

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Rationality, Modernization, and Magical Figures in Bucovina: A Community Case Study

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DEGREE: Master of Arts

COLLEGE: Science and Humanities

DATE: May 2015

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In September 2010 Romania proposed a law that would make witchcraft a taxable profession. Romania, who joined the European Union in 2007, is undergoing a process of modernization. According to the literature with the onset of modernization, comes a decrease of traditional beliefs, such as witchcraft and magic for example. If Romania is modernizing why would lawmakers propose a tax on witchcraft? This question was explored during ethnographic in Bucovina, a north eastern rural province of Romania, during the summer of 2011. Throughout this fieldwork informants stated that this tax only concerned the Roma, an ethnic minority in Romania, whose practices were thought to be illegitimate. Informants went on to say that this law would never be passed and that there are more legitimate magical figures practicing in rural areas in Romania.

This thesis describes my encounters with a number of magical figures in Bucovina, in particular in Costna, a village where I talked to Ana, a magical figure practicing divination. I talked to members of her community who knew her well. This thesis describes the different views community members have of this magical figure and magic in general, as well as looks at how these views relate to the modernization of Romania.

In Bucovina, despite modernization, magic and witchcraft do not seem to have

disappeared or to be replaced with more so called “rational” beliefs. Not only have these beliefs not disappeared, but rather they may be used more and in fact play an important part, somewhat paradoxically, in how Romania has modernized. In effect, Romanians have used magic and witchcraft with remarkable success to make sense out of and to “operate in” the modern world.