

## **A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Romanian History Textbook Narrative**

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In his seminal *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, historian Lucian Boia (2001) famously points out that the Romanian identity narrative is rife with “nationalist myths that carry an authoritarian and xenophobic message” (p. 30). The “great mythological configurations around which national consciousness has crystallized and evolved” (p. 82) in Romania are the obsessive search for “origins” (placed by all contemporary history textbooks in the Early Bronze Age, at the time of the formation of the Dacian and Getae barbarian tribes), the insistence on the “unity” of the “Romanian people” throughout its history, and a similar insistence on the “continuity” of the “Romanian people” – that is, on the unbroken thread that starts with a homogenous “Getae-Dacian” ethnic group, then goes through a “Daco-Roman” phase, only to emerge, through a nearly-magical process called “ethnogenesis,” as a homogenous, exclusivist, organic “Romanian nation.”

The tropes of “origins,” “unity” and “continuity” frame an ethnocentric view of Romanian identity that is continually fed to Romania’s youth throughout their schooling years, and is buttressed by complementary messages coming from other influential institutions, such as the media and the Orthodox Church. Ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities also receive the message: they never were, are not, and will never be simply “Romanians”; at most, they can hope to be “good Romanians.” They will be tolerated in times of peace and economic development (such as the period between the World Wars and the current, European Union-membership period). In times of war or economic downturn, however, their essential deficit will invariably be remembered and utilized as a pretext for their scapegoating. The analysis and criticism that I offer in this paper are meant to be part of a loving work of critical pedagogy whose main goal is to dismantle the “ethno semantics of race and blood,” to use Victor Neumann’s (2013) phrasing, that makes this victimization of the Other possible and, indeed, nearly inevitable (p. 378).

More specifically, I am to trace the way in which contemporary Romanian history textbooks create the fiction of a homogenous ethnonational entity that moves inexorably through history and eventually becomes the “Romanian people.” I focus on three meaningful moments: 1) the (discursive) transformation of the “Getae-Dacians” into “Daco-Romans” through the process of “Romanization,” 2) the (discursive) “birth” of the “Romanians” through the process of “ethnogenesis,” and 3) the Romanians’ supposed preservation (and strengthening) of their unproblematic ethnic identity in the face of the threat posed by the post-3<sup>rd</sup> century “migratory peoples” that entered the territory of today’s Romania. The three heuristics under study here (“Romanization,” “ethnogenesis” and the family metaphor of national “birth”) perform intensive ideological labor in the textbooks, as they provide the building blocks of a clean, straight-forward narrative of ethnonational progress through history. The “Getae-Dacian” identity category that the textbook authors have put together at great pain (given the rhetorical somersaults that the poor evidentiary support necessitated) is tempered in the forge of “Romanization” until it transforms into a “Daco-Roman”/“proto-Romanian” category. That receives further treatment by being taken through an “ethnogenesis” process at which point it undergoes one last organic transformation as it turns into a fully “Romanian” ethnonational identity category, which will now be presented as the “child” of two “parents” – a proud but ultimately weak Dacian “mother” and a dominant, culturally aggressive Roman “father.” All of these processes are offered for the students’ ideological consumption as largely unidirectional, progressive, easily observable undertakings that are devoid of tangents, bifurcations, retreats, paradoxes, ambiguities, uncertainty and hybridity. Finally, all of these processes focus squarely on the *ethnic* category as the master-key to virtually the entirety of “Romanian history.”

## **ROMANIZATION**

The main thesis of virtually all Romanian history textbooks, past and present, is that the Romanian people is the product of a synthesis between Romans and Dacians, with the latter assimilating into the “culture” (and/or “civilization”) of the former through an organic, inexorable, and beneficial process of “Romanization.”

No textbook seems to harbor any doubts about the validity and suitability of the term itself, despite, as will be shown below, the significant volume of critical scholarship that has been brought to bear on

“Romanization” by numerous students of the ancient world. No Romanian textbook agonizes over the definition of the term, with Burleac, Lazăr & Teodorescu’s (2005) unassuming description being representative in this regard: “the acquisition of the Roman culture and the Latin language by the peoples conquered by the Romans” (p. 20).<sup>1</sup> According to the combined wisdom of Romanian historiographers, the adoption of the “Roman way of life” by the conquered Dacian population was facilitated by a medley of the following institutions: the Latin language,<sup>2</sup> literacy, spiritual beliefs, “material culture” (that is, the stuff of archaeology: coins, pottery, buildings, jewels, weapons, burial grounds, etc.), legal and administrative systems, cities (with such features as aqueducts, public baths, amphitheatres, granaries, schools, roads), trade, service in the military, “mixed marriages” (a euphemism for intercourse between Roman men and Dacian women leading to procreation), funereal customs, and names (see especially Giurescu, Berciu-Drăghicescu & Grigore, 2006; Băluțoiu & Vlad, 2012; Burleac, Lazăr & Teodorescu, 2005; Dumitrescu et al., 2004; Stan & Vornicu, 2012). Stan and Vornicu’s twelfth grade textbook offers a convenient three-pronged chronological sequence for the process of “Romanization”: 1) a “preliminary phase” lasting from Burebista’s reign (82-44 B.C.) to the Roman conquest (106 B.C.), 2) a “Romanization proper” phase lasting from the Roman conquest to the Aurelian Withdrawal (271 B.C.), and 3) a “late Romanization” phase lasting from the Aurelian Withdrawal to the so-called “Romanian ethnogenesis.” The other textbooks are generally less willing to provide such stage-by-stage periodization, preferring instead to allude to a fluid, but also incontrovertible, process of “Romanization.”

In his 2004 book on the assimilation of central Spain into the Roman Empire, Leonard Curchin (2004) defines “Romanization” as

a descriptive rather than a definitional or explanatory term. It is a convenient name for a construct or paradigm devised by modern scholars to describe the process of cultural transformation by which indigenous peoples were integrated into the Roman empire (p. 8).

Hingley (1996) traces the beginnings of the term’s prominence to the works of Francis Haverfield, who, in the early 1900s, lectured and wrote extensively about, as the title of one of his books puts it, *The Romanization of*

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<sup>1</sup> “Romanizare – însușirea culturii romane și a limbii latine de către popoarele cucerite de romani.”

<sup>2</sup> Constantiniu’s (2002) *An Honest History of the Romanian People* calls the Latin language “the main factor in the Getae-Dacians’ and in Dacia’s process of Romanization” (p. 41).

*Roman Britain* (1912). The model of “Romanization” that Haverfield put forth, which stressed the overwhelming attraction that Roman civilization exerted over the conquered “natives,” has resisted largely untouched for almost a century, having encountered serious challenges only from the 1990s on. According to Roth (2003), it was Martin Millet’s *The Romanization of Britain* book (1990) that set off the most recent, and most significant, round of challenges to the concept in question. While the term has, by and large, survived the debate despite calls for its complete elimination (see Merryweather & Prag, 2003), its meaning is no longer fixed and taken for granted. Below, I review three main challenges that critical historians have brought to bear on what Quinn (2003) calls the “traditional interpretative models” of “Romanization.”

The first criticism leveled against the concept of “Romanization” has to do with the historians’ propensity to present the “Romans” and the “barbarians/indigenes/natives” as homogenous, stable and distinct identity blocs who possessed homogenous, stable and distinct “cultures” which could be “passed” from one to another like gifts (Curchin, 2004; Hingley, 2003; Hingley, 1996; Quinn, 2003). The authors of most contemporary Romanian history textbooks have created the ahistorical fiction of a unitary “Getae-Dacian” identity category. Working primarily from a lone reference from Strabo’s *Geography* according to which “[t]he language of the Daci is the same as that of the Getae” [Book VII, 13, p. 215]), the textbooks range from claiming, against evidence and logic, that Strabo had himself proclaimed the Dacians and the Getae to be the “same people,” to admitting that Strabo distinguished between the two but then arguing that “same language” really should be taken to mean “same people.” The Burleac, Lazăr & Teodorescu (2005) fourth grade textbook provides an illustrative, ambiguity-laden example of the latter narrative. In the introduction to the “Our Ancestors: the Getae-Dacians” chapter, the authors tell us that

[t]he Getae and the Dacians were related [and] they spoke the same language, which is why we call them Getae-Dacians or Daco-Getae. The Getae lived in Wallachia and to the south of the Danube, while the Dacians lived within the Carpathian arch (Transylvania) and in the Banat (p. 12).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Geții și dacii erau înrudiți, ei vorbeau aceeași limbă [sic], de aceea noi îi numim geto-daci sau daco-geți. Geții locuiau în Muntenia și la sudul Dunării, în timp ce dacii trăiau în interiorul arcului carpatic (Transilvania) și în Banat.”

This initial attempt to thread the needle is soon, however, abandoned, as one of the end-of-chapter questions for the students flatly asks, “Why did the Getae and the Dacians constitute the same people?” (p. 13)<sup>4</sup>. The history teacher assigning that question in class is offered no advice on how to deal with a student who answers, “They didn’t. The chapter says they were related and spoke the same language, but didn’t live in the same place.”

Curchin (2004) introduces a further wrinkle into the question of the “barbarians”’ ethnic homogeneity when he argues that many of the “tribes” described by the Roman and Greek writers might have been “new defensive coalitions formed in response to the Roman advance” (p. 32), rather than groups that had formed organically before their clash with the Roman Empire based primarily on family kinship.

As for the Romans, while most textbooks recognize that both the Republic and the Empire were multiethnic conglomerates, when discussing the Romans’ conquest of Dacia, very little of that recognition is in evidence. In fact, as Curchin (2004) reminds us, “‘Roman’ culture was not homogenous, but multifaced and unstable,” in large part “borrowed” from the Greeks and others, and in general best conceived of as a forever-changing tapestry of behaviors, values, beliefs and artifacts created not just in Rome, but in every corner of the Empire, by citizens and non-citizens alike (p. 9). “Thus, both ‘Roman’ and ‘native’ are constantly shifting concepts, and it is meaningless to portray them as opposite poles when those poles attracted and merged with one another,” Curchin (2004) concludes.

The issue of ethnic homogeneity aside, Roth (2003) also questions the reliance of theories of “Romanization” on *ethnic* categories, as opposed to other kinds of identity categories that would have been more salient to “most people on a daily basis” (p. 37). As will be seen below, the most recent models put forth by the historians who still see value in rescuing the concept of “Romanization” give a lot of consideration to *class* identities as they examine the crucial role that “native” *elites* played in adopting the Roman culture (whatever each one of these last three terms means to the individual scholar).

A third major criticism brought against the concept of “Romanization” is its historical ties to the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideologies of colonization, nationalism and imperialism which can be seen in particular in the old model’s insistence on the absolute primacy of the “Roman element” (Curchin, 2004; Quinn, 2003; Hingley,

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<sup>4</sup> “De ce geții și dacii constituiau același popor?”

2003). In other words, the story of “Romanization” is usually described as the story of how the Romans made non-Romans into new Romans by simply presenting them with an attractive package of superior political organization, high culture, sophisticated language, moral values and engineering prowess. Positively overwhelmed by the offer, most native peoples (with a few notable exceptions) quickly succumbed and willingly turned themselves into Latin-speaking, toga-clad Romans.

The teleological model of historical development (from the culture of primitive “barbarian tribes” to the culture of advanced “Roman civilization”) is explicitly laid out in Burleac, Lazăr & Teodorescu’s (2005) textbook:

*The superiority of the Roman culture*, the necessity of cooperation with the Roman bureaucrats, the Dacians’ joining of the military, [and] the marriages caused more and more Dacians to learn the Latin language (p. 21, my emphasis).<sup>5</sup>

and in Dumitrescu et. al’s (2004) textbook:

Urbanism, therefore, represents a feature of the new, *superior* way of organizing the societies included in Rome’s administrative system (pp. 10-11, my emphasis).<sup>6</sup>

Băluțoiu & Vlad (2012) strike a somewhat discordant note when, while still working within a paradigm of “development,” they acknowledge the reciprocal nature of the “Romanization” process:

Roman rule contributed to the socioeconomic development of the Thracians, who underwent the process of Romanization. Greco-Roman spirituality adopted some elements of the Thracians’ religion. The Thracian Spartacus was the leader of the greatest slave uprising which shook the powerful Roman state (p. 76).<sup>7</sup>

Newer scholarly examinations of the processes of acculturation, assimilation and, indeed, “Romanization” now recognize that sociocultural changes within a society have a complicated relationship with issues of “superiority” and agency. In other words, for a particular set of beliefs, values and behaviors to triumph over

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<sup>5</sup> “Superioritatea culturii romane, necesitatea cooperării cu funcționarii romani, înrolarea dacilor în armată, căsătoriile au făcut ca tot mai mulți daci să învețe limba latină.”

<sup>6</sup> “*Urbanismul* reprezintă, așadar, o trăsătură a noului mod, superior, de organizare a societăților din spațiile incluse în sistemul administrativ al Romei.”

<sup>7</sup> “Stăpânirea romană a contribuit la dezvoltarea economico-socială a tracilor, care au cunoscut procesul de romanizare. Spiritualitatea greco-romană a preluat unele elemente ale religiei tracilor. Tracul Spartacus a fost conducătorul celei mai mari răscoale a sclavilor, care a zguduit puternicul stat roman.”

another such set it is not absolutely necessary that the first set be perceived as superior to the other – certainly not by all, or even most, members of the “receiving” population. The great majority of the Romanian textbooks tell a story, either by implication or outright, of a population of conquered Getae-Dacians who were willing, even eager, to renounce their “culture” and adopt that of their Roman masters, the quicker the better:

[The Romans] blended with the local population through marriage, such that the natives were *quickly and profoundly* Romanized. As in many [other] lands conquered by the Romans, Romanization, that is the *attracting* of the native population towards the Roman world (through language, material and spiritual culture, and kinships) was very strong (Băluțoiu & Vlad, 2012, p. 110, my emphasis).<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, however, the same textbook claws back some of its praise for the irresistible “Roman culture” when attempting to construct an argument against the theory that the “Romanized” population was evacuated alongside the army during the Aurelian withdrawal:

From the abandoned provinces, only the army, the administration and some inhabitants left. Most of population stayed. Often, people preferred the barbarians’ rule which was gentler than that of the Empire (p. 118).<sup>9</sup>

Băluțoiu & Vlad’s opportunistic hedging not only reveals that there were indeed some aspects of the “Roman world” that the natives did not entirely enjoy, but it also seems to suggest that the Romans’ administrative system was not, in fact, an integral part of what it meant to be a Roman – otherwise, those who rejected the harsh rule of the Empire preferring to it the rule of uncouth barbarians could not have been as “Romanized” as previously described.

Nevertheless, the Dacians are generally portrayed as recognizing the superiority of the Roman culture after succumbing to its military prowess, and simply deciding to assimilate:

The natives *willfully* take on the process of assimilating [into] Roman civilization. On these grounds, they acquire aspects of the conquerors’ culture, and especially the Latin language (Dumitrescu et. al, 2004, p. 11, my emphasis).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Ei s-au amestecat prin căsătorii cu populația locală, astfel încât băștinașii au fost repede și profund romanizați. La fel ca în multe ținuturi cucerite de romani, romanizarea, adică atragerea populației băștinașe spre lumea romana (prin limbă, cultură materială și spirituală, înrudiri) a fost foarte puternică.”

<sup>9</sup> “Din provinciile abandonate plecau numai armata, administrația și unii locuitori. Cea mai mare parte a populației rămânea pe loc. Deseori oamenii preferau stăpânirea barbarilor, mai blândă decât a imperiului.”

<sup>10</sup> “Autohtonii își asumă în mod conștient procesul asimilării civilizației romane.”

Of course, given the utter lack of testimonies from the Dacian side, this willingness of the natives to assimilate is a complete projection on the part of the authors who seemingly find it impossible to believe that the Dacians would resist in any way trading their Dacian identity/culture for a Roman one. One wonders why the natives fought the Roman legions in two bloody wars in the first place rather than welcome them with open arms. Hingley (1996) points out that our victor-written historical records are almost completely devoid of the voices of the conquered people. He challenges scholars of Romanization to seek evidence (material and otherwise) of the ways in which subjugated populations not only adopted, but also resisted and transformed the symbols, ideas and material culture of the conqueror. Virtually no such work is in evidence in contemporary Romanian history textbooks.

In his review of the immense literature on Romanization, Curchin (2004) identifies five different “commonly-used models of Romanization” (p. 12): 1) a “dominance model,” according to which Rome simply imposed its culture on its new subjects by force, 2) a “self-Romanization model,” whereby the “barbarians” adopted Roman culture willingly, 3) an “elite model,” which argues that the upper classes of the newly conquered people saw an advantage in adopting the Roman ways and modeled them to their own subjects, 4) an “interaction model,” which emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the Roman-barbarian cultural exchange without denying the power imbalance that defines that relationship, and 5) an “integration model,” favored by Curchin himself, which sees the Roman culture and the barbarian culture “undergo a mutual permeation and amalgamation to form a new, ‘provincial’ culture” (p. 14). The history textbooks under study here assume, by and large, the self-Romanization model, with very few exceptions, such as Băluțoiu & Vlad’s (2012) lonely reference to the Romans’ adoption of certain aspects of the Thracians’ religion, and Dumitrescu et al.’s (2004) explicit privileging of elite groups (e.g., the literate priests and bureaucrats who learned the Latin alphabet, and the young men who joined the Roman military who learned the Latin language).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> True to form, Curchin (2004) takes the time to complicate even the models he doesn’t quite agree with: “The elite had obvious motives and incentives to become Romanized. The real test of Romanization is whether it infiltrated the lower classes, or whether the elite formed a thin, Romanized veneer overlying a largely unassimilated society” (p. 136). The Romanian history textbooks do not even attempt to address this question.



While the current scholarship on “Romanization” is occupying itself with deciding whether the concept is “fundamentally incoherent” (Quinn, 2003, p. 28) or merely in need of a radical re-imagining, Romanian historians remain convinced that, upon losing the Dacian Wars, the natives willingly and thoroughly adopted all things Roman, including and especially the Latin language, the quicker to become the “Romanian people.” The inexorable process of “Romanization,” according to Constantiniu (2002), transformed the “Getae-Dacians” into “at first, Romans, then Romanics, and eventually Romanians” (p. 43).<sup>12</sup> According to Stan and Vornicu’s (2012) textbook, the third, and last, stage of “Romanization” ends with the so-called “Romanian ethnogenesis.” The next section addresses that concept in some detail.

## **ETHNOGENESIS**

Following in the footsteps of German scholarship’s “philological nationalism” (Reynolds, 1998, p. 29), Romanian historians tend to equate “ethnicity” with “language community.” Their reluctance to call the “Getae-Dacians” an “ethnic group” might be connected to their uncertainty about the language(s) that the pre-Roman population of Dacia spoke; once the process of “Romanization” had worked its magic on the natives and taught them Latin, however, all such hesitation disappears and the stage is almost set for the emergence of a “Romanian people.” One last hurdle remains: will the new nation be able to hold onto its “Romance language,” or will it succumb to a newcomer’s cultural pull and adopt *his* language? The answer to this question is thought to determine the very essence of the budding nation. Giurescu Berciu-Drăghicescu & Grigore (2006) explain this process of ethnic “clarification”:

Between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, Slavic and Germanic migratory tribes swamped Europe and the Roman Empire. They established new states. In some regions, the Romanic population assimilated the migrants. Where the Romans did not exert a strong influence, the Slavs and the Germans gained dominance. New European peoples were thus born. The process whereby a people is formed is called ethnogenesis. With this process, the respective people’s language is also formed (p. 15).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Superioritatea categorică a civilizației romane față de cea geto-dacă și-a spus cuvântul; ea s-a impus în spațiul carpato-danubian, a romanizat pe băștinași și a făcut din geto-daci, mai întâi, romani, apoi romanici și, în cele din urmă, români.”

<sup>13</sup> “În perioada secolelor III-VI, peste Europa și Imperiul Roman s-au revărsat triburile de migratori germanici și slavi. Ei au întemeiat noi state. În unele zone populația romanică i-a asimilat pe migratori. În zona unde romanii n-au avut o influență puternică, slavii și germanicii s-au impus. Astfel au luat naștere noi popoare europene. Procesul de formare a unui popor se numește **etnogeneza**. Odată cu acest proces se formează și limba poporului respectiv.”

Other textbooks will offer slight variations on the theme, but most will include the same basic elements: the new European nations (as opposed to the Greeks and Romans) were formed around the time of the so-called Migration Period when tribes coming from the Asian steppes (Huns, Goths, Vandals, Franks, Avars, Slavs, Bulgars, etc.) pushed into territories previously conquered or dominated by the Romans and, after a series of clashes with the Empire and with each other, as well as further in-land migrations, settled in various corners of the continent. The most important element of “nationhood” is the national language, and most of the new nations slowly coalesced around one of three language families (Romance, Germanic or Slavic). Most textbooks will either explicitly or implicitly endorse Giurescu Berciu-Drăghicescu & Grigore’s (2006) above-stated selection criterion (i.e., weak Roman influence leads to Slavic or Germanic linguistic, and therefore ethnic/national, dominance; strong Roman influence leads to Latin hegemony), with the “Daco-Romans” the premier example of a people whose Roman “character” was strong enough to assimilate the militarily aggressive Slavs and Germans.

The manner in which textbook authors privilege the Romanian language in their narrative of the history of Romania to the detriment of all other languages spoken on the country’s territory for hundreds of years cannot fail but communicate to their readers a message of ethnic exceptionalism and exclusivity: true Romanians are native Romanian speakers; Romanian-speakers are strong people because they speak Romanian; speakers of other languages are not real Romanians; their ancestors were weak and succumbed to the Slavs and to the migratory peoples and adopted their language. (Predictably, few Romanian historians care to inquire after the “cultural strength” of Romania’s contemporary linguistic minorities who have clearly managed not to be “assimilated” into the Romanian language community that surrounds them).

In a classically protochronistic argument, Burleac, Lazăr & Teodorescu (2005) unequivocally privilege language over most other nation-building institutions, including statehood:

The label “Romanian” that the people/nation to the north of the Danube gives to itself proves that it is a direct successor of Roman culture and the Latin language.

The Romanians are, alongside the Greeks and the Albanians, the oldest inhabitants of South-East Europe and among the first to be Christianized. As opposed to neighboring peoples, the Romanians were late in

organizing themselves into state-like formations, coexisting for centuries alongside the migratory peoples (p. 27).<sup>14</sup>

Given the Balkan peoples' extreme political sensitivity towards the labels that various groups and countries claim for themselves (e.g., the "Roma" people, the "Vlachs," the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), it is, to say the least, disingenuous for the textbook authors to posit an endonym as definitive proof of legitimate membership in a specific identity category. In any case, for the "oldest inhabitants" assertion to make any sense, one must first accept the complete equivalation of "people/inhabitants" with "language communities" (for the rest of South-East Europe has continuously been inhabited by people since pre-historic times, too, not just the Dacian/Romanian territory). After eliminating from contention Hungarian and all Slavic languages (seen as having been brought to Europe late in the game by the migratory peoples), one is indeed left with three main languages still spoken in South-East Europe: Greek, Albanian and Romanian. The authors do not concern themselves with the question of exactly how old Hungarian and Slavonic are, because they have developed elsewhere. The point here is not just to extoll the Romanian speakers' venerable linguistic tradition, but also to contribute to the thesis – crucial for Romanian historiography – that Romanians "own" the territory of contemporary (Greater) Romania because their language has been spoken here longer than any other language.

Burleac, Lazăr & Teodorescu further provide us with a genealogy of the Romanian language. Thus, Romanian is a "Romanance language" despite the fact that "it has evolved apart from the rest of Romanity" (p. 26).<sup>15</sup> It is heavily indebted to Latin in its sounds, its grammar and its "basic vocabulary," including "most of the words that name degrees of family kinship, spiritual traits, professions, and others" (p. 27).<sup>16</sup> The final product came about as a result of an "evolution" of the Latin language, plus the "retention" of "some Dacian words," plus some "borrowings" from "migratory peoples, especially the Slavs" (p. 26).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Denumirea de român pe care și-o dă poporul de la nordul Dunării dovedește că acesta este continuatorul direct al culturii romane și al limbii latine.

Românii sunt, alături de greci și albanezi, cei mai vechi locuitori din sud-estul Europei și printre primii creștinați."

<sup>15</sup> "Deși a evoluat separat de restul romanității, totuși ea păstrează principalele trăsături care o definesc ca *limbă romanică*..."

<sup>16</sup> "Din latină s-au păstrat majoritatea cuvintelor care denumesc gradele de rudenie, trăsăturile sufletești, ocupațiile ș.a."

<sup>17</sup> "Evoluția limbii latine vorbite la nordul și sudul Dunării, menținerea unor cuvinte dace, împrumuturile de la migratori, în special de la slavi, au condus la formarea *limbii române*."

While no linguist denies the overwhelming Romance character of the Romanian language, the exact development and nature of it are the subject of considerably more debate than the textbook authors would let on. “The Romanian language has its origins in Latin,” Alexe (2015) writes in his *Dacopathy*, “but it has a Balkan structure and grammar, similar to those of Albanian, Bulgarian and Macedonian,” none of which is considered a Romance language (p. 63). Furthermore, while many textbooks have no qualms in identifying “Thraco-Dacian” words that carried over into Romanian (e.g., the Burleac, Lazăr & Teodorescu [2005] textbook identifies 11 such words, all related to shepherding, and the Giurescu, Berciu-Drăghicescu & Grigore [2006] textbook identifies 6 of them), Alexe also argues that the “Getae-Dacians” must have spoken more than one language (which, incidentally, considerably aided the hegemony of Latin in the wake of the Dacian Wars simply because of the need for a *lingua franca*). Since there is absolutely no written evidence of the language(s) that the Dacians spoke, no one really knows for sure which contemporary Romanian words have a Dacian etymology, which is why the authoritative *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language* (DEX) does not offer a Dacian etymology for any word whatsoever (Borza, 2018). It is also worth repeating that the Romanian language was, for centuries, written in the Cyrillic (and not the Latin) alphabet, and that the pronounced Latin character of contemporary Romanian vocabulary owes much to the Transylvanian School’s heavy-handed attempts to “Latinize” the language.

Regardless of the exact components that went into the Romanian alloy, the historiographic consensus is that the Romanian people and language formed sometime between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The curriculum mandated by the Romanian Ministry of Education for all tenth grade history textbooks requires that that “moment of creation” be called “ethnogenesis.” As such, all textbooks have a subchapter titled “The Romanian Ethnogenesis,” and, as with “Romanization,” they almost always seem to take the word’s applicability for granted and in no need of explanation. The innocuous-looking term, however, has had a long trajectory in historiography, having named an entire school of thought pertaining to the transformations undergone by early medieval Europe.

Originally borrowed from cultural anthropology, “ethnogenesis” entered historiography in the 1960s through the work of German-speaking scholars Reinhard Wenskus and Herwig Wolfram, whose writings

contributed to a venerable tradition of Germanic studies which concerned themselves deeply with the emergence of the “ethnic groups” thought to lie at the origin of the German peoples (e.g., the Goths). Although the body of scholarly literature that later came to be known as “Ethnogenesis theory” includes several diverging strands, the emphasis on the primacy of ethnicity (and “ethnic discourses”) in the dynamics of early medieval European constitutes a common thread for all historiographic approaches in this family. Ethnogenesis, which Gillet (2006) observes has by now acquired “the status of orthodoxy” (p. 243), seeks to offer a clear answer to a question that has long vexed historians: Why and how did the Europe of Hellenism and the Roman Empire turn into the Europe of a hundred little ethnic groups vying for political preeminence? And that answer is one that earlier Romantics would have no trouble recognizing: “the transition from classical to medieval culture [was] driven not by economics, religion or warfare, but by ethnicity” (Gillet, 2006, p. 242). What the Romantics would not recognize, however, is Ethnogenesis’s awareness of the fact that ethnic groups are not natural phenomena, but rather social constructed entities. In Wenskus’s and Wolfram’s telling, the ethnic groups that survived Late Antiquity and the early medieval period did so by coming together around charismatic leaders who were able to wield a pre-existing “core of tradition,” as well an origin myth, to fashion coherent social identities (Reuter, 2006, p. 102).

According to Gillet (2006), the Ethnogenesis model sees ethnic identification as predating the Roman conquests, with local communities well aware of their cultural and linguistic commonalities and disjunctions. Such awareness is supposed to have laid dormant under Roman domination, only to reawaken when the imperial wave retreated in order to form the “nations” of Europe. The Romanian textbooks clearly share the German historians’ belief in the existence, and indeed preeminence, of the “barbarians”’ ethnic nature, but the route they take to its identification is a bit more subtle owing to their ideological need to also accommodate the mighty Romans. (It is worth noting that Gillet observes that the Ethnogenesis model does allow for the incorporation of Roman and Christian cultural elements into the process of ethnic formation).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In his *History*, which was written for the wider public, Constantiniu (2002) shows no such subtlety, as he speaks of an “ethno-linguistic synthesis” between the Indo-European newcomers and the “natives” of “Dacia.” The result of that synthesis is said to be “the individualization of ethnic blocs” such as the Greeks, the Illyrs and the Thracians (p. 29).

Băluțoiu & Vlad's (2005) text does not use the word "ethnicity" or its derivatives when referring to pre-Roman groups. Instead, it prefers the use of "peoples" or the Biblical "*neam*/kin." Likewise, when addressing the origins of various "peoples," the authors employ the word "genesis," without the "ethno-" modifier. However, they leave no doubt in their readers' minds that the "Getae-Dacians" were a homogenous, unitary "people" practically indistinguishable in nature from the kinds of groups that they will later in the textbook call "ethnic groups." That identity is further cemented by the repeated labeling of the "Getae-Dacians" as "our ancestors." Indeed, on just one rather sparse page, the authors speak of "ancestors" three times. In one of those instances, the indexical "our" is tellingly replaced with "of the Romanian people" (p. 77). This emphasis on the uninterrupted connection between the "Getae-Dacians" and the "Romanians" speaks to the authors' assumption that the two categories are perfectly compatible. (They do not speak of "Dacian aristocracy" or "Roman men" as "our ancestors," for example, since class and gender do not move in the same taxonomic circles as "ethnicity/*neam*/people").

Dumitrescu et al.'s (2004) twelfth grade textbook is also generally careful not to call the "Getae-Dacians" an ethnic group, instead using "tribes" and "the natives." Twice, however, it breaks protocol: once when it tells us that the historian Jordanes neglects to mention "the *ethnicity* of the great priest" Deceneu who advised the Getae king Borebistas (p. 9, my italics)<sup>19</sup>, and again when it tells us that the process of pre-Aurelian Withdrawal Romanization led to "essential *ethno*-linguistic changes" among the Getae-Dacians (p. 11, my italics)<sup>20</sup>. (The distinction between the ethnic category and the linguistic one is a curious one given the insistence, across all textbooks, on the preeminence of language in the formation of ethnic groups).<sup>21</sup>

Despite its universal acceptance of the assumptions (and language) of Ethnogenesis by Romanian historians, the theory is not without its critics. According to Gillet (2006), for example, in their description of the ethnic formation process, Wenskus and Wolfram mistook "absorption" for "assimilation." In other words, they assumed that the small "ethnic" groups that fell under the sway of a charismatic leader became one in

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<sup>19</sup> "Jordanes [...] nu precizează etnia marelui preot."

<sup>20</sup> "[S]e ajunge astfel nu numai la 'modificări comportamentale,' ci și la 'schimbări esențiale etno-lingvistice.'

<sup>21</sup> The "ethno-linguistic" reference is repeated later in the chapter, in the same context of Romanization.

every significant way, without the possibility of minority groups in, say, the Kingdom of the Franks, retaining some aspects of their “particularist identities” (p. 248).

A second criticism levelled at “ethnogenesis theory” is related to its reliance on literary sources that make reference to various labels that are anachronically construed as names of ethnic groups. Ethnogenesis-friendly historians comb through documents belonging to a wide range of genres (e.g., letters, historical accounts, works of fiction, bureaucratic papers) looking for name-droppings (e.g., “Goth,” “Slavic,” “Vlachs”). They then assemble the cherry-picked references into a grand narrative that serves as proof that ethnic identity was not only fully alive in the early Middle Ages, but was actually the most important force shaping local communities. Predictably enough, Romanian historians are enthusiastic practitioners of this methodology, which is usually put to work to demonstrate the strength and unbroken continuity of the ethnic *ethos* in what many of them call “the Dacian space.”

A prime example of this is Adolf Armbruster’s (1993) *The Romanity of the Romanians: The History of an Idea*, which remains the canonical text dealing with the eponymous issue. Originally published in 1972, Armbruster’s book meticulously collects a multitude of historical references to the Latin-speaking populations of the Balkan Peninsula, in its quest to prove that the Romanians’ self-awareness as a Romanic/Latin people “coincided” with the naming of the Romanians in foreign literary sources. One potential problem: the earliest “written news about the Romanians” speak of a Latin-speaking population to the *south* of the Danube. Another potential problem: they do not actually mention “Romanians,” but rather the “Vlachs.” The latter term originated in the name of a Celtic tribe known to Caesar – the Volcae – and was subsequently used by the Slavs (who borrowed it from old German) to refer to all Latin-speaking foreigners. (The name of the Romanian-speaking province of “Wallachia” shares the same root, as do the names of “Wales” and “Wallonia”).

In keeping with the Ethnogenesis school’s insistence on finding “‘ethnic discourses’ operating alongside the overt narrative and aims of the text, or even contrary to them (as ‘contradictions’ and ‘paradoxes’),” Armbruster first distinguishes between two classes of “Vlachs” (the generic Latin-speaking population and the “proto-Romanians”), then admits that the term is still in dire need of scholarly attention and cannot yet be fully put in the service of “Romanian ethnogenesis,” and then nevertheless proceeds with assuming that all literary

references (usually Byzantine, Hungarian or German) to the “Vlachs” refer to the ethnic group which would later come to be known as the “Romanians” (Gillet, p. 248).

As for the geographic inconsistency, Armbruster makes a half-hearted attempt to argue that what goes for the southerners goes for the northerners as well because they shared not only a Latin-based language but also a material culture. “Material cultures” (that is, the traces of human habitation that archeologists concern themselves with) have long been equated to ethnicities – but erroneously so, according to many contemporary scholars (e.g., Vulpe, 2001; Niculescu, 2007; Hingley, 1996; Quinn, 2003; Brather, 2002; Boia, 2001) who argue that two otherwise distinct groups can share the same pottery style, while different segments (classes, etc.) of the same group might use certain objects differently.

Armbruster is himself quoted in many twelfth grade history textbooks in the curriculum-mandated “The Romanity of the Romanians in the Historians’ View” chapter. One of those textbooks, edited by Alexandru Barnea (2014), includes such a quote in a sidebar on its very first page of main text. The chapter’s narrative wastes no time in getting to the point:

As the “thousand-year veil” owing to the eastern migratory groups’ domination over the Carpathian space begins to fray, the first testimonies about the Romanians begin to appear. Thus, in the Byzantine world, the ethnic identity of Romanians was well-known, as the first reference [to it] is to be found in a military treatise from the 7<sup>th</sup> century (*Strategikon*). Because of [their] language, they were called Romans... (p. 4)<sup>22</sup>

The military treatise in question is generally attributed to the Byzantine Emperor Maurice (reigned 582-602) who led military campaigns against the Persians, the Avars and the Slavs. It is in a passage describing the Slavs who had settled to the north of the Danube that the Barnea textbook finds that putative early proof of the Byzantines’ awareness of the Romanians’ “ethnic identity.” The *Strategikon* is not quoted or even paraphrased in the textbook, or, for that matter, in Armbruster’s book which briefly says that the treatise “mentions the existence of the Roman element<sup>23</sup> to the north of the Danube at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century” and, in a

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<sup>22</sup> “Pe măsură ce ‘vălul milenar’ datorat dominației migratorilor răsăriteni asupra spațiului carpatic se destramă, încep să apară primele mărturii despre români. Astfel, în lumea bizantină, identitatea etnică a românilor era bine cunoscută, prima mențiune găsindu-se într-un tratat militar din secolul al VII-lea (*Strategikon*). Datorită limbii, aceștia erau numiți romani...”

<sup>23</sup> The Byzantines called themselves “Romans.” The Greek word Ρωμαῖοι has been translated as “Romei” and as “Romaioi.”



footnote, sends the reader to a 1969 book by Romanian historian P.P. Panaitescu for more information (p. 25). It is Panaitescu who finally offers a translation (from the original Greek) of that crucial *Strategikon* passage:

And those who call themselves refugees or fugitives are tasked with pointing out routes and warn those who are in danger against those whom they should avoid. They are Romans (Romanoi) who have in time received this status (of refugees) and, having forgotten their own, they favor the enemy. These, if they are well-intended (towards our people) should be rewarded, and if they misbehave, they should be punished” (p. 88).<sup>24</sup>

Panaitescu then proceeds with offering his own interpretation of the passage:

Thus the Byzantines knew quite well that a Roman population dwelt among the Slavs, in Dacia, which collaborated with them [the Slavs]; they considered it to have come from among the refugees from the Empire. Those refugees were there for sure, and I have spoken about the current of migration among the peasants of the Empire towards the north of the Danube. Note that the text speaks of people who have lived for a long time, perhaps for generations, among the “barbarians,” [and] have, “in time,” forgotten their own. How could the writer distinguish between the refugees who had arrived from the south and the Dacian natives who spoke the same language? We think it is possible to include the natives under the label of Romans living in Dacia that this text references. In any case, here’s reliable documentary proof that, at that time, Romans lived alongside the Slavs to the north of the Danube, and collaborated militarily [with them] against the Empire. It is the only written historical source that explicitly mentions the presence of the Romans to the north of the Danube in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (pp. 88-9).<sup>25</sup>

While Panaitescu introduces this analysis as proof that the “Daco-Romans” lived alongside the Slavs to the north of the Danube, his actual hermeneutics is riddled with hedges betraying considerable hesitation and ambiguity. He recognizes that the author of the *Strategikon* does not care to explain what exactly he means by the “Roman” label that he places on the refugees. He also recognizes that citizens of the Byzantine Empire (i.e., “Romans”) were known to take refuge among the Slavs from the Byzantine tax collectors. So, in effect,

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<sup>24</sup> “Iar cei care se numesc refugiați sau fugari, [sic] se îndeletnicesc cu arătarea drumurilor și dau de veste celor primejduiți de cine trebuie să se ferească. Ei sunt romani (romanoi), care cu timpul au primit această calitate (de refugiați) și uitând pe ai lor, favorizează de preferință pe dușmani. Aceștia, dacă sunt bine intenționați (față de ai noștri), se cuvine să fie răsplătiți, iar dacă se poartă rău, să fie pedepsiți.”

<sup>25</sup> “Bizantinii deci știau bine că între slavi, în Dacia, locuia o populație romană, colaborând cu cei dintâi; ei o socoteau provenită dintre refugiații din Imperiu. Acești refugiați existau desigur și am vorbit de curentul de migrațiune a țăranilor din Imperiu spre nordul Dunării. De observat că în text e vorba de oameni care trăiau de mult, poate de generații, între ‘barbari,’ cei care ‘cu timpul’ au uitat de ai lor. Cum putea distinge scriitorul pe refugiații veniți din sud de băștinașii de aceeași limbă din Dacia? Socotim posibilă înglobarea băștinașilor sub numele de romani trăitori în Dacia, pomeniți în acest text. În orice caz este aici o dovadă sigură, documentară că pe atunci trăiau romani alături de slavi în nordul Dunării, într-o colaborare militară împotriva Imperiului. Este unicul izvor scris care atestă explicit existența romanilor în nordul Dunării în veacul VI.”

Maurice might simply be speaking of those individuals and none others. Panaitescu hesitantly rejects that possibility with a rhetorical sleight of hand: he asks whether it's possible that Maurice is including, under the label "Romans," *both* Latin-speaking refugees from the Empire *and* Latin-speaking Dacian "natives." He then answers his own question: Yes, that is indeed possible. The problem is that Maurice has absolutely nothing to say about any Latin-speaking "natives" – that population is introduced in the conversation by Panaitescu alone. The failure of a source to specify what he means by a label is conveniently taken by Romanian historians as proof that he *might* have had in mind their preferred meaning; from there, it's a small step to the certainty that the ancient writer did indeed intend to say that which provides support for the "pro-Romanian" position. Panaitescu seems to sense that he is on extremely thin ice with this reasoning, as signaled by the hedging with which he begins his rather inconclusive conclusion: "*In any case, here's reliable documentary proof that, at that time, Romans lived alongside the Slavs to the north of the Danube*" (my italics).

As if Panaitescu's analysis was not logically deficient enough, his translation from the *Strategikon* is also dubious. The main English-language translation of the treatise – done by George Dennis (1984) – further casts doubt on the Romanian historian's discovery. When Maurice writes that "They are Romans (Romanoi) who have in time received this status (of refugees)," Panaitescu interprets that to mean "people who have lived for a long time, perhaps for generations" in this region. This reading is important to him because, if accurate, it would allow him to argue that Maurice's "refugees" were really (in part? mostly? entirely?) Latin-speaking "natives" - that is, "Daco-Romans." However, Dennis's English translation divorces the "refugees" from the "Romans" altogether, and, more importantly, has a completely different take on what the reference to "time" actually means:

The so-called refugees who are ordered to point out the roads and furnish certain information must be very closely watched. Even some Romans *have given in to the times*, forget their own people, and prefer to gain the good will of the enemy. Those who remain loyal ought to be rewarded, and the evildoers punished (pp. 123-4, my italics).

In a footnote, Dennis explains who the "refugees" were: "During the reign of Heraclius refugees from the Danube regions, Pannonia, Dacia, and Dardania sought safety in Thessalonica" (p. 124, footnote). Nothing is said about the language they spoke, and thus the English translation gives us no reason to equate them with the

“Daco-Romans.” As for the “Romans,” they seem to have been former Byzantine subjects since it seems possible for them to “remain” loyal – presumably to the Empire and not to a foreign people as rewards are advised for such loyalty. Finally, this translation gives us no indication that the “Romans” did anything “in time”; rather, they have simply “given in to the times” and betrayed their people.

What began as Panaitescu’s tortuous argument in favor of “Daco-Roman” continuity to the north of the Danube (a question of the highest importance to the Romanian historians bent on proving at all costs that the proto-Romanians resided in the lands of “Dacia” long before the arrival of the Slavs and the Huns), morphed into a curt assertion in Armbruster’s otherwise detailed analysis of literary sources, and then into an even more succinct, albeit prominently placed, statement in the Barnea textbook. Along the way, what *might* have been a *Strategikon* reference to a Latin-speaking (non-refugee) population to the north of the Danube became incontrovertible proof that “in the Byzantine world, the Romanians’ ethnic identity was well-known” (Barnea, 2004, p. 4). Witnessing this process, one would be hard-pressed to disagree with the critics of the Ethnogenesis approach to historiography who fault it for “waiv[ing] methodological analysis of sources in order to construct them as conduits for a predetermined category of information,” that is, information about “ethnic identity” (Gillet, 2006, p. 249).

Even if the “thousand-year veil” that prevented the “proto-Romanians” from having a presence in Europe’s chronicles didn’t exist and the record were full of Vlacho-Romanian name-droppings, one would still be on shaky ground when speaking of a Romanian “ethnic identity” before the modern era. And that is because, according to the critics of Ethnogenesis, the names one finds in the documents of the early Middle Ages were not initially attached to the ethnic groups that they are attached to now:

“Ethnic” titles such as “kingdom of the Goths” are literary terminology, reflecting centuries of Greco-Roman thought conflating geographical regions with *ethne*, “peoples” and insouciant of the autonyms or world-view of foreign peoples (Gillet, 2006, p. 252).

Just like Herodotus’s and Strabo’s usage of the labels “Getae” and “Dacians” is not a reliable indication of the existence of two well-defined, distinct ethnic groups, the Byzantine, Hungarian and German documents’ usage

of the labels “Vlach” or “Roman” is not a reliable indication of the formation of a “Romanian” ethnic identity during early medieval times (to say nothing of the vacuous “proto-Romanian” heuristic).

Despite its salutary embrace of social constructivism, Ethnogenesis theory is “fundamentally essentialist” in its insistence on the cohesiveness, stability and eventual permanence of “ethnicity” (Gillet, 2006, p. 252). Reuter (2006) explains why Wenskus and Wolfram’s Ethnogenesis is a dead end:

[B]oth Wenskus and Wolfram have depicted the earlier state of scholarship, with a hint but only a hint of parody, as conceiving peoples as being fixed, capable only of changing their names (so that the early medieval Saxons corresponded to the Tacitean *Chauci*, and the major issue in deciding where the Bavarians came from when they arrived in the early sixth century is in identifying them with some earlier group). It is possible to parody their position in turn as being one of flux followed by fixation: there is a period of ethnogenesis, but then we have the people; ethnogenesis, like history, comes to a full stop; it takes some time to make the Bavarians out of whatever mix we choose to stress, but once made they are there (p. 103).

In a nutshell, that is exactly the story that the Ministry of Education-approved history curriculum wants Romanian students to take away from their textbook: following a period of flux in which, to quote Băluțoiu & Vlad’s (2012) euphemism-heavy assertion, the Getae-Dacians “connected” with the Romans “in a durable manner,” the “Romanian people” was “constituted” and has remained as such ever since then (p. 79)<sup>26</sup>. No amount of cohabitation with Hungarians, Slavs, Roma or Turks from the early Middle Ages to the present day could ever sully the wholesomeness of the Romanian ethos.

## **THE FAMILY METAPHOR**

In “Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies,” Walter Pohl (1998) points out that the Ethnogenesis school of historiographic thought often chose to describe the transformations that their precious (ethnonational) “people” went through over the centuries with the help of biological metaphors (“birth, growth, flowering, and decay”). Such heuristics favored “all kinds of chauvinist ideologies” that violently condemned any alternative to the nation-state. While contemporary historians are considerably more skeptical of the “one people, one state” dogma that used to rule the day in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Pohl writes, “it is remarkable

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<sup>26</sup> “În sfârșit, romanii, cu care geto-dacii au intrat în legătură mai târziu, dar în mod durabil, pentru a constitui poporul roman...”

enough that we still seem to rely upon biological metaphors” in our historical narratives. The story of “ethnogenesis” that dominates Romanian historiography, for example, is frequently told in terms of such biological metaphors, especially those having to do with the family life of human beings: birth, parents, children, siblings, relatives, etc. Many of the textbooks under study in this paper also follow this pattern when discussing (ethno-)nation-building and language-formation (two processes which to them are to be found in a dialectical relationship).

Giurescu, Berciu-Drăghiceascu & Grigore’s (2006) fourth grade textbook tells us that “The Romanian people is born Christian” (p. 26)<sup>27</sup>, Burleac, Lazăr & Teodorescu’s (2005) textbook mentions a “Geto-Dacian family” (p. 13), and virtually all textbooks speak of the Romanian people’s “ancestors.” Băluțoiu & Vlad (2012) further develop the family metaphor in their discussion of the Romanians’ “birth certificate” (though they curiously enclose the verb “signed” within quotation marks, perhaps betraying a glimmer of awareness about their use of metaphor):

Through its conquest by Trajan, Dacia became a Roman province. Thus was “signed” the Romanian people’s birth certificate, the cohabitation of Dacians and Romans constituting the foundation for the appearance of Europe’s eastern-most Latin people (*neam*) (p. 108).<sup>28</sup>

The essential role that metaphors play in our cognitive processes has long been recognized by students of communication. Cognitive linguist George Lakoff has given the idea perhaps its most famous treatment in a succession of books<sup>29</sup> starting with *Metaphors We Live By* (1980, co-authored with Mark Johnson). Our actions are in large part determined by our worldviews, Lakoff argues, and those worldviews are anchored by concepts that (metaphorically-speaking) live in our heads. In turn, those concepts are essentially metaphors: maps that allow us to grasp that which seems foreign and overly complicated to us in terms of that with which we are already familiar with and which we find easy to work with. The process by which a cultural group (call it “ethnic group,” “nation” or what have you) develops its own distinctive sense of identity over time is extremely

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<sup>27</sup> “Poporul român se naște creștin.”

<sup>28</sup> “Prin cucerirea ei de către Traian, Dacia a devenit provincie romană. Astfel s-a ‘semnat’ actul de naștere al poporului român, conviețuirea dintre daci și romani constituind temeiul apariției celui mai răsăritean neam latin al Europei.”

<sup>29</sup> See *More Than Cool Reason* (1989, co-authored), *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1990), *Moral Politics* (1996), and *Don’t Think of an Elephant!* (2004).

complicated and hard to pin down, as are, for that matter, *all* processes involving multiple human beings. (Witness the quantity and heterogeneity of social science literature attempting to explain the way societies work). The conceptual map that the family metaphor provides us with helps us wrap our heads around that complexity, and, for that reason, is perennially favored by those who write textbooks for the use of individuals whose intellectual sophistication is seen as limited due to their young age.

All of the fourth grade textbooks under study here begin with a discussion of the student's actual family ("Draw your family's genealogical tree"). They then bring in the concept of a "tribe," which is often defined along the lines of "a group of families that have a common ancestor" (Burleac, Lazar & Teodorescu's, 2005, p. 12).<sup>30</sup> By the time the concept of the "ethnic group/nation/*neam*" comes to the fore, the family metaphor has already been primed – and, just as importantly, does not feel like a metaphor anymore, but rather as the literal truth. (Small wonder, then, that we still speak of our compatriots as "our blood").

As with any map, a master metaphor does not only facilitate one's understanding of a complex concept, but it also limits that understanding to one cluster of preferred meanings. (A political map will prompt the student to see the world in terms of countries, for example, while a geographical map will make her think of mountains and plains, instead of Belgium and Zimbabwe). Moreover, a "simple metaphor" is never simple: its sense-making abilities rely on a succession of secondary, less explicit, metaphors, which Lakoff calls "entailments." Below, I propose a list of such entailments that, I believe, come in a package with the nation-as-family metaphor:

*Two parents:* Modern three-parent in vitro fertilization experiments notwithstanding, all human beings have two biological parents. The Romanian people's two "parents," the Dacians and the Romans, neatly fit into that schema which effectively excludes the possibility that the Romanians might also have a Slavic "parent," or, God forbid!, a Hungarian one. As Băluțoiu & Vlad's quote above makes clear, it was the "cohabitation of Dacians and Romans" that led to the "appearance" of the Romanian people.

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<sup>30</sup> "Trib - grup de familie care au un strămoș comun."

A child cannot add to her biological parents at a later date – hence the suspicion that the high stewards of the Romanian language (a group that includes the contemporary leaders of the rule-setting Romanian Academy, as well as the authors of school textbooks) show towards recent neologisms.

A child does, however, have grandparents and great-grandparents – that is, ancestors. The Băluțoiu & Vlad's (2012) fifth grade textbook offers a quick lineage, complete with evaluative adjectives and the indexical “our”:

Within the great Thracian family, the Getae-Dacians represent one of the important kin (*neamuri*). They are, at the same time, our most removed ancestors (p. 77).<sup>31</sup>

The authors do not explain what “most removed” means and the decision to start Romanian history here, and not elsewhere, is obfuscated through the use of a simple declarative sentence. Of course, one reason for that phrasing might lie in contemporary historiography's inability to make any solid observations about the “Indo-European peoples” that “came” before the Thracian Getae-Dacians. However, the phenomenon has its equivalent in how individuals obsessed with the purity of their ethnoracial “blood” tend to work with their reconstructed genealogical tree: by privileging certain branches as “important” and by prudently stopping their inspection of the tree before the reality of ethnoracial diversity makes itself too visible.

*The birth:* A child's birth is an event that is clearly bounded in time: it follows a transition period of roughly nine months, it happens over a small period of time (anywhere from a few minutes to 18 hours), and, at the end of it, the child is definitively separated from her mother. Working within the birth metaphor, Romanian historians have no qualms indicating in their textbooks a distinct period of time when the Romanian nation was in the womb, as well as a relatively well-defined moment when the “baby” was birthed (e.g., before or soon after the Aurelian withdrawal, or before the Slavs arrived in Eastern and Central Europe). To suggest that the Romanian language or the Romanian nation continued undergoing radical transformations into the Middle Ages and Modernity (and, indeed, that they're very likely to continue experiencing such transformations in the near

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<sup>31</sup> “În marea familie a tracilor, geto-dacii reprezintă unul dintre neamurile importante. Ei sunt, totodată, cei mai îndepărtați strămoși ai noștri.”

future, given the country's membership in the European Union and the acceleration of various globalizing phenomena) is still, in the mainstream Romanian public space, tantamount to committing heresy.

*The child:* A child is a distinct, bounded entity, who, despite undergoing constant change throughout her life, will not acquire a fundamentally different shape. The child's body will grow, but it will not develop a third arm, nor is it likely to lose an arm – and if it does, the loss is perceived as an unnatural, highly regretful accident that greatly handicaps the individual.

The child might be very similar to another child, but she will never become that other child. Children don't blend into each other. Two children do not become three children, and they cannot, at any point, merge into one entity. Thus, even though virtually every Romanian knows that the Romanian language has long “borrowed” words from other languages, the Romanian public space (including the school classroom and the media) is never lacking in outraged denunciations of so-called “loan words” – especially when the “lender” of words is the world power *du jour*, English-speaking America. The “Romlish” idiom spoken by much of Romania's youth is often perceived by those who hold the most cultural power to be an unnatural attempt at hybridization, akin to the building of a Frankenstein monster from body parts originally belonging to different people.

Likewise, hyphenated ethnic identities (e.g., “Hungarian-Romanian”) have not made no headway in the Romanian-speaking world, such labels being inexistent in history textbooks, even with regards to historical characters with mixed parentage, such as King Matthias Corvinus (1458-1490) who appears to have had a Hungarian mother and a Romanian father. Contemporary schoolchildren raised in a mixed household are effectively told by the history textbook that one must carry just one ethnic identity – or, at the very least, that one of their multiple ethnic identities must be so overwhelmingly dominating of the others as to be, ultimately, the only identity that really matters. The echoes of the “miscegenation” debates of the last four centuries are obvious to anyone with a basic knowledge of the subject.

In this paper, I have sought to examine precisely how the historical narrative put forward by contemporary Romanian textbooks has been built on the tropes of *origins*, *unity*, and *continuity*. To that end, I have identified two pivotal moments when the “Geto-Dacian” identity category shed its old names and acquired



new ones: from “Getae-Dacians” to “Daco-Romans” via “Romanization,” and from “Daco-Romans” to “Romanians” via “ethnogenesis.”