

White Man Law versus Black Magic Women. Racial and Gender Entanglements of Witchcraft Policies in Romania

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Abstract. *This study focuses on structural discrimination in Romania, based on gender and racial logics. The article analyzes social policies directed at a historically marginalized ethnic group, the Roma. Racial logics have often been used in colonial encounters or experiences of slavery, where a “witch-enemy” was created to differentiate the white from the non-white, the educated from the uneducated (Perkinson 2004). In investigating important changes in the role of spirituality in Romania, this paper follows the intersections of religion, belief and the secular in public life, legislation and everyday practices. In 2007, Romania completed its accession to the European Union. The EU made demands for more efficient measures against racial discrimination¹ (Bale 2013; Schiek, Chege 2008), one of the biggest socio-economic issues of the country. Romania carries a burden of five centuries of Roma slavery (Kaplan 2016) and the largest WWII Roma genocide (Gheorghe 2013), equaled only by the silence of the Romanian state surrounding past and present anti-Roma racial violence. To track historical patterns, the article analyzes contemporary cases of Romanian politicians developing what seems to be racist policies, aimed at a historically marginalized group in Europe. Witchcraft is a productive category to think through global, political and economic insecurities. Panics around the occult symbolize larger cultural anxieties regarding socio-economic changes and indicate a move to challenge an existing order (Mantz 2007).*

Keywords: *Magic, Orthodox Christianity, Politics, Racial discrimination, Gender discrimination, Roma.*

National Political Context on Romanian Gender and Racial Policies

Following Romania’s 2007 EU membership, the country’s government has debated bills in 2010 and 2011, meant to formalize and tax ritual magic. The

1 Perhaps most telling of the importance of racial policies for EU is the request that member states comply with Article 2: “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.”

legislative efforts have been characterized by Romanian politicians as meant to dispel “medieval practices” in order to align Romania to “the modernity of the 21st century”², thus creating a dialectical binary between witchcraft and the modern, secular state. Some politicians have argued these bills are meant to make witchcraft an official, taxable job, in order to address EU’s concerns about Romania’s corruption and fraud³. From this point of view, the legislative projects are, in theory, meant to protect clients from fraud targeted at them by scammers⁴, some of them being of Rroma origin. In practice, the witch tax can be seen as a racial stance. In fact, as a response to the witchcraft tax, one of the witches said: “Romanians cannot be witches, this is something only the Rroma can do”⁵. Subsequent statements made by politicians involved in the witchcraft tax bill, as well as recent media portrayals, reveal that the group of scammers was perceived to be exclusively Rroma women, even though there are many cases of practitioners of witchcraft who are not Rroma. Rroma women are stereotypically believed to scam naïve non-Rroma Romanians by pretending to be witches (Sway 1975). This paper seeks to understand the entanglements of magic and the secular in Romanian national politics.

While much has been written on Rroma discrimination (De Soto&Gedeshi 2005; Scheffel 2005) both in Romania (Kaplan 2016; Gheorghe 2013) and in Europe at large (Pogany 2004), this paper analyzes the phenomenon by looking at the seemingly secular public discourse of Romanian politicians, meant to protect what is essentially a set of highly-racialized policies. Racial violence on the basis of witchcraft accusations has been well documented by social sciences in post-colonial spaces (Comaroff, Comaroff 2001; Geschiere 1997; Glickman 1959; Kapferer 1997; 2002; Taussig 1980), and the global West (Ankarloo, Henningsen 2001; Favret-Saada 1981). The Christian Orthodox world has, in this sense, remained an unexplored space, despite its long history of racial violence (Stewart 1997) and of the role of religion in public life and in the making of the modern state (Coleman 2013; Kivelson 2003; Leuştean 2010; Stan, Turcescu 2007; Wanner 1998; 2012).

The sorts of legislative moves made in recent years by the state and public institutional actors discussed here, were aimed at limiting the association

2 <http://www.ziare.com/politica/parlament/vrajitoare-la-parlament-descantece-pentru-deputatul-care-vrea-sa-interzica-ghicitul-1139239> (accessed Oct 10th, 2016)

3 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-152_en.htm (accessed Oct 10th 2016)

4 <http://www.opiniatimisoarei.ro/vrajitoria-si-farmecele-aproape-de-intrarea-in-legalitate-propunerea-deputatului-alin-popoviciu-a-fost-adoptata-in-senat/09/11/2010> (accessed Oct 10th, 2016)

5 <http://www.evz.ro/revolta-vrajitoarelordeputatii-nu-stiu-cu-cine-se-pun-am-adus-un-barbat-la-nevasta-in-1-9.html> (accessed Oct 10th 2016)

of the public sphere with witchcraft and superstition. Especially during Romania's long attempts to become a EU member state, these attempts were quite consistent, with legal bans on TV advertising and laws for taxing witchcraft. The defective justice system, as repeatedly pointed out by the European Union, made people realize these policies were not feasible. With the 2008 economic crisis and the many bankruptcies it produced, many Christian believers turned to the supernatural for support (Bever 2009).

In Romania, like in many other Orthodox Christian countries, witchcraft is seen differently than what classical anthropological scholarship has taught us. Pop-Curșeu's (2014) research within European literature from the early 19th century, and its ramifications in the 20th century, finds that witchcraft has a central role and that a strong literary motif, the Gypsy-witch, constantly appears in numerous works. Pop-Curșeu finds that witches appear often in this literature, as diabolical beings, a common trend when referring to members of minority groups from an ethnic or social point of view – this trend relies on two main stereotypes: Jews in the West and Gypsies in the East. Pop-Curșeu notes that the social marginality of the Roma is highlighted even more in their superficial or unsuccessful Christening efforts, as well as their refusal to align to accepted forms of modernity. Agnes Hesz (2007) suggests that narratives on bewitchment serve primarily as communicative devices by which people negotiate their social position in the community, even in cases when overt social conflict is not involved. Hesz analyzes the construction of the bewitchment narrative of one peasant family living in a Hungarian village in Romania, to argue that bewitchment narratives – besides their obvious psychological effects – are used as communicative means for negotiating one's position in a particular social space.

Perceived gendered divisions have often existed with regards to the practice of magic, in both literature and social discourse. The research I have conducted on Romanian Christian Orthodox ritual magic (2011-2017) shows, however, that both practitioners and clients of ritual magic are male and female. My work challenges the idea that magic is solely a feminine (and irrational) practice, and instead goes to argue that magic serves an array of needs for many different individuals. Gavriluță (2006) conducted research in several Moldavian counties and identified dual representations of the feminine divinatory agents versus the masculine ones. Gavriluță concluded that even though women are well represented among clairvoyants, clients, and spectators, these valorizations function as negative stereotypes and do not serve the practitioners themselves.

Similarly, Norris and Inglehart claim that in post-communist Eastern Europe, contrary to the 'supply-side religious markets theory', the 'more homogeneous religious cultures and institutions' (2011, 127) proved to be less

secular. They were thus more religious than the heterogeneous ones, and held greater religious pluralism. In Romania's current lived religion, multiplication of one and the same ritual action is widespread, including veneration of saints and relics, the use of written prayers (*acatiste*), and candle rituals. This multiplication of rituals, including witchcraft, serves to improve the channel of communication with the world beyond, and it increases the chances of getting the message across (Stahl, Venbrux 2011).

Describing the Data Collection

The current study relies, methodologically, on my own interviews with practitioners of magic (2011-2016) and on the study of documents, specifically newspapers focusing on local and national news. My work investigates reporting of media outlets, and foreign coverage of the events analyzed (2016). My interviews explore the views of practitioners of magic about the witchcraft tax bill. Interviews involved revisiting 15 practitioners of magic in Bucharest and the county of Suceava (Romania), some of which identified as Rroma (6), others who were identified by the community as Rroma, but did not personally identify this way (3) and finally, practitioners of magic who did not personally identify as Rroma, nor were they identified as such by the community (6). This diversity aided the study in terms of allowing for a complex space of analysis on what it means to be a practitioner of ritual magic and how they are affected by these policies. In structured interviews, as well as informal and less-structured discussions, we discussed many topics related to their practice, yet for the sake of brevity and the scope of this study, this article will analyze, as much as possible, only their comments related to politicians as regulators of ritual magic. This investigation uses data gathered from three men and twelve women, as the interviews speak most to the relationship between practitioners of magic and political figures. In terms of study of documents, the article is based on discourse analysis from interviews and articles that came out in Romanian media between 2010 and 2013, that have to do in some way with the witchcraft tax bills. The focus is primarily on media and political discourse from both practitioners of magic and politicians as they respond publicly to the context created by the legislative measures, as well as the comments that the various social actors make about secular practice and witchcraft.

Anthropology's Entanglements with the Magic and the Secular

Before moving further, it is important to outline the functional definitions of secularism and magic that this paper will use. According to Bilgrami (2014), secularism refers to three concepts. First, it is a position to be taken about religion, even as religion itself may not be clearly defined, secularism will always have a parasitic position with regards to that definition. Next, secularism is a political doctrine (a function different from “secular” and “secularization”) – meaning that it takes a stance against religion solely in the realm of policies. In contrast, “secular” and “secularization” refer more broadly to intellectual and social processes, to people’s practices, but not to policies. Finally, secularism is not good in itself, as a stance against religion that is restricted to policies. There will be conflict from two different sides, with two different sets of moral values (this is different than, for example, atheism, that does not claim its truth from a set of moral values).

Ideas about secularism crystallized during the European Enlightenment and the Protestant Reformation, a time that has also helped form the essentialist legacy of Eurocentrism, with its roots in colonial ideologies and racism (Hornborg 2011). Similarly, Michel Foucault defines Enlightenment not as a universal form of progress, but as a series of historical events and processes that induce forms of knowledge, projects of rationalization of knowledge and practices, as well as a series of technological mutations (Foucault 1984). For example, during Saba Mahmood’s fieldwork in Egypt (2005), secularism did not mean abandoning religion, but rather regulating religion through state and civic institutions.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that these processes of secularism worked in historical stages. The first stage took place during Reformation and Enlightenment, two processes started in the West by separating religion from magic (Scribner 1993) - in other words, by removing superstition from religion, which is why the entanglements of magic and the secular are important to discuss. As a consequence, for central scholars in the social sciences, such as Weber, practitioners of magic are people who have power over the supernatural but work outside of an organized church, privately, who act as clients rather than parishioners (Weber 1905). In other centers of Christianity, like the Orthodox countries, this process happened much later and it was not as drastic (Wolff 1994).

For this reason, Orthodox countries have had a different interaction with religion and magic (Tătăran 2016). Furthermore, while conversations about the nature and place of secularism are important, they often

discursively marginalize an important space – Eastern European Christian Orthodox countries. One possible reason for this academic gap lies in the ideological West-East divide in the scholarship produced on areas largely accepted as ‘Eastern European’, ‘socialist/communist’ and ‘post-socialist/post-communist’ – in short, a secular bias in anthropology and neighboring disciplines about this geographic and socio-political area. From a critical point of view, we can say that area studies are working towards reifying ideological boundaries within the European subcontinent, in part due to this inherent secular bias. Much like African, Latin American, or East Asian studies, the study of Eastern Europe can perpetuate stereotypical ideas about cultural difference. These include stereotypes about the nature of people in the area, their moral values and work ethics, their capacity for producing capital and a modern society, racial and gender identities, and the like. This approach is fed by an evolutionist impulse in the anthropological discipline and international organizations (often neoliberal) that expects constant modernization from the ‘developing world’ (hence the name). However, this preached modernization never reaches an endpoint – when Eastern European countries finally attain certain imposed standards, the West will have already developed further, and have reached new standards, so there is always an impossible amount of catching-up to do. The EU appears to be a politico-economic project essential to perpetuating this mindset.

The secularism project (discussed for its essence as a policy-making project) culminated with Marxism, an intellectual endeavor that got translated into policies by many countries around the world (Zebrowski 2012). However, against its very secularizing essence, the secularism processes turned to sacralizing secularization itself (Hadden 1987). To go on, the belief in secularization reached new heights in the post-9/11 era and has been supported by a deep antagonism to religious belief and against various forms of institutionalized religion (Ammerman 2007). Charles Taylor discusses the change of the role of religion in public life and for people becoming self-sufficient, as the gods have been placed in secular things (Flanagan, Taylor 2010).

However, from a Bourdieusian perspective, central to the theoretical approach in this article, scholarship should focus on the actual practices and interests of social actors, rather than the formal beliefs and doctrines of decontextualized subjects (Bourdieu 1991). Bourdieu partially relies on Emile Durkheim’s idea of ‘sociology of religion’ (1912) and the fact that religion needs to be analyzed as a dimension of knowledge and communication, that allows for logical and social integration. Bourdieu understands the sociology of religion as a sociology of power, much in the same way that Max Weber (1971) does. Furthermore, Marx and Bourdieu agree in

understanding ideology as translating social rapport into supernatural rapport (1977[1867]). These theoretical connections are important to my topic because Durkheim, Weber and Marx all postulated that a belief in the supernatural would drop with the rise of modernity, a theory that relies on the bias that the anthropological discipline has had towards magic. Furthermore, it is important to note that for Max Weber, the origins of capitalism originate in religion (Weber 1971). Weber sees the Calvinist doctrine of predeterminism as essential to the spirit of capitalism and the form of ascetics associated with it (Weber 1905).

As far as defining religion and magic, the anthropological legacy is as long as it is complex. Tambiah (1990), for example, goes through Tylor and Frazer's intellectualist and evolutionary theories, the French school's Durkheimian and Maussian doctrines, Malinowski and Radcliff-Brown's functionalism, Levy-Bruhl's philosophical approach and ends with Evans-Pritchard, Horton, Beattie and Gellner, to explain that these eleven decades of scholarship are essential to make sense of why magic, religion and science are viewed as tendentious categories. Tambiah's primary concern in this theoretical endeavor is simple: how do we understand and represent the modes of thought of other cultures?

Magic is arguably one of the most contested topics in social research and in everyday life. There is a particular level of pressure on individuals holding political and administrative functions to avoid belief and practice in magic, which has harsh consequences in a period of secularized development, such as communism or adjusting to a politico-economic supranational project, such as the EU. The article argues that we have never been Enlightened (in the way that the European intellectual tradition of the 17th and 18th century describes the term), drawing on Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) to highlight the fact that modernity, as a project of the Enlightenment, is not applicable to think through everyday experiences and beliefs of urban political elites and that social actors are juggling hybrid forms of concealing and revealing beliefs, in order to save face in a certain social context.

The article draws on the anthropology of magic as a site of ideological struggle, in order to understand how political figures engage with, resist and mobilize the occult for their own individual and political ends. Social scientists have long discussed the fact that beliefs in the supernatural are historically constructed (Liendhardt 1961; Stroumsa 1995; Petersen 2003, Bendix 2004) and used to attain political power (Bok 1983; Vidal, Whitehead 2004). The involvement of magic in politics is not something new. Daniel Jütte (2015) suggests that Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist definition of magic (stating that magic is an esoteric practice meant to solve everyday

problems) is not enough to mirror the experience of pre-modern elites, for whom magic offered an idealized substitute for political action, to which they did not have access.

Contemporary local and regional contexts in Guyana and Venezuela have incorporated the occult in regional and national politics, by ways of shamans leading political groups prior the colonial encounter (Vidal, Whitehead 2004). Having a cosmology in place with these elements already established is very important for local forms of government and administration to keep their structure in the advent of new national and international political order. My project thus builds on Jack Goody's (1961) definition of religion as the body of beliefs and practices directed at supernatural beings and powers, to understand a belief in magic as inherently religious. Goody's account is a good functional definition that allows the researcher to bridge beliefs accepted by the church and those deemed as superstitious.

Case Studies – Witchcraft State Regulation

On January 1st, 2011, the national tax codes were updated to promote adding witchcraft to the list of jobs in the national labor code. The law project was forwarded for review on April 9th 2010, and was initiated by 25 members of the government, with an overwhelming majority of 21 of them being from PDL, the democrat liberal party, and only one politician representing the Rroma minority. The law project supported that all divinations and charms be taxed with a 16% tax and that witches be held liable when their predictions and charms would not have the promised results (article 244 of the new Penal Code). in terms of the types of practices targeted by the law project, this translated into 16% tax for professions such as witchcraft, astrology, or fortunetelling, understood under the law as separate fields. Furthermore, this allowed the state to sentence those whose predictions have not come true under article 215 of the Romanian criminal code, under fraud. The bill states: “misleading someone, by presenting a false fact as a true fact or a true fact as a false fact, with the purpose of unjustly gaining for oneself or someone else material benefits, will be punished with six to twelve months in prison.”⁶ As a response to this particular point, Ana, one of the practitioners of magic who I interviewed stated:

“These men (n.a. the politicians) don't understand what we do, but they want to send us to prison. If someone comes to me with a problem and the cards show me it will be resolved in three points, that can mean anything

6 <http://legeaz.net/cod-penal-actualizat-2011/art-215-cpen> (Accessed Oct 15th 2016)

from three days to three weeks, months, years...do you understand? How can I be sent to prison for that? What if the client decides to take me to court after three days? What happens then?"

The media focused on interviewing Roma witches' dissatisfaction with the new labor code, even though the law affected practitioners of magic from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. A group of Roma witches protested in front of the government by throwing hexes at the politicians responsible of the change, which became the only event of its sort described in the media. In a very similar move, the US has seen an interesting extension to the January 2017 Women's March against Donald Trump, the new US president. In February of 2017 witches around the US have gathered to throw hexes at Donald Trump⁷. The first meeting, set up over social media was on February 24th, while the second one was scheduled for March 26th and the third for April 24th. The witches work asynchronously and have promised on their social media page to throw a binding spell over the new president at every waning crescent moon at midnight until he is driven out of office⁸. Both in the 2011 Romanian case and in the 2017 US case, we see witchcraft being used by oppressed, often minority women, as a gendered tool against white men in power.

Laycock (2011) suggests that the Romanian witches are exclusively Roma women, and can be equated with psychics in the US. According to my ongoing research (2011-2017) in Northern Romania, at the border of Romania and Ukraine, as well as the capital city of Bucharest, Laycock's theory can be contradicted, as there are many non-Roma women witches in Romania, as well as a fair number of men who practice witchcraft, from all ethnic groups, some of them Orthodox priests. Most witches who participated in this study (2011-2016) do not identify their practice outside of Orthodox Christianity, as they use the same prayers as Christian Orthodox priests and ask for help from the same supernatural figures (central figures are God, Jesus, Holy Mary). However, based on Alak's research, there is also a small group of Roma Muslims in Romania - yet even in the Muslim communities in Romania, the Roma are not accepted as equals - the native Turkish-Tatar Muslim community accepts them only as "ignorant" Muslims because they lack religious knowledge and ignore basic Islamic practices (Alak 2015).

Even though Romanian politicians openly oppose witchcraft, and define the practice as backwards and superstitious, this view does not seem

7 <http://nymag.com/thecut/2017/02/witches-are-planning-to-hex-trump-this-friday.html> (accessed May 3rd, 2017)

8 <https://www.facebook.com/bindtrump/> (accessed May 3rd, 2017)

to be supported by the numerous clients that the witches have. In fact, the witches enjoyed increasing revenue even during the 2008 economic crisis, according to my interviews with both male and female practitioners of magic. As stated already, these policies and their media portrayal polarized two groups. On the one hand, we find the group that this article refers to as “the white men”- meaning the non-Roma Romanian male politicians. On the other hand, we find “the black magic women”- meaning the Roma female witches. This situation has historical precedents in Romania, which support this dichotomy. Andrea Fehér’s investigation (2015) is based on the records of the secular Court from the Romanian town of Cluj in the eighteenth century, where more than 250 women were accused of witchcraft. Much like the 2010-2011 cases that are central to this article, the eighteenth century documents reveal female criminality from a male perspective, and contain moral, legal and sexual elements of a male discourse on female crime. On a similar note, Šešo’s research in contemporary Croatia (2012) reveals that the breaking of taboos or social, moral or religious values, causes women to “become” witches. Šešo claims that in certain Croatian communities, rumors or gossip will start about women perceived as ugly, unmarried, divorced, promiscuous, who are then brands them as witches when a negative incident occurs in the community. The same arguments, made on a racial logic, are making Roma women “become” witches in Romania.

Witchcraft regulation bills are not novel or present solely in Romania. In recent years, many countries around the world have had similar debates. South African lawmakers started the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1998, meant to end witchcraft violence (Niehaus 2013). South Africa’s Law Reform Commission ratified the Witchcraft suppression act in 2010⁹, which had a strong impact on similar legislative projects in the 2000s in Cameroon (Geschiere 2006) and Zimbabwe (Tebbe 2007), as well as the Kenyan Justification for Review of Witchcraft Act, in 2013¹⁰. In 2008, after the Consumer Affairs Victoria department has been contacted by numerous Australian citizens with complaints on witchcraft fraud, the Australian legal organisms in Melbourne have started discussing regulations on witchcraft practitioners¹¹. Tajikistan, which has made international headlines for enacting a series of bizarre laws, is set to amend its criminal code that would see practitioners of “witchcraft” and “sorcery” sent to prison rather than merely fined as they are now. In 2008, the parliament of Tajikistan,

9 <http://www.paganrightsalliance.org/review-of-witchcraft-suppression-act-update/> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)

10 <http://www.klrc.go.ke/index.php/klrc-blog/518-justification-for-review-of-witchcraft-act-cap-67> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)

11 <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/psychics-may-face-regulations-that-help-tell-which-is-witch/2008/05/03/1209235234274.html> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)

Central Asia's poorest nation, banned witchcraft and fortune-telling as part of the strongman president's antipoverty campaign begun a year earlier, which also led to lawmakers imposing a ban on extravagant weddings and funerals¹². Saudi Arabia's Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has long been focused on fighting witchcraft, starting a special anti-witchcraft unit in 2009¹³. In Toronto, Canada, in 2009, a woman faced trial after claiming she can practice magic¹⁴. In 2010, 40% of the cases judged in the Central African Republic Court were cases of witchcraft, with over half of the cases ending in prosecutions¹⁵. Even the extremist group Hamas outlawed witchcraft in the Gaza strip, in 2010, following a series of events involving women fortune-tellers (Perlmutter 2013). Costa Rican politicians have similarly called for a ban on *brujeria*, or witchcraft in 2010, through the Organismo de Investigacion Judicial (OIJ), arguing that a legal ban would limit the country's number of reported cases of fraud¹⁶. In 2011, Iranian politicians accused the president's staff of witchcraft, which started a national debate on the status of witchcraft practitioners in the country¹⁷. Across the world, Ilya Ponomaryov, a Russian MP, has drafted a bill on regulating "occult and mystical" services in healthcare, introducing licenses for healers and wizards in 2013¹⁸. Ponomaryov's bill is not even the first of its kind in Russia's recent debates; it actually follows another similar bill that was voted in the State Duma in 2010¹⁹. In 2013, Swaziland's Civil Aviation Authority announced that witches caught flying above 150m would be arrested and fined²⁰. Indonesia's legal code has, ever since 1981, had anti-sorceries provisions. In 2013, Indonesian juridical provisions claimed that any person who claims to possess magical powers, or who informs or encourages others to believe in witchcraft, would be sentenced to

- 12 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/tajikistan/11888550/Tajikistan-to-introduce-prison-sentences-of-up-to-seven-years-for-witchcraft.html> (accessed October 4th, 2016)
- 13 <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Saudi-Arabias-Anti-Witchcraft-Unit-breaks-another-spell> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)
- 14 <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/woman-charged-with-posing-as-witch/article1393710/> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)
- 15 <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/06/hex-appeal/308103/> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)
- 16 <http://www.insidecostarica.com/dailynews/2010/august/08/costarica10080801.htm> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)
- 17 <http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303657404576357323069853958> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)
- 18 <https://www.rt.com/politics/russia-witchcraft-bill-opposition-362/> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)
- 19 <https://www.rt.com/news/law-bans-witches-advertisements/> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)
- 20 <http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/2013/05/13/broomstick-flying-witches-to-be-brought-down-in-swaziland> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)

prison²¹. In 2013, the Indian State Government released news on a draft law meant to punish both those abusing witches and those practicing it²². State organisms and NGOs in Tanzania have been working on passing bills to protect the country's albino citizens from being mutilated for witchcraft, with visible efforts in 2015²³.

All the above instances are taking place in a context of globalizing neoliberalism, which in one way, produces its own type of witchcraft (Smith 2008). Witchcraft is most useful in anthropological scholarship as a mechanism to critique supposed neoliberal proclivities of those in power (Højer 2009). Deepening our understanding of Romanian political elites' beliefs and practices regarding ritual witchcraft allows us to do so. In practice, this means amongst Romanian political elites authority is bestowed to/rescinded from ritual witchcraft, similar to variation of treatment of Romanian politicians relative to use of ritual witchcraft within their communities.

Romania's post-communist transition is strongly linked to neoliberalism and open markets. By analyzing the intersections of neoliberalism and witchcraft, we see the latter as intimately connected to economic growth and thus to neoliberalism. Even though some may see witchcraft as opposed to a secular state administration, the EU offered many practitioners of witchcraft a chance to register as alternative health practitioners and work under a legal framework, under the institutional protection of CAMBRELLA (A pan-European research network for complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)) (Cambrella Report 2013, Project ID: 241951. Funded under: FP7-HEALTH).

We thus come to understand that witchcraft and the modern state function similarly, in part because they are both occult economies (Højer 2009). Success gained through mediation of either the state or witchcraft creates suspicion. This approach leads us to investigate how power circulates in the neoliberal state when governments establish apparatuses for policing witchcraft (Berger 2001). How do governments authorize certain forms of witchcraft while de-authorizing others? How does this shift of the state complicate the relationship of witchcraft and modernity for the people who live off it, and what are the implications for research?

Additionally, modernity and witchcraft are compatible systems (Humphrey 1994), as they both gain authority from concealment and from absence of knowledge (Højer 2009). Furthermore, recent academic discussions

21 <http://www.insideindonesia.org/legislating-against-the-supernatural> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)

22 <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2013/apr/11/government-prepares-stringent-law-to-fight-witchcraft-467062.html> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)

23 <http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/01/16/377505104/can-a-new-ban-on-witchcraft-protect-the-albinos-of-tanzania> (accessed Oct 3rd, 2016)

have brought into light the concept of “modernities”, which have challenged the assumption that modernity is a universal, historically well-circumscribed process (Cotoi 2015). For example, in the summer of 2014 I met Maria, a witch who many people in her community said was Rroma, but she herself did not identify as such. She recounted the long history of local and national political elites who have crossed her doorstep in search of help or answers about the future. She commented, amused, on how the 2008 financial crisis and EU accession brought her many customers, counter to her initial fear that occult practices would lose credibility in the dawn of this new, Westernized modernity to which Romania has aligned itself. Out of the interviews with the fifteen people who practice various forms or ritual magic, gathered between 2011 and 2016, a total of thirteen told me that the 2008 financial crisis had indeed made their trade bloom. However, many of the people practicing magic are suffering discrimination based on racial and gender logics. As the focus of the discourse surrounding the witch tax grew increasingly, it happened that numerous times, the figured of power who got to speak to the media were white (non-Rroma), educated rich men. The people they spoke of were a majority of uneducated, Rroma women. The article will further investigate the inherent racial and gender discrimination that took place in the debates regarding the witch tax.

Romania, Witchcraft, and Modernity

Romania has become an EU member state twenty years after the fall of communism, yet the ties between politics and witchcraft are still strong. Unlike the communist era, some of the entanglements between witchcraft and modernity have become public. During the 2010 Romanian presidential elections, the final candidates were Mircea Geoană and Traian Băsescu. Geoană highlighted the role of witchcraft in contemporary politics by publicly accusing Băsescu of employing the occult to win. Băsescu’s helper was named as Aliodor Manolea, a male para-psychologist, and non-Rroma citizen who thus has a different sort of authority than Rroma women, and who had appeared by the side of numerous politicians (Pop 2014). In this mediatized discussion of Rroma women, the individuality of a few famous witches, all of which advertise themselves as the true queens of white magic, is lost through racial logics, and they are discussed as a nameless, faceless, and illiterate group.

While linked to fears surrounding the occult, the sort of *otherness* that should most interest scholars is the one arising within, and among, these mythicized borders. These traditions, such as the occult practices of Rroma

women, have enraged the sensibilities of Orthodoxy, through their breach of moral practices. The Romanian media covered a law project started by prime minister Boc's administration, which requested witchcraft become a taxable, formally registered job. The registration of this profession in the legal record would make witches vulnerable to litigation; these legal forms would also allow an unsatisfied customer to file a court case against the practitioner of magic. While the tax project did not make clear associations with racial logic, Roma politicians quickly expressed worries that the practice might affect the image of the whole minority. Nicolae Păun, a Roma politician who took part in the witch tax law project said, on December 11th, 2011:

*"I am convinced that giving up this medieval, obscurantist practice (e.g. witchcraft), which has nothing to do with Christianity and 21st century modernity, throws an undeserved slap across the face of the entire ethnic group that I am part of and whose interests I have been defending for over two centuries"*²⁴

This perspective highlights efforts for EU integration, and the implied effort for secularization, inclusive to the political tendency to protect the rights of the Roma minority; a difficult project to implement in Romania, where according to recent research, many would rather go to a witch than to a psychologist (June 19 – July 1 2013 - AB Research Group Romania, national study of 1.000 respondents aged 18-60).

Struggles of Identity

The prevailing opinion on Romania's transition into EU statehood has emphasized the apparent struggle between its Orthodox, superstitious, traditional past, and its modern progressive EU member state identity. As discussed earlier, some Romanian politicians see witchcraft as a remnant of a superstitious past, while others see it as a way to move the EU anti-corruption agenda forward. Concurrently, Romanians see many of the EU regulations, such as no longer allowing the merchandising of traditional products, or impositions on healthcare policies, as an affront brought by Westernizing forces.²⁵ For Romanians, this outside intervention strips

24 Am convingerea ca renuntarea la aceste practici medievale, obscurantiste ce nu au nimic de-a face eu crestianismul si modernitatea secolului al XXI-lea arunca o nemeritata palma asupra intregii etnii din care fac parte si ale carei interese am ales sa le apar de doua decenii

25 <http://www.balkan.eu.com/romania-scrambles-traditional-food-eu-directive/> (accessed Oct 14th, 2016)

their identity²⁶, while individuals appear to conceptualize such intervention similar to communist regulations that banned many traditional and spiritual manifestations from public life (Verdery 2014).

These tensions reveal why it is important to understand the ways in which communist and post-communist state institutions use witchcraft (and media discourses) as a tool for control and political advancement. At a broader level, it is equally important to challenge anthropology's core assumptions about the social spaces and social actors commonly accepted as working with witchcraft, in light of new forms of urban engagement and exchange (Højer 2009). Witchcraft is a good tool to analyze the implications of modernity. It can be argued that the role of modernity is to break the protective framework of small communities and tradition (Giddens 1991; Bennett 2012) Westernizing values, in the form of secular nationalism at the base of many Western European countries, can be seen as this sort of disruptive force and may not fit Orthodox countries and may not be fully implemented (Mylonas 2003).

In the aftermath of forced urbanization of the communist era and urban migration for work opportunities during the post-communist period, witchcraft is understood to belong to rural, traditional belief and practice, mystified by the urban-rural cleavage. The ways in which several binaries, as identified and addressed in the current study (e.g. Romanian/Rroma, urban/rural, communist/EU, Orthodox/secular, magic/modernity), intersect with Romanian beliefs about the authority of ritual witchcraft is of great importance for the present investigation. These binaries determine how Romanian politicians may be treated in their communities for seeking power through the use of witchcraft. Male, urban, (often ethnically Romanian) political elites who believe in witchcraft have the potential to be viewed as less apt to govern in an EU member state and to be punished in public discourse (Pop 2014). In other words, they have the potential to be deemed less fit, or they are often perceived as less fit, thus leading to their derision in public discourse. Using the occult means deviating from both Christian Orthodox and secular values by engaging in what is seen as a female, rural (often Rroma) marginal practice (Pop 2014). These ideals about male, secular politicians create an essential and vilified public discourse about spiritual and ethnic identities. According to Harding, secular discourse expands and contributes to separating an imagined, correct form of rational religion from a created 'culturally repugnant other' (Harding 1991, 374). Consequently, this creates demonized forms of praxis and doxa, though drawing artificial ideological boundaries (Bilgrami 2014). Romanian urban political

26 <https://courses.cit.cornell.edu/his452/Andrei/ContestedFoodinPostnationalist%20Europe/ContestedCuisine.html> (accessed Oct 18th, 2016)

elites discuss witchcraft in public more than ever (Pop 2014). At the same time, members of governing bodies maintain extremely tight connections with the Romanian Orthodox Church (Stan, Turcescu 2005), a religious institution that formally condemns the practice of magic.

National Identity and Ritual Witchcraft

To date, no study has focused on the Romanian intersections of the secular and religious with national and racial identity through the lens of ritual witchcraft. Also, no significant data has been produced on the experience of politicians in Romania as a EU member state and the role of secular thinking in framing that experience. What little research there is concerning Romanian politicians and secular thinking focuses on transitions between political regimes (Stan, Turcescu 2007; 2011; Leuştean 2010), communist legacies (Deletant 1999; Tismăneanu 2003; Verdery 2014), and state-church entanglements (Glanzer 2009; Cinpoş 2010). This research is largely reflective of the academic interest in the use of secularization as an epochal process of rationalization or disenchantment.

Using Benedict Anderson's theory (1983), I argue that an imagined history is being laid around a universalized process of growth, where the end point is secularization. In this process, the West is often the model, while post-colonial states seem have to follow this model (Wolff 1994). To complicate things further, Eastern European states have a history of close relations with the national Orthodox church (Leuştean 2010). This Orthodox identity often overlaps with national identity, suggesting that secularization processes are more difficult to implement, and societies here are harder to modernize through the same processes as non-Orthodox states. The clearest examples in this sense are the massive pilgrimages that Romanian Orthodox communities make to exorcist priests, as well as the negative public discourse regarding Roma women and their practices associated with witchcraft.

While witchcraft has long been a topic of interest in the social sciences (Winkelman 1992), it has only recently become a point of debate in legal and policy scholarship (Forsyth 2016). As discussed so far, the legal efforts of Romania's secular modernization of spiritual practices included listing witchcraft in the new Romanian labor code; this translates into 16% tax for professions such as witchcraft, astrology, or fortunetelling. In public discourse, EU integration has taken place amidst numerous debates between Romanian political urban elites, who accuse each other on public television of employing witchcraft for achieving personal and professional ends, including during the presidential elections (Pop 2014).

An online survey (February 2nd-9th 2011) from the Romanian media trust Ziare asked 2,837 people whether or not witchcraft should become an official job and be sanctioned as such. 1,831 (63.9% of respondents) voted for the law project that would lead witches to be imprisoned if their divinations are incorrect. Another 714 people (24.68% of respondents) were indifferent to the topic, while the remaining 328 (11.42% of respondents) suggested that witches should not be persecuted on the basis of the truthfulness of their predictions.

It is unclear, however, how lawmakers would determine the criteria that can regularize witchcraft, since its processes are occult, and as stated by the witches I interviewed, not understood by the politicians who try to regulate them. In response to the entire project, several Roma women who practice witchcraft protested in front of the Palace of the Parliament, in the premise that the government's intent is to financially exploit the practitioners of witchcraft²⁷. The protest included threats toward the politicians. In particular, protesters threatened politicians with curses, notably about their virility. In early 2011, the project was already passed in one of the Chambers of the Parliament, but was voted against in the second Chamber. Horia Uioreanu, a member of the government commission for budgets stated:

*"It's silly, if you see the witches paying money, I'll be the first to vote. The law could pass, because any individual making profit from a practice needs to be taxed, but it is hard for me to believe that witches, manele musicians and healers would agree to pay any money (...) If they could cast a spell on the politicians, to make them come back to their senses, I'd be happy, but I doubt that they would become rational, regardless of how many spells the witches would cast"*²⁸.

Drawing on the above statement, it is worth noting the various categories of practitioners it names. Witches (vrăjitoare), manele musicians (maneliști) and healers (tămăduitoare), are terms referring exclusively to Romanian citizens who are ethnically Roma. The witch tax is not about witchcraft per se. As it becomes increasingly evident, it is a project of ethnonationalism; white, urban, educated imagined Romanians using policies against

27 <http://www.b1.ro/stiri/eveniment/mai-multe-vrajitoare-au-protestat-la-palatul-parlamentului-impotriva-impozitarii-practicilor-oculte-video-16853.html> (accessed Oct 19th, 2016)

28 <http://www.ziare.com/stiri/inchisoare/vrajitoarele-si-ghicitoarele-care-nu-prezic-corect-ar-trebuie-sa-faca-inchisoare-sondaj-1074256> (accessed Oct 10th 2016)

the Rroma: rural, illiterate folk (mostly women), with the intention to create and reiterate what it means to be Romanian, through inclusion and exclusion²⁹.

The research conducted for this article addressed the limited amount of research on why politicians in Romania seek power through the occult, drawing on recent anthropological work that examines the relationship to witchcraft that modern, secular discourses create and encode (Harding 1991; Humphrey 1994; Geschiere 1997; Pels 2003). I follow the premise that Romania's post-communist transition is defined by the coexistence of opposing phenomena, characterized by coups of destatizing and restatizing (Verdery 1996), which reveal the dislocating and disorienting effects of modernity. Why did, in the context of Romanian modernity and EU membership, witchcraft emerge as a response to the ruptures introduced by communism, post-communism, and the various secularization projects present in these eras and political regimes? Even though modernity and witchcraft may seem polarized, post-communist transitions have opened economic opportunities for practitioners of the occult (Pimenova 2013), creating a synergy between state and witchcraft, where the weak state makes it profitable for individual entrepreneurs to flourish, but not for institutional actors (Verdery 1996).

Romania is one of the most recent admits to the EU, in 2007, after a particularly long and convoluted application process (Foucher, Chato 2008). As several other countries with a Christian Orthodox majority (Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia), the identity of Romanian Christian Orthodox believers overlaps with their national identity (Quintillan et al. 1999; May 2000). This is an important fact, seeing how most of the governmental and administrative positions in Romania are occupied by Christian Orthodox believers (Stan, Turcescu 2000). Consequently, one of the existing challenges for Romanian Orthodox political urban elites is to negotiate their identities and beliefs and to successfully perform their public roles as European politicians in tandem with their private identities as Orthodox believers, who may have mystical beliefs. Failure to espouse the two identities has been visible in neighboring Orthodox countries: Ukraine's desire to join the EU ended in a war that Russian president Vladimir Putin called a holy war to reunite Kievan Rus, the "Jerusalem of Orthodox Christianity" (Kaplan 2012) and led to a number of racial segregations. Orthodox Christianity has been a common denominator for building nationalism on

29 The author has interviewed many non-Rroma practitioners of magic. The author understands that there are many different confessions in Romania and that organizations exist, such as the Association ANATECOR (Arad) that offers courses and trainings in practices such as astrology, divination, numerology etc., organizes congresses, etc.

ethnocentrism throughout southeastern Europe (Aschauer 2016), leading to discriminating politics led by a mythicized Orthodox identity.

In the examples of Romanian politicians engaging with facets of the occult, the state supports gendered hierarchies of power (Pop 2014). In this sense, the Romanian state, supported by neoliberalism, tends to authorize male figures and de-authorizes female figures. Gendered hierarchies in occult economies can be found in pantheons of deities, types of witchcraft practitioners and the access that they have to institutional support in practicing witchcraft (Bever 2009). Most inhuman entities summoned through the rituals mentioned in this article are from the Christian Orthodox cosmology, and be they good or bad, they are almost always male. Similarly, while high numbers of practitioners of witchcraft are male, they were not affected by the witch tax in the same way as the Roma women, since they have a primary, stable, work environment. Women who get to work for the institution of the church, often do so unofficially, aiding a priest (e.g. identifying the demonized parishioners, for the priest to exorcise).

A logic of race informs the understanding of forms of witchcraft that are authorized (those protected by various institutions) versus practices unauthorized by the state (done by Roma women). In this sense, race reveals the types of citizens the modern nation state supports, previously analyzed through gender. Many times in my fieldwork in Suceava and Bucharest, I have seen vast differences in authority between male (ethnically Romanian) priests practicing witchcraft and (ethnically Roma) females who do not benefit from any institutional support. For the priests, this role is served by the Romanian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, the women's practices are being used in public discourse to reproduce racist policies and stereotypes, while the same practices done by the priests gain attention and crowds of pilgrims and are seen as legitimate. These racial hierarchies connect to the next theme, that of the state, as they discuss the economic reproduction of desirable citizens and of their practices.

Conclusion

From my analysis of several sets of politician interviews in the press, public and media speculations suggest that the cause of inclinations toward occult practices are based on a lack of education (implying impetus stems from rurality), a propensity towards spiritual beliefs and practice, as well as superstition, and a general Eastern European backwardness. The most speculated upon but least researched motivation, implicates clashes of modernity and

witchcraft in Eastern European countries, including blaming anti-progressive ideals of national and religious identity.

The number of events that occurred in recent years and centered witchcraft in public political discourse can be a good tool to debate how political figures use witchcraft as a political tool. One argument that can be made in this sense can be drawn from Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993). The argument is that, *we have never been Enlightened*. This may be useful in understanding that modernity, as a project of the Enlightenment, is not applicable to think through everyday experiences and beliefs of urban political elites and that social actors are juggling hybrid forms of concealing and revealing beliefs, in order to save face in the public sphere. When drawing on values such as progress, modernization, EU integration, Romanian politicians manage to implement some policies that rely on a racial logic and support gender discrimination. Furthermore, by associating Roma women with witchcraft and with a dislike towards paying taxes, the public discourse of the politicians helps reproduce a secularized ideology presenting the Roma as backward and un-adapted to modernity, while at the same time, other politicians suggest this is solely an anti-corruption measure.

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ALEXANDRA COȚOFANĂ

Baltojo žmogaus teisės prieš magiškas juodąsias moteris: raganavimo rasės ir lyties sąsajos Rumunijoje

Santrauka

Šio tyrimo objektas – struktūrinė diskriminacija dėl rasės ir lyties Rumunijoje. Straipsnis tiria socialinę politiką, nukreiptą į istoriškai diskriminuojamą etninę grupę – romus. Rasinė logika dažnai buvo naudojama kolonijiniams arba vergovės laikais siekiant atskirti „baltąjį“ nuo „ne baltojo“, išsilavinusį nuo neišsilavinusio ir tokiu būdu sukurti svetimus (Perkinson, 2004). Tiriama religijos vaidmens pokyčius šiuolaikinėje Rumunijoje, straipsnyje analizuojamos religijos, tikėjimo ir sekuliarumo sankirtos viešajame gyvenime, įstatymuose ir kasdienybėje. 2007 m. Rumunija tapo į Europos Sąjungos nare. Efektyvesnė preventinė politika diskriminacijos dėl rasės buvo vienas iš pagrindinių reikalavimų stojant į ES (Bale, 2013, Schiek, Chege, 2008). Rumuniją slepia penkių amžių romų vergovės problema (Kaplan, 2016) ir

didžiausias romų naikinimas II pasaulinio karo metais (Nicolae, 2014), kuriam pri-lygsta tik buvusios ir esamos Rumunijos valdžios tyła šiuo atžvilgiu. Straipsnio autorė pasirenka „raganavimas“ kaip prizmę, per kurią analizuojamos globalios, politinės ir ekonominės problemos. Teigiama, jog Rumunijos viešajame gyvenime aptinkamas rūpestis dėl okultizmo simbolizuoja didesnį kultūrinį nerimą dėl socialinių ir ekonominių pokyčių bei paskatas keisti esamą tvarką (Mantz, 2007).

Reikšminiai žodžiai: magija, ortodoksinė krikščionybė, politika, diskriminacija dėl rasės, diskriminacija dėl lyties, romai.