219), “able to oppose the calling of the most obvious realities” (Ibid.:222). Yet, as we will see, these *ideas* have to be “organic”, i.e. shared in a real society, and not *ideologies* imposed from above on such historical realities.

Together with *place*, *ideas* form a “skeleton” of continuity that enables the historian to fill in the gaps of historical documentation with comprehensive hypotheses. How is this possible? – Iorga wonders, rhetorically. It is possible because “at a certain moment one sees a development that reached a certain degree which is to be found in historical records. This development must come from somewhere. Human civilizations develop along certain logical lines. Through the development of certain civilizations one can see what these lines are or how a chain is formed. If one has a certain prudence and an inner sense of historical realities, one can unite shapeless fragments into a hypothesis” (Iorga, 1928/1987:86).

This continuity is not just the object of a *poietic* historical reconstruction, but a social reality too: “the past is living in the present”, so that Iorga could claim that “we [the Romanians] too still feel in a Thracian and Macedonian way” (Ibid.:79-80). As the last – if not final – term of this living continuity, Romanians may thus be more empathic with the “forms through which Thracian and Macedonian barbarism has been perpetuated up to this day” (Ibid.:79).

Iorga points here to one of his core hypotheses about national history as rooted in the social life of “free peasants”: “the class which created the State in direct connection with the national idea mediated by democracy, the class which for the first time created a kingdom in the Arges mountains, that peasant class was, beyond any doubt, free.” (Iorga, 1922/1992:210). This free population, with a small hierarchy if any at all, choosing its legitimate leaders, was already a “nation”, having a primal kind of “nationalistic instinct” that managed at a certain moment in history to create “a country for a nation” (Ibid.:212). Thus, Iorga concludes, “it is not our nation that was created by a State, but our State that was created by a nation. France, as large, beautiful and proud as it is, is still a country made out of several nations. It is the form of state that blended these nations together and made it capable of a unitary development that made France what it is today. In our case the State is a creation of the nation” (Ibid.:209). Iorga’s approach to the nation-state relation highlights a much

7 We are using the term „rationalism” in the sense of Leach’s methodological distinction between rationalism and empiricism (Leach, 1976). “According to the predilections of the author we find that special stress is laid either on the structure of ideas [rationalism], or on the structure of society [empiricism]” (Ibid.:3), the authors being more interested in what people say, in the first case, and in what people do, in the second.

broader concern of Romanian nation-builders: lacking a strong State as for instance in France, which is able to fuse together different “nations” and thus play the role of an engine for national unity, one solution is to consider the nation as already present. “Evidence” of this could be produced by discursive means, proving the continuity in time and space of this “nation”. Continuity had to be considered as good in itself⁸. The “Peasant State”, of which the politician Iorga was dreaming, was a renewal and re-empowerment of this “good continuity”.

b. A Geographic Hypostasis: George Vâlsan and Simeon Mehedinți

“What a nice word, ‘moșie’ (estate)! Of course it’s derived from ‘moși’ (ancestors), but it still refers to the land. It blends these two elements into one. So that a man should neither forget that his ancestors are all of this land, nor that this land has been humanized through the labor and successive death of predecessors. This word supports the right of the existing owner from the darkness of time” (Vâlsan, 1919/1992, p.29).

The country’s territory is made up of national elites as an “estate”, blending these elements (people and nature, time and space), as Vâlsan put it, into one body, the living being of the country. The “country” exists only through this mutual predestination and consecration of the people and territory, which accomplish themselves only in a profound concurrence with each other— more often than not, with God’s blessing. The prudent and subtle George Vâlsan ventured to say, as a geographer, that “there is some exaggeration” (Ibid., p.31) in Michelet’s assertion that “the bird is like its nest; and man is like the homeland”. Wary of what “was oft’ and a bit superficially called ‘geographical fatalism’” (Ibid.), Vâlsan, on the other hand, assumes as a noble task, the decoding and validation of the Romanian nation’s geographical individuality: “The duty of the present-day geographer, when studying a country, is to highlight its real individuality and to distinguish it from other neighboring individualities.” (Ibid., p.33) The universal vocation of geography as a science must be articulated with its particular, i.e. its national mission: “There can be a geography of one region, which is overlapping with a national consciousness” (Ibid.:31), namely, a “localized geography, a *chorography*” (Ibid.). This “chorography” thus becomes a *national* and *militans* geography, in somewhat the same manner in which Gusti spoke about a *Romanian* and *militans* sociology.

8 But continuity in itself is not always perceived as sufficient. The subject of this continuity, the nation or the people, is frequently considered as being in a „vegetative” state, weak, „dormant”, and thus needing the state to turn it into a real nation. Nevertheless, even when the state presents itself as „the precondition for the creation of the nation” rather than the other way around (cf. Lazar, 2002:108), it still needs to perceive itself as the „achievement of a collective destiny” (Ibid.), thus being still rooted in continuity.

Yet what is the “real individuality” of the Romanian country all about? Here is one possible illustration, among others: “In our University’s Institute of Geography we have inherited plaster relief maps that portrayed the land of the Hungarian State as if it had been predestined by God Himself to be under one rule – Hungarian, by all means: a flat plain, surrounded everywhere by mountains. (...) But if the relief map had been expanded by another three or four degrees to the East, the Hungarian student’s admiring gaze would have seen something else; namely, that besides the Hungarian wonder, and from its very elements, God wrought yet another wonder: a tall citadel, surrounded by mountains and bounded by plains held together by three major rivers. Here is a truth that the national Hungarian consciousness did not see. Now it must see it, and think about it. What is better and which is stronger: a plain bound by mountains that holds in bondage many peoples or a tall citadel amidst the mountains that is bound by plains, and inhabited by a single people in an overwhelming majority?” (Ibid.:27-28) The country’s territory is thus less a political matter than one of *natural* right, “predestined by God Himself” and consecrated, as I said, through the concurrence of a perennial geography and population, which lend the country its irreducible “individuality”. And that individuality, through its very nature, can only be dismembered at the risk of death.

This reciprocal consecration of a geographical space and population explains why the age of a people is not so much linked to its demographic continuity along the meanderings of history, as it is to the duration of its dwelling in the same space. Upon this foundation, Mehedinți rejects the Roman conquest as the inaugural moment of the Romanian people and asserts that “the Romanians are one of the oldest peoples of Europe” (Mehedinți, 1928/1986:192): “First of all, far from being a young people, beginning with the Dacian war, the Romanian people’s origins lie in the remote past. Compared to all its neighbors, it is the only people which does not know of having had a homeland anywhere else than on the land where it lives today” (Ibid.). “Thus, starting from new premises, we must revise our ideas about the life/living being of our people,” Mehedinți concludes. And to do so, “we first need the precise inventory of autochthonous civilization from the most ancient times until today. To an anthropologist like Pittard, it seems as if nothing prevents us from tracing the continuity of the population linked to the Carpathians back to the Neolithic Period. Research into the Paleolithic Period has been expanded with positive results from the Dniester and the Black Sea to the Tisza plain. When we have before our eyes the entire series of the documents of civilization linked with the land we dwell on, only then will we be able to draw a scientific parallel *between our life and the life of others*” (Ibid.:194, italics mine).

The people is thus autochthonous by definition and autochthonism defines the people. Even when the age of this autochthonism is lost in the dawning days of the Paleolithic Period where Mehedinți, prudently no longer speaks

about the people, but about “the continuity of the population”, this ancient population nevertheless, mysteriously belongs to “our life” as distinct from “the life of others”.

This vision would not be complete if it did not reach up to the ontological, that is, to a certain fundamental idea of man. And the man of autochthonism is the native, as the only real. In this way, Mehedinți opposes, for instance, “the conception of an abstract child, that is, a being that would be more or less the same in all the countries of the world”⁹, with which “many pedagogues” operate. And, Mehedinți says, “such a child exists nowhere”. As such, “the education of a people’s youths can only begin with the concrete-child, as is presented by its ethnic environment, laden for good or for bad with all the legacy inherited from its ancestors” (Ibid.:197-198). And the conclusion is categorical: “...there can be no pedagogy without autochthonism” (Ibid.:200).

Mehedinți and Vâlsan are the founders of scientific geography in Romania. Their autochthonistic visions are far from being unique or excessive in those times. On the contrary, they were carefully structured in an elaborate chain of reasoning, yet elaborated from a strategic perspective shared in various ways and to various degrees by a majority of national elites. This stake-cum-mission leads their actual geographical reflection on a trajectory that adds up geography-chorography-ethnography-ethnopedagogy into a coherent and consistent system.

c) A Sociological Hypostasis: Dimitrie Gusti

“...the attentive observer of the development of social science over the past few decades will easily find, despite all the pluralism of contemporary scientific thinking, a fundamental problem, common to all the sciences, which could be taken as a starting point for their unity. It is *the problem of the whole and the total (...)*”(Gusti, 1943/1999:8, italics mine). As a longstanding problem, “we might say that the slogan of contemporary science”, Gusti says, “would be a ‘return to Aristotle’” (Ibid.). “Therefore,” Gusti concludes, speaking in the name of sociology – “the true Real is the Social Whole” (Ibid.:13). Hence, Gusti postulates an integral and consistent holism, which we will try to briefly present as follows.

The basic tenet that should be invoked in the opening of Gusti’s system is what he called “the law of sociological apriorism”: „the individual is social not because he is living in society but because society lives in the individual” (Gusti, 1941, p.54). It is important to note that this enunciation

9 “There is no ‘man’ in ‘mankind’ from the viewpoint of a serious analysis. Man is to be found only in his family, in his nationality,” Aurel C. Popovici also said in 1910. In various enunciations, this idea was fairly common during that age.

is an almost faithful reproduction of the way in which Durkheim defined “collective consciousness” as being “the society which lives and acts within us” (Durkheim, 1893/2001:146). Whereas for Durkheim there is a genuine and dramatic “dualism” between collective and individual consciousness, generating two successive forms of solidarity (mechanical and organic), for Gusti there is rather a “monism”, thus eliminating from the very beginning the *dramatic character* of human evolution (and actually of modernity), without thereby neglecting the dynamics of social change.

This society which lives within us was conceived by Gusti as “social units”, which are identified with social reality: „social reality shows itself as concrete units” (Gusti, 1941:30). Sociology as a science of social reality will thus find its object of study already given in a „natural” way: „The delimitation can be done in a natural way following the indications of reality itself: the sociological monograph concerns the study of concrete social units whose principles of delimitation correspond to their organic and holistic nature” (Ibid.:27). However, this does not mean that social units are static entities. “A social unit is not only a simple existence, but an ascent, an ennoblement, a breakthrough, an empowerment, an act of creation, a process of salvation and emancipation” (Ibid.:14). Sociological knowledge thus finds its militant role starting from this, because, for Gusti, “getting to know existence means to ensure its direction in life, to enlighten, rejuvenate and enrich it” (Ibid.).

Gusti classifies these social units into three main categories: *communities*, *institutions* and *groupings*. At one extreme, community is defined by „an entire integration of the life of individuals, the annihilation of the individual will” (Ibid.:66). At the other end, the social grouping is thought to be based on „the free will of the individuals”, and is characterized by its „conventional or contractual nature” (Ibid.). We should take note of the way in which Gusti actually reintroduces, through this classification, Durkheim’s collective-individual “dualism”, but giving the latter a secondary and derived role. In the same fashion, “social groupings”, linked with the expression of individual consciousness (respectively, of the will, with Gusti), are presented in a way much more akin to Tönnies’ rather than Durkheim’s vision.

This position becomes more evident when Gusti explicitly refers to the individual: “A society is necessarily made up of individuals (...). At first sight, the individual seems to be society’s last and irreducible element. But science cannot stop here” (Gusti, 1941:53). And Gusti will try to go further, in order to avoid this unscientific “illusion”.

Let us then reconstruct Gusti’s reasoning from this perspective. Sociological apriorism can also be formulated in the following way: “There are no individuals outside the society, nor is there a society without individuals. Yet there is a social outside any experience” (Gusti, 1943/1999:18). This *aprioric* social “outside any experience” is manifest through “concrete” social units,

which are thus the only truly “real” ones, beyond its constitutive components. “Therefore, in a social unit there is no question about who has an exclusive value, the individual or society, as the individual is organically comprised within the social whole, and thus a social unit is a living plurality, while the plurality of individuals is a living unit. *Unitas multiplex*” (Ibid.:21). Set on an equal footing with society, the individual remains, however, subordinated to the social unit: “An individual can participate in several social units, without changing their nature. This means that the change affects the individual himself, to the extent to which he takes part in one or the other of the social units and that the latter have their own principle of organization, irreducible to the component individuals” (Gusti, 1937/1995:4). Historical reality is also read from this perspective: “The historical event is a social element, even if it is expressed by a single individual, because for it to be historical it needs to spread into an ever wider circle of individuals, and thus to assume a character of *collective consciousness*, under the aspects of: language, custom, tradition, institutions” (Gusti, 1943/1999:17, italics mine). The same is true in the political realm of the state: “The political, mechanical, libertarian atomism, characteristic of the scientific, sociological atomism which exclusively extols the individual, was opposed by a mechanical, centralizing and just as exaggerated collectivism, which exclusively extols the collectivity, by eliminating the individuals. (...) The true structure of the State cannot be, however, either individualistic alone, or only centralizing, but must be attuned to the Laws of the social units” (Ibid.:21).

We could therefore say that it is not society that is prior and superior to the individual, but that the social unit is prior and superior to both terms, because it brings them together and defines them reciprocally in its concrete reality.

Beyond the success or validity of all these efforts, what is spectacular is their attempt to dissolve antinomies and discontinuities, and thus to *de-dramatize modernity* as tension and/or gap. Gusti’s world seems to call for consistent actions, rather than for consistent choices.

Yet this general and systematic vision constitutes the necessary foundation for the lifelong task which Gusti assumed: the construction of a *national* and *militans* sociology. To that effect, “D. Gusti does nothing but consistently apply, to the most minute detail, his system of sociology, hence of general theory of society, to one of the most important historical variants of social life, which is *the nation*” (Herseni, 1980:101). Let us now follow the “applied” part of Gusti’s sociological vision.

First of all, if the nation is only “one of the most important historical variants of social life”, then “the sociology of the nation” cannot be other than a “variant” of sociology. Indeed, Gusti explicitly considers the sociology of the nation as a „sociology-in-need”, the kind of approach Romanian reality demanded, and which was entirely legitimate in its purposes, without pretending to be the

„real sociology”, as he puts it, but only a „new branch” of it. The reason for it is contextual but mandatory: „Positive science, i.e. oriented toward facts, cannot ignore the hierarchy of problems imposed by reality itself. As far as the nation stands as the most important form of modern life, the science of society, sociology, has to build itself too, first of all as a science of the nation” (Gusti, 1938, p. 24).

Postulated as the (local) object of (present) sociology, the nation will be imbued with a specific ontological dignity, yet one which would seem to belong to it, which would define it independently from the interested consideration of the sociology of the nation. From the very beginning, the general sociological apriorism, for which man is social inasmuch the society lives within him, will have its particular pendant in the fact that “the nation lives (...) in each individual” (Gusti, 1919/1995:33). Although Gusti does not use this term, we might thus also speak of a “national apriorism”, derived from the general “sociological apriorism”.

According to Gusti’s system, then, the nation will be a “social unit”; but – and this point is crucial -, it will be considered as a social unit of the type of the “community”, and not that of the “social grouping”, of the same nature as the family, for instance and especially, closely related with the village.

The national community will then be heightened in rank, being considered to be “the only self-sufficient social unity” (Gusti, 1943/1999:15). In this quality, the nation also becomes “a central purpose”: “As early as 1774, Herder wrote that ‘Each nation holds the centre of happiness in its midst, like any ball its centre of gravity’” (Gusti, 1943/1999:15).

Furthermore, as a self-sufficient social unit, the nation does not – or not yet¹⁰ – have another super-imposed unit above it: “Below the nation it is not the humanity that is revealed as a self-sufficient world, but humanity as the totality of nations, as a harmony of national beings (...)” (Gusti, 1938:26). On the contrary, it integrates – or should integrate – in a harmonious way all the social sub-units which are part of it and to which it confers a common meaning.

In accordance with the special role which he assigns to will in the establishment and functioning of social units, Gusti also considers the nation as “a voluntary creation, since, unlike the people, which is a natural ethnic

10 This nation-centered outlook is to be understood in the context of the young “Greater Romania’s” political and social problem at that time. From the very beginning, Gusti accepts the “framework” of humanity, but only as an ideal possibility rather than a real fact. As an ideal, he even states in 1934 that “internationalism is all about the close collaboration among nations, with the unspoiled freedom of their specific productive genius, to build the most superior social unit, i.e., mankind” (Gusti, 1934:189). With consolidation of the Romanian nation, he changed the accents of his approach and even proposed, beginning with 1946, a project of a “Social and Economic Institute of the United Nations”, thus shifting his approach from nation to nations.

community, the nation is achieved through a constant effort, through the will to be, to live and to struggle. (...) It is not what nature made it, but what it strives to be, what results from the ceaseless effort of those composing it” (Gusti, 1937/1995:4). From this perspective, Gusti will enthusiastically salute Renan’s famous formula regarding the nation as “an everyday plebiscite”, which, taken in itself, seemed to comfort his voluntaristic vision: “a nation is what it wills to be”, Gusti states, but within “a certain framework, in keeping with a given national character.” At this point Gusti departs from the “French model” in order to discover again, through the lenses of his system, the autochthonistic logic: “As a rule, a nation develops on a certain soil, the soil of the homeland. The links born from this settlement are quite varied. Some peoples conquered the land after their habits and their views of life were formed, leaving their birthplace, the cradle of their formation. That is why the land does not express them, nor do they express the land. Other peoples distanced themselves, through a subsequent development, from their geographical environment, becoming alienated from their own civilization under the influence of imported civilizations. In both cases, there is a discrepancy between the environment and the nation, and civilization becomes an inorganic reality, alien to the geographical background in which it develops. Yet there are also peoples that are born in a certain land continue an ancient, immemorial life, which grows as an extension of the geographical landscape, and whose habits and civilization leave in turn an imprint upon the land. Such is, for instance, the Romanian nation. The Romanians are a Carpathian people, and the Carpathians are a Romanian world. Without that connection, this time essential and organic, between the land and our people, we cannot understand anything from the present history and civilization of the Romanian nation” (Gusti, 1937/1995:5). In consequence, “a science of the nation is not possible without thorough research of the relationships between the nation and the land on which it is sheltered” (Ibid.).

The theoretical vision of the continuity of social processes in application to the concrete object of analysis generates the following thesis: “Social progress in its entirety is summed up by the evolution of these two *degrees* of social units: in creating from the *potential* nations, which are the primitive peoples, *actual* nations.” (Gusti, 1919/1995:35, italics mine) Progress is thus only a problem of “degree” and a process of “actualization”: *Werde was du bist!*¹¹

At this stage, “the sociology of the nation” continues with the “*militans* sociology”, because this self-development or actualization must be channeled through the clarification of “the national ideal” and the orientation of “the national will” in accordance with it. This is due to the fact that “the ideal

11 “Gusti incorporated Goethe in his intellectual and moral outlook, in the conduct of his life, in his way of thinking, so that, in order to seek his advice and get answers, he would not open the books each time, but will find them given in his own thinking.” (B dina, 1968:16)

is not always clearly envisaged and the nations will often strive for foreign ideals, unfit for their nature. That is why thorough research of the national ideal is mandatory, a problem which makes up the ethics of the nation. So far, the only reliable source for an ethics of the nation was national history. More in-depth knowledge is still required that can only be achieved through a science of current national reality, i.e., the science of the nation. This builds the foundation for the eventual establishment of the true national ideal, which will no longer represent a form of alienation or departure from the historical trajectory of the nation, but a maximum development towards fulfillment, of all its natural capacities” (Gusti, 1937/1995:15). Sociology will thus offer its services to the nation, and through them the nation “will be brought to self-awareness and will realize what makes it distinctive from other nations. This knowledge will become the basis for healthy nature and national policy” (Gusti, 1941:40). Without being limited to this, *militans* sociology is thus first of all a pedagogy of the nation, which is, essentially, a kind of *ethno-maieutics* apt to selectively and electively “actualize” the “potentialities” of the Romanian people.

After all this, it can no longer come as a surprise that the defense of the rights of nations, vehement especially in the years around World War I, was considered as being primary and having priority over the rights of individuals. „Beginning with the French Revolution, the whole political world speaks about human rights as eternal rights, part of all the constitutions (...). When will the time come to consider the rights of nations, which are the condition of human rights, as eternal as the latter ones? Indeed, what is the individual alone, isolated, without the nation he belongs to? Nothing! The nation is the substance of the soul that gives cultural legitimacy to the individual. (...) Real life is national life; individual life is evanescent and permanently changing, it has value as far as it is life through and for the nation. Is it then not strange that people talk about the eternal rights of man when one should consider first the eternal rights of nations?” (Gusti, 1915/1995:125-126) Here is once again, clearly and militantly formulated, a thesis which was only outlined, as we have seen, by Herder. Beyond this, we recognize in all that has been said above, a few of the defining features of the autochthonistic ideology, even if in Gusti’s writings man’s “existence in space” is much more nuanced and more dynamic – and emphasized more in the applied “sociology of the nation” than in his general theoretical system.

3. The Chart of Autochthonism and the Invention of Tradition

All these authors are different in many respects. Their political involvement and theoretical backgrounds are different too. And yet, all of them are members of the large intellectual family of autochthonism in as far as they share, *sui generis*, the same framework of ideas. Thus we can group them together

under the heading of autochthonism, in their attempt to “make sense” out of the still challenging circumstance of “being Romanian”. “On what realities do we ground French consciousness” – Maurice Barrès questioned in 1899, only to answer with an autochthonism *à la française* rooted the “land and blood” of France (see Detienne, 2003). It is to this very framework of autochthonism “Romanian style” that we would now like to proceed.

But is this a legitimate approach? Can we speak about a shared framework if it is not present in any of its individual expressions? I believe we can, in as far as we search upstream toward what makes this framework a meaningful ideological system and not downstream toward the way each author has emphasized one aspect or another of this system or has enacted it in the daily social and political life. I believe we also should, since autochthonism is a system, which makes sense as a system, so that one cannot subscribe to just one of its parts without finally getting involved, to some extent at least, in the overall type of rationality it presupposes. It represents the dominant “ideal type” of rationality shared in spite of the divergent readjustments due to changing contexts or personal power stakes. Autochthonism as ideology is neither un-historic, nor non-conflicting, but instead a *longue durée* phenomenon. And it has its genuine rationality, it “makes sense” – to some extent at least – to its believers. It cannot be just dismissed as “irrational” but it can neither be overlooked in its rational consequences.

In the case of Romania (but, of course, not specifically and not only in this case), the social, economic, and political interests at stake in defining and defending the new “national” subject of belonging engendered, as we have seen, an autochthonous definition of belonging/exclusion, that seems to have been the best available political solution in the context of Romanian nation-building. This endeavor to found the nation had to be embedded in a larger field of more or less independent but convergent ideas, which together shape what may be called the *autochthonous ideal type of rationality*. Thus understood, autochthonism claims to be rooted in the “real” social life of the people and thus promote the “true” ideals of human life. In this respect, it is a *Weltanschauung* or a kind of “theodicy” in the sense of Max Weber, which gives meaning to life. Our brief “reconstruction” addresses this issue in a way irreducible to –if not independent of – autochthonist social theories and autochthonist policies deriving from or claiming their belonging or dissidence to it. We may map it out by the following main characteristics:

1. Sociological apriorism. We use Gusti’s expression to name the grounding principle of man as a social being and not just as a being living in society. The different critiques of individualism and contractualism¹² are usually

12 Even explicit contractualist claims of Enlightenment intellectuals were rooted in such a kind of principle. As noted by Vlad Georgescu, in this period “the general opinion is that the social contract was adopted because man was by nature a social being” (Georgescu, 1971: 88).

rooted in this principle. When applied to politics, it engenders *collectivism*; when applied to methodology, it produces *holistic* approaches, which usually address *community* as their object of concern. It is useless to say that such a general view is anti-individualistic.

2. Particularism. The “society which lives within us” – according to Gusti’s phraseology– is a *particular* society¹³, not humanity *in general*, which, from this point of view, is not “real”. Such a particularistic view is not prone to be universalistic, even though it does not deny some types of universally shared values and goods.

3. Organicism. The particular existence is “real” because it is *natural* – and insofar as it remains natural –, and opposed to the *artificial* general norms of mankind (or those of any rejected Other, starting with the Ottomans).¹⁴ All its components are “naturally” bound to each other.

4. Localism. This particular society is a society placed in a specific locality. Localism here means *placing the particular in space*. Thus, the individual of this society is also placed in a specific locality, belonging to the *topos* in which he is born. Localism may be embodied in *nationalism* when and if the nation is perceived as the main social *topos*. Nevertheless, the ideal of localism remains a kind of *federalism*, where a harmonic diversity of autonomous local societies is given. In this sense, localism is not intrinsically chauvinistic – even if xenophobia usually emerges from it.

5. Traditionalism. This particular society is not only a society placed in a specific locality; it is placed from its very origin (or, even more so, its placement is its origin): the *autochthon* is also an *aboriginal*. Thus understood, traditionalism is a *tracing of the particular in time*. The (local) past is thus a defining dimension of current society due to the *continuity* of (local) past and present. The present is thus, in a defining way, the legacy of the past, or, to put it the other way around, a mythical past (sometimes blessed by God Himself is the legitimating time of a present space or territory. A continuity of a population over as many centuries as possible, identified as *the* people or *the* nation, was the main legitimacy of state-building as enacting this population in its true and ever-lasting rights.

13 Tracing back the roots of the conservatism of the *Volkskunde*, Bausinger identifies a main source in the „discovery of the particular (*das Eigentümliche*), closely bound by Leibniz to his universalistic conception. The frequently quoted sentence concerning a “pre-established harmony” of the world reflects an organic principle: the proper and indubitable interdependence of the parts grounds the intrinsic right and value of the particular, the individual, the spatial and temporal singular” (Bausinger, op. cit.: 19).

14 Starting with Cantemir, who speaks about „*lex naturae*”, the references to natural rights were mainly used in a polemic political context: “the writers tried, indirectly, to supply a theoretical justification of their anti-Ottoman and anti-Phanariot attitude and point out (...) the incompatibility between foreign domination and the natural laws of development of society” (Georgescu, op. cit.: 88-89).

6. Organic development. According to this understanding of history as continuity, actual changes are necessarily rooted in this continuity: any kind of split or shift with respect to the past affects the existence of society in the present. According to the organic approach to society, these actual changes must be spread harmoniously over the organic body of society. In as far as the autonomous development of man is the modern “rule of the game”, autochthonism locates this autonomous development in the *real, local* and *traditional* society, where, as a *continuous* process, the past forms a bridge with the present reality to attain a future.¹⁵

7. Rationalism. Even if not necessarily linked with autochthonism, rationalism¹⁶ is privileged as the main methodological choice.¹⁷

8. Social “Bildung”. Modernity (and modernization) may be seen as an uplifting in this continuous process, from its *natural* to its *conscious* stage.¹⁸ At this level, the development of man in his real society is (also) the result of a social pedagogy, a kind of “ethno-maieutics”, which brings to the surface of social acting hitherto unknown or dormant capacities.

Sharing with other nation-building elites this *ideological* „autochthonist chart”, ethnology was also required to forge its own *scientific* legitimacy. It did so by inventing tradition, i.e. by interpreting the *social facts* as *traditional facts*.

Even if largely overlapping, “traditional facts” are not just facts of tradition, i.e. social facts of a “traditional” society; they are methodological (and not only ideological) constructions. As such, they could be defined as present observable facts and artifacts expressing the worldview of *autochthonous* people. The two main notions of continuity and unity are thus approached and find a creative solution.

First, the subject of these traditional facts is a kind of ideal type, bridging *ab originem* beliefs and behaviors with present ones which are linked together

15 As a policy-making rule, the idea of organic development is deeply rooted in Romanian modern culture. Its best-known expression belongs to Titu Maiorescu. But the idea that development is continuous and not discontinuous, that there is no future without a past, was first stated by Alecu Russo (1840, 1851, 1855), then by the prince Barbu Stirbei (1855) and Al. Moruzi (1861) (Vlad Georgescu, 1991). With considerable differences, major Romanian representations of progress may be linked to organic evolutionism of a Spencerian kind, and are frequently used as counterarguments to theories of revolution (Pop, op. cit.). “Traditionalism” and “organic development” are thus two complementary approaches to designing social change.

16 See note 7

17 In 1845, Mihail Kogălniceanu raises the question concerning “what is the development of a society?”, when he states: “if we would answer that it is the development of its ideas, we would say an evident truth” (Kogălniceanu, 1845/1967: 127). Almost a century later, Eugeniu Speranția, for instance, will explicitly state that “society is a fact that happens in the mind; its existence is an idea” (Speranția, 1939: 501). Empiricism is dismissed – or largely suspect!

18 Here, Vasile Pârvan opposes „ethnographic” and „popular” culture to „national” and „creative” culture, claiming that the mandatory shift from the first to the second as „the duty of our times” (Pârvan, 1920).

by works of tradition. Traditional facts are not just present end-products of the historical process of tradition, but recurrent expressions of this process. As landmarks of traditional legacies throughout time they are thus timeless: *eternity was born in the village* – Lucian Blaga poetically exclaims, just overemphasizing what has become a common sense representation.

This implies further that: a) not all social facts are traditional facts, expressing the authentic worldview of an autochthonous people; there is and has to be a *selection* – and what ethnology has chosen *not* to be “traditional” is extremely telling too¹⁹; b) traditional facts do not find their full meaning in a functional whole of contemporary society²⁰, but as *survivals* of some original models or *Urtex*te; the present is thus read through the past model²¹; c) as selective survivals of an initial causal model, traditional facts are value-laden facts, which express the *authentic* worldview of an autochthonous people. Finally, traditional facts are objectifications of the continuity of an autochthonous people. “In a very real sense, the attempts to reconstitute *Urtex*te expressed metonymically the programmes of national regeneration they were intended to serve” (Herzfeld, 1996:236).

On the other hand, these traditional facts are common to all autochthonous people, i.e. their “natural” territory is the *ab originem* space of their nation. The only context of what ethnologists will observe and collect in different particular villages can be said to be, in fact, the general national context. This also means that this ethnology is ethnology *in* the village rather than *of* the village – in fact, an ethnology *of the nation done in the village*. The idea of cultural unity of the nation is thus well served too.

Having traditional facts as its very object of concern, the Romanian national ethnology serves its nation-building goals, and is implicitly or explicitly rooted in the dominant autochthonist nation-building ideology. As already stated, autochthonism and tradition were mutually reinforcing each other during the nation-building process. They have to be mutually questioned too in order to engage in a post-national critique of Romanian ethnology.

19 There is not an ethnological interest in sexual practices or licentious jokes, for instance, and one will never see a peasant’s toilet in a peasants’ museum.

20 As for Tylor, who recommends the “dissection” of culture into fine “details” according to systematic classifications like botanists or zoologists (Tylor, 1871/2000: 29), the first step of ethno-folkloristic research is also taxonomical. Traditional facts must be classified appropriately and independent of their current social context.

21 Similarities and dissimilarities or, better, a kind of ambiguous relationship, exists with Tylor’s doctrine of cultural survivals. Methodologically, surviving traditional practices are used to trace their living heritage. However, this does not mean they are ideologically interpreted as belonging to a primitive or former stage of evolution: few ethnologists – if any – would conclude that such traditional behaviors or beliefs would place the peasant close to „the negro from South Africa” as Tylor did. Such traditional practices address only the issue of *continuity* and not that of *evolution*. Some elites take express periodic outbursts of modernist revolt. In the name of the 1940 generation, for instance, Constantin Noica writes: “We no longer want to be the eternal peasants of history!” (Noica, 1943/1989: 21)

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