

3-2016

### Review of Dâncu's "Triburile. O Patologie a Politicii Românești, de la Revoluție la Generația Facebook"

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#### Recommended Citation

Stoica, Mihnea-Simion (2016) "Review of Dâncu's "Triburile. O Patologie a Politicii Românești, de la Revoluție la Generația Facebook", *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 36 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol36/iss2/7>

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## BOOK REVIEW

Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Triburile. O patologie a politicii românești, de la Revoluție la Generația Facebook* (Trans. *Tribes: A Pathology of Romanian Politics from the Revolution until the Facebook Generation*) Cluj-Napoca: Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2014, 321 p.

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Vasile Sebastian Dâncu is one of the most important authors devoted to analyzing political realities from the perspective of a mythical and symbolic consciousness. Starting from the analyses proposed in the European space by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Maffesoli, sociologist Dâncu gives new significance to political communication within the Romanian cultural space. Whether it is studied thoroughly or encountered only accidentally upon turning the pages of a newspaper, opening the TV or surfing the internet, politics invades our everyday life. Its constant presence can be considered abusive "background noise," but one that is visibly mired in a terrible identity crisis. For the author, this serves as a trigger for the numerous publications that define his well-known intellectual project in which he interprets Romanian realities from the vantage point of mythical-symbolic consciousness: *Useless Politics* (*Politica inutilă*), *Disposable Homeland* (*Patrie de unică folosință*), *Counter-ideologies: The Country of Happy TV-Viewers* (*Contraideologii. Țara telespectatorilor fericiți*), and *An Inner Romania* (*O Românie interioară*). These are just some of the books written by the author, all with the lens he very much cherishes: to see the world beyond the statistical figures which occupied, until recently, much of his time.

*Tribes: A Pathology of Romanian Politics from the Revolution until the Facebook Generation*, the latest work of Professor Dâncu, is a blunt diagnosis for an almost incurable political system, the hideous figure of which the author describes with great accuracy. The reader often has the impression of reading a novel of political fiction, a dystopia that can—at

its best—steal bitter smiles. However, the reader wakes up to the dreaded reality when realizing that the characters found in the book are those politicians who not very long ago could be seen, with regularity, on the voting lists of various elections. The ones who involuntarily have to bear this undesirable *political body* are the individuals with “shifting points of stability,” growing up in an era of television and social media addictions. They are the ones living under the so-called “third solidarity,” marked by insecurity. They are, in fact, each and every one of us, representatives of the *Facebook Generation*, called a “generation” to designate a sum of lonely contemporary individuals.

The *tribes* that Dâncu writes about confront us with a new form of solidarity, specific to the sacred in politics. This reinvestment of the sacred in the profane determines such forms of organization that their imminent disintegration does not surprise anyone, as they manifest themselves at the simple appeal of a feeling that can change the association between individuals with the speed and unpredictability of a kaleidoscope. The book breaks down various myths, such as the one of electoral stability. Driven by the religious logic of tribes—but at the same time leaving it behind—not even politicians remain loyal to their own parties. In the evolution of species, the *political entrepreneur* is the one declared winner of the day. It is a clear sign that contemporaneity has overcome the traditional ideological cleavages. The book repeatedly validates Kirchheimer's predictions from the 60s, recognizing the success of the *catch-all party*. But the author warns that while politics has the ability to paint its façade in colors that can attract a very diverse electorate, the structure hidden behind the curtain remains abandoned and weakens day by day.

The writings that the author collected in this book, some of which he wrote more than a decade ago, reflect the dialectic of the sacred and the profane, which serves as a support for the unfolding of events and the evolution of political communication. Viewed from the perspective of a symbolic consciousness, the events depicted in the book tend to show that

politics is circular, that utopias seem to disappear only to return under other forms, but with the same force—exactly as prescribed by the myth of the eternal return, which is part of the postmodern human life. As in a sizeable *insectarium*, Dâncu manages to pin down all flaws that have affected Romanian politics from the Revolution of 1989 until today. And they are not just a mere sequence, but represent a dynamic, an evolution... or rather an involution. The author discusses how many politicians decide to suspend their own will by “slipping into slavery;” he writes about political myopia and the greed for power, elements that reduce politics to an eternal and sterile competition. The adversarial attitude to criticism, coupled with fear, isolation, political autism and sectarianism, populism, the Pinocchio syndrome, are all part of today’s political show. The author alerted his readers earlier to some of the political diseases that have taken a predictable historical direction, writing about “useless politics” and underlining the unprecedented power of spontaneous sympathy and emotion as main operators of solidarity. Tribalism thus appears as a natural reaction of the human being forced to rethink how to relate to others in what seems to have become a “stateless society.”

Dâncu also writes about the necessity of disconnecting policy-making from vulgar political militancy, arguing that the decision process should be redirected toward its initial goals, which go beyond the PR strategies of politicians. However, though in a society in which intellectuals choose not to get involved in politics, the author invites this important group to participate in the political debate. The intellectuals are no longer seen as possible messianic forces participating in politics, but as carriers of positive meanings, borrowed from the sphere of the sacred. They can assist in building coherent and cohesive projects, without which the Romanian society is likely to live in a permanent bankruptcy. Although the author interprets separately the radiographies of both the political left and right, he states that the diseases of the two are often common, acquired by contagion.

The book allows us to understand that there is also a negative side to the presence of the sacred in Romanian politics, which tends to live under the sign of narcissism, isolating itself by inventing and promoting what it believes to be providential figures, who then assume limitless powers and behave as immortals, attitudes which always prove to be harmful for the entire society. The book can sometimes leave the impression of reflecting petty political disputes that have more or less marked post-revolutionary Romania. But I believe the aim of these texts is to complete the details of a picture whose doubtful aesthetic makes politicians reluctant even to look at it, either because they are unable to understand it or because they are ashamed of the 'work' they have contributed to. In his book, Dâncu also tries to shape the profile of the genuine politician, whom he describes as a spokesperson of collective attitudes, endowed with a sum of qualities that can ensure the authenticity that is so much needed. Such people usually act as visionary figures, bringing a conscious symbolic meaning to everyday life.

The volume is, in fact, a brief diary of the author's political activities, a time of storytelling that reflects the need for a mythical type of narrative. It speaks about a stage in the life of the author in which he admits that he directly understood the *ab initio* lack of confidence that citizens feel towards the one who assumes political commitments, and stresses the severe need for political literacy. Dominated by immediate emotions, which limit the horizon of expectations, politics has come to abandon utopia, an element that ultimately provides politics with content. Dâncu notes with regret that politics remained at the base of Maslow's pyramid, where primary needs still rule the day. And all the pathologies that politics has managed to survive turned it into a "mutant", insensitive to ideological nuances. This refusal of ideology is actually a denial of meanings that can take us closer to the deeper meanings of politics, understood as seeking for the betterment of life. This reality draws a

considerable distance from the sacred dimension in shaping politics, but as a consequence, even if unintended, re-enacts (inauthentic) forms of recovery of the sacred.

However, Dâncu's book is definitely not a call to resignation. It should be read rather as a recipe, through which the author prescribes remedies for saving politics from the vicious circle it has been caught in. Without claiming the biblical epistles, the book could be viewed as a letter—one that is addressed to the people of *Facebookistan*, individuals living in a fragmented society, a postmodernity the major drawback of which—the dictatorship of emotions—is probably its biggest advantage, as it gives enough space to be spellbound, to resacralization, allowing us a glimpse, however tenuous, of new beginnings. Thus, the author calls to our attention the importance of utopias and of the symbolic consciousness in the reconstruction of political life. In spite of not being the creator of a new political mythology, the book should definitely be read (whether or not we are interested in politics), as it reflects upon a field that deeply influences our lives. The topics debated in the book provoke or inspire, but either way, they are deeply relevant for the times we live in today, offering a valuable analysis of the political life for both researchers and those who dare to take the plunge into the world of politics. At the same time, it can serve as an excellent tool for assessing what has happened with Romanian politics on its path to democracy after the 1989 anti-communist revolution.