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# MYTHOLOGICAL PROFILES OF THE POLITICAL LEADERS

Ștefan Stănciugelu\* and Irina Stănciugelu

*National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, 6 Povernei St., 010648, Bucharest, Romania*

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## Abstract

An analysis of the debate concerning the typology of political leaders is directly related to the classification criteria used. Such key categories of reading and classification of types of political leaders put us in front of an unmanageable theoretical-conceptual diversity. For example, using the criterion of competence, we can identify technocrats/non-technocrats political leaders, concepts which, in turn, may have their own sub-concepts etc. Thus, we have political leaders of crisis, which are different from the political leaders of growth periods, which are also different from those we identify by invoking the criteria of party affiliation or power circles on which they rank and hold direct power: regional/local/national political leaders; the criteria of social impact would generate the following categories: charismatic/non-charismatic leaders, etc. We believe that the most useful line of analysis concerning this topic is directly dependent of a particular sociological tradition of French school, whose founding father is the author of an already classic work, *The Show State* (1977), by R.G. Schwartzberg.

*Keywords:* typology of leaders, political myth, personality, identity, image

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## 1. Theoretical assumptions: three landmarks in the analysis of the political leaders' typology

### 1.1. Real personality and the media image personality

Such an approach on the typology of political leaders does not lead methodologically to the psychology of individual or social personality, but to the area of social imaginary, in which the real personalities of the political leaders are being reconstructed using the mechanisms of socio-political imaginary, meaning public appreciation of the fundamental elements of a political leader: popularity, personality, competence, authority, prestige, as N. Frigioiu observed in chapter *Contemporary Leadership and Its Problems*, from the work dedicated to the public image of leaders and political institutions. A political leader is, beyond the real man, an image which, in turn, must be understood as “more than a sketch or model of personality; it is a cognitive attribute of an individual; it can

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\*E-mail: stanciugelustefan@yahoo.com

be a memory or a reminder of a past event, a belief about what will happen in the future, an opinion or attitude about any subject concerned, or an amalgam of memory, faith, facts and opinions” [1]. For the contemporary political regimes, the media show of Power puts us in front of an oscillating perception between the Political Man we vote and the Image, the creation, in which he is involved, often as a director or screenwriter of his own duplicated portrayed that he shares to the public. In an increasingly dependent media on the emotions and the ‘common speech’ that some of the editors affirm that the public demand [2] and under a communication paradigm in which the economic marketing works by participating in a ‘common denominator’ – „a comprehensive orientation to the customer's full satisfaction of his needs and desires” – [3, 4] the marketing of political leader is being built by calling expectations, images, ideas, key elements of the social imaginary of a particular historical era. The message of a political leader is not built by appealing to ideas and projects which he may propose for his community. Paradoxically, today political leaders delivers the messages that voters want to hear, and they build it using surveys, research or insights about what the general public want to hear from a political leader in a certain historical moment. Desires and needs, ideas and opinions, beliefs and expectations of the social imaginary take the form of a certain personalized political power, which is then delivered back to the society, assuming it as part of their own ideas and projects.

### ***1.2. Customization of power***

An analysis of political behaviour in different types of defined political regimes institutions identify a constant that we need to take into account in our analysis: the customization of power. Thus, irrespective of the democratic / authoritarian / totalitarian nature of the political regime, in each if these elements we can observe the phenomenon of customization of the political power. In varying degrees, depending on the political regime, the Power and the Institution gain priority in the political imaginary when it comes to social behaviours which are related to them. A president of a democratic political regime tends to be called after the name of the highest leader in the state: the Basescu regime, the Iliescu regime, the Constantinescu regime - are so many customization of a whole institutional system, although their power and state attributes of these people-Presidents are far from those of Stalin, Mussolini, etc.

### ***1.3. The political myth***

The analysts of the phenomenon concerning personalization of political power make a fundamental observation in delimiting the scope of our analysis: the required correlation between the Image of a politician in which the Political power and the Political myth are being personalized. The successful political leader is necessarily a hero of a political show in which is created ‘a confusion between the role and the porpoise of the management function’. The political

decision is itself a part of the show where totalitarian regimes make possible the identification of leader's image with the rationale of Fairness and Justice itself: "Aside from splendour and dream, the heroes spread certainty. Masters of despair, they help overcome anxiety, uncertainty in periods of change, of difficulty. Behind the guide, people feel safe, because heroes cannot be wrong. They always see far, clear and fair." [5]

A relevant example for such a situation of total identification of institutions and members of a political community with the Hero is offered by the totalitarian Nazis and fascist regimes. Thus, fascism is based on the cult of the hero that guides Italian people and defends him from historical errors. Article 8 of the fascist militias Decalogue, says the French sociologist, has the following formula: 'Mussolini is always right'. The Hero of the German social crisis, in the same historical period, embodies the nation and makes the self-dissolution personality of any citizen a deserved perspective, as it's evidenced in Goring's statement: "I have no conscience; my conscience is called Adolf Hitler" [5, p. 19-20].

It is true, as N. Frigioiu noted that this phenomenon of policy customization is directly dependent - as degree and dimension - of the content and the nature of the social and political life. Thus, in situations of political crisis, the process of power customization is mostly favoured, the social perception operating in the sense of accepting the concentration of the political power in the hands of a single individual ennobled with the valences of the Hero savior. Society equilibrium periods allow smaller indices of power customization and the leader's place is taken by institutions - the customization of political institutions - the personal power deriving from this abstract and impersonal power of political institutions. Regarding the content of the power personalization phenomenon in contemporaneous democracies, it should be noted that mass media and the communication technology give a special attention to the relation between the leader and the tele-visual political community, assuming it's function as being 'the recovery of the paternal love heat of the Leader' which bureaucratization and atomization of the society require it as a necessity: „Mass media perfectly fulfil this task. Thanks to it the citizens have the impression of a direct contact with the leader, through the telegenic image. And the leader hits this nerve of familiarity with pleasure - even artificially - and affective relations - even illusory." [5, p. 20]

The direct contact between the political leader and the social community has therefore a privileged conjunction at the level of political imaginary made of real individual archetypes of explanation and comprehension of the political order and the social world in which we live as individuals [1; 5, p. 293]. There are four such archetypes - fundamental political myths, as an alia mythological founder of the political senses, R. Girardet, notes: The Hero Saviour, The Conspiracy, The Unit, and The Golden Age. They are found in contemporary history, hidden behind some stories or political discourse-images in which the political speeches in an election campaign are the most relevant expression [6].

## **2. The typology of political leaders: The Hero, The Charming Leader, The Common Man and The Father**

Contemporary media has turned the political leader into a real ‘star-system’. The difference in the history of contemporary democracies relies on the nature itself of this type of leader-star media. There are four main forms in defining the Saviour in the election campaigns: The Charming Leader, The Common Man and The Father. We will present, in what follows, ‘the personality descriptions’ of these subjects-images of political perception, as they appear in Schwartzberg’s *The State Show* [5].

### ***2.1. The Saviour and the show of exceptionalism***

- He is a cold, solitary, superior political character, called to solve a problem.
- He is exceptional and providential – the idol bearing badges of salvation, as the Antihero wears those of persecution.
- He is a Legislator or a Founder, and often the providential dictator.
- He is the answer to a necessity symbolically constructed within the political imaginary: the Homeland faces the danger of being conquered by foreigners or of collapsing, from the inside.
- Led by this guide, the people feels safe, for the Heroes cannot be mistaken. They always see afar, clearly and justly.
- Power becomes ‘something mysterious by excellence’, something which hides secrets behind closed doors, whose key is unnecessary to the public: ‘Father Stalin is working’, said a cliché propagandistically accredited for the Soviet Citizen, when he/she saw the light left intentionally on all night in the dictator’s office.

### ***2.2. The champion of normality as an ‘anti-hero’ - The Common Man***

- He is a simple man, proposed to ‘a public opinion tired of the nation’s heroes’.
- He is the calm, conformant, modest, tranquil, prudent, experienced man, who succeeded on his own.
- The Common Man suggests political stability into a social Order which no longer needs a Hero.
- The leader belonging to this category is a ‘champion of normality’, characterized by conventionality and who appears as very similar to the common citizen in the public’s eyes: “Hyper-representative through his banality, he embodies common opinions, common sense and national wisdom. Being mediocre and common, he spreads commonplaces and obvious truths. In short, he is no stranger to anything familiar.
- He stands there, simple and tranquil, looking downwards to the people. He stands on the human scale temperate, modest, calculated. A superstar of normality, an antihero, the antithesis of heroic authority, he is by excellence

the authority of routine. The common man who embodies common virtues has sometimes a masterly talent which transforms him in a great star, despite still remaining modest.” [5]

- The common man is simple, he assumes and constructively units our frustrations.
- He creates a common personality – We, the Common, the Simple, those who participate through him in the exercise of Power.

### **2.3. Our ‘Brother’ and the social need of seduction - The Charming Leader**

- This is the Saving Hero who is suited for a public opinion willing to be not exactly convinced, but seduced.
- He is the young, charming leader, the politic hypostasis of the *Brother*, who offers trust for he is capable of complicity and imitation.
- He seduces voters because he can support the rebellion against social constraints.
- He is the hero of solidarity for those who rise against the previous generation’s constraints – the representative of an imposed power:
- On the contrary, the fraternal image is associated to democracy, conceived as an attempt of opposition against personal power and already appointed leaders, with the purpose of shaking authority, guardianship.

This political character is a part of an internal and external situation of stability and of a satisfactory economic situation: J.F. Kennedy in 1960, Giscard d’Estaing in accordance to the 1960 revolt of youth – they are the result of an internal and external political imaginary which values the education, style, action and nonconformity of the Father Hero.

- His ‘class’ distinguishes him from both the common voter and the previous leader.
- The Charming Leader has different origins than the Common Man.
- He is an inheritor, coming from a rich family or one with tradition in a certain domain of public or economic life. He is a playboy, associated with love affairs, cumulating the political Don Juanism of social seduction with amorous seduction.
- The Charming Leader makes one start dreaming and creates the pleasure of assimilation, while a Common Man makes no-one dream.

### **2.4. The Hero of social stability - The Father of the Nation**

- He appears in situation when public opinion needs authority, guardianship.
- He inspires confidence in crisis situations which need horizons of stability.
- The Father has three fundamental characteristics: (a) Wisdom, a result of experience; (b) Competence – ‘Who says wisdom, says science’, with the meaning of competence, of solving problems which common people cannot

handle; (c) Authority – the leader has the strength of imposing himself and is respected by others.

- The Charming Leader and the Common Man are incapable of responding to crisis situations.
- The Father of the Nation is the only solution for troubled times. And, because he is a parent, he requires filial submission from his children. He must be the monarchical sexagenarian governing a family of subjects.
- This type of leader is projected on an archetype easily recognizable within the social imaginary – the Father, the Parent who protects his children.
- The Father of the Nation (of the tribe, of various types of political community) is an archetype present in the political imaginary of any historical era, for it is the ‘archetype of domestic security’.
- Paternal authority projects upon the whole Nation, and this especially since the father is also a Wise man, whose life and action experiences are absolutely necessary in situations of crisis and distrust: He embodies firmness, energy, the capacity of making decisions and imposing them, overcoming obstacles and resistance. This authoritative man uses an energetic vocabulary, which always repeats the word *I*: ‘I decided’, instead of ‘The Govern decided’ (...).

Applying this typology at the Romanian political field, R. Enache notices that the first political myth of the post-communist Romania is bounded to an embodiment of absolute evil and it’s constructed around the negative hero: “Paradoxically, the first myth of post-revolutionary Romania was Nicolae Ceausescu. In the first moments after the Revolution, the myth Nicolae Ceausescu was the embodiment of absolute evil. This absolute evil was then the only certainty.” [7]

This myth has been a landmark for all Romanian politicians, a good way for them to detach from such a model and to consider themselves as different. The second myth created around a political leader in the post-communist Romania was Ion Iliescu, a specific historical figure - the revolutionary stage (1990), the moment of the President (1992), a politician-solution phase (2000), that after 11 years, the liberating revolutionary to metamorphose in Father’s Figure [7].

### **3. The mythological personality – ‘dominant political myth’ as a founding criterion**

The typology of political leaders that we identify in the literature and which we define in our theoretical frameworks of our methodology allows an additional construction as a result of reporting those types of political leaders to the political myths. It is already an axiom of our theoretical model that the political leader and the political myth are two concepts that communicate and, under certain conditions, they almost overlap in their meaning. For example, for the Romanian political imaginary, built since the middle of the nineteenth century by a legendary figure for a strictly contemporary action, Michael the

Brave is in the same time the hero rescuer who overlaps within the unity of Romanians. Given that in 1600 the Romanian ruler united the three Romanian provinces and considering that the revolutionaries in 1848, who tried to unite Moldova with *Tara Romaneasca*, needed a hero to justify their project, Michael the Brave becomes a historical figure that overlaps with the Golden age - an age of union of all Romanians, designed in the past, but which is invoked in the present and for the future of the revolutionary project in the middle of the nineteenth century [8, 9].

#### **4. Objective social order and subjective mythological choice in the political discourse: 24 mythological identities**

It is accepted the idea that the myth is a story of a social reality, as the political myth is deriving from the social myth – both being archetypes of the social and political imaginary. The efficient utilization of these archetypes of the political imaginary in managing a situation of major political conflict, in which the political Order is contested, implies two different things whose meanings we are going to discuss further: (i) the identification of a dominant myth inside of the political imaginary of a certain community, and (ii) the recurrence of the same myth in the public political message of the same leader. The Romanian politician whose discourse is frequently constructed on The Conspiracy myth is Corneliu Vadim Tudor, being difficult to find a public discourse in which he does not refer to this myth. The most skilful and the best suited politician for utilizing The Golden Age myth is Ion Iliescu, nearly all his discourses being centred on the axis Unity-Golden Age. Traian Băsescu won the elections in 2004 by credibly utilizing The Conspiracy against the People myth, generating the Unity myth as its undeniable consequence. Of all fundamental political myths, The Conspiracy seems easiest to use, while the most difficult to use seems to be The Golden Age. Regarding the latter, it seems that its blockage is related to the apparition of an extremely efficient stereotype in Romanian socio-political imaginary of the last few decades: ‘Politicians lie to us’. Any future offer of organization, welfare, etc. is placed under the signs of deceitful, empty promises. Therefore, it is understandable why this myth is so difficult to use in Romanian politics. Even when attempts of using this myth are being made, its definitions relate to the legal-administrative and organizational domains – democratic political values that in reality have no real-sensorial definable content (welfare, standard of living, etc.). It seems that The Golden Age as a political offer in a message of abundance, of ‘a better life’, is definitely ruined for the Romanian political imaginary. For example, The Golden Age that Traian Băsescu mentions in his discourse for the 2009 presidential electoral campaign refers to the structure of the Parliament – eliminating one of the Chambers and decreasing the number of members. For the candidate Crin Antonescu, The Golden Age is an age of morality – ‘Romania – the land of common sense’. Re-evaluating in a negative sense the well-known 2004 slogan ‘Live well!’, the 2009 presidential elections seem to have transformed The Golden Age, an economical offer of the

confronting politicians, into a taboo. The slogan, once the pride of the 2004 political communication, a mischievous greeting equated to an urge for wellbeing, had become in 2009 a ground for Traian Băsescu's harassment and a taboo. The implicit future of 'Live well!' had in the meantime become present and past, and the people have not 'lived well' the previous five years. Based on this, in the logic and in the terms of electoral confrontation, the opponents of the president and candidate Traian Băsescu were aggressively asking him to take responsibility for his failure of accomplishing the economic state present in the meaning of the slogan 'Live well!'

The idea of a political myths 'hierarchy' amidst the political imaginary tells us that, for example, if the political imaginary of a national community contains a dominant of fear of losing national independence, then it is fundamentally wrong to construct an electoral campaign in which the strategic concept is defined in relation to the Golden Age myth as an era of abundance, cooperation, welfare etc. Such a situation forwards a proposition of order or 'hierarchy' of the importance of political myths. Inside the specific political context, each political leader chooses a certain kind of approach that is necessarily related to the use of the fundamental political myths. Thus, explicitly or implicitly, the political message of each candidate proposes a certain state of community resulted from his own politics if he is elected. Usually, the political competition and the political message become easier to be comprehended by the electorate if the negative discourse depicting the competitors is used. On the other hand, every political message of the electoral campaign ask for vote – political participation. All these elements of the political competition are directly or indirectly related to the myth of Conspiracy, Unity, Golden Age or the myth of Saviour.

*Our hypothesis* is that the quantitative presence of these 4 political myths generates a certain Mythological Identity of the Sender of political message.

## **5. Mythological content analysis: matrix of mythological identity**

In his public message delivered after his impeachment in July 2012, the Romanian President, Traian Basescu, used the myth of Conspiracy as a fundamental archetype of his political message that might have the formula no. 16 in Table 1 of Mythological Identity – C-G-S-U: "The final target of the parliamentary majority led by Victor Ponta, Crin Antonescu, Daniel Constantinescu, Gabriel Oprea, Kelemen Hunor is putting control of justice. The suspension of the President is just a phase. The problem of these gentlemen and their parties is to take justice under their control. Again, the suspension of the President is just an intermediate step planned to take place in the coming days. I appeal to politicians in the parliamentary majority and I warn them that, trough the serious violation of country's laws and Constitution, and also of Parliament regulations they situated the Romanian state and the 22 million Romanians in a very difficult situation, on my analysis being similar with the crisis generated by the miners between 13 and 15 June 1990. Also the effects of policy actions who

took place in the last week, of the prime minister and the parliamentary majority today, will have very serious economic effects for Romania and its population. This is the message I want to convey, again, I ask the parliamentary majority and its leaders to immediately cease actions against the Romanian state institutions, whether they are constitutional court, whether it's the Senate, the Chamber of Deputies, the Ombudsman or any other institutions, including the justice, the final target of the parliamentary majority and its leaders. It is time for politicians to have an equal status in front of justice, as like as any other state citizen and those hiding in Parliament because they must go before justice it is something which no more can be tolerated. It's a call that I make for responsibility.” [http://youtu.be/L0xcf92J9tc, accessed on April 22, 2013]

**Table 1.** The matrix of mythological identity.

<b>UNITY I</b>	<b>SAVIOUR II</b>	<b>CONSPIRACY III</b>	<b>GOLDEN AGE IV</b>
<b>1. U-S-G-C</b>	<b>7. S-U-G-C</b>	<b>13. C-U-G-S</b>	<b>19. G-U-C-S</b>
<b>2. U-S-C-G</b>	<b>8. S-U-C-G</b>	<b>14. C-U-S-G</b>	<b>20. G-U-S-C</b>
<b>3. U-C-S-G</b>	<b>9. S-C-G-U</b>	<b>15. C-S-U-G</b>	<b>21. G-S-C-U</b>
<b>4. U-C-G-S</b>	<b>10. S-C-U-G</b>	<b>16. C-S-G-U</b>	<b>22. G-S-U-C</b>
<b>5. U-G-S-C</b>	<b>11. S-G-U-C</b>	<b>17. C-G-S-U</b>	<b>23. G-C-U-S</b>
<b>6. U-G-C-S</b>	<b>12. S-G-C-U</b>	<b>18. C-G-U-S</b>	<b>24. G-C-S-U</b>

### **5.1. The dominant myth of conspiracy**

The fragment from the statement on July 3, 2012 which the suspended President of Romania makes in the Parliament for the repeated violation of Romanian Constitution places the author of the political message in an identity formula which certainly has a high number of references to the idea of conspiracy, and this thing situate on the first place the myth of conspiracy. Thus the conspirators (the parliamentary majority who suspended the president) extend their institutional identity in 6 individual identities –the leaders of parliamentary groups who voted for suspending the President.

### **5.2. The Saviour**

It is currently situated in the implicit content of the political declaration regarding Centre crises situation in which the conspirators are going to lead the national community. The Saviour sees the true meaning of actions taken by conspirators: the immediate target of suspending the President of Romania is a false problem, after which hides, in fact, the true purpose of the conspirators – the control over justice and the attack over the democratic EU values.

### **5.3. Golden Age**

It is the era presented as ‘impeached’ by the Conspirator and that should be reinstated - independent Justice and restore European democratic values.

As can be seen, the preeminence of the conspiracy myth provides a kind of mythological identity to the Transmitter. Present as Saviour – a Hero fighting against the conspirators and that sense their true intentions, the Romanian president warns that his suspension is actually a suspension of the Golden Age, the conspirators wish to take the control over Justice and over the democratic European values.

### **5.4. The Unity myth**

Is only implicitly present here in the sense of a coalition of conspirators against Romania's population represented by the 6 leaders of parliament political parties composing it.

At first reading of this political message the conspiracy is present in 5 cases, the Golden Age in 4 cases, the Hero Saviour implicit appears in two instances, and the myth of Unity is found in two points of the speech.

The conclusion of this analysis, after identifying the number of appearances of the 4 fundamental political myths, we see that, fundamentally, the Transmitter belongs to the matrix of mythological identity, category number III (conspiracy), figure 16 (C-S-G-U) from Table 1.

## **6. Conclusions**

In the present study we have tried to show that the typology of political leaders can be developed by introducing a new variable – the political myth. In an era of over-personalization of political power that media communication often generate, the message of the political leaders cannot avoid the use of fundamental political myths, especially when we are dealing with a political crisis situation or an electoral campaign, itself a symbolic depiction of a generalized crisis in which politicians and parties fight for power. Starting from the classical typology of political leaders (Schwartzenberg) and from the analysis of the four fundamental political myths (Girardet), we tried to extend the personality stances of the hero (Saviour, Father of the Nation, Common Man, and Charming Leader) by identifying the mythological dimension of these personalities. Our proposal covers a matrix of mythological identity made by combinations of the four fundamental political myths, from which we obtain a total of 24 figures generated by combining the symbols S (Saviour), Golden Age (G), Conspiracy (C), and Unity (U).

The hypothesis we tried to analyze here is that any political message of a leader can be integrated into one of the 24 mythological figures, depending on the order and the number of situations when the 4 fundamental political myths appear. In terms of methodology, the exclusive product of any qualitative

undertaking is the result of a quantitative procedure - counting the number of appearances of the four fundamental political myths within a political message. As it was highlighted in our analysis, Basescu's political message in 3 July 2012 uses for 5 times the Conspiracy myth, 4 times the myth of the Golden Age and twice the Saviour myth and the Unity myth. Using the symbolism associated to this view, the Matrix of Mythological Personality, the identity of the Romanian President, whose political message has been analyzed, belongs to the Conspiracy category, the figure no. 17 (Table 1).

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