NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN ROMANIAN IDENTITY[1]

Abstract. *This research aims to consider and analyze the specific Romanian forms of integration in Europe along with its synchronization. This approach has a starting point in the dashing imaginative domain of identity. Two symbolical and mythical elements, the labyrinth and the ball of threads, have the leading part in the beginning of this contribution. In Romania, journalism and women-writers helped considerably their nation to synchronize with the European standards and the goals of the 19th century. The country had to accomplish several major assignments in the political, social and cultural fields and women were perfectly empathetic. The journalists living in Transylvania (part of Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1867 and 1918), were strongly influenced by the modern views, ideologies and perspectives, but, because of the Romanian nation's common causes, there was no difference between them and the peer female inhabitants from the other Romanian counties. The present contribution also highlights the first authentic presence of the most important Romanian women-writers who shaped both their country's position in Europe as well as their own. Women went a long way towards equality, freedom, emancipation and an upper social eminence. Besides their actions and activities, the paper outlines the stylistic and general literary qualities of their remarkable outcomes.*

Key-words*: myth, Romanian synchronization, journalism.*

The human body and its mental representation are central parts of the identity. For a nation, its spiritual body is a perfect mirror of its unique features, for its language, specific history, traditional and specific art trends, mythical and symbolical significances. Our contribution aims to point out the fact that the body is not only a physical expression, but it is the embodiment of human identity and personal or collective experience. We show little interest to the biological body, because we appreciate that the imaginary projection constructed socially is far more important for the identity of our nation and its effort to synchronize with Europe. The feminine spiritual body is a scene of sensations, experiences, "a theatre of feelings" (Chiciudean, G. 2010: 49), but it is also an active part in the social context with a vital contribution in asserting national identity and the importance of the women's emancipation in Romania.

Keeping in thought the outstanding and full of determination historic and political context of the 19th century in the Romanian counties, and afterwards in the independent Romania, we may highlight one of the most well-known imaginative antitheses: *Order* versus *Chaos*. Before the 19th century, Romanian culture was dominated by chaotic and winding attempts to define its national structure. That overwhelming disorder and amalgam needed badly several forces to impose a coherent undertaking. Our country, an island of Chaos at that time, was a place in which Romanian people were lost as in a labyrinth. The labyrinth or the maze is a frequent imaginary representation of the impossibility to communicate (Oişteanu, 1989: 263). The maze is like a border between two realms. At the beginning of the 19th century, Romania was the realm of Chaos or of Disorder. Over the western border, it was the organized realm of the civilized modern societies. The heroes' actions came into proeminence in order to connect the two realms and skillfully bring the Order into the Chaos. These heroes epitomize both the masculine and the feminine tenets. In mithology, their names are Theseus and Ariadne. The latter offered the thread leading to the imaginative representation of malefic and disheveled force, the Minotaur. Reaching

[1] Odette Arhip, The Ecological University of Bucharest, arodette@live.com

BDD-A6129 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.188 (2026-11-07 07:03:33 UTC)

the center of the labyrinth, defeating the Minotaur, getting out of the maze are all the characteristic features of an attunement, of a spiritual revival (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1995: 192). Mircea Eliade, a man of science of so good reputation, has also underlined the value of this battle for Order and Truth. In his famous book, *Tratat de istorie a religiilor*, Eliade points out the difference between *relative truth* and *absolute truth*, which means, in fact, a confrontation for obtaining absolute truth mainly based on an almost transcendent virtuousness (Eliade, 1991: 51)[1].

So, Romanian people have had this archetype of *Order* versus *Chaos* well and frequently presented in both popular and cultivated culture. It has a clear-cut significance: the ordered Chaos becomes Cosmos. There are several conspicuous cosmogonic fables. An old one presents a meaningful chart of the sky on which the popular term for the Milky Way is translated into Romanian by the phrase *Calea întortocheată/The Mazy Way*. Ariadne herself is another constellation with the name *Aridela*, which clearly calls up the mythological onomatology. In this mythological display, Romanian folk mentality brings into focus another major symbol, namely the symbol of *ball of threads* which lays stress on the paradigm of the labyrinth and the meaningful travel inside it (Oişteanu, A., 1989: 265)[2]. The brave traveler got into the labyrinth and into the centre of the ball of threads trying to untie the knot which means, in fact, to conflict with the perils and the difficult drags, with the drawbacks, or the terrible darkness and murkiness symbolizing the ignorance, perplexity in front of the unknown, new things, methods, and subjects.

In comparison with the Romanian society of the 19th century, we conclude that there was also a national effort to get out from the less known part of the European map by acquiring the correct way to the modern civilization, the cutting-edge trends and the ideologies. Romanian people wanted to form into a united and independent nation. One of the most legitimate and powerful wishes was that of synchronizing with all the ideas and the ideals of the Western European countries.

The historical period in which Transylvania was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire stood for a general spiritual progress, but also for a women's emancipation loop. This fortunate influence took place both in all the Romanian counties and in Transylvania and it was conclusively helped by the literary, political and journalistic acts. The newspaper became the major mean of information, a faithful witness of the entire Romanian evolution. Gathering the information from all corners of the country, it was proved that the main, old and traditional cultural capitals of Europe were important factors which had greatly influenced the intellectuals' education, spiritual progress and the Romanian communication with Western Europe.

The subject of Romanian women's contribution to the cultural development of our country has been approached by us several times. The women's position in the Romanian society and the history of our country seem to be a constant issue and a permanent debate almost in every historic epoch. It is not the only matter with such characteristics. For example, multiculturalism is also an issue as old as Europe and its

[1] "În perspectiva adevărului relativ, lumea fenomenală, deşi ontologic ireală, există într-un mod foarte convingător în experienţa omului obişnuit. În perspectiva adevărului absolut, spiritul descoperă irealitatea a tot ce pare să existe, dar această revelaţie e verbal inexprimabilă [...], dacă nu este păstrată valoarea conduitei morale...".

[2] *Cf.* „... ghemul este o paradigmă a labirintului, în aceeaşi măsură în care ultimul este o paradigmă a primului, pentru ca atât unul cât şi celălalt să nu fie decât simbolice reprezentări ale Haosului."

BDD-A6129 © 2012 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.188 (2026-11-07 07:03:33 UTC)

history has begun when the Roman elite took possession of Greek spiritual legacy and all the benefits of its civilization (Karnoouh, Cl., 1997: 7).

The first ideas about feminism appeared in Romania due to a few women-writers who had also a journalist career. They are less known because they had not an active voice in the political field which was the most noticeable. Some of them were active in the traditional Romanian counties; others were keen personalities in Transylvania. Of course, this is a very brief introduction to an ample topic. It is not a specific characteristic only for Romania. Since the very beginning, feminism was reformist in all the countries. The British authors used to assert that the goal of the feminist research works has been "to give back the women to the history", but also "to give back the history to the women" (Miroiu M., 1995: 33). In order to render to the women their visibility from the historical point of view, it was a common place for quite a long period to differentiate with respect to "Hi-story" (phonetic expression for men's history) and "Her-story". The so called her-story is very interesting in Romania too.

The first Romanian woman journalist was Maria Rosetti (1819-1893) who edited few newspapers quite well-known in that epoch: *Românul/The Romanian*, *Mama şi copilul/Mother and Child* (Petcu, M. 2007: 39). It was a first example for a woman's implication in activities usually linked to men's working field. As a matter of fact, several clues regarding the feminist movement came in sight at the same time with other important European countries. I. Heliade Rădulescu, statesman, poet and journalist, published a literary and scientific review, *Curierul de ambe sexe* (1837), as a result of his complete understanding of the intellectual tendency of his time. The same remark is valid for *Albina românească* (Gheorghe Asachi), *Icoana Lumii/The Icon of the World* and George Barițiu's *Gazeta de Transilvania*.

Another notable person was Sofia Nădejde (1858-1946), Iosif Nădejde's wife and Octav Băncilă's sister. The first was a significant politician, publicist and sociologist. The latter was one of the most gifted Romanian realist painters with radical political views. Sofia Nădejde started as a journalist in *Femeea română*, but she continued to publish in *Basarabia*, *Contimporanul/The Contemporary*, *Literatură şi ştiință/Literature and science* (editor – Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea), *Gazeta săteanului/The Villager's Newspaper*, *Muncitorul/The Worker*, *Munca/The Labour*, *Social-democrația/Social Democracy*, *Lumea nouă/The New World*. She was the director of *Evenimentul literar/The Literary Event*, also a well known translator, and the author of quite a lot of novels, short-stories and plays: *O iubire la țară/Love in the Country, Din chinurile vieții/Among the Turns of Life, Robia banului/The Thrall of Money, Părinți şi copii/Parents and Children, Patimi/Passions* etc. From a literary point of view, she experienced the impact of the French naturalism and another two Romanian currents - *poporanism* and *semănătorism*. She shared with her husband and brother the radical ideas and she played a very active role in the socialist movement of that historical epoch. She was appreciated as the leader of the feminist movement and her beginning as a journalist had a clear and fierce attitude. She argued for the equality between men and women and for liberty. She had a famous dispute against Titu Maiorescu. They argued about brain capacity at men and women, the latter maintaining that women had no capacity to develop their intelligence and their social function must be remote (Mihăilescu Ştefania, 2002: 85)[1]. The female author proved very sound

[1] „Oare nu-i ruşine pentru secolul nostru, ca jumătate din omenirea, aşa numită civilizată, să stea în sclavie? S-au eliberat robii, d-lor; însă noi am rămas. Poate credeți că exagerez? Nu, nicidecum şi voi arăta mai jos că vorbesc adevărat. Veți zice oare: ce nu vă educăm: nu vă dăm voie să vă

BDD-A6129 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.188 (2026-11-07 07:03:33 UTC)

scientific knowledge, being an equal crusader for Titu Maiorescu. Sofia Nădejde pointed out correctly the fact that the so-called women ignorance was a direct consequence of the lack of education and scarce social conditions which were unfortunatelly retained by the political class (Mihăilescu, S., 2002: 82). The women must be equally appraised and their value has to be assigned. This appreciation became effectual for the Romanian public opinion as well. The precarious aspects of the Romanian women's life were discussed and presented by the revolutionary rising generation.

The first initiator of feminism in our country was Maria Flechtenmacher (1838-1888), a musician, writer, and a journalist who married the well known composer Alexandru Flechtenmacher. Alexandru Flechtenmacher politically militated in favor of the revolutionary ideas, the union of Moldavia and Tara Românească. He created the musical background for *Hora Unirii*, the harmonious symbol of the great historical achievement from 1859. His wife, Maria Flechtenmacher, published the social and literary newspaper *Femeea Română/The Romanian Woman* between January 1878 and April 1881. That periodical benefited by the contributions of significant personalities of Romanian cultural life: Vasile Alecsandri, Alexandru Macedonski, Constantin Mille, Iosif Vulcan, Constantin Bacalbaşa, etc.

In many of her articles, Maria Flechtenmacher mentioned the statistical aspects regarding women's situation: women consisted in 43, 4% from the active population of the country, a figure which established Romania on the second place in Europe, one step behind Austria (44 %), but far in front of France and Italy. As Nicolae Bălcescu or C. A. Rosetti stated (Mihăilescu, S., 2002: 18), Romania women worked in very difficult conditions, with very small earnings, for too many hours each day and enduring as well legal injustice as a result of the laws enacted by Vasile Lupu, Matei Basarab, Callimachi, Caragea or based on the *Civil Juridic Code* (1866), the latest being strongly influenced by Napoleon's Code.

In one of her leading articles (5th of April 1878), Maria Flechtenmacher indited a real ode for the Romanian women who deserved to be equal to those living in the United States, England, Italy or Germany. She proudly mentioned the fact that many women from Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina subscribed to her magazine or the fact that a lot of associations congratulated her and the civic-minted actions of the women living in the capital of the country. Those tones and undertakings presented in her publication were known in the Western Europe too as many female readers had taken out subscriptions to *Femeea română/Romanian Woman* (Mihăilescu, S., 2002: 76). Maria Flechtenmacher was initiated in the existing of other European magazines far more advanced in promoting and protecting feminine rights (e.g. *The Magazine from Geneva, La Cornelia* - Florence*, La Donna* - Bologna*, Women's Suffrage Journal* – England, and many others issued overseas). She impressed by her arraignment and her militant sentences (Mihăilescu, S., 2002: 78)[1]. Her style was simple, quite unpolished,

---

îmbrăcaţi după gust? Eu voi răspunde că şi sclavii primeau o educaţiune, care folosea numai stapânilor; şi sclavii erau siliţi să se împodobească, nu însă pentru a li se face lor plăcere, ci stăpânilor. Tot asemenea şi cu femeia: toată educaţiunea ce primeşte nu este decât ceva ce nu contribuie nicidecum la dezvoltarea inteligenţei sale." *Cf. Cestiunea femeilor* and *Răspunsul d-lui Maiorescu în chestia creierului la femei,* in Mihăilescu, Stefania, *Din istoria feminismului românesc,* vol. I, Iaşi : Polirom, 2002, pp. 83-95.

[1] She underlines in *Articolul redacţional*: „Vom arăta apoi mai la vale cum în Franţa, unde generalitatea femeilor nu se ocupa decât de invenţiunea luxului şi-a modei, bărbatul se ocupă de cultură, de drepturile femeii, care constituie jumătate parte a societăţii umane. La noi însă ce face

BDD-A6129 © 2012 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.188 (2026-11-07 07:03:33 UTC)

but direct and bold, mentioning a lot of information and being a true model and a stimulus for the Romanian population *across the mountains* meaning Transylvania - Arad, Gherla, Făgăraş, Cernăuţi, etc.(Mihăilescu, S., 2002: 76). One may notice the effort to blur her feminine features in favor of other detached ones. She wrote ironically about the Parisian fashion, the worldly habits, and regretted the deaths of great feminine spiritual leaders such as George Sand, de Sevigné, de Girard, Madame de Staël etc. (Mihăilescu, S., 2002: 78).

Taking into account the women differentiation, several female writers and journalists brought in the general situation and underlined the necessity to emancipate Romanian women as a condition for at least two causes: updating Romanian society and synchronizing it with the European standards. For example, Sofia Cocea Chrisoscoleu (1839-1861), a journalist and a teacher, wrote more than 40 articles in which those aspects were discussed. She insisted upon the inherent link between women's emancipation and a new, modern Romanian society. She was also an advocate for the union of the Romanian counties and she presented her point of view in many newspapers: *Românul/The Romanian*, *Dacia*, *Steaua Dunării/The Star of Danube*, *Reforma/The Reform*, *Foiletonul zimbrului/The Urus Columns*. She wrote very direct articles for the Romanian women in order to impel them to take action in all kind of activities regarding the progress of our nation. For example, in the article *Către damele române/Towards Romanian Women*, she brought out the important function of education and the fact that women must be involved with great responsability in the teaching actions (Mihăilescu, S., 2002: 67).

Accordingly, quite many women interfered in educational dimension of the Romanian society. They founded schools, edited reviews, wrote articles and brought out into full relief the necessity to promote women and their activities which were of equal importance to those of men's. For example, the daughter of a lawyer, born in Botoşani (1843), Constanţa Dunca Schiau, who studied at Vienna and Paris, outlined a national project for girl-schools and she received an official recognition. She also published short-stories and novels in the magazine, *Amicul familiei/The Friend of the Family* (1863-1865). She translated a lot in order to present the hard and inequitable women's condition in Romania. The old fashioned mentality regarding the social women condition was presented in her works: *Femeia femeii/The Woman's Woman*, *Fiicele poporului/The Daughters of the Nation* and *Feminismul in România/The Feminism in Romania*. Following those examples, another woman born in Banat, Emilia Lungu-Puhallo (1853-1932), issued magazines as *Familia/The Family*, *Biserica şi şcoala/The Church and the School*, *Amicul familiei/The Family's Friend*, *Drapelul/The Flag* in which she wrote about the same major social, political and civic women's concerns (Petcu Marian, 2007: 38).

Constanţa Hodoş was another female-writer and publicist who was born in Arad in 1860. She represented an usual appearance in magazines like: *Tribuna/The Tribune, Vieata/The Life, Lumea ilustrată/The World in Images, Universul/The Universe, Luceafărul/The Morning Star* and, as the director of *Revista noastră/Our Magazine*, she was provided with very famous and valuable contributors: G. Coşbuc, M. Sadoveanu, Elena Farago, I. Minulescu, Alice Călugaru, G. Topârceanu, Elena Văcărescu.

---

bărbatul pentru femeie? N-o ajută la nimic bun!... o descurajează, o ia în râs dacă vede că voieşte să sfărâme singură crisalida care-i ţineau lipite aripile inteligenţei. Căci instrucţie graţie Domnului nu i s-a dat până acum."

BDD-A6129 © 2012 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.188 (2026-11-07 07:03:33 UTC)

Ecaterina Raicoviceanu is considered the first Romanian professional journalist (Predescu, L., 1940: 913) and she militated in favor of the women's emancipation being aware that this kind of action signifies a more complete and accurate portrait of the Romanian people. Ecaterina Raicoviceanu urged on the great union of all the Romanian counties, event historically performed in 1918. She depicted the main characteristics of our nation in her eleven volumes of literature and translations very strongly influenced by the American thoughts and ideology. As a matter of fact, she lost her right to publish any more in 1945.

In 1855 two other important female publicists and writers were born: Ruxandra Berindey Mavrocordato and Aspazia Munte. The first one was a gifted co-worker for many French magazines, but she also established the newspaper *Le Moment* from Bucharest. The latter, together with Lucia Minodora Cosma, published also a lot abroad, but also at home: *Luceafărul/The Morning Star* (Budapest), *Temesvarer Zeitung* (Timişoara), *Românul/The Romanian* (Arad). Both of them spoke several foreign languages (French, Italian, German, English, Hungarian, and Serbo-Croatian) and they had artistic endowment proved in great European cities: Paris, Rome, London, and Milano.

Although all these authors debated the same subjects, it is obvious that their actions were quite feeble because there was no coordinated activity and everybody tried to promote causes and to bring home great ideals in several places on the whole territory of Romania. Comparatively, there was no difference between programs, articles and claims, but all of them lacked the power of a coherent system.

Paradoxically, the strongest women association had developed in Transylvania (Braşov) under the following name: *Reuniunea Femeilor Române/Romania Women Reunion*. In 1911, its president, Maria Baiulescu, submitted to call together the women for a congress dedicated to unify all the reunions existing on the territory attached to Austro-Hungarian Empire. That congress took place in Braşov, on June 1913. The elected committee consisted almost entirely of feminine personalities from the main towns of Transylvania: Elena Săbădeanu (Sibiu), Catinca Bârseanu (Sibiu), Ana Filip (Abrud), Paulina Rădulescu (Lugoj), Sofia Beleş (Arad), Elena Pop (Blaj), Elena Meţianu (Zărneşti), Maria Moldovan (Mediaş), Ana Pop de Lemeny (Cluj) and Lucreţia Murăşeanu from Turda (Mihăilescu, Ştefania, 2002, pp. 31-32). Eleonora Stratilescu expressed the full solidarity of the women from "the free country" with the modern tendencies of those living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Feminism, as an organized social movement, is a natural outcome of a modern nation striving to present itself to Europe and to the world. Several quite legendary personalities, such as Maria Rosetti, Ana Ipătescu, Elena Cuza, Pelaghia Roşu, Sevastiţa Bălcescu, Zoe Golescu, were crucially present and involved in the revolutionary movement (1848), The Union from 1859, The Independence War (1877) and The Great Union of 1918. They were not inferior to any other European woman defending the barricades of the revolutions from France, Germany or those from Austro-Hungarian Empire. The women constituted an essential part of the Romanian identity cast on the modern European background.

Romanian women involved in journalistic or literary activities had an active part in finding the way out from the mythical *labyrinth* of ignorance and non-recognition in the modern and civilized European area. Next to men, they tried hard to follow the thread of the destiny of our nation and of their own destiny. They were aware of the importance of their continuity and the present imaginary representation of a cultural, political and social European profile cannot exclude the Romanian features. All

BDD-A6129 © 2012 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.188 (2026-11-07 07:03:33 UTC)

these mentioned social and cultural changes associated with the modernity cultivated a focus on the national and individual identity which was found out due to the successful travel through the mental maze. The boundary lines got blurred.

References

Chevalier, J., Gheerbrant, A., *Dicţionar de simboluri,* vol. I, II, III, Artemis, Bucureşti, 1994
Chiciudean, G. (ed.), *Incursiuni în imaginar. De la corpul imaginat la corpul reprezentat,* Æternitas, Alba Iulia, 2010
Durand, G. *Figuri mitice şi chipuri ale operei,* Nemira, Bucureşti, 1998
Eliade, Mircea, *Tratat de istorie a religiilor,* traducere de Mariana Noica, prefață de Georges Dumezil, Humanitas, Bucureşti, 1991
Floch, J-M, *Identités visuelles,* PUF, Paris, 1995
Karnoouh, Cl. *Un logos fără ethos,* in *Tribuna,* no. 38/18-27 September 1997
Mihăieş, Mircea, *Cărţile crude. Jurnalul intim şi sinuciderea,* Amacord, Timişoara, 1995
Mihăilescu, S., *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte,* vol. I-II, Polirom, Iaşi, 2002
Miroiu, M., *Gândul umbrei. Abordări feministe în filosofia contemporană,* Alternative, Bucureşti, 1995
Oişteanu, A., *Motive şi semnificaţii mito-simbolice,* Minerva, Bucureşti, 1989
Petcu, M., *Istoria jurnalismului şi a publicităţii în România,* Polirom, Iaşi, 2007
Predescu, L., *Enciclopedia României. Material românesc, oameni şi înfăptuiri,* Cugetarea, Bucureşti, 1940

BDD-A6129 © 2012 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.188 (2026-11-07 07:03:33 UTC)