

Political Cartoons

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***Abstract:** This paper aims to analyze Academia Cațavencu's view of the political culture, as a symbol of contemporary satire, making a short description of both the cultural satirical phenomenon and its contribution to shaping a national identity. Furthermore, the process of enlightenment through satire is integrated in the context of media globalization, emphasizing the connection between the delivered message and the utilized environment.*

***Keywords:** political cartoons, media, new journalism, cultural satire, Academia Cațavencu's cultural perspective, media globalization.*

Introduction: *Contemporary media theory*

The human need of knowledge gives birth to new ways of understanding reality, to the desire of cross-culturalization, our way of being creating a visible form of existence. The practical experience offers the responses to the cultural paradigm; therefore the social contribution to the re-construction of the media messages leads to a wealthy, shared knowledge.

If we define cultural imperialism as a hybrid form of global culture, we can provide that “perverted effect”¹ of the social order, effect described by Raymond

1 Raymond Boudon, (1998). *Efecte Perverse și Ordine socială*, Presses Universitaires de France: EroSong &Book, p. 25.

Boudon as an “unwanted but desirable reality”². Taking into account that “a prediction becomes social fact in the same moment it is emitted”³, we can underline the universality of the cultural paradigms, the individual being an important part of a new dimension defined by the motto ~ *You are what you consume* ~ which today has become ~ *You consume what you are* ~.

In “Through the Vanishing Point” Marshall McLuhan analyses the idea of culture, in which he encompasses the creative act of the art (eg. “In art, the importance of the same principles is illustrated through the force of suggestion. Leaving something unexpressed, the observer gets the chance to accomplish perfection (...)”⁴, whereas the individual who does not take part in the construction of the cultural models is left with the sole option of analyzing and completing the object of creation by using personal patterns. Nowadays, the culture receives different values: from business to art, from media space to scientific institution. Nevertheless, in this case, culture will be considered a positive practice which can influence the media publics exposed to a certain cultural message, taking also the shape of a culture understood as a pre-existent primordial space, where all the classic terms in art, literature, history or music meet.

The media revolution, which is characteristic to “The Millennial Generation”⁵, a social order named symbolically “The Media Generation” engenders an utopist society Y, in which the individual intends to transport all the messages from an environment to another. In this way, introduced into a process of “mixed communication”, the messages become structural, codified after a universal language, the media vocabulary. The transmission and re-transmission of the same message through different channels produces not only the globalization of the cultural mechanism, but also a commercialization of the ideas. As a result, the individual is subject to a continuous buy-sell process. The Anthropologist Leach was right when he pertinently declared that “the TV generation not only that it is not avoided by conformism, but it becomes more conformist.”⁶

“The Change”⁷ is a general idea explored by McLuhan, the technological transformation being able to modify the environment, the individuals as well as the perception of the reality.

2 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

3 *Ibidem*, p. 22.

4 Marshall McLuhan (2006). *Texte Esențiale*, București: Nemira, *Through the Vanishing Point*, p. 266.

5 Ș. Stanciu, M.A. Ionescu. *Cultura Organizațională*, București, Comunicare.ro

6 Marshall McLuhan (2006). *Texte Esențiale*, București: Nemira, *Media Mix, Oi în haine de Wolfe*, p. 80.

7 Marshall McLuhan (1975). *Galaxia Gutenberg. Omul și era tiparului*, Editura Politică, București, p. 8.

The cultural and social impact of television reflects on the postwar literature, a literature which seems to anticipate a deformed world, authoritarian, subjected to the medium. Orwell's *1984* imagines an utopist society ruled by the Big Brother effect. In addition, "the new electronic interdependence recreates the world after the model of the global village"⁸, an effect predicted already in 1972, in the film *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang. In this dysutopist film human beings are the slaves of a technological society which closely resembles the dependence upon media forms of our days.

As he lives in "The Media Age", the individual proclaims the hegemony of the global media organizations. He thus defines the process of globalization as a resource for the media development which participates involuntarily to the reconstruction of the local culture, by mutilating it, and transforming it into an international message. Owing to Television, that form of "symbolic violence"⁹, the production of messages has become a real "cultural industry"¹⁰, a business that treats national concepts such as identity and culture, rituals and symbols at a global level.

The confrontation between unaltered spaces in the globalization tendency and the spaces that sustain this phenomenon of Transnationalization of cultural industries could be translated in terms of local identity, a symbol which exists inside global institutions.

Tributary to the idea that "the era of globalization speculates, on one hand, the consumerism's reflex (...) and, on the other hand, potentates the postmodern incertitude"¹¹, the organizations take advantage of the global market in order to exhibit and sell a certain message. We thus become witnesses of "the Transnationalization of the social movement"¹², the globalization bringing not only media, technologic or economic evolutions, but also an early emergence of the multiculturalism.

The identity crisis launched by the globalization did not affect the media institutions which adapted the message to the medium, "the gravity of the problems that confront the humanity is far from generating local issues (...), forcing to a planetary assumption"¹³. As a result, the individual develops a planetary consciousness.

This cultural globalization encompasses not only the uniformization of national identities, but also entails a collaboration of the diversities, an inter-cultural exchange:

8 Marshall McLuhan (2006). *Texte Esențiale*, București: Nemira, *Galaxia Gutenberg*, p. 184.

9 Bordieu apud A.D. Rachieru (2003). *Globalizare și Cultura Media*, Iași: Institutul European, p. 11.

10 A.D. Rachieru (2003). *Globalizare și Cultura Media*, Iași: Institutul European, p. 8.

11 A.D. Rachieru (2003). *Globalizare și Cultura Media*, Iași: Institutul European, "Ce este cultura Media?", p. 20.

12 A.D. Rachieru (2003). *Globalizare și Cultura Media*, Iași: Institutul European, p. 82.

13 *Ibidem*, p. 82.

"Cultural globalization approach, which underlines cultural change, interconnection and diversity"¹⁴.

Douglas Kellner's definition of the media universe as a "deceptive cultural environment"¹⁵ highlights the unstable truths modern means of communication spread, a phenomenon derived from both technological development and the polarity of social mentalities. If we consider cultural change to be a reformed reality, from the elements' that produced the alteration of social DNA perspective, we can emphasize the informational inter-change between the different media structures: radio, Television, written press or the Internet. Through "enough revolutions which point out which means of communication are unique artistic forms, that offer pre-eminence to one set of human possibilities instead of another"¹⁶, we managed to identify specialized high-performance media, the experience of a short media history developing a certain selectivity of the social mind.

Fusing the term mass-media with the term printed media, publications that spread media content through written information, allows us to enter a primordial communication space, "literature being the voice of ancient things in new shapes, while newspapers voice new realities in lasting and unchanged shapes"¹⁷. As such, the press, which was initially an art form, became a cultural instrument that transforms reality in terms of a social objectiveness.

As the printed media overestimates the individual's interest for a reality he is already living in, new media becomes more attractive, a phenomenon which replaces the social platitude with the digital interactivity. "But it is because of this diversity of individual communication means that understanding a message involves understanding the speaker's language"¹⁸, leading to fewer opportunities for individuals to relate on a social level than in the case of interpersonal communication.

As for the contemporary printed media, "it acts as an elite, without always proving its qualities and taking on its responsibilities"¹⁹. As a bridge that connects the individual to the social, political and cultural spaces, written media distinguishes itself from other informative means through objectiveness and conventionality. Some

14 Jean K. Chalaby, *American Cultural Primacy in A New Media Order , A European Perspective, The International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 68(1): 33–51, 2006.

15 Kellner, D. apud A.D. Rachieru (2003). *Globalizare și Cultura Media*, Iași: Institutul European, „Ce este cultura Media?”, p. 12.

16 McLuhan, Marshall (2006). *Texte Esențiale*, București: Nemira, *Media Mix, Oi în haine de Wolfe*, p. 86.

17 Karel apud Marshall McLuhan (2006). *Texte Esențiale*, București: Nemira, *Media Mix*, p. 92.

18 Mihai Dinu apud A. Rogojinaru (2006). *Relații Publice și Publicitate. Tendințe și Provocări*, București: Tritonic, *Interpersonal vs Impersonal în comunicare*, p. 74.

19 Kapland apud A. Rogojinaru (2006). *Relații Publice și Publicitate. Tendințe și Provocări*, București: Tritonic, I.G.Fârte, *Către o revoluție conservatoare în comunicarea de masă*, p. 96.

contemporary newspapers are banners for messages without essence or content, a standard form that lacks the necessary communication qualities. This division of journalistic perspectives is the consequence of social change, the individual deteriorating the cultural agenda and replacing it with a digitally planed one.

Mass-media reigns over human experiences, inoculating a need for escapism, while the individual, saturated by the number and diversity of messages society offers, identifies oneself with a bantered description of reality rather than with an objective description of it. The result is the concept of *cultural satire*, which allows the reader to escape from a conventional printed media into social irony.

The saturation of conventionality is responsible for a new direction in the new media, which promotes a different social reality. Boring journalistic styles (eg. "on arrive aux standards du journalisme de qualité, en appliquant tous les jours les normes (...) de la profession, en cherchant toujours à harmoniser les éléments appartenant à la réglementation et à l'autoréglementation"²⁰) and news which describe events in dull tones, convince the audience to look for a different communication pattern, one that includes irony in its depiction of the social reality. Cultural satire is part of a liberal press that alters the standard approach of the cultural environment, metamorphosing into an environment of social and cultural criticism. The main role of this concept is that of educating the public, restructuring all media content in a way that highlights the lack of cultural elements in both collective and individual thoughts.

Noting that "until today, all stories began with *Once upon a time..* and all prayers ended with *Forever and ever ...*", the weekly newspaper Academia Cașavencu proposes a different approach of classic journalism, using an unique writing style that reminds the reader of the famous I.L. Caragiale. This satiric view of the society derives from an effort journalists make in order to alter the present perception of reality. „Adding into the text even the smallest element which in the investigated reality does not exist or changing (even with good intentions) the names of individuals (...) not to mention the creation of composite characters (...) is simply considered a fiction contained in the so-called composite types (...), in new journalism printed media."²¹ Moreover, Academia Cașavencu's journalsitic fits in this type of media.

Giving up that kind of communication where "journalists stressed by deadlines often overlook the wealth code, resorting to platitudes and stereotypes and break

20 A. Rogojinaru (2006). *Relații Publice și Publicitate. Tendințe și Provocări*, București: Tritonic, C.F. Popescu, *Standardele Jurnalismului de calitate: Relațiile dintre reglementare și auto-reglementare*, p. 153.

21 A. Rogojinaru (2006). *Relații Publice și Publicitate. Tendințe și Provocări*, București: Tritonic, C.F. Popescu, *Standardele Jurnalismului de calitate: Relațiile dintre reglementare și auto-reglementare*, p. 158.

the code rules, the mistakes made being afterwards socialized and normalized”²², Academia Cațavencu re-interpret social mistakes, describing them in incisive and malicious shades, exposing them to the public for being reviewed, mocked and punished.

In this way, cultural satire derives from news satire, the types of texts published in this weekly journal being enslaved to irony and humor. Different from “(...) the pleasure text that thanks, fulfilling with euphoria, (...) that comes from culture”, the *delight text* typical to Academia Cațavencu, “puts you in a state of loss (...), staggering the historical, cultural, and psychological basis of the reader.”²³

In contrast with the general trend of media *feminization*, Academia Cațavencu suffers a process of *masculine* messages, the specific language being translated by appealing to reason and humor, subtle or obvious ironies becoming a *lovemark* of the newspaper, “those brands with charisma without which people can not live”.²⁴

General description of the newspaper Academia Cațavencu

Academia Cațavencu represents a weekly journal that treats with viciousness, as it auto characterizes itself from the first pages, being a media source that combines news utility and the informative function of all the transmitted messages, with the ironical approach of the social field and the entertainment function of all the articles published. Also, through the original approach of real we can assimilate the social functions of transmitting new values to the society’s environment, the journal being able of building a new target group saturated by all the political and social uniformity. *Academia Cațavencu* subscribes to playing the networking part in regarding the social groups that buy and share the ideas and approaches of this news-paper. In this way, the journal has, firstly, a strong individualized image on the news paper market, being in connection with the prestige effect given by the way it researches and receives events and news, re-transmitting information from their own point of view, by using humor and irony. Being characterized by credibility, attraction and authority from the target group’s point of view, *Academia Cațavencu* describes political, economical, modern and cultural events from a very different approach.

Regarding the general structure of this weekly journal, the news paper has into account the evolution of the political events, but also the cultural events that are relevant to the audience. The first page suggests usually the main theme of the weekly approach, representing with irony a real situation from the political scenery.

22 A. Rogojinaru (2006). *Relații Publice și Publicitate. Tendințe și Provocări*, București: Tritonic, I.G. Fârte, *Către o revoluție conservatoare în comunicarea de masă*, p. 96.

23 Roland Barthes (1994). *Plăcerea Textului*, Cluj: Echinoc, p. 23.

24 Kevin Roberts apud A. Rogojinaru (2006). *Relații Publice și Publicitate. Tendințe și Provocări*, București: Tritonic, A. Crăciun, *De la branding la lovemark. Ce este brandul?*, p. 53.

From the point of consistency and coherence of the journal, it subsumes articles that offer continuity and context unity, most of the editorial pages being under page titles that indicate the main theme of the written parts. (eg. "Politicians saying weird things" or "Some like the robbery")

From the intentional perspective, the news paper sustains the entertainment function, the direct intention of the articles being unveiled by the writing style and the range of subjects picked for news stories. (eg. "What would the folk singers sing about presidency candidates", under the main title: *Mother Nature – Alcoholic Father*). In addition, to maintain the connection with the younger readers, *Academia Cațavencu* pays attention to modern subjects, in concerning daily technology in editorials as: "Old and new Mondenity" or "Internet without age", where they describe the new media issue.

Political Cartoons

Political cartoons represent a unique form of media message, offering a new vision of electoral campaigns or candidates, typically captured in a single image. Freedom of expression and creativity of the cartoonist reveals a new form of media communication, mass media being a political satire medium. So, communication develops freely without regard to traditional forms of message exposure, the candidates being in the light of journalistic irony. In this way, electoral forms undergo significant changes, passing from a model focused on ideology, to one focused on the political character. Cartoons represent therefore a "safe" area where we can express opinions and make accusations, as opposed to the news, where information must be factual and not inflammatory.²⁵ With political satire, candidates now have to be extremely careful both with their gestures and the information sent as well as with their behavior within the family, privacy being one of the favorite topics of political cartoonists. (eg. Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky). Political cartoons and other types of political humor are part of campaign messages received by voters. An example would be Jon Stewart's program *The Daily Show*. Political satire has been accepted by political campaigns, fact that confirms its legitimacy in the media. An example is the invitation to join Air Force One during the re-election campaign in 1996, received by the cartoonist Mike Luckovich from Atlanta Journal Constitution from Bill Clinton. Effective political cartoons have a complex message transmitted using a single image, many of the jokes used being understood and appreciated primarily by insiders (eg. "they are inside jokes that few people understand").²⁶ In this context political socialization occurs, information known by public being in fact insights offered by political satire. Taking

25 Joan L. Connors (2005). *Representations of the 2004 Presidential Campaign, Political Cartoons and Popular Culture References*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, p. 49.

26 *Ibidem*, p. 49.

into account of the basic functions of politics – to support and balance the civic process of socialization, we could define political socialization as “the process of political learning or education, in this case, of the individual who forms such beliefs, acquire knowledge and skills, gain specific guidance and expresses its preferences or political options.”²⁷ In connection with the development of political culture and family values, political socialization represents the link between individual as a human structure and individual as social and political vertebra. Identifying the concept of political socialization as “a gradual process of assimilation of ideas and political standards, made by an individual (...)”²⁸, the self-nature of the phenomenon could be emphasized, political socialization stages making up the steps of growth, education and individual socialization. The uses in cartoon context of popular reference provides what Morris called domestication “process by which abstract ideas, cool characters and unfamiliar events are transformed into something close, familiar and concrete”²⁹. In examining the political cartoons Medhurst and DeSousa have identified four major themes: ordinary political places, cultural allusions, personal traits and thematic situations. They have defined allusions as “any fictional, mythical and narrative form, with its substrate in the folklore, legends, literature or electronic media”³⁰. These encoded types of message representation can be correctly interpreted only by an informed public that is familiar with the literary source or with the cultural aspect of the images.

Table analysis

The above table analyzes the main cartoons from the newspaper *Academia Cațavencu* which were published during the election campaign November-December 2009. A total number of 21 cartoons were analyzed from the following numbers of the newspaper: 44 (4-10 November 2009), 45 (11-17 November 2009), 47 (November 25-December 1, 2009) and 48 (2-8 December 2009 – contains two special editions featuring the two candidates of the second round: one featuring Traian Băsescu and the other one featuring Mircea Geoană).

As the election campaign, the main themes of the cartoons are obviously related topics, bringing to the fore “the election battle” and its main actors. As the characters, stand the constant presence of President Traian Băsescu (14 out of 21 cartoons are starring the character Traian Băsescu), followed by its main rivals: Mircea Geoană, Crin Antonescu Sorin Oprescu. Episodic characters are: Emil Boc, Elena Udrea, Sorin Oprescu’s mother, Ion Iliescu, a group of children and different categories of voters (women, elderly).

27 Ion Mitran, (1997). *Politologia în fața sec. XXI*, București:Editura Fundației “România de mâine”, p. 25.

28 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

29 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

30 Joan L. Conners, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

Analysis grid

Nr.	Political background	Exaggerated physical characteristics	Exaggerated psychological features	Satirized situations	Cultural cues (TV, movies, music, cartoons etc.)
1	In terms of positioning, the character Traian Bănescu is located in a boat which is at sea.	With reference to physical features he has a crooked large nose and he's an old man.	He's presented as a vicious man; he's smoking and drinking alcohol.	"The country is ready, pull the ropes, if you like the monsoon, also vote another time!" Reference to the presidential election.	Allusions to the cartoon character Popeye the sailorman.
2	Ballot box - are presented two actors, the Voter and the Corruption.	In terms of characters: the Voter is depicted in terms of female and the male is the Corruption, but did not appear to be covered by a sign; the woman eyes reflect wonder, the woman seems to be old.	Reflects unconscious, wonder, and a puzzled expression, the female character does not seem to understand what is happening.	"You voted, you took the money and you left. My request is not to tell anyone anything because voting is secret. Clear?" it refers to the 2009 presidential elections - corruption is depicted using the vote buying.	None.
3	The action takes place at the doctor office. Cartoons characters - Traian Bănescu and Dr. Andrei Streinu Cercel.	Bănescu - has a big nose, lifted shoulders, eyes closed, his head is high. He is dressed in a sailor shirt and is sitting on a chair, listening to the doctor with his hands on his feet. Situation which reflects obedience.	He is presented as a humble man.	The doctor is wearing a gown and a little belt and has a stethoscope. Doctor replying to Bănescu: "You aren't hydrocephalic. You have only a big head." Bănescu is wearing a sailor's shirt and has an aging appearance. The main theme here is swine flu and how it was administered and presented by Dr. Andrei Streinu Cercel.	None.
4	Bănescu's cartoon appears next to an electric chair with 360 and 220 V, presented as opportunities to vote for parliamentary elections in 2009.	He appears smoking a cigarette, with his hand in his pocket, next to an electric chair that supports his leaned shoulders. He's nose is big and his eyes are inclined.	Expose a sad and hopeless man.	Cartoon of President Bănescu with his hand in his pocket, he's smoking a cigarette next to an electric chair and is replying: "I would like a parliament with 220...360 are too expensive. We can not afford that!" Cartoon theme- the referendum.	Hint to the X-Files TV series, here with the title – Flop Files

Nr. Political background	Exaggerated physical characteristics	Exaggerated psychological features	Satirized situations	Cultural cues (TV, movies, music, cartoons etc.)
5 Space is not well defined; the two actors are Geonană and Sorin Opreșcu.	Sorin Opreșcu appears in the role of the doctor, having a back door with the inscription: Dr. Opreșcu; Mircea Geoană is dressed in pajamas, as a patient, with a Kent pack and a bottle in his hand.	Sorin Opreșcu is an authority in this case and Mircea Geoană is a man without any political power, who's trying to bribe the authority.	"Mircea, take up your bed and walk!"	Allusion to a verse in the Bible.
6 Regarding the political background, Traian Băseșcu is seated in a chair at a table, with reference to the oval office, imposing a totalitarian regime.	Traian Băseșcu is the image of Hitler, he is seated at the table with hands crossed, has a lock on the forehead and Hitler's mustache.	Reflect the cold and totalitarian attitude. He tells to the second character: "Elena comes to me! Elena Braun!"	Băseșcu character is satirized using the resemblance to Hitler, making the association between the name of Helen Braun, Hitler's wife and Elena Udrea. It is suggested a certain rapprochement between Traian Băseșcu and Elena Udrea.	References to historical figures, Băseșcu is compared with Hitler.
7 Traian Băseșcu is presented on the referendum poster.	In terms of physical appearance, the character is smiling, is dressed for hunting, with a belt and highlights his clothing and a gun on which is engraved: "Referendum."	The character position denotes: personal achievement by fulfilling his main objective - the reduction of the number of parliamentarians.	The theme to which reference is made is the message of the referendum: "Of what they were afraid, they cannot escape. Of 471, remain only 300 MPs. Come to referendum." Traian Băseșcu is associated with a shepherd and he replies: "Shotgun and wide belt, how many were we once!" To appeal to irony, the message is associated with a well known Romanian song: Shotgun and wide belt.	To appeal to irony, the message is associated with a well known Romanian song: Shotgun and wide belt.

Nr.	Political background	Exaggerated physical characteristics	Exaggerated psychological features	Satirized situations	Cultural cues (TV, movies, music, cartoons etc.)
8	<p>Political space is determined by the suggestive title: Fall hit: Portable policy. The four political cartoon characters are: Sorin Opreșcu (Geoană, Crin Antonescu and Traian Băsescu.</p>	<p>Mircea Geoană (Geoană G.) is called DJ and is dressed in baggy pants and shirt, with an overly large lower lip; Sorin Opreșcu (<i>Rocktor</i>) is the image of a rock star, wearing leather and specific symbols: target, tattoos, an imprinted shirt with the name of the band Iris. He has two albums: Albano and Busuioc; Crin Antonescu (<i>Antonescu Crinureev</i>) depicts a tap dancer with tambourine in hand, and is wearing a red shirt and a red vest with big lips. Traian Băsescu is called Populărescu (from populism), and is dressed in folklore clothes, wearing sandals, and at his neck he has a tambourine resembling a drake.</p>	<p>Traian Băsescu displays a cheerful attitude, Crin Antonescu appears to be very stylish, Sorin Opreșcu has a negative and outraged attitude, and Mircea Geoană looks very relaxed.</p>	<p>The theme – the electoral campaign. The political characters are the main characters of a musical.</p>	<p>Reference to the TV show- <i>American Idol</i>, and each actor is a musical character, a rock musician, a folk musician, a DJ or a step dancer.</p>
9	<p>Băsescu's image appears on a banner with the message: "Of what I'm afraid, I can't escape!"</p>	<p>Traian Băsescu appears as the main character of a banner, he has large nose and is wearing a striped shirt ... The second character looks at his picture with his hands behind his back, dressed as a guardian.</p>	<p>The general mood is one of fear and anxiety: "Of what I'm afraid, I can't escape!"</p>	<p>Băsescu is satirized as being afraid of his political opponents, but also as being afraid of being pursued "for certain mistakes."</p>	<p>None.</p>
10	<p>The action takes place in an office. The main characters are Băsescu and a citizen who wants to prove an electoral blackmail, using a DVD: "I have prepared a video with Geoana giving an uppercut to an old lady."</p>	<p>Băsescu has hands on his head, a big nose, and is sitting at an imposing desk, dressed in suit. The second character is wearing glasses, a hat, and a detective coat.</p>	<p>The second character wants to be undiscovered, wanting to provide certain information about Băsescu's political opponent -Geoană. Băsescu seems embarrassed by the situation, he does not want to be put in this role, and hence his hands on his head reflect the problems his is being confronted with at the moment. He seems to be surprised by a reporter's question: "Mr. Băsescu, the Parliament will request the suspension on the grounds that you have expelled Elena Udrea from the government. How do you comment on this?"</p>	<p>The satirized theme - electoral bribery.</p>	<p>None.</p>
11	<p>Traian Băsescu is the main character of an interview.</p>	<p>Traian Băsescu is dressed in a suit and is holding a flag.</p>	<p>He seems to be surprised by a reporter's question: "Mr. Băsescu, the Parliament will request the suspension on the grounds that you have expelled Elena Udrea from the government. How do you comment on this?"</p>	<p>The cartoons' theme is: Elena Udrea's expulsion from the government.</p>	<p>None.</p>

Nr.	Political background	Exaggerated physical characteristics	Exaggerated psychological features	Satirized situations	Cultural cues (TV, movies, music, cartoons etc.)
12	The political space is represented by a boxing ring, where Traian Bănescu is sitting next to a heating.	Bănescu is wearing boxing gloves, and is dressed in shirt and shorts.	He appears to be ready for the attack against the heating: "Between you and me, wind (Vântule)!"	Allusion to the character Sorin Ovidiu Vântu.	None.
13	The main character is Emil Boc which is accompanied by children.	Emil Boc is lower in height than the children that accompanied him; he is wearing a suit and make a hand salute.	Emil Boc: "I swear that the President never hit a child."	Main theme –the Presidential scandal, in which Bănescu has been accused of hitting a child in public.	Hint to a childhood game, the Hopscotch.
14	Traian Bănescu is walking on a street where a crowd of old ladies are crying "Bute President!"	He is dressed in a suit, walking around peacefully, with arms at his bent back.	An attitude of indifference is displayed.	The coldness of the politicians regarding the needs of the citizens.	None.
15	Bănescu is in a restaurant where he is talking to two cooks.	None.	None.	The satirized situation is represented by the changing laws. Doctors: "You have exhausted all the solutions of the constitution." Bănescu: "Ok! Than let's pass on Levant!"	Hint to the work „Levantul” of the romanian writer Mircea Cărtărescu.
16	Two political characters take part in a debate: Sorin Oprescu and Traian Bănescu.	Sorin Oprescu is finger pointing to Traian Bănescu, Traian Bănescu has raised hands, and the two candidates are sitting behind a desk.	Sorin Oprescu saying to President Traian Bănescu: "I accuse you that you mock, drink, curse, slut and beat children..." Feeling attacked Bănescu replies: "Nothing of what's Romanian is foreign to me."	Election debates of the campaign.	None.
17	The main political actors are Sorin Oprescu and his mother-in-law.	Sorin Oprescu is in front of the desk where his mother-in-law sits. His hand is in his pocket and he has a relaxed attitude. His mother-in-law has her hands clasped, while on her desk she has a tape and a rolling pin.	None.	Sorin Oprescu asks his mother-in-law to give him the tape: "Mother-in-law, the bloodthirsty viewer wants the tape where I am being punished by you."	None.

Nr.	Political background	Exaggerated physical characteristics	Exaggerated psychological features	Satirized situations	Cultural cues (TV, movies, music, cartoons etc.)
18	The allusion to a specific political space is made by the message itself: "Geoană, be respectful with Nea Nelu, you think you are smarter since you have been President?"	None.	None.	The main theme of the cartoon is the prospective victory of Geoană in the presidential elections. Geoană appears as being rebuked to have not behaved well with the most important member of his party.	None.
19	Geoană's presence among children.	Geoană is sitting at children's table, having his lower lip being fallen on the table due to excessive size. His feet and shoulders let him squatting, he is hardly reaching the table due to the small chair.	The image of Mircea Geoană of this cartoon is that of a child that feels sad because he cannot find his place among the others.	The satirized situation is the resemblance of Geoană with a child.	None.
20	There is no well-defined political space in this cartoon.	Bănescu's cartoon is an expressive one, he is smiling broadly, although the wrinkles seem to cover his face, his nose is big and his eyes are tired.	The character seems to express a sense of wellness and joy.	The satirized character is Traian Bănescu.	None.
21	The image of Bănescu who is touching a woman's breast.	Bănescu has a high nose, and is having a glass in his hand; while on the table we can see an ashtray and a cigarette.	A vicious unscrupulous character.	The satirized character is Bănescu who replies: "When the President does it, it means that it is not immoral."	None.

The cartoons satirized physical characteristics and personality traits of the main political players of the election campaign, campaign issues, campaign debates, the political past of the candidates, focusing an essential element of political cartoons – the private lives of the candidates. As physical characteristics the following aspects are satirized: Boc's small stature, Traian Băsescu's nose and big head (an analogy with a subtle trait of his personality – stubbornness), Geoană's big lips, the female forms of Elena Udrea. Another aspect highlighted by the cartoons is represented by the personality traits of political actors (it alludes the immorality and the alcoholism – possible defects of Băsescu, as well as to the favoritism toward Elena Udrea, the blatant pride of Geoană, Crin Antonescu's pedantic character, the corruptible nature of Sorin Oprescu). In terms of candidates' ideologies, these are rarely satirized, the cartoons being more focused on satirizing the personality traits and the election fight with all its specific components. However it appears allusions to the populism practiced by Traian Băsescu and his party (Băsescu appears wearing folk garment in front of the crowd) and the dictatorial attitude (his resemblance to Hitler). It is also satirized the prospective situation of Geoană's victory in presidential elections and the referendum issue proposed by President Traian Băsescu (the cartoons featuring the referendum, the roles are reversed, Băsescu being the one who is afraid of his political opponents and not the one who inspires fear, as it has appeared in the original message). The satire of the private lives of the candidates is done using the electoral debate issues, due to the fact that aspects of the counter-life are often used as "strategic weapons" in the electoral race and occur mainly during the TV election the main candidates are confronting. Another cartoon theme is corruption, a constant presence in most Romanian political cartoons and especially in those that appear in *Academia Cațavencu* weekly newspaper, which as Caragiale satirizes the main moral values of the whole Romanian society and especially its political scene. Moreover, the naming of the newspaper is highly suggestive for the direction of the publication as well as for the broached issues. Inevitably a caricature of the presidential scandal that has Băsescu as its main character appears (the scene where the president hits a child) thoroughly publicized to the end of the campaign. Both this controversial cartoon and the one featuring Sorin Oprescu addressing his mother-in-law "Mother-in-law, the bloodthirsty viewer want the tape where I am being punished by you". Satirizes the mores of society (the search for sensational in order to create "the show" to the detriment of quality information) and the "infotainment" character of the TV industry. It seems that is confirmed the assumption that in contemporary elections both at a national level and at an international one, the stake is in fact the power obtained by the instrumentality of "the political game", attention focused initially on the ideology of the party and of the candidate is now being directed toward the political show promoted by the media.

In terms of cultural allusions, unlike the other cartoons of the international press the Romanian ones are quite few. However, appear allusions to a verse in the Bible

(analogy with the alleged religiosity of Romanians), to the work of the famous writer Mircea Cărtărescu (initially affirming its support for Băsescu), to the folklore songs (eg. "rifle and wide belt") which are in the area of interests of a specific target, to the internationally popular cartoon characters (Popeye the sailorman) and to the famous state leaders (eg. Hitler).

In conclusion, from the analyzed cartoons mentioned above we cannot directly observe a trend of political bias of the publication, but rather a critical tendency to the leadership of the country, regardless of their political affiliation as well as to the entire Romanian political system.

Conclusions

The main feature of the informational content produced by the printed media, as well as the new media (the Internet, the social networks), is the legitimacy of the media discourse versus the postmodern era, noting that communication, as a process, could only ascend due to recent hegemony in the media context. As such, many of the publications that can be found on the market today can easily be cataloged as "infotainment", "usually dominated by homogenous technological and financial pressure"³¹. Another dimension the media approaches is "the preponderance of an economic discourse in countries partaking in a globalized economy"³². This aspect can be generally noted when regarding international publications which, in contrast to smaller national publications, give priority to financial news and changes in the global economy.

Part of a newspaper which analyses and criticizes the national cultural space, the column chosen for a case study in the present article, conveys political events and news for satiric purposes. Through a diversity of articles and writing styles, the column offers its readers an incursion in the cultural space. As standards of the satiric journalism, the cartoons show a balanced and properly build relation between actual facts and parody, conveying an intention, close ideological roots, of the pressman to improve the process of educating the public. On the other hand, the informative character of the events presented in the column is reduced to simple highlights of political activities, their purpose being that of establishing a column with satirical tendencies.

In an era of the spectacular, of *infotainment*, Academia Cațavencu manages to maintain the interest of the audience in a column of cultural satire, the information presented through the political cartoons being valued firstly by an original drawing style and secondly by the involvement of the authors in criticizing political events.

31 Daniela Roventă-Frumușani (2004). *Analiza Discursului. Ipoteze și Ipostaze*, București: Tritonic, 2.1 Discursul mediatic, p. 117.

32 *Ibidem*, p. 118.

Although “personal anecdotal representations”³³ take precedence, “the social actors opting for simple, seductive, non-problematic phrases, using the model of the advertisement’s slogan or a newspaper’s headings”³⁴, political cartoons can bear complex messages and subtle references to political businesses and the degradation of the national cultural system, the headings standing as symbols of the newspaper’s unique type of humor.

“The common culture, modeled after the advertisement’s video and slogan, as well as the bulimia, competition and activism of the media”³⁵ is shaped into a culture of satire in Academia Cațavencu. Among “leading contemporary journalistic tendencies such as: legitimizing perspectives, human interest and cordial communication”³⁶, incisive journalistic criticism, irony and the direct involvement of the writer in defining a message favor a unique analysis of the national cultural identities. Defined by postmodern conditions (subjectivity, hedonism, self-determination, self-assumption) and less by the feminization tendencies of journalism, the analyzed newspaper’s perspective is dominated by “the agent of change”, the journalist taking the role of “the watch-dog of the civil society, involved in a punctual analysis of events identified as critical incidents”³⁷.

As such, the confirmation of the cultural satire is the result of values promoted by a new wave in journalism, while investing the communication standards with critical sense and humor represents a polished postmodern trend of assuming one’s own imperfections. This way, reality becomes a space where “offences and rectifies, moments of euphoria and dysphoria take place: laughter, embarrassment, smiles; everyone performing and reaffirming social values (...), the world is a wedding ceremony”³⁸.

The weekly newspaper Academia Cațavencu distinguishes itself on the Romanian cultural market through a critical approach to news and information for the general public. Choosing topics of present interest, with references to the current social culture, the newspaper draws devoted readers of all ages, who appreciate the irony and the harmony of ideas it presents. The messages conveyed through the column of political cartoons can be fully grasped only by a knowing and able public, acquainted with the cultural, social and political present, a fact which leads to a continuous cultural education and training. The present article analyses the cartoons published during the November-December 2009 election campaign, in which the candidates

33 *Ibidem*, p. 118.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 118.

35 *Ibidem*, p. 119.

36 *Ibidem*, p. 123.

37 *Ibidem*, p. 127.

38 Y. Winkin apud Daniela Roventă-Frumușani (2004). *Analiza Discursului. Ipoteze și Ipostaze*, București: Tritonic, 1. *Analiza Discursului-Spațiu interdisciplinar*, p. 13.

are covered in ironies, their decisions, moral values, conduct, grounding, physical appearance and family life being humorously brought before the critical eye of the reader. The satirical spirit and the incisive hints amuse its readers, while the political caricatures are part of the electoral messages. Therefore, the cultural satire found on the pages of the weekly Academia Cațavencu represents a social tendency more than a generalized reality, the satire evolving on a psychological level of a collective national mentality, as well as in the form of political cartoons. Cultural mimicry, as an effect of societal degradation, leads to a continuous interchange between the printed media and the audiences, saturated by the same cultural standards. Satirizing the political reality becomes a characteristic of both the process of transformation of journalistic styles and the social revolution, the two being dynamic and complementary.

In the broader context of outlining a cultural identity, satire, as a journalistic phenomenon, cannot determine the link between the national interpretation of reality and that of the weekly newspaper Academia Cațavencu. The existence of an audience for this type of written press hints the existence of a micro-society which adheres to the values, attitudes and beliefs promoted by a new-journalism of social irony, the culture of satire metamorphosing, on a local scale, in a subculture of the social entity specific to the journalistic liberalization that occurred after the year 1989.

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